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Keeping in Touch: Photography and the Supernatural 1839 – 1933

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Submitted for the examination of Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of Sussex

October 2019

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree. However, the thesis incorporates material already submitted as part of required coursework for the degree of:

Masters Degree, Victorian Studies

Awarded by Birkbeck College, University of London, 2011

Signature

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

ELEANOR ROBINSON

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

KEEPING IN TOUCH: PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE SUPERNATURAL 1839 – 1933

SUMMARY

This thesis explores the influence of photography upon the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture of the supernatural, arguing that the invention of photography helped bring about a change in the kind of ghosts experienced in popular culture and ghost fiction. Where most previous studies investigating photography and the supernatural have focused on its more immediate output, spirit photography, my project provides a fresh understanding of how spirit photography came about in the first place and how, in turn, the marriage of photography and spirit influenced the Spiritualist movement and the ghosts which haunted the literature of the long nineteenth century. My main contention is that over time, photography helped contribute to the desire for a more haptic communion with the dead, which is suggested by the treatment of photographs in ghost stories and in the ‘material’ phenomena which came to dominate spiritualistic practices.

The project is divided into four chapters. The first chapter explores the motif of the ‘shadow’ in two ghost stories by Charles Dickens and argues that the shadowy ghosts in those tales were the product of post-photographic thinking and shifting concepts of time and memory: asking questions about how, in the age of the photographic image, contemporaries ‘keep in touch’ with the past (and how future generations will ‘keep in touch’ with them). In the second chapter I analyse the growth of ‘magic portrait’ ghost stories, tracing their development in the context of the invention of photography and the birth of the National Portrait Gallery, arguing that the ‘magic’ photograph stories offer a different kind of haunting, which is usually generated by touch, and best compared to the aura emitted by a ‘relic’. In the third chapter I consider the photographic influences behind Spiritualism, arguing that the Spiritualist medium was acting like a camera in producing visions and physical manifestations of the dead, which ultimately contributed to the beginnings of ‘spirit photography’ and a more tangible understanding of spirits. In the final chapter I examine both séance and portrait spirit photographs, exploring the iconography that emerged from spirit photographs and demonstrating some of the concepts and iconography which informed spirit photography and which became immersed in popular culture via fin de siècle and early twentieth-century ghost stories. In this chapter I explore the ‘material’ proof and ectoplasmic effusions that mediums and psychic investigators sought, and at times produced, and trace connections between these activities and M.R. James’s obsession with haunting material in his ghostly fiction.

The thesis refocuses attention on canonical and lesser known contemporary ghost stories, and offers fresh insights into nineteenth-century Spiritualist culture and practice, repositioning both of these cultural-literary experiences firmly in the wake of photography. My aim is to evaluate how Victorians recalibrated their ideas on 'keeping in touch' with the spirits following the invention of photography, and understand the extent to which the expectations of haptic contact with the dead has evolved and even influenced our supernatural inheritance today.

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	6
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	7
Introduction	10
Scope of the Thesis	23
Critical Background	25
1. ‘An Awful Likeness of Himself’: Dickens and the Shadows of Early Photography	30
The Shadow and Early Photography	31
‘The Little Piece of Business Between the Sun and Myself’	44
The ‘Shadows of the Things that Have Been’	51
‘An Awful Likeness of Himself’	59
2. ‘The Very Sanctification of Portraits’: Authentic Likenesses and Magic Pictures	81
Capturing ‘Life Itself’: Magic Painted Portrait Ghost Stories	84
The National Portrait Gallery and the Quest for Authentic Likenesses	90
Photographic Relics	100
Magic Photographs	107
3. The Medium as Camera: Spiritualism and ‘Photographic Thinking’	128
‘Photographic Thinking’ in the Séance	132
Spiritualism and Visual Culture	140
The Medium as Camera	148
Touching Spirits	158
4. Materialisations of the Immaterial: Spirit Photography and the Ghost Story	164
Spirits on Camera	166
Touching Testimonials	176
Material Materialisations	184
The Ectoplasmic Medium	189
The Material Ghost in M.R. James’s Fiction	199
Conclusion: “‘Things in a Dead Man’s Eye’”	212
<i>Bibliography</i>	218

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Spirit Photograph, HA90046, 1886. Brighton Museum, Sussex	10
1.	< https://brightonmuseums.org.uk/discover/2013/05/10/caught-in-the-snap-when-photographers-get-framed/ > [accessed 1 Oct 2019].	
2.	John Tenniel, <i>Frontispiece</i> , original illustration, 1848. Charles Dickens, <i>The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain</i> (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1848), original version with illustrations by J. Tenniel, J. Leech and F. Stone.	16
3.	William Crookes, <i>William Crookes and Spirit in Electric Light</i> , albumen silver photograph, 1874. Barlow Collection, British Library, London.	19
4.	Colin Dingwall, <i>Plate V</i> , in <i>A Report on a Series of Sittings with Eva C.</i> (London: Society for Psychical Research, 1922).	20
5.	Joseph Wright of Derby, <i>The Corinthian Maid</i> , oil on canvas, 1783 – 1784. National Gallery of Art, Paul Mellon Collection, Washington D.C., U.S.A.	34
6.	William Henry Fox Talbot, <i>Wrack</i> , Print of Seaweed, salted paper print, 1839, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S.A.	38
7.	William Henry Fox Talbot, Decorative Front cover of <i>The Pencil of Nature</i> , 1844-1846 (London: Longman and others, 1844). British Library, London.	42
8.	George Cruikshank, <i>The New School of Portrait-Painting</i> , Woodcut of an Engraving of Richard Beard's Studio, 1841-2. National Science and Media Museum, Bradford, 10299698.	47
9.	John Mayall, <i>Daguerreotype of Charles Dickens</i> , 1849-1850 Sussex Photohistory website: < https://www.photohistory-sussex.co.uk/DickensCharlesPortraits.htm > [accessed 1 Oct 2019].	48
10.	Herbert Watkins, <i>Charles Dickens</i> , albumen carte-de-visite, 1858 National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG P301(19).	49
11.	William Henry Fox Talbot, <i>The Geologists</i> , salt print, 1843 The National Science and Media Museum, Bradford.	53
12.	Charles Dickens, <i>A Christmas Carol, Original 1843 Manuscript</i> (New York: Levenger Press, 2011), p.10.	57
13.	John and Charles Watkins, <i>Charles Dickens</i> , albumen carte-de-visite, 1861. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG Ax16252.	62
14.	John Tenniel, <i>Frontispiece</i> , original illustration, 1848. Charles Dickens, <i>The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain</i> (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1848), original version with illustrations by J. Tenniel, J. Leech and F. Stone.	64

15. J. Leech, *Redlaw and the Phantom*, original illustration, 1848. Charles Dickens, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1848), original version with illustrations by J. Tenniel, J. Leech and F. Stone. 64
16. Unknown maker, *Daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe*, 1849. The Paul Getty Museum, Object No. 84.XT.957 © 1995 The J. Paul Getty Museum. 85
17. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Thomas Carlyle*, albumen print, 1867 National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG P122. 91
18. National Portrait Gallery, *Portrait of the Day*, National Portrait Gallery website, London. 93
19. Samuel Cousins, *Sir Thomas Lawrence*, mezzotint, published by Walter Benjamin Tiffin, 1830. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 1634b. 105
20. Unknown artist, *Sir Thomas Lawrence*, photograph of plaster cast of death mask, 1830. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 1634. 105
21. Arthur J. Goodman, *Introductory Plate for 'An Imaginative Woman'*, lithograph, 1894. *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 2.951 (1894). 110
22. *Lock of Percy Bysshe Shelley's hair and an alleged fragment of his ashes, together with a lock of Mary Shelley's hair*, 1822. British Library, London, Ashely MS 5022. 116
23. John Murray, *Distant Views of the Taj from the East (Agra)*, 1855 British Library, Online Gallery. 144
24. *Poster Advertising Pepper's Ghost 'Exhibited and Explained'*, c.1885 Royal Polytechnic Institution, Westminster. British Library, Evanion Catalogue. 145
25. William H. Mumler, *Mary Todd Lincoln with the Spirit of her Husband, President Abraham Lincoln and Son Thaddeus*, 1872. College of Psychical Studies, London. Plate 1, in Louis Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler Spirit Photographer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) p.170. 167
26. *Mumler's Trial*, *Harper's Weekly*, 8 May 1869. American Museum of Photography, U.S.A. 169
27. William Crookes, *William Crookes and Spirit in Electric Light*, albumen silver photograph, 1874. Barlow Collection, British Library, London. 174
28. Frederic Hudson, *Plate 1*, in Houghton's *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye* (London: E.W. Allen, 1882). 175

29. Eric Dingwall, *Plate 1*, in Dingwall's *a Report on a Series of Sittings with Eva C* (London: London S.P.R., 1922) p.232. 192
30. Juliet Bisson, *Figure 128: Flashlight Photograph of 5 January 1913* (retouched). Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisations* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co Ltd, 1920), p.216. 194
31. Eric Dingwall, *Plate IV*, in Dingwall's *a Report on a Series of Sittings with Eva C* (London: London S.P.R., 1922) p.260. 195
32. Secondo Pia, *Photograph of the Turin Shroud*, 1898. Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne. 197
33. J. Traill-Taylor, *Cyprian Priestess, My Copy of the Enlarged Psychic Portrait*, from Andrew Glendinning, *The Veil Lifted*, in James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible* (London: L.N. Fowler & Co, 1911) p.85. 200
34. Frederic Hudson, *Florence Cook lying in a trance, with a spirit form behind her*, in Martyn Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography* (London: The British Library, 2006), Jolly, p.31. 203
35. James McBryde, *It Leapt Towards Him Upon the Instant*, illustration for 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad' from M.R. James, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904). 204
36. William Mumler, *Female "spirit" standing next to a table with a photograph propped against a vase with flowers*. Albumen Silver Print, 9.8 v 5.7cm (1862-1875), The J. Paul Getty Museum. 212

INTRODUCTION: KEEPING IN TOUCH

From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of the star.¹

‘Ah, Monsieur!’ she murmured, ‘you cannot imagine, you cannot conceive the wonder and the joy of these séances to me! My little one! My Amelie! To see her, to hear her, even – perhaps – yes, perhaps to be even able to – stretch out my hand and touch her.’²



Figure 1. Spirit Photograph, HA90046, 1886. Brighton Museum, Sussex.

When the spirit medium, Simone, awaits her séance with the formidable Madame Exe, she did not expect to die. In ‘The Last Séance’ (1933) by Agatha Christie, the medium produces a ‘full-form materialisation’ of Madame Exe’s daughter Amelie, which is so

¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* [1980] (London: Vintage Books, 2000), pp.80-81.

² Agatha Christie, ‘The Last Séance’, in *The Hound of Death* (London: Harper Collins, 2016), p.235. Further references to ‘The Last Séance’ are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

lifelike that her fiancé Raoul thought it was “an actual living child of flesh and blood”. He adds, “I even touched her – but seeing that the touch was acutely painful to you, I would not permit Madame Exe to do the same” (p.231). Simone mimics the action of a camera. Sitting in the darkness of the spirit cabinet she produces an image from the past. The ghost that arrives is not transparent, white-sheeted, nor has clanking chains, as the clichéd ghost was said to do. It appeared so real that it was mistaken for a “flesh and blood” child.³ Madame Exe describes the ‘wonder and the joy’ that the revival of her dead daughter incited although, like Raoul, the verisimilitude with the original causes her to wish for more tangible contact, to “stretch out” her hand and “touch her” (p.235).

Whilst this story does not refer specifically to photography, it is symptomatic of what I term ‘photographic thinking’, which influenced the evolution of the supernatural in the popular imagination and precipitated a change in the way that we expect ghosts to appear.⁴ As Helen Groth comments, the invention of photography produced an ‘epistemic rupture’, a revolution in the way that people knew and understood the world around them. The new invention allowed Victorians to see the past in photographic images.⁵ In the initial decades after its inception, some contemporaries associated the shadowy memory-images produced by the camera with ghosts, and in supernatural fiction, spirits and spectres often adopted photographic qualities. Fiction writers displayed a post-photographic perspective in their imaginative revival of the ‘haunted portrait’, which at times echoed the magical, mimetic characteristics of the photograph. In the Spiritualist world, mediums like Simone acted like cameras in producing realistic, “flesh and blood” images of spirits, and supernatural photographs of the studio and the séance created a new host of ghosts

³ See Marley’s Ghost in Charles Dickens, ‘A Christmas Carol’ [1843], in *Complete Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2009), who is ‘transparent’ and chained to ‘cash-boxes, keys, ledgers’ (p.66). Owen Davies claims this dates from the use of the white sheet as a shroud in the eighteenth century, although it quickly followed that the image was ‘more of a stereotype, exploited by hoaxers and used in literary and pictorial representations over the centuries’; see *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.20. The cliché is epitomised and satirised in Oscar Wilde’s ‘The Canterville Ghost’ [1891] in *Complete Short Fiction*, ed. by Ian Small (London: Penguin, 2003).

⁴ A term partly borrowed from Pamela Thurschwell, who adopts the phrase ‘magical thinking’ in her book *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵ Helen Groth, *Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p.11.

defined by drapery and ectoplasm. Photography contributed towards the development of a more material ghost, which haunted haptically and tempted us to touch.

The thesis is titled, 'keeping in touch', because the phrase epitomises various inter-related contemporary desires which motivated the interaction between photography and spirit: for communication, connectedness and tactility. The new medium provided a novel means of connecting with the past which, for many contemporaries and recent critics, had tactile connotations. Carolyn Dinshaw observes the physical connection that the critic, Roland Barthes, perceives to be inherent within the photographic medium. In his celebrated work, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes 'insists on the achieved somatic relation between bodies enabled by the technology of photography.'⁶ Barthes claims that the photograph is an 'emanation of the referent', which makes the observer feel as if they were physically connected with the subject. He suggests that the radiations emitted from a real body through a photograph 'touch him' like the 'delayed rays of a star' (quoting the critic, Susan Sontag).⁷ For Barthes, the indexicality of photography, its status as eye witness ('*the thing has been there*') could provide the 'tactile history', which he so desired.⁸ The rays from the referent would touch the beholder, separated by time, but conjoined in the eye-contact that photography facilitated.⁹ Dinshaw observes that for Barthes, the photograph fulfils a desire to 'make contact [...] a desire for bodies to touch across time.'¹⁰

The photograph I have selected at the top of this Introduction (Figure 1) is a 'spirit photograph' of 1886, apparently showing a ghostly, shrouded hand, although on closer inspection, it shows the shoulders and neckline of the fraudster. Notwithstanding that it is a fake spirit photograph, the close-up of the hand, showing the details of the flesh, whilst enveloped in drapery, emblemises the desire for tactile connection offered by the spirit photograph and captured by Christie's Madame Exe. It

⁶ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre-and Postmodern* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 3, p. 51, and pp.80-81.

⁷ Barthes, pp.80-81.

⁸ Dinshaw, p.52.

⁹ The critic, John Tagg, noted that Barthes's comments about photographic identity were made in the context of the loss of his mother and his desire for physical contact may have been influenced by his grief. He desired 'if not to have her back, then to know she was here'; see John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.1.

¹⁰ Dinshaw, p.3.

invites us to ‘touch across time’, from the dead to the living, from the Victorians to the current day.

The photograph provided an image through which the Victorians could feel in contact with their dead and revive historical memories (both individual and national). Photographs also helped to build and define relationships in the present, providing a narrative as well as a memorial function. Susan Sontag’s observation in *On Photography* (1977) that, ‘through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness’, is just as relevant to the Victorians as to the present day.¹¹ The protagonist in Henry James’s ‘Friends of the Friends’ (1896) seeks a photograph of her lover so that she can put it on the mantelpiece in an expensive frame.¹² Thomas Carlyle kept in touch with his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1846 by exchanging daguerreotypes.¹³ The desire for ‘connectedness’, which the photograph answered and perpetuated, was also a significant cause of the popularity of spirit photography. Spiritualists wanted photographs to be a means of keeping in touch with the dead, so that the deceased could send messages, and continue their narrative, like a tourist sending postcards from another world. Moreover, ‘keeping in touch’, embodies the desire for physical contact that underlies that search for ‘connectedness’, and which contributed to the formation of a more tactile ghost in supernatural fiction. Lastly, photography and the supernatural kept in touch with each other during the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, and arguably, still do today. This thesis is about how the two movements touched each other, and how that contact has shaped our supernatural legacy today.

*

From its inception, photography had a connection with the supernatural. As William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) declared in his address to the Royal Society in 1839, his new process of ‘photogenic drawing’ was based on capturing ‘the most transitory of

¹¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p.8.

¹² In *Henry James: The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories*, ed. by T.J. Lustig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). References to the text will be to this edition and made parenthetically in the text (see Chapter 2).

¹³ See Chapter 1; e.g. Letter of 18 April 1846 from Thomas Carlyle to Ralph Waldo Emerson, in *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. by Joseph Slater (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1964), p.395.

things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary', which was fettered 'by the spells of our "natural magic."' ¹⁴ The shadow had been associated with the ethereal from time immemorial, due to its ghostly, uncanny qualities, and had been harnessed by the phantasmagoria at the end of the eighteenth century to produce supernatural images and spooky thrills. This legacy contributed to the impression that the new photographic technology was produced by magic, which the proto-photographers encouraged, perpetuating the fable that the image had been 'impressed by Nature's hand' rather than produced by chemistry and technology. ¹⁵ Contemporaries were quick to ascribe supernatural characteristics both to Talbot's photogenic drawing and the daguerreotype invented by the Frenchman Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851) in the same year, such as the poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who described the latter as more 'marvellous' than 'the Mesmeric disembodiment of spirits'. ¹⁶

Barrett Browning compared the new invention to the popular practice of 'mesmerism', which entailed healing through hypnotic trances or 'passes'. ¹⁷ The writer, Charles Dickens, was a practising mesmerist, whose imaginative interest in the 'spirits' more generally is indicated by his famous ghost stories. ¹⁸ Dickens was not alone in his engagement with the supernatural. The Victorian era was the 'Golden Age of the Ghost Story', during which a profusion of ghostly tales emerged, circulating in

¹⁴ 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, Or the Process by which Natural Objects may be made to Delineate Themselves without the Aid of the Artist's Pencil', *Athenaeum*, 589 (1839), 114-7 (p.115). Also quoted in Groth, pp.135-6.

¹⁵ William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* [1844-1846] (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), title page and p.2.

¹⁶ *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford 1836-1854*, 3 vols, ed. by Meredith B. Raymond and Mary Rose Sullivan, (Winfield, Kan.: Armstrong Browning Library of Baylor University, The Browning Institute, Wedgestone Press, and Wellesley College, 1983), II (pp.357-8).

¹⁷ Also known as 'animal magnetism', mesmerism was introduced by Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer in the eighteenth century and popularised by Dr. John Elliotson (a friend of Charles Dickens) in the 1830s; see Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens: A Biography of Charles Dickens* (London: Cornerstone, 1991) pp.259-260. For more on mesmerism, see Ronald Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004) pp.15-28.

¹⁸ Regarding ghosts, Dickens said in a letter to the Spiritualist, William Howitt, 'I have always had a strong interest in the subject, and never knowingly lose an opportunity of pursuing it' (6 Sep 1859), *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Kathleen Tillotson and others, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965-1999), IX, pp.116-117. Quoted in Louise Henson, 'Investigations and Fictions' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Dickens's interest did not necessarily extend to belief. He also enjoyed satirising both Spiritualists and ghostly clichés: see 'Well-Authenticated Rappings', *Household Words*, 17.413 (1858), 217-220; and 'A Christmas Tree', *Household Words*, 2.39 (1850), 289-295.

popular magazines, journals, periodicals, and which Nick Freeman describes as ‘a distinct genre of short fiction which encompassed the brief, spooky anecdote and the technically elaborate and psychologically sophisticated tale.’¹⁹ The ghost story is generally thought to have evolved from the creaky edifices of the Gothic novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when the likes of Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Mary Shelley thrilled readers with bloody nuns, haunted houses, and supernatural monsters. As well as Dickens, various other canonical writers produced significant supernatural tales in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Oscar Wilde and M.R. James, all of whose work I analyse in this thesis.

In Chapter 1, I explore how, following the invention of the daguerreotype and calotype in 1839, the motif of the shadow became invigorated with photographic characteristics, which are played out in Charles Dickens’s ‘A Christmas Carol’ (1843) and ‘The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain’ (1848). Dickens displayed a keen engagement with photography, having his daguerreotype taken on various occasions, and articulating his own memorising process through the metaphor of the camera. I argue that the temporal uncertainties that emerge from these texts suggest that Dickens is coming to terms with a post-photographic present, in which memories, ‘the things that have been’, can haunt the present, past and future generations to come – like photographs.²⁰ Such a blur between shadows, memories and photographs is indicated by John Tenniel’s illustration of the reminiscient Redlaw and his ghostly double for ‘The Haunted Man’ (Figure 2), which I discuss in Chapter 2. By illuminating the unstable, contingent nature of memory in these texts, Dickens is rehearsing how photography might both enhance, and yet also compromise, our sense of ‘connectedness’ to the past.

¹⁹ Jack Sullivan, ‘Golden Age of the Ghost Story’, in *The Penguin Encyclopaedia of Horror and the Supernatural* (New York: Viking Press, 1986) pp.174-6; and Nick Freeman, ‘The Victorian Ghost Story’, *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 93-107 (p.93).

²⁰ Dickens, ‘A Christmas Carol’, p.75.

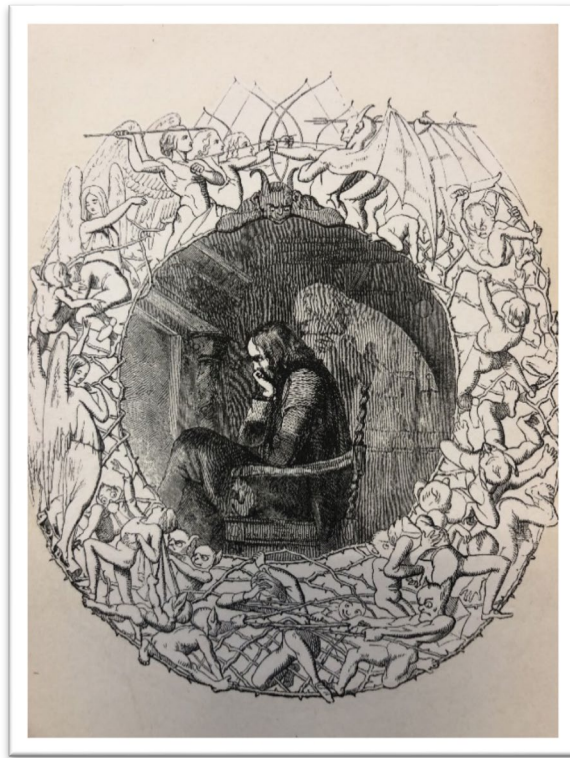


Figure 2. John Tenniel, Frontispiece, original illustration, 1848. Charles Dickens, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1848), original version with illustrations by J. Tenniel, J. Leech and F. Stone.

A year before Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol', the American writer Edgar Allan Poe was engaging with the haunting verisimilitude of the daguerreotype in his 'The Oval Portrait' (1842). The portrait encountered by the solitary soldier is so lifelike that he thinks he had 'mistaken the head for a living person'.²¹ Around the time that photography was invented, the Gothic 'magic portrait' story was reinvigorated, and an abundance of tales concerning portraits that appeared terrifyingly lifelike, spoke, or jumped out of their frames, circulated in popular Victorian journals and periodicals. This revival coincided with contemporary debates concerning the establishment of a new gallery for the 'excellent Portraits of Historical Men,' later known as the National

²¹ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, ed. by David Galloway (London: Penguin, 2003), p.202. Further references to this story refer to this edition and will occur parenthetically in the text.

Portrait Gallery (which I will refer to as the NPG) which was spear-headed by the celebrated historian and social commentator, Thomas Carlyle.²²

In Chapter 2, I argue that certain ‘magic portrait’ stories appeared to be engaging directly with photographic themes and discourses, exploring the darker implications behind the perfect mimesis offered by the new technology and dramatising the idea that an image of the past could be resurrected and speak for itself. I read Carlyle and the other founders’ preoccupation with authentic portraiture to be grounded in a post-photographic context, which tension emerges in certain ‘magic portrait’ stories. Interestingly, despite the photographic discourses that I claim to be embedded within haunted painted portrait fiction, there are far fewer ‘magic photograph’ stories in the nineteenth century. Where magic photographs do arise, they offer a different type of haunting. They do not come alive or jump out of their frames, but in the ghostly stories I explore by Wilkie Collins, Thomas Hardy and Henry James, they evoke an auratic power which connects characters across space and death. In magic photograph stories, haunting tends to be contingent upon the engagement of the beholder, specifically their willingness to touch and be emotionally touched by the photograph in return.

Barrett-Browning’s reference to the ‘disembodiment of spirits’ also anticipates the arrival of another significant supernatural movement of the age: Spiritualism. The belief that the dead could communicate began in 1848, when two teenage girls, Maggie and Kate Fox from Hydesville, New York state, both started hearing unusual taps and raps in their house.²³ Soon a rudimentary rapping system existed, which worked through the substitution of raps for letters of the alphabet. Messages were passed between them and, they later learnt, the spirit of a dead peddler whose remains were buried in the house. News of the discovery rippled across America and from 1852 and even travelled across the Atlantic through a Mrs. Hayden, the wife of an American journalist, who started conducting her own séances in London.²⁴ In 1888, the

²² Letter from Thomas Carlyle to Lady Ashburton, 8 September 1853, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. by Kenneth J Fielding (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), XXVIII (p.264).

²³ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, 2 vols ([n.p]: Pantianos Classics, 1926), I, pp.31-32.

²⁴ Pearsall, p.29.

Fox sisters confessed it was a hoax. However, this mendacious start seems not to have inhibited the movement's popularity and it spread widely across different countries, genders and social groups.²⁵ Whilst the popularity of Spiritualism waned around the 1930s, due largely to accusations of fraud and fakery, Spiritualist networks continue to have a small following today, as do informal séances, experiments with Ouija boards, and stories about Spiritualist phenomena.²⁶

In Chapter 3, I explore what I regard to be the photographic impulses and influences behind Spiritualism. Photographs were often incorporated within séance practices, and photographic principles shaped séance culture and the manner of exposing fraudulent mediums. I argue that the concept of 'materialisations' was post-photographic, in the sense that these phenomena were effectively inspired by the medium acting as a camera. Photography provided a metaphor for a new kind of contact that was sought with the dead. The camera underwrote certain Spiritualist claims, gave them credibility, positioned them in association with science and technology, and ultimately provided the tangible evidence of the existence of the spirits sought by Spiritualists and scientists. As time went on, and Spiritualist séances became more ambitious, sitters demanded to experience more tactile phenomena. A paradoxical desire emerged to obtain material proof of an immaterial world, which I claim to be stimulated, at least in part, by the influence of photography.

The revolutionary discovery that spirits could be photographed stemmed from a seemingly accidental discovery by the engraver, William H. Mumler, in Boston, in October 1862. According to his autobiography, Mumler was 'whiling away an idle hour in taking a negative' when 'the spirit-form first appeared'.²⁷ In one of the photographs that he took, he discovered another human form sitting beside him whom he

²⁵ See Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1980; repr. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.65. Doyle suggested the Fox sisters' confession 'was false, motivated by pecuniary reasons and family politics. Doyle, *History*, pp.53-57.

²⁶ See Spiritualists' National Union <www.snu.org.uk> [accessed 30 Sep 2019] for active Spiritualist networks; e.g. *Ouija: Origin of Evil* (2016), Michele Roberts *In the Red Kitchen* (1990), Sarah Waters *Affinity* (1999), Neil Spring's recent novels and film about Harry Price, member of the Society for Psychical Research and debunker of fraudulent mediums, e.g. *The Ghost Hunters* (2013).

²⁷ William H. Mumler, 'The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit-Photography', in Louis Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler Spirit Photographer* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p.70.

recognised as his cousin who had died twelve years since. His photograph was passed to the Spiritualist press, following which Mumler became so inundated with requests for photographs that he became a full-time spiritual photographer.²⁸ In 1869, Mumler was arrested and stood trial for fraud although, following a storm of publicity, he was acquitted due to a lack of evidence.

Notwithstanding this inauspicious beginning, spirit photography went on to capture the imaginations of British Spiritualists. The enterprising studio photographer, Frederick Hudson, combined with the medium, Georgiana Houghton, provided hundreds of Victorians with photographic portraits showing spirit 'extras' and figures shrouded in 'drapery', invisible to the eye but captured by the eye of the camera.²⁹ At the same time, Spiritualists and scientists sought to photograph the supernatural intelligences and 'manifestations' that they witnessed in séances.



Figure 3. William Crookes, *William Crookes and Spirit in Electric Light*, albumen silver photograph, 1874. Barlow Collection, British Library, London.

²⁸ Mumler, 'Personal Experiences', pp.71-72.

²⁹ Georgiana Houghton, *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye* (London: E.W. Allen, 1882).

The most famous of these experiments took place in 1873, by the scientist, Sir William Crookes, with the spirit-guide 'Katie King' (Figure 3 above). Contemporaries, such as one journalist from the *Daily Telegraph* (1873), commented on the corporeal appearance of the spirit, claiming the ghost looked 'as material as myself'.³⁰ Many sitters were tantalised by these real-looking ghosts, enjoying the frisson of closer contact that they offered with the (supposedly) dead. As Jennifer Bann observes, Spiritualism 'helped to subtly transform the figure of the ghost, from the less-than-human apparitions of earlier narratives into the more-than-human characters of the later nineteenth century.'³¹

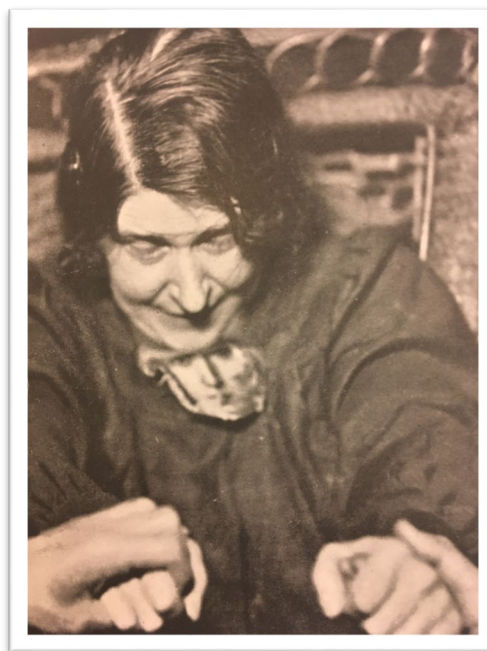


Figure 4. Colin Dingwall, *Plate V*, in *A Report on a Series of Sittings with Eva C.* (London: Society for Psychical Research, 1922).

At the fin de siècle, some mediums responded to the demands for tangible proof and 'ectoplasm' erupted into the séance. The young medium, Marthe Béraud (later known as 'Eva C'), was able to produce 'slow painful extrusion of wet organic matter from the visible body of the medium', which scientists named 'ectoplasm'.³² As

³⁰ 12 August 1873; in Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1902), II, p.99.

³¹ Jennifer Bann, 'Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter', *Victorian Studies*, 51.4 (2009), 663-685; p.665.

³² Martyn Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography* (London: The British Library, 2006), p.64.

well as producing fleshy and material effusions, Eva C produced images of spirits (Figure 4 above), which some sceptics claimed to be ingested cut-outs from magazines. In this, she and the other ectoplasmic mediums, were truly acting as cameras. Their endeavours were caught on camera, and in a strange meta-textual leap, supernatural photographs were taken of ectoplasmic photographs. By this point, the camera was heavily invested in Spiritualist practices, shaping Spiritualists' and mediums' behaviour, forming a photographic record or 'proof' of what had occurred.

In Chapter 4, I trace the integration of supernatural photography within contemporary ghost stories, highlighting the development from its role in providing testimony to a vehicle for conveying messages. I study the changing imagery of the ghostly in the wake of supernatural photography, in particular Houghton's interpretation of drapery, and the effusions of the ectoplasmic mediums, which set the scene for belief in a more 'material' ghost, formed of complex, articulate drapery, or haunting flesh. I argue that M.R. James's supernatural fiction illustrates this 'material turn', in its exploration of malicious ghosts that haunt through bed-linen, a cocoon-like bed, or even tendrils of hair.³³ As Owen Davies comments, 'fiction [...] both reflected and shaped popular perceptions about ghosts.'³⁴ The complexity and imagination behind these 'material' hauntings, and their powerful, fleshy connotations, suggest that M.R. James is doing more than exercising the traditional stereotype of the white-sheeted ghost.

My claim that the supernatural took a 'material turn' at the fin de siècle offers a different position to that of Terry Castle, who claims that ghost-seeing became more internalised as the century progressed: 'by the end of the nineteenth century, ghosts had disappeared from everyday life, but as the poets intimated, human experience had become more ghost-ridden than ever.'³⁵ Whilst it cannot be denied that certain supernatural texts of the latter decades of the nineteenth century paid a notable interest in the psychological aspects of ghost seeing (such as Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Green Tea' [1872], Robert Louis Stevensons's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* [1886] or

³³ M.R. James, *Collected Ghost Stories*, ed. by David Stuart Davies (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007).

³⁴ Davies, p.216.

³⁵ Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: 18th Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.144.

Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* [1898]), such an argument that ghosts had 'disappeared from everyday life' does not accommodate the material, exteriorised ghosts of Spiritualism, or the fleshy, corporeal haunting developed by the ectoplasmic mediums. Moreover, there were various ghost stories from the latter half of the century featuring tactile and corporeal ghosts, which would seem to undermine Castle's claim.³⁶ At the fin de siècle and in the early twentieth century, ghosts appeared to be very much still present in séances and fiction.

Whilst it would be attractive to take my argument further, and claim (contrary to Castle) that ghosts become *more* embodied over time, I hesitate to make such a contention, given that, firstly, ghosts had appeared in embodied terms prior to the Victorian era. As Davies comments, 'by no means all ghosts were pale visions. In the various collections of ghost sightings published during the second half of the seventeenth century, there are several ghosts that percipients swore looked just as they had dressed in life.'³⁷ Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1823) contains a good example of a pre-Victorian supernatural entity which was no 'pale vision' but was formed of flesh and ignited into life through electricity.³⁸ Secondly, in the nineteenth century, ghosts could appear in a variety of different guises, ranging from the material to the immaterial. In her *Night Side of Nature* (1848), Catherine Crowe's record of supposedly veridical sightings, she reports that 'on some occasions, apparitions are represented as being transparent, while on others they have not been distinguishable from the real corporeal body'.³⁹ Therefore, whilst there are various stories of fleshy, embodied ghosts at the fin de siècle, there are others in which ghosts appear distinctly psychological (such as those cited in the paragraph above). It is hard to make a claim for an over-reaching pattern. As Srdjan Smajic comments, 'ghosts were at once the most culturally pervasive and ontologically unstable of all supernatural figures in the nineteenth century'.⁴⁰ My argument is more suggestive of a trend toward materiality

³⁶ See examples in Chapter 4: e.g., Charlotte Riddell, 'Old Mrs. Jones' (1882), Mrs. Molesworth, 'Lady Farquhar's Ghost' (1888) or Christie, 'The Last Séance' (1924).

³⁷ Davies, p.22.

³⁸ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. by Siv Jansson (Ware: Wordsworth, 1999) p.45.

³⁹ Catherine Crowe, *Night Side of Nature* (New York: B.B. Mussey, 1850), Chapter IX.

⁴⁰ Srdjan Smajic, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.31.

in ghostly fiction, and the emergence of a more tactile, externalised ghost, which became more prevalent towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, rather than a clear, consistent development in that direction.

Scope of the Thesis

In this study, it has been my intention to relay my narrative in roughly chronological order, starting from the invention of photography and Dickens's stories of the 1840s in Chapter 1, to the ectoplasmic mediums and M.R. James's ghost fiction of the early twentieth century in Chapter 4. However, the Chapters should also be viewed as focusing upon separate themes and should not be construed as conveying progression except in the broadest sense (my claim that supernatural practices and fiction manifested signs of a 'material turn', in which photography is implicated). At times the chronological order falls away, notably in Chapter 2, when I follow the 'magic portrait' sub-genre of ghost fiction into the 1890s, and in Chapters 3 and 4, when I utilise Christie's fiction of the 1920s and 1930s to illustrate my analysis of nineteenth-century séance practices.

This thesis includes evidence from both Spiritualist writings and ghost stories, the latter which are of course the fictional product of writers' imagination. Whilst I acknowledge that these are very different types of literature, written with differing aims and methods, for my purposes they reflect a trend in 'supernatural' thinking. These writers were focusing on ghosts, spirits and what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle termed in *The Case for Spirit Photography* (1923), 'discarnate intelligences', albeit in different contexts, and in order to create a multidisciplinary assessment of the impact of photography across popular 'supernatural' culture, I do not think it problematic that I have drawn from fictive and non-fictive accounts.⁴¹ The fact that Spiritualist phenomena and supernatural photographs were often alleged to be fraudulent has no bearing on my claims, which are more focused on the appearance of the supernatural in the popular imagination. As Jennifer Green-Lewis has said, 'the human significance of photography cannot be fully charted without attending to the role that it has played

⁴¹ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography* (New York: George H. Doran, 1923) p.81.

in our dreams', and fiction plays a valid part in elucidating the substance of those dreams.⁴²

My evidence from fiction chiefly stems from short ghost stories rather than longer works, as the short story tended to be the form of choice for most ghost story writers. However, I have also occasionally included longer novellas in the study, such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Florence Marryat's *The Dead Man's Message* (1894), where they touch on relevant supernatural themes.⁴³ In order to keep the thesis focused in scope, I have only ventured into the world of poetry a handful of times, where it felt appropriate or relevant to do so in connection with the supernatural texts I was studying, but as a result, I do not include poetry in my field of the 'supernatural'. I focus principally on the figure of the ghost or spirit or those of haunted pictures, and have not extended this research to other, specific supernatural phenomena, such as vampires, mummies and zombies.

I agree with Owen Clayton that 'there were a series of nineteenth-century understandings of photography', which were related to, though not determined by particular photographic methods.⁴⁴ This is especially noticeable in the distinction between the viewing experiences of the daguerreotype and calotype, which I explain in Chapter 1 and the early parts of Chapter 2 concerning Poe's 'The Oval Portrait'. However, whilst I agree that there were different photographic methods and processes in popular use at certain periods, some of which I discuss in this thesis, I also think that there was an over-arching concept of 'photography' in play in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which ran in parallel with these photographic differences and developments. The broader concepts introduced by both Daguerre and Fox Talbot – fixing the shadow by means of a camera, developing the image through the use of chemicals, obtaining a perfect mimesis of the past moment, and a recalibration of the function of human memory which was implicated in this – underwrote the formation of a photographic consciousness which cannot easily be

⁴² Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Victorian Photography, Literature, and the Invention of Modern Memory* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p.6.

⁴³ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), referred to in the text as *Dorian Gray*; and Florence Marryat, *There is no Death* (New York: Cosmo Classics, 2004),

⁴⁴ Owen Clayton, *Literature and Photography in Transition 1850-1915* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) p.2.

ascribed to a specific method or process. It is this broader concept of 'photographic thinking' which is my chief focus, which I claim contributed to a change in how the supernatural was experienced and conceptualised by contemporaries.

A brief note on location and timing. I have mostly situated my study on the supernatural and photography in Britain (except in Chapter 1, when I have, at times, referred specifically to England, due to the different patent rules in place there). I have referred mostly to British Spiritualist texts and ghost stories, although I have included Wilde, an Irish writer, and referred liberally to American sources or writings by Americans, such as the supernatural fiction of Poe, Henry James or the Spiritualist writings of D.D. Home. This is due to the natural circulation of those texts within a British audience. I have designated the start of my relevant period as 1839, the year of inventions by Daguerre and Talbot (notwithstanding some references to the pre-photographic period in Chapters 1 and 2) and concluded in 1933, which I regard to be the natural end point to the great popularity of Spiritualism and spirit photography and the publication of Christie's 'The Last Séance'.

Critical Background

Much critical work has been written on photography, which has been absorbed into this thesis. In particular, Barthes's ontological understanding of the photograph, its indexicality, its nature in depicting '*that-has-been*', and his physical construction of the photographic interaction between subject and beholder, has been influential for me throughout, but especially in articulating my arguments in favour of photography acting as a relic in Chapter 2.⁴⁵ However, I recognise that Barthes's views have been challenged, and a number of critics, such as John Tagg, Allan Sekula and Victor Burgin, are not persuaded by photography's indexical quality and regard what Barthes calls its 'evidential force' to be 'a complex historical outcome' which is shaped by 'relations of power'.⁴⁶ I do not accept 'indexicality' wholesale and explore the idea of the camera as 'instrument of evidence', and the problems of its perceived 'indexicality' in Chapter 4,

⁴⁵ Barthes, p.77.

⁴⁶ Tagg, pp.4-5.

by discussing fiction based on supernatural photographs, and the 'fake' spirit photographs that compromised its status in depicting an 'authentic encounter.'⁴⁷ My claim is that an indexical understanding of the photograph can be accompanied by a healthy awareness of what has been left in and left out of the image.

Susan Sontag's insightful comments on photography have helped me to articulate aspects of society's current relationship with photography, especially the 'connectedness' that it facilitates between people. Elizabeth Edwards's work on the materiality of photographs was an essential starting point for my arguments on the Victorians' haptic engagement with photography in Chapter 2.⁴⁸ I found Batchen's thorough history of the evolution towards Daguerre and Talbot's discoveries in *Burning with Desire*, and his argument that photography was not 'invented', per se, in 1839, but was the product of multiple experiments by different people over a large number of countries at different times, to be an influential study. His discussion of Pliny and the 'Corinthian Maid' contributed greatly to my understanding of the shadow motif, as has Marina Warner's colourful *Phantasmagoria*, which also provided helpful support in understanding the pre and post-photographic context of the shadow.⁴⁹ Warner's work has been a vital resource in tracing the development of supernatural iconography, and her thinking that 'new technologies for seeing, recording, and picturing have reconfigured the traditional materials from which soul and spirit have been formed by the imagination', is a significant note that is sounded throughout this thesis.⁵⁰

Much valuable research has been produced on Spiritualism in recent years, and various critics have argued that the movement was important for social, cultural and scientific reasons that had been previously overlooked. Janet Oppenheim was one of the early recent historians to provide an informative history of the movement, followed by Alex Owen's influential history focusing on the prominent role of Victorian female mediums and the contribution of Spiritualism to the women's rights

⁴⁷ Tagg, p.3.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Edwards, 'Introduction: photographs as objects', in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁹ Batchen, p. 113-116; Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵⁰ Warner, p.13.

movement.⁵¹ More recently, Tatiana Kontou has argued persuasively that mediumship was intricately bound with theatrical practices, showing that new and naturalistic techniques of acting ran parallel with the Society for Psychical Research (SPR's) quest to define mediumship with psychology and science, and Roger Luckhurst and Shane McCorristine have demonstrated the influence of the SPR in galvanising developments in the burgeoning field of psychology.⁵² Whilst these studies endorse the importance of Spiritualism and demonstrate how the movement facilitated, and in some cases catalysed, progress in a wide variety of other social or scientific fields, there has been little critical interest in examining the influence of photography on Spiritualism prior to Mumler's first spirit photograph in 1861.⁵³ I follow Bann in arguing that the arrival of Spiritualism ushered in a more active, physical ghost than previously, as symbolised by tracing the developments of the ghostly hand in supernatural fiction. However, my claim is situated more around the contribution of photography and spirit photography to the changing iconography of the ghost (rather than just Spiritualism). Moreover, my claims are focused on the materiality and tactility of the later ghosts, rather than their agency per se (given there are various ghosts from Gothic fiction or that date prior to Spiritualism that possess agency).⁵⁴

Previously regarded as a rather crude and regrettable photographic interlude, spirit photography has attracted significant critical interest in the previous twenty years. Critics such as Martyn Jolly, in *Faces of the Living Dead*, have produced hugely informative histories on 'the spirit photography craze' and the impact it had on popular culture, positioning it as 'compelling historical evidence for technology's power to serve as a means to cope with the inexplicable and undesirable experiences

⁵¹ Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁵² Tatiana Kontou, *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), p.10; Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy 1870-1901* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵³ Gunning is one of the few critics to observe the 'uncanny' way that the medium echoes the photographic process, becoming a kind of camera; in 'Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films and Photography's Uncanny', and in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. by Patrice Petro (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp.42-68 (pp.56-58), which I refer to in Chapters 3 and 4.

⁵⁴ Bann, pp.663-664.

of modernity.⁵⁵ Tom Gunning has produced fascinating analysis on the impulses behind spirit photography and the impact it had on the new technology of 'moving pictures.'⁵⁶ In *Nature Exposed*, Jennifer Tucker explores how spirit photography intervened in mid- to late nineteenth-century debates concerning the supposedly 'objective' status of photography and its place in the scientific world.⁵⁷

In terms of Victorian fiction, in recent years, much critical attention has fallen on the impact of photography on the realist novel. Nancy Armstrong, Daniel Novak, Jennifer Green-Lewis, and Owen Clayton have, for example, provided fresh insights into the way that Victorians reacted to photography and how these reactions were embedded into contemporary fiction.⁵⁸ Whilst I share the consensus that photography had a significant impact on how people saw and wrote about the world, and I have benefited from their analysis and applied it where relevant, my thesis differs in its focus on the world of spirits and ghosts rather than that of realism and therefore for the most part I do not agree or disagree with their findings. Susan Williams's work on magic portrait fiction in the years prior to the American civil war proved a helpful study on this fascinating sub-genre, as did Kerry Powell's reading of the influences behind *Dorian Gray*.⁵⁹ Bar Williams's work, there has been little research on the impact of photography (and/or spirit photography) on ghost stories, which forms a critical strand of this thesis.

*

I return to Simone, who produced the 'physical semblance of the spirit's dead body' (p.235), whom Madame Exe declared to be her "'own flesh and blood! My little one come back to me from the dead, alive and breathing.'" From within the cabinet there

⁵⁵ Jolly, Frontleaf, *Faces of the Living Dead*.

⁵⁶ Gunning, 'Phantom Images', p.64.

⁵⁷ Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005) p.66 and p.126.

⁵⁸ Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996); Daniel Novak, *Realism, Photography and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ Susan Williams, *Confounding Images: Photography and Portraiture in Antebellum American Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); and Kerry Powell, 'Tom, Dick and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction', *Philological Quarterly*, 62 (1983) 147-170.

is a scream and the thud of a body falling. Raoul and the maid, Elise, rush forwards and find Simone to be dead and shrunken to “half her usual size”. Elise asks in horror, “what has been happening here?” (p.241). The author prefigured a horrific world in which the ghost borrowed the lifeblood of the medium so that she could return to the arms of her mother. My aim in this thesis is to answer Elise’s question: “what has been happening here?” How did it get to this point – in which spirit mediums provided images of the dead and ghosts could feasibly be formed of ‘flesh and blood’? What I will aim to demonstrate in this thesis is that the desire to keep in touch with the dead was shaped, to some degree, by photography.

1 'AN AWFUL LIKENESS OF HIMSELF': DICKENS AND THE SHADOWS OF EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY

The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our 'natural magic', and may be fixed forever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy.⁶⁰

The silhouette created when light is obstructed by a solid object, known as a shadow, has not only reassured us of our visual existence from time immemorial, but has helped us to understand and explain the nature of that existence. Following Plato, the shadow has provided a metaphor through which thinkers could articulate the difference between the original and the copy. For Pliny the Elder, it symbolised the human desire to record an image and preserve it in the memory. Often used metaphorically to describe dreams and ghosts, shadows have always held an intuitive relationship with the romantic and the supernatural, providing easy inspiration for shadow puppet play and the haunting phantasmagoria. The shadow's age-old affinity with ghosts and haunting made it ripe for absorption into the relatively new 'ghost story' genre which spawned in the nineteenth century, providing atmosphere, chiaroscuro description and the perfect tool for describing the indescribable.

Moreover, in 1839, following the official announcement of Daguerre's invention and Fox Talbot's creation of the 'photogenic drawing' process in the same year, the shadow became imbued with added significance and meaning. Essential to the technical processes behind photography, especially as relayed through the discourse of the early photographers, the shadow became synonymous with the new invention. In this chapter, I will examine the shadow motif, paying particular attention to the new connotations imported by photography, and exploring how Dickens employed the shadow within his ghost stories, 'A Christmas Carol' (1843) and 'The Haunted Man and The Ghost's Bargain' (1848).⁶¹ I argue that, whilst he employed the

⁶⁰ Fox Talbot, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing', p.115.

⁶¹ Charles Dickens, 'A Christmas Carol' and 'The Haunted Man' in *Complete Ghost Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2009). Further references to these stories are to these editions and will be given parenthetically in the text.

shadow with a 'backward glance' at its past cultural appropriations, the writer used the shadow in a new way, which is responsive to the new invention of photography.⁶² What emerges from these tales is illustrative as regards modern reactions to photography, and the impact it had on contemporary thinking as depicted through the lens of fiction. More importantly, through his engagement with the shadow, I argue that Dickens brings to light the important role that photography had (and could have in the future) for archiving personal and communal memories, as well as gesturing towards some of the concerns that an over-reliance on photographic records might produce. Through his engagement with photographic shadows and memories, Dickens articulates what 'keeping in touch' with the past might look like in a new, photographic world.

Part I — The Shadow and Early Photography

In Plato's allegory of the cave, described in *The Republic* (375 BC), Socrates imagines primitive man to be imprisoned in a cave, facing a blank wall, watching the shadows projected by figures passing in front of a fire behind him and believing them to be real.⁶³ The philosopher is like a prisoner who has been freed from the cave, who understands that the shadows on the wall are projections of a reality outside the cave. Following Plato's logic, the shadows represent the limited perceptions available to ordinary man (the non-philosopher). They are mere imitations of the real world. The shadow also plays an important part in Pliny the Elder's understanding of art. In *Natural History* (AD 77), Pliny claims that the art of painting originated when Butades of Corinth's daughter traced the outline of the shadow of her lover on the wall, so that she could remember him when he went away.⁶⁴ Again, the shadow is being used to create an alternative reality; the woman provides an imitation of the real so that she can be reminded of her lover. Victor Stoichita observes that in Pliny's tale, the desire to

⁶² Green-Lewis uses the term 'backward glance' in *Modern Memory* to denote the way that early photographs looked backward to the past with a view to forging links with the future (p.42).

⁶³ Plato, *The Republic*, translated by G.M.A. Grube (Lancaster: Hackett Classics, 1992), VII, 514a-520a (pp.186-192).

⁶⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, ed. by H. Rackham, trans. by Prof. E.H. Warmington, 10 vols (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1952), XI; Bks XXXV, XLIII, pp.370-373.

create an image was engendered by the desire to remember: 'the primary purpose of basing a representation on the shadow was possibly that of turning it into a mnemonic aid; of making the absent become present.'⁶⁵

As Batchen elucidates in his discussion of Jacques Derrida's essay, 'Memoires of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins', Derrida observes that memory is necessary to the Corinthian maid's act of drawing: 'Perception has its origin in remembrance [...] Detached from the actual moment of perception, cast by the same thing that it divides, a shadow is simultaneously a memory and the stick of Dibutades a blind person's cane.' In order to draw something, Derrida explains, the artist has to turn away temporarily from the subject in order to touch pen to paper, and therefore he draws blindly, from memory, rather than observation. The shadow left by his pencil makes him, as Batchen put it, 'doubly blinded', as it obstructs him from both the subject and the line on his page. Further, Derrida observes that the maid must have drawn her lover blindly, without their glances meeting, as her lover was asleep and had his back to her. For Derrida, the picture of the shadow lover has absence as its subject. It is a memory of him, requiring the imagination to conjure up the details of his image.⁶⁶ In both Plato and Pliny's tales, the shadow is an imitation, gesturing towards absence and the existence of an alternative reality. These ancient legacies have helped shape the shadow into a motif which is coloured with complex ideas relating to ontology, memory and the imagination.

The fact that the shadow appeared to be real, and yet was insubstantial, made it an emollient form to absorb supernatural fantasies. Stoichita discusses how Plato elides the concept of 'shadows' with that of specular images, 'phantasmata' and 'eidola', in *The Republic* and *The Sophist*.⁶⁷ In his translation of Homer's *Iliad* (1791) William Cowper blurs ontological distinctions, referring to a spectre as 'shadow', 'phantom', and 'dream'.⁶⁸ In *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Samuel Taylor Coleridge also

⁶⁵ Victor Stoichita, *The History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1997), p.15.

⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Memoires of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins' (Paris: Reunion des Musées Nationaux, 1990), 54; quoted in Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England; MIT Press, 1997), pp.118-119.

⁶⁷ Stoichita, pp.25-26.

⁶⁸ *The Iliad of Homer Translated into English Blank Verse by William Cowper* (London: Hard Press, 2006), II, see references to 'phantom' (line 8), 'shadow' (line 23, 70) and 'dream' (lines 6, 18, and 26).

conflates the idea of ghosts, dreams and shadows when he refers to the ‘shadows of the imagination’ in his professed intention to use ‘persons and characters supernatural’ in his *Lyrical Ballads*.⁶⁹ The ontological instability of the shadow was exploited by eighteenth-century visual entertainers, especially operators of magic lanterns and phantasmagoria. Although there may have been other experimenters before him, the invention of the magic lantern is usually accredited to Athanasius Kircher, as his accounts in *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (c.1640) of the first projector using lenses and slides, reflection, refraction, and the play of light and shadow, are the most detailed. Warner observes that the subjects of this early visual entertainment, which are depicted in Kircher’s notebooks, ‘are almost always supernatural creatures, with looming devils and dancing skeletons predominating.’⁷⁰

The magic lantern was reinvigorated after the French Revolution in Paris by the inventor, Étienne Gaspard Robertson, who created the ‘Fantasmagorie’: sound and light show (from the Greek, ‘assembly of phantoms’). Using a projector on wheels called the ‘Fantascope’, which moved back and forth, giving the illusion that the spectres were approaching the observer, and with bright light from an oil lamp, Robertson produced a terrifying montage of shadows. Again, leaning on supernatural imagery, the shadows of skeletons, demons and ghosts were projected onto walls, and special effects were produced using smoke, which thrilled the audience.⁷¹ These shadowy spectres of doom descended from what Warner terms, the ‘baggage of past beliefs’, which I believe also included the shadow imagery in the Bible, such as the ‘valley of the shadow of death’.⁷² Shadows are often associated with death, sadness, or can symbolise an emerging threat: ‘there’s a shadow hanging over me’ became a common phrase to describe sorrow or a fear of the future.⁷³ As Warner puts it, whilst

⁶⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* [1817], 2 vols, ed. by J. Shawcross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), II (p.6).

⁷⁰ Warner, p.142.

⁷¹ Warner, pp.147-149.

⁷² Warner, p.155; Psalms 23.4.

⁷³ Lennon/McCartney, *Yesterday* (1965). Holman Hunt’s *The Shadow of Death* (1870-1873) envisages a young Christ in the carpenter shop, stretching his arms, throwing a shadow which appears to be a forecast of his future crucifixion: <<http://www.williamholmanhunt.org/shadow-of-death/>> [accessed 30 Sep 2019].

the shadow was often associated with entertainment, it could be a reflective and melancholy motif, 'a prime vehicle of ideas for absence, loss and memory.'⁷⁴



Figure 5. Joseph Wright of Derby, *The Corinthian Maid*, oil on canvas, 1783 – 1784. National Gallery of Art, Paul Mellon Collection, Washington D.C., U.S.A.

At the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the activity of silhouette-drawing became fashionable in middle-class drawing rooms. This coincided with the spread of the ideas of the Swiss physiognomist, Johann Kaspar Lavater, who in his *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (published between 1775 and 1778) preached that characters and dispositions could be read from the person's outward appearance. Lavater often used a silhouette profile projected on a screen to analyse characters and amateurs enjoyed attempts to do the same, determining character from the position and size of the nose, chin and brow.⁷⁵ Pliny's myth of the Corinthian maid enjoyed a popular revival (in conjunction with silhouette-making) and was the subject of a piece commissioned by the famous potter, Josiah Wedgwood, in 1783, by Joseph Wright of Derby (see Figure 5). Geoffrey Batchen observes that Josiah's son Thomas would have been 14 years old when the painting was delivered and it may well have inspired him (given a few years later he began his own early photographic experiments, as I explain below).⁷⁶ Whilst Batchen's idea that the painting may have inspired the young

⁷⁴ Warner, p.156.

⁷⁵ Warner, pp.161-162.

⁷⁶ Batchen, p.116.

Wedgwood in his photographic endeavours is attractive, Wright's focus on the maid's drawing around her lover's body rather than his shadow (which is not visible in the picture) suggests the artist's focus is more on the origin of portrait-painting, rather than a prevision of the pre-photographic experiments with which Thomas Wedgwood later engaged. In fact, the most obvious shadow in the picture is the maid's, which suggests that the artist's focus could be a commentary on the 'shadowing' quality of myth itself, drawing attention to the way that the maid's experience is repeated, imitated and retold over centuries.

By the early nineteenth century, the shadow had absorbed a variety of ideas and narratives. For many it still spoke of Plato's philosophical origins as a model for thought and it is certainly arguable that this legend was in Tennyson's mind when he wrote 'The Lady of Shalott' (1833), a poem in which the lady watches a world of shadows from the interior of a cave-like tower.⁷⁷ The revival of the Corinthian Maid story, along with silhouette-drawing, helped further associate the shadow icon with the depiction of identity and record-making. Simultaneously, the shadow whispered of the supernatural excitements of the phantasmagoria and symbolised future sorrow. Shadows could both provide reassurance of presence - seeing a double image on a sunny day, a silhouette of a person's profile – but, witnessed in the dark, could be associated with death and absence, the chimera of the unknown.

*

The shadow was an important feature of proto-photographic experiments from their inception. Thomas Wedgwood conducted various experiments at the end of the eighteenth century, which were published by the renowned scientist Sir Humphry Davy in 1802.⁷⁸ Wedgwood harnessed the power of the sun by producing the imprints of shadow images onto white paper and leather prepared with silver nitrate. Whilst early experimenters like Wedgwood were not yet capable of 'fixing the image' permanently,

⁷⁷ Republished in 1842. See Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Poetical Works of Alfred Tennyson* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1870).

⁷⁸ Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), pp.37-39.

as it continued to expose in light and eventually disappeared, they demonstrated the desire to project and retain the shadow onto paper.⁷⁹

Daguerre had previously invented the 'diorama' and been an illustrious showman before announcing his invention of the daguerreotype in 1839. In the 1820s, he had formed a partnership with the inventor, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, who had been experimenting with creating images from light onto paper and silver salt since 1816 (and who is in fact credited with producing the first, faint but permanent, photographic image in 1826, which he called 'heliography').⁸⁰ Around that time, Daguerre had also been experimenting with silvered copper plates strengthened with iodine, but his experiments were not as far advanced. After Niépce died, legend has it that Daguerre identified the last stage in fixing the image through an accident involving spilt mercury. Following negotiations with Niépce's family, Daguerre took his discovery to the astronomer and scientist Francois Dominique Arago, who spoke eloquently on his behalf to the Académie des Science on 7th January 1839 and to the French government, which offered pensions to Daguerre and Niépce's estate in exchange for rights to the 'daguerreotype'. The image was formed onto a silvered copper plate, first sensitised by applying the vapour of iodine. Its copper surface made it reflective, which at times made it hard to see.⁸¹ As one contemporary journalist put it, writing in 1839:

In order to form some idea of M. Daguerre's discovery, the reader may suppose himself before a looking-glass in which he sees his own face reflected, and, standing fixedly for ten minutes, he finds at the end of that time an ineffaceable impression is left upon the glass, presenting the form and features of his portrait.⁸²

Being a direct positive made of metal, it could not produce copies and only one original was produced each time. Contemporaries were especially impressed with the fantastic clarity, 'delicacy' and 'minutest details' that the polished metal was capable of capturing.⁸³ Another reason for its popularity was because the French government had declared it 'A Gift to the "whole world"', with the exception of England, where

⁷⁹ As explained by Talbot in 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing', p.115; and Batchen, p.27 and p.31.

⁸⁰ Clayton, pp.16-17.

⁸¹ Gernsheim, pp.67-73.

⁸² 'Heliography', *Penny Magazine*, 8.457 (1839), 186-187 (p.186).

⁸³ 'Heliography', p.186.

Daguerre had registered a patent (only a few days before the French government made this generous declaration).⁸⁴ This made it easy for large numbers to practise and sell the new technology, and it took off rapidly in America as a result.

Although Daguerre laid claim to the invention of the daguerreotype in January 1839, it was Talbot's photogenic drawing process, which he later developed into the 'calotype' in 1841, which formed the precursor to the positive-negative process that dominated photographic history until the digital revolution. The calotype relied upon the action of light upon paper coated with solutions of nitrate of silver and iodide of potassium, forming silver iodide. The result was an image composed of areas of shadow that varied proportionately to the amount of exposure to light.⁸⁵ This 'negative' image formed a direct opposite to the original subject, in that the lightest areas of the photographed subject appeared darkest, and vice versa.⁸⁶ By contrast to the daguerreotype, the calotype was soft and grainy, slightly blurred, showing its paper surface underneath. Talbot registered a patent on his calotype in 1841 and pursued anybody who practiced without a licence. This meant that the calotype process was used by fewer people (few could afford the patent fees) and consequently did not advance at the rate of the daguerreotype, which most people could enjoy for free (with the exception of England, the only nation subject to Daguerre's patent).

In his address to the Royal Society of February in 1839 (also published in the *Athenaeum*), Talbot describes his photographic process through the motif of the shadow:

The phenomenon which I have now briefly mentioned appears to me to partake of the character of the *marvellous*, almost as much as any fact which physical investigation has yet brought to our knowledge. The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our 'natural magic', and may be fixed for ever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Article (1): 'History and Practice of Photogenic Drawing, or the true Principles of the Daguerreotype. By the Inventor, L.J.M. Daguerre, translated by J.S. Memes, LLD', *The Edinburgh Review*, 76.154 (1843), 312-344 (p.322).

⁸⁵ Gernsheim, p.82.

⁸⁶ According to Gernsheim, the scientist Sir John Frederick William Herschel, an early experimenter with Daguerre's and Talbot's techniques, was the first to coin the terms 'positive' and 'negative' in his paper to the Royal Society of 1840; pp.95-97.

⁸⁷ Fox Talbot, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing', p.115.

Talbot later explains his thinking in his later work, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-1846):

The ordinary effect of light upon white sensitive paper is to blacken it. If therefore any object, such as a leaf for instance, be laid upon the paper, this, by intercepting the action of the light, preserves the whiteness of the paper beneath it, and accordingly when it is removed there appears the form or shadow of the leaf marked out in white upon the blackened paper; and since shadows are usually dark, and this is the reverse, it is called in the language of photography, a negative image.⁸⁸



Figure 6. William Henry Fox Talbot, *Wrack*, Print of Seaweed, salted paper print, 1839, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S.A.

Talbot's photographic model was based on preserving the sensitised paper from the blackening effects of light. The 'negative' was then converted to a 'positive' image through a second exposure process onto photo-sensitive paper and then fixed through the use of gallo-nitrate of silver solution.⁸⁹ Figure 6 is an early contact print, taken using photo-sensitised paper but without a camera, showing that the area of the picture exposed to light has gone dark and the part overshadowed by the plant appears light.

Notwithstanding the differences in their appearance and methods of production, both daguerreotype and calotype were often referred to by

⁸⁸ Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, Plate XX.

⁸⁹ Gernsheim, p.82.

contemporaries as 'shadows'. In its commentary on 'photogenic drawing', the *Athenaeum* follows Talbot's lead in emphasising the role of the 'shadow'.⁹⁰ Similarly, in his response to Talbot's paper of January 1839, Mr. Lubbock of the Royal Society, describes how 'even a shadow, the emblem of all that is most fleeting in this world, is fettered by the spell of the invention, and remains perfect and permanent long after it has been given back to the sunbeam which produced it'.⁹¹ Lubbock's description demonstrates how contemporaries tended to conflate the idea that the camera could *photograph* the most fleeting and temporal of subjects, the shadow, and also by recording shadow images of other subjects, the photograph itself *acted like a shadow*, copying and retaining something that had been real and present.

In their correspondence of 1846, the writer Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle frequently refer to daguerreotypes of each other as 'shadows' or 'sun pictures':

Furthermore, - yes, you shall have that sun-shadow, a Daguerreotype likeness, as the sun shall please to paint it: there has often been talk of getting me to that establishment, but I never yet could go. [...] *Provided* you, as you promise, go and do likewise! A strange moment that, when I look upon your dead shadow again; instead of the living face, which remains unchanged within me, enveloped in beautiful clouds, and emerging now and then into strange clearness! ⁹²

In this letter from Carlyle, the latter describes the daguerreotype metonymically as that 'sun-shadow' and 'dead shadow', whereby its shadowy nature has become its defining feature and a recognisable shorthand for the daguerreotype. In his response, Emerson also refers to photographs as 'shadows'. He praises the ability of the sun as an 'artist', on the basis of its capacity to recall precise detail, so drawing an emotional response. It:

Remembers what every other forgets to report, & what I wish to know, the true sculpture of the features, the angles, the special organism, the rooting of the hair [...] and the sun does that, & you have done it in this portrait, which gives me much to think & feel.⁹³

Emerson sounds captivated by the 'shadow' image of his friend, which highlighted small details of Carlyle's face and triggered nostalgic reflections. In contrast, Carlyle expresses horror at the 'poor Shadow' he receives of Emerson, which he terms a 'bad

⁹⁰ 'Our Weekly Gossip', *Athenaeum*, 588 (1839), 96-97 (p.96).

⁹¹ 'Royal Society', *Literary Gazette*, 1150 (1839), p.75.

⁹² Letter of 18 April 1846 from Carlyle to Emerson, *Correspondence*, p.395. This correspondence came to my attention through Clayton, pp.1-2.

⁹³ Letter of 31 May 1846 from Emerson to Carlyle, *Correspondence*, p.400.

Photograph', in which the personality of Emerson is 'imprisoned in baleful shades, as of the valley of Death', thus again indicating his employment of the term 'shadow' (by the partial quotation of Psalms 23.4).⁹⁴ Emerson is pleased that the implied 'shadow' will help him remember his friend. Carlyle is concerned that it will give him a false recollection of Emerson, one he associates with death. In this concern, Carlyle anticipated Barthes, who felt that the photograph could bring about 'a micro-version of death'. For Barthes, the click of the camera precipitated a moment when 'I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object', in which 'I am truly becoming a specter'.⁹⁵ The ghostly image produced by the camera could often provide an inferior imitation of the person, looking frozen and corpse-like. Here, we see how Platonic ideas of the shadow as imitation, Pliny's concept of the shadow portrait, and Biblical overtones concerning the shadow of death, have been blended and revive in photographic discourse.

In a much-quoted letter of 7 December 1843, Elizabeth Barrett Browning also terms the daguerreotype a shadow, praising the magical way in which it could represent the past moment:

My dearest Miss Mitford, do you know anything about that wonderful invention of the day, called the Daguerrotype? [*sic*] [...] Think of a man sitting down in the sun & leaving his facsimile in all its full completion of outline & shadow, stedfast [*sic*] on a plate, at the end of a minute & a half!! The Mesmeric disembodiment of spirits strikes one as a degree less marvellous. And several of these wonderful portraits... like engravings — only exquisite & delicate beyond the work of graver — have I seen lately — longing to have such a memorial of every Being dear to me in the world. It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases — but the association, & the sense of nearness involved in the thing... the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed for ever! —⁹⁶

As Groth observes, the way in which Barrett-Browning refers to the photographic process echoes that of Talbot in his address to the Royal Society of February 1839 (as reported by the *Athenaeum*) on 'photogenic drawing', when he describes the 'marvellous' retention of the shadow.⁹⁷ Groth also notes that Daguerre's invention was

⁹⁴ Letter of 17 July 1846 from Carlyle to Emerson, *Correspondence*, p.404.

⁹⁵ Barthes, p.14.

⁹⁶ *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, pp.357-8.

⁹⁷ Fox Talbot, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing', p.115.

announced on 26 January 1839, in the same edition of the *Athenaeum* in which Barrett Browning published her eulogy to Letitia Landon. The announcement referred to the:

Long researches made by M. Daguerre, to produce the wonderful effects of light and shadow which he exhibits in his dioramas, have ended in his present invention. Briefly to explain it: it enables him to combine with the *camera obscura* an *engraving power* – that is, by an apparatus, at once to receive the reflection of the scene without, and to fix its forms and tints indelibly on metal in *chiaroscuro*.⁹⁸

Barrett-Browning and the writer of this article (of January 1839) use similar terms as Fox Talbot to praise the daguerreotype: 'light and shadow', 'engraving', 'reflection'. Given that the image seen on paper would have been much more than a 'shadow' (it would have showed the duplicate image of the real person, even if fairly blurred and hazy at this early stage), suggests that the shadow had become an instrumental metaphor for understanding both types of photographic practice.

Barrett-Browning's comparison of 'shadow pictures' with 'the Mesmeric disembodiment of spirits' indicates that she had absorbed the supernatural discourse which was commonly employed by early inventors, like Talbot.⁹⁹ As Batchen observes, in *The Pencil of Nature* Talbot was keen to distance himself from the agency behind photography. Both in his report in 1839 and later writings he implies that it was a spontaneous process which took place with little human intervention, describing how the shadow image was 'impressed by Nature's hand' and titling his own work, *The Pencil of Nature*, attributing agency to Nature and to the sun.¹⁰⁰ Even the image Talbot used on the front cover (see Figure 7 below) illustrates the incorporation of light plants and dark shadows behind them (similar to Talbot's early images of the 'fixed shadows' of plants, as per Figure 6), blended together into a pattern through the 'pencil' of the artist, suggesting the harmonious correspondence between nature and art in the new process of picture-making.

⁹⁸ 'Foreign Correspondence', *Athenaeum*, 587 (26 January 1839), p.69, also quoted in Groth, p.135.

⁹⁹ Fox Talbot, 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing', p.115.

¹⁰⁰ Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, title page and p.2; Batchen pp.66-68.



Figure 7. William Henry Fox Talbot, Decorative Front cover of *The Pencil of Nature*, 1844-1846 (London: Longman and others, 1844). British Library, London.

Moreover, as I noted in the Introduction, other contemporaries were keen to articulate the process in magical terms. In their visit to a celebrated photographer's studio, portrayed in their article 'Photography' (1853), journalists Henry Morley and W.H. Wills of *Household Words* describe the photographic process in supernatural terms, naming the photographer the 'expert magician', calling the dark closet where the processing took place, 'the very head quarters [sic] of spectredom' and the mixture of chemicals as the blending of 'spirits'.¹⁰¹ In her well known discussion on 'Photography' (1857), Lady Elizabeth Eastlake employs a supernatural lexicon: pronouncing the early photographic experimenters 'magician[s]', Niépce as a 'sorcerer', and making comparisons with literary magic, calling photography 'one of those subtle agencies which, though Ariel-like it will serve you bravely, will never be taught implicitly to obey', referring to the capricious spirit in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.¹⁰² Jennifer Green-Lewis observes the 'language of magic and mysticism'

¹⁰¹ 'Photography', *Household Words*, 7.156 (1853) 54-61 (p.56).

¹⁰² Lady Eastlake, 'Photography' [1857] in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, Connecticut: Leete's Island Books, 1980), pp.39-68 (p.52 and p.55).

which pervades the later poem 'Fox Talbot – His Early Experiments' (1889), by the writer and photographer Friese Green, who compares photography to a 'magician's charm':

We nurse the absent, in affection warm
Present the distant, and retain the dead
Shadows remaining, but the substance fled;
For faces vanish like the dreams of night
But live in portraits drawn by beams of light.
Exquisite Nature caught in changing dress;
Motion in photography appears at rest.¹⁰³

The poet notes the seemingly supernatural way that photography appears to keep the dead alive, making distant things appear present. In particular, he emphasises how the shadow remains even after the substance has departed ('secure the shadow 'ere the substance fade' was by this point a well-established marketing motto to persuade people to have their image taken before their beauty or health faded).¹⁰⁴ In the poem, the shadow is associated with magic and with memory, but this time in the context of a technological process that distorted the usual rules of space and time, presence and absence.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the motif of the shadow had been overshadowed by photography. Contemporaries often referred to both daguerreotypes and calotypes as 'shadows', and consequently, the shadow became imbued with a new, post-photographic identity, which was closely associated with mimesis and the depiction of the past. However, like a palimpsest, the shadow still bore the traces of its cultural heritage, especially as a metaphor for thought and as harbinger of the supernatural. Moreover, the new photographic shadows (whether by daguerreotype or calotype) were black and white, aping the spectral (phantasmagoria) and yet also standing as an appropriate metaphor for memories – building from the black and white silhouette indicated by the Corinthian maid — which from photography onwards, became ever more the 'muted colour palette' associated with the 'backward

¹⁰³ Friese Green, 'Fox Talbot – His Early Experiments', *The Convention Papers*. Supplement to *Photography* 1.36 (1889), 6; quoted in Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, p.44.

¹⁰⁴ Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, p.45.

glance'.¹⁰⁵ It is therefore no wonder that this strange silhouette, which underwrote so many different stories, provided a suitable vehicle for Dicken's ghostly tales.

Part II — 'The Little Piece of Business Between the Sun and Myself'

It therefore follows that Dickens's ghost stories, 'A Christmas Carol' and 'The Haunted Man', were born into a photographic age.¹⁰⁶ Although photography had officially emerged in 1839, numbers of professional photographers were relatively small in England in the 1840s, due to the aforementioned patents in place in respect of both processes until the early 1850s. Those few who were in practice were well-known and profitable (more on these later). In 1853 Daguerre's patent lapsed, and two years later Talbot's patent expired and following public and legal pressure, he chose not to renew it. Subsequently, from this point on, numbers of professional photographers in London escalated rapidly and photography became more accessible. Lady Eastlake reports that by 1857, there were 147 photographers in London.¹⁰⁷ A London photographer reportedly said in 1863 that, 'within little more than the last decade of years [photography] has grown from an amusement of the educated, or the occupation of a small number of professional Daguerreotypes, in a few metropolitan cities, into an important branch of the industry of the world.'¹⁰⁸

Whilst there were few professional image-takers in existence in England in the 1840s, Scotland, in which Talbot's patent was not registered, played a key role in the development of early positive-negative photography. Scotland produced the oldest photographic society, the Edinburgh Calotype club, established in 1843 and home to the painter, David Octavius Hill, who, in tandem with the photographer, Robert

¹⁰⁵ Warner, pp.162-3. Even now, films/television often add a sepia glow when they want to indicate a flashback in time. The phrase 'backward glance' is borrowed from Green-Lewis, *Making Modern Memory*, pp.40-41.

¹⁰⁶ The concept of a 'photographic age' is borrowed from the title of Nancy Armstrong's book, *Fiction in the Age of Photography*.

¹⁰⁷ Lady Eastlake, 'Photography', in Trachtenberg, p.40.

¹⁰⁸ 'A Photographer's Relief Fund', *Photographic News*, 11 Dec 1863, 589, quoted in Tucker, p.34.

Adamson, became the most renowned photographic duo of the 1840s.¹⁰⁹ Hill and Adamson collaborated in producing a huge number of salted paper prints of Scottish subjects, including landscapes, buildings and various portraits of native Scots. Hill and Adamson used Talbot's calotype process, soaking the light sensitive salt and silver into the upper layers of the paper, creating a plain, matt surface, opposed to the shiny, mirrored effect of the daguerreotype.¹¹⁰

For the most part, in England in the 1840s, commercial portrait artists favoured using the daguerreotype, due to its shiny, polished surface and the fine detail that it could achieve. In 1841, the entrepreneur, Richard Beard, purchased a licence from Daguerre (via his English agent, Miles Berry) and set up a daguerreotype studio under the glass roof of London's Royal Polytechnic Institution.¹¹¹ The Frenchman Antoine Claudet also obtained a licence from Berry and set up practice on the roof of the Adelaide Gallery, near St Martin-in-the-Fields in London. Initially Claudet's portraits were not as popular as Beard's, but by 1842, his technique with a new 'Petzval' lens from Paris engendered equal success and he even sold directly to Queen Victoria.¹¹² Another well-known daguerreotypist was the American, John Jabez Edwin Mayall, who opened a daguerreotype studio in London in 1851 and took daguerreotypes of many famous celebrities.¹¹³

Dickens had numerous photographic portraits created over his lifetime, including cartes-de-visite, daguerreotypes and prints, which indicates the value he attached to the photographic monument. He was initially sceptical of the merits of photography. In a letter to his friend, Angela Burdett-Coutts, of May 1841, he advises her:

¹⁰⁹ Gernsheim, pp.165-167. For more on the history of the Edinburgh Calotype Club and its members, see 'Pencils of Light: the Albums of the Edinburgh Calotype Club':

<<https://digital.nls.uk/pencilsoflight/history.htm>> [accessed 30 Sep 2019].

¹¹⁰ See 'Salt and Silver: Early Photography 1840-1960', exhibition by the Tate Gallery, London, 5 March 2015: <<https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/flowering-photography>> [accessed 30 Sep 2019].

¹¹¹ Gernsheim, p.135. A number of Beard's daguerreotypes are available in the NPG:

<<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp06664/richard-beard>> [accessed 30 Sep 2019].

¹¹² Gernsheim, p.134.

¹¹³ See NPG website: <<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp53668/john-jabez-edwin-mayall>> [accessed 30 Sep 2019], which holds more than 160 images by Mayall. Mayall is mentioned as a 'very skilful artist' in 'Photography', *Household Words*, p.57.

If anybody should entreat you to go to the Polytechnic Institution and have a Photographic likeness done – don't be prevailed upon, on any terms. The Sun is a great fellow in his way, but portrait painting is not his line. I speak from experience, having suffered dreadfully.¹¹⁴

Given Beard had just opened his studio in the Royal Polytechnic Institution in that year, we can surmise that Dickens was probably one of the first people to try the new invention (although sadly this original daguerreotype has not survived), thus implying his piquant, if critical, interest in the new technology. Dickens may have discussed Beard with his friend and illustrator of *Oliver Twist* (1839), George Cruikshank, who produced a caricature of Beard's studio in a woodcut illustrating a poem on 'The New School of Portrait-Painting' in the same year (see Figure 8 below).¹¹⁵ In this early impression of a studio, we see the clamps for keeping the sitter's head still, and magnifying glasses being imposed on the waiting sitters (highlighting the microscopic detail that the camera was anticipated to detect). Whilst we assume the 'suffering' Dickens mentions in the letter is about the product, Cruikshank's capturing of the sitter stalled by the vice gestures at the discomforts endured by subjects. As the writers of 'Photography' in *Household Words* comment, regarding the sitters at a photographer's studio, "they have all been executed here", comparing the 'sitting' to an execution, and calling the photographer the 'taker of men'.¹¹⁶ As Barthes observes, subjects often had to assume 'long poses under a glass roof in bright sunlight', and the process of being propped up by a brace was akin to a 'surgical operation'.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Letter of 23 May 1841 from Dickens to Burdett-Coutts, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Kathleen Tillotson and others (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), II, p.284.

¹¹⁵ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866); and *George Cruikshank's Omnibus* (London: [n.pub.], 1842), pp.29-32; quoted in Gernsheim, pp.137-138.

¹¹⁶ 'Photography', *Household Words*, p.55. Novak mentions adverts for chairs which could be used for either photography or dentistry, p.43.

¹¹⁷ Barthes, p.13.

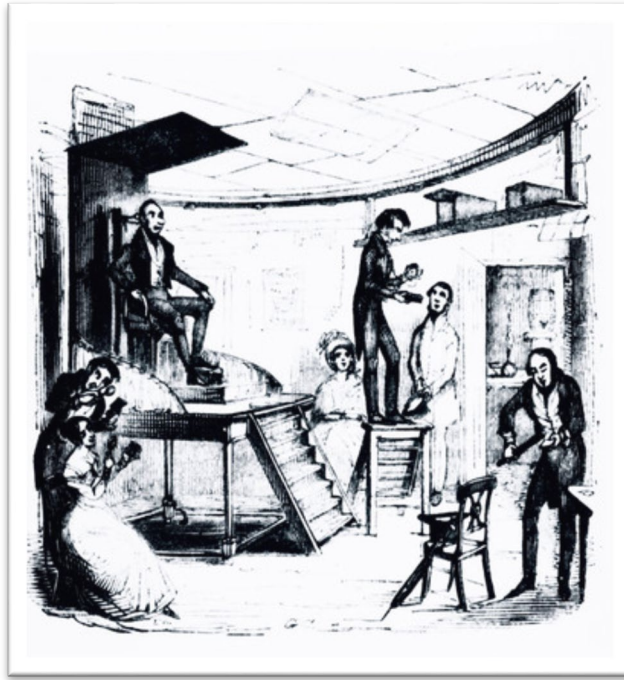


Figure 8. George Cruikshank, *The New School of Portrait-Painting*, Woodcut of an Engraving of Richard Beard's Studio, 1841-2. National Science and Media Museum, Bradford, 10299698.

In his letter to Burdett-Coutts of May 1841, Dickens describes 'the Sun' as the active agent behind the process (rather than the photographer), suggesting he had absorbed the discourse of Talbot and other contemporaries in distancing the photographer from the process. Dickens would also most likely have read about the new photographic inventions, and the chemical processes through which the daguerreotype and calotype were created, given that significant articles on both processes were featured in the same edition of *The Edinburgh Review* (1843) as a rather brusque review of Dickens's *American Notes for General Circulation* by James Spedding, which Dickens read and responded to.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ *The Edinburgh Review*, 76.154 (1843). Article (1) is 'History and Practice of Photogenic Drawing, or the true Principles of the Daguerreotype,' by L.J.M. Daguerre, translated by J.S. Memes, LLD; Article (3) is 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or the Process by which Natural Objects may be made to Delineate themselves without the aid of the Artist's Pencil', by Henry Fox Talbot, 310-344; and Article (8) is James Spedding's 'Review of *American Notes for General Circulation*, by Charles Dickens', 497-522,. Dickens wrote to *The Times* asking to clarify one or two 'misrepresentations' by Spedding in its columns (letter to the Editor of *The Times* 15 January 1843 [pp.423-424]); and in a letter to Macvey Napier, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, stated that 'it did [...] hurt my feelings excessively', 21 January 1843 [p.430]); in *Letters*, III.

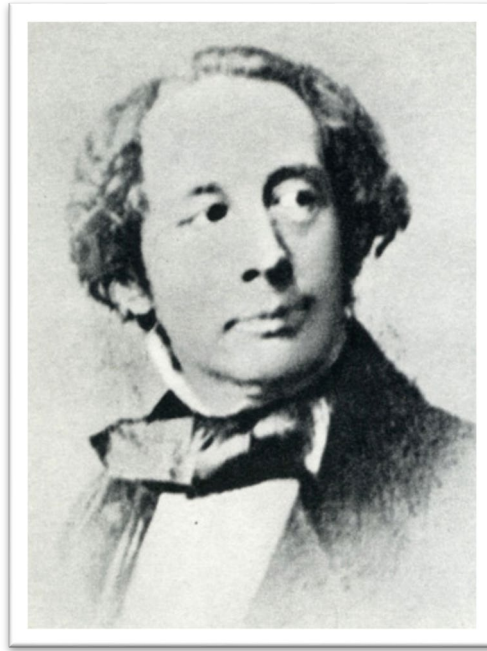


Figure 9. John Mayall, *Daguerreotype of Charles Dickens*, 1849-1850. Sussex Photohistory website.

A daguerreotype of Dickens taken around 1850 (usually attributed to John Mayall, see Figure 9), not long after writing 'The Haunted Man', has survived. Dickens's letters record that he visited Mayall in 1852, observing in another letter to Burdett-Coutts of December 1852:

I'm happy to say that the little piece of business between the Sun and myself, came off with great success. [...] The Artist who operated [John Mayall], is quite a Genius in that way [...] I am disposed to think the portrait *by far the best specimen* of anything in that way, I have ever seen. Some of the peculiarities inseparable from the process - as a slight rigidity and desperate grimness - are in it, but greatly modified. I sat five times.¹¹⁹

The critic, Regina B. Oost, observes that a brochure for Mayall's Daguerreotype Portrait Galleries appeared with the edition of *Bleak House* of 15 May 1853, a few months after Dickens had had his own photograph taken at Mayall's studio, which implies both his support for Mayall and the assumption (by the publisher at least) that Dickens's readership would be interested in having their image taken.¹²⁰ Various articles were produced on photography in Dickens's journal, *Household Words* and *All*

¹¹⁹ Letter to Miss Burdett-Coutts of 23 December 1852, *Letters*, VI, p.834. Editor notes that the photograph taken on 31 December 1852 by J.E. Mayall cost £3.30, as noted in his account book.

¹²⁰ Regina B. Oost, "'More Like Than Life': Painting, Photography, and Dickens's *Bleak House*", *Dickens Studies Annual*, 30 (2001), 141-158 (p.143).

the Year Round, such as the aforementioned 'Photography' and also 'Busy with the Photograph' (1854), which discussed the 'marvellous' and 'beautiful' deeds produced by 'the agency of light'.¹²¹

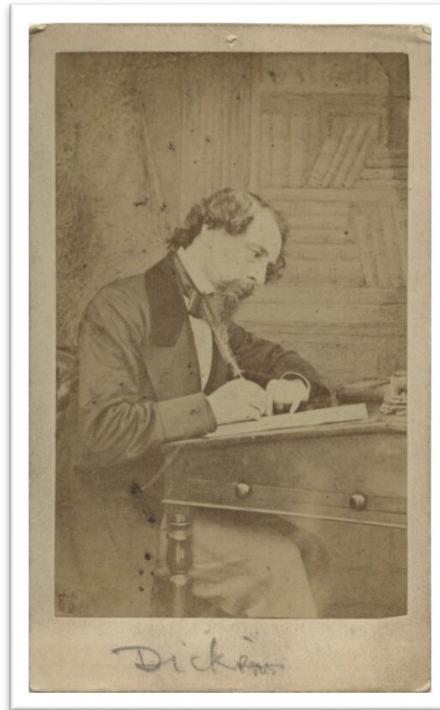


Figure 10. Herbert Watkins, *Charles Dickens*, albumen carte-de-visite, 1858

National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG P301(19).

From the mid- to late 1850s, images of Dickens were widely distributed and he was often recognised as a result of circulating photographs.¹²² In a letter to his friend William Kent in 1856, he expresses ambivalence about the pressures of photography and a dislike of having his face on sale:

Scarcely a week passes, without my receiving requests from various quarters, to sit for likenesses, to be taken by all processes ever invented. Apart from my having an invincible objection to the multiplication of my countenance in the Shop Windows, I have not – between my avocations and my needful recreation – the time to comply with these proposals.¹²³

¹²¹ 'Photography'; and William Blanchard Jerrold, 'Busy with the Photograph', 9.214 (1854) 242-245.

¹²² Kate Flint, 'Visual Culture', in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Holly Furneux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.155. Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990), pp.852-3.

¹²³ Letter to William Kent, 24 December 1856, *Letters*, Vol VIII, p.245.

Notwithstanding this reluctance, in 1858, Dickens made time for a photograph by Herbert Watkins (Figure 10), which one contemporary reviewer described as ‘one of the happiest specimens’ by that photographer.¹²⁴ Dickens was photographed writing, which suggests he recognised the importance of what we would describe now as ‘marketing’ himself as a writer. Dickens had further images taken over the years, by Amadio in 1859,¹²⁵ and Robert Hindry Mason in 1864-5, and Mason also photographed Dickens and his family at his home at Gad’s Hill Place in August 1866. On his trip to America in 1867-8, Dickens sat for Jeremiah Gurney and Mathew Brady – presumably recognising that the sale of photographs there would help publicise his public readings and increase profits.¹²⁶

Dickens also occasionally mentions photography in his novels, for example in *Great Expectations* (1868), when Pip says he used to imagine the gravestones of his dead parents: ‘As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs)’.¹²⁷ As Green-Lewis observes, Pip’s view is conditioned by his belonging to a photographic age: before the 1840s, it was the era of ‘posthumous visual oblivion’, in which only the rich were visually remembered. The fact that Dickens draws attention to the narrow possibilities available to the pre-photographic generation for visualising lost loved ones suggests his awareness of how photography has revolutionised the way that the dead are remembered.¹²⁸ Whilst, like Carlyle, he may have been ambivalent, at times, about the quality of the ‘shadow’ produced, Dickens continued to have photographs taken and circulated throughout his lifetime and explored them in his journalism and writing. It is therefore feasible that the recent photographic inventions may have been in his mind when writing ‘A Christmas Carol’ and ‘The Haunted Man’.

¹²⁴ ‘Charles Dickens’, *The Critic*, 17.426 (1858), 534-537, (p.536).

¹²⁵ ‘Scientific Items’, *The Critic*, 18.451 (1859), 211-212, (p.211).

¹²⁶ Kate Flint, ‘Visual Culture’, pp.155-156. Henry James also sat for Mathew Brady in 1854, referring to ‘Mr Brady’s vise’ in his autobiography, *A Small Boy and Others*, ed. F.W. Dupee (New York: Criterion, 1956), p.52. Also quoted by Edward L. Schwarzschild, ‘Revising Vulnerability: Henry James’s Confrontation with Photography’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 38.1 (1996), 51-78 (p.52).

¹²⁷ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.3.

¹²⁸ Green-Lewis, p.92. Dickens also mentions photography in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) and *Oliver Twist* (Novak, p.64, footnote 4).

Part III — The ‘Shadows of the Things that Have Been’

As is well known, from the numerous literary, cinematic and theatrical renditions, ‘A Christmas Carol’ is the famous story of Scrooge, a mean-spirited moneylender who hates Christmas, calling it ‘humbug’ (p.58). He is visited by the ghost of his old partner Joseph Marley, bound to walk the earth with heavy chains because of the sins of his life, who warns Scrooge to expect three ghosts that night. The Ghost of Christmas Past then appears, who shows Scrooge errors that the latter made in privileging money and neglecting loved ones in the past. Next, the Ghost of Christmas Present reveals scenes of happy Christmases that he has excluded himself from, in particular the impecunious Cratchits and the invalid Tiny Tim. Lastly, he sees the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, who points to his future death, unmissed and unloved, along with the death of Tiny Tim. Following the visits of the three Ghosts, Scrooge declares that he will mend his ways.

There are various suggestions that Dickens is engaging with the nascent invention of photography in this tale. The plot is premised upon the idea of a character witnessing visions of the past, present and future, which are described throughout as ‘shadows’. When the Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge images from his childhood, of neighbouring children playing on horses, the Ghost says ““These are but shadows of the things that have been [...] They have no consciousness of us.”” (p.75) When Scrooge asks to leave the images of his past behind, the Ghost exclaims ““One shadow more!”” (p.83), and shows him an image of Scrooge’s fiancée from the past, Belle, happy in the present with her chosen husband and family. When Scrooge protests about what he sees, the Ghost replies ““I told you these were shadows of the things that have been,”” said the Ghost. ““That they are what they are do not blame me!”” (p.84) The repeated use of the word ‘shadows’ to describe the images witnessed by Scrooge is noteworthy because Dickens does not usually use it to denote ghosts in the text (instead he usually uses ‘Ghost’ or ‘Spirit’), but like the early photographers or writers quoted previously (Carlyle, Emerson, Barrett-Browning) he uses the term ‘shadow’ to describe the images of the past.

Richard Terdiman uses the phrase ‘present past’ to describe memories: ‘whenever anything is conserved and reappears in a representation, we are in the

presence of a memory effect.’¹²⁹ This offers an apt description of the pictures of the ‘things that have been’ that are shown to Scrooge, of his ‘poor forgotten self as he had used to be’ (p.75). Like memories, they appear to be in the present, although we know they took place in the past. The idea that the ‘things that have been’ could be captured as images and later shown to others sounds photographic in nature. It is as if the Ghost is showing Scrooge a photographic panorama (which did not yet exist), or, looking ahead to a photographic scrapbook, which became popular in the 1860s. As mentioned earlier, the magic lantern and phantasmagoria also offered entertainment in the form of shadows, and therefore these could have been in Dickens’s mind when using the word ‘shadow’ to refer to images of ‘things’ past. Davies claims there is a “‘phantasmagoric logic’” in ‘A Christmas Carol’, that is, a ‘sequence of connecting mental images’ in the different visits of the Ghosts. To my mind, Dickens’s use of the shadow here could conceivably have been inspired by a blend of both visual and early photographic culture, and is simultaneously tapping into the rich catalogue of ancient associations, philosophical and spiritual, which predated them.¹³⁰ As Dickens claims in ‘The Chimes’ (1844), ‘spirits [...] take such shapes and occupations as the hopes and thoughts of mortals, and the recollections they have stored up, give them.’¹³¹ The interpretation of ghosts will always be contingent and changeable depending on the nature of contemporary preoccupations and the circumstances in which they are born. As the invention of photography was a key preoccupation of the time, which had the potential to alter the recollections of the past and the legacy given to the future, it is quite possible that these concerns may have informed the shadow imagery in ‘A Christmas Carol’.

One characteristic of the ‘shadow’ in the story which suggests it may have been shaped by photography is the shadow’s disruption of temporal norms. The shadows experienced by Scrooge not only emanate from the past, but display the present and future as well. When the third Ghost arrives, Scrooge guesses that he is to be shown more ‘shadows’: “‘You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not

¹²⁹ Richard Terdiman, *Present Modernity and the Past Memory Crisis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.8.

¹³⁰ Davies, p.237.

¹³¹ Charles Dickens, *The Chimes* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1845) p.106.

happened, but will happen in the time before us,” Scrooge pursued. “Is that so, Spirit?” (p.104). The ‘shadows’ in ‘A Christmas Carol’ glance backwards, focus on the present, and then look forwards. This reminds us of the way that perusing a group of photographs can lift us through leaps in time, travelling into the ancient past (by viewing contemporary photographs of ancient busts, sculptures, and geological formations), capturing the present, and looking ahead to the photographic legacies that will be handed to the future. An image by Fox-Talbot titled *The Geologists* (see Figure 11), taken in the same year that ‘A Christmas Carol’ was published, in 1843, portrays such a leap backwards in time. Whilst the focus is on the Victorian ‘geologists’ in the foreground, the implied subject is the craggy, fossilised rockface they are pointing to, which gestures to layer upon layer of time past.¹³²



Figure 11. William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Geologists*, salt print, 1843. The National Science and Media Museum, Bradford.

Barthes makes a similar observation in *Camera Lucida*, when he views a photograph of a man awaiting his execution. The photograph is necessarily of a past moment, but the ‘*punctum*’, or point that pricks him concerning the image is: ‘*he is going to die*’. In the same photograph we encounter the past: ‘*this has been*’ and the future ‘*this will be*’.¹³³ Similarly, in ‘A Christmas Carol’, the ‘shadows’ show what has occurred, what is occurring, and what will be, in the image of the gravestone and unidentified corpse

¹³² Green-Lewis also refers to this photograph in *Making Modern Memory*, observing that the photograph itself (of fossils) produces further fossilisation ‘since both shadow and rock left versions of themselves as traces on Talbot’s calotype’ (p.80).

¹³³ Barthes, p.96.

(*'he is going to die'*). When necessary, the Ghosts provide the narrative that determines the meaning of each image, just as we often provide an explanatory gloss for photographs, which aid interpretation.

Dickens further complicates the temporality in the story by suggesting that the 'shadows' of the future might be contingent, not necessarily presages of the future, but visions of what *might* happen, and which Scrooge could potentially control. Of Tiny Tim and the Cratchits, the Ghost says: "'I see a vacant seat [...] in the poor chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die'" (p.94). The Ghost's suggestion that the 'shadows' might not be true images of the future, but predictions based on current behaviour, reminds us of the fictional, distorting possibilities of photographs. We know from his letters to Burdett-Coutts that Dickens was cognisant of the 'rigidity and desperate grimness' that emerges from the process – the way that the camera made it appear that a person was dying – or could look one way in a photograph, and then another in the next. We have seen the vice which propped up the head in Cruikshank's image of Beard's studio which held sitters up during the long exposure times, suggesting the necessary props used to achieve a 'natural' appearance. Photographic truth could be contingent.¹³⁴ As Daniel Novak puts it, in its potential for fictionality, Victorian photography 'problematised ideas of a stable self,' which is what we see in Scrooge's story: the form of one 'shadow' could alter the next.¹³⁵

Green-Lewis argues convincingly that Dickens's photographic awareness in *David Copperfield* (1850) is indicated by a change in the temporal norms of the text, a switch 'into photography's pictorial present tense'.¹³⁶ When David observes the steerage on the ship that Peggotty and Emily must take to America, he reports on the scene as if it were a picture: adopting the role of spectator, describing copious detail (with no detail being more important than another) and using the present tense, as we all do when we look at photographs (e.g. 'here I am, at the beach'). By doing this, we remove the moment from its narrative progression, framing a scene or moment, taking

¹³⁴ As Barthes said, 'the Photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else' (p.28).

¹³⁵ Novak, p.34.

¹³⁶ Green-Lewis, p.108.

it out of the usual flow of time.¹³⁷ There are moments when we feel, in 'A Christmas Carol', as if Scrooge is looking at various 'shadow' scenes as though they are pictures, or as Green-Lewis puts it, keeping him visually in the 'present tense of memory'.¹³⁸ He is reluctantly made to be an onlooker in his own life, whilst the Ghosts show him images. We know that Scrooge looks for himself in the images, as we all do when looking at photographs: he tried 'to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared' and 'looked about in that very place for his own image...[yet] he saw no likeness of himself' (p.106). The way that Scrooge initially looks at the figure of his own corpse (and yet professes not to recognise who it is) echoes Carlyle and his perception of his image as his 'dead shadow', gesturing to that feeling of knowing and not knowing your own face.¹³⁹ Scrooge is forced to recognise the nature of his future plight, should he continue in greed and selfishness. When looking at the dead body, he says, in a telling drift toward the present tense, "'I see, I see'" (p.109) (in Barthes's terms, that would be: 'here I am, as a corpse'). The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come also slips into the present tense, when he talks of the absence of Tiny Tim: "'I see a vacant seat'" he says (p.94). On realising his potential fate, should he carry on behaving heartlessly, Scrooge declares that he will "'live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!'" (p.116). Whilst the usage of the 'photographic present' is not as extensive as in *David Copperfield*, there are flashes of this in 'A Christmas Carol', along with a sense that Dickens is exploring how a character can travel in time through observing images. Scrooge's intention to live in the Past, Present and Future, sounds peculiarly modern and post-photographic.

Although the visions are said to appear real to Scrooge, there are suggestions that the 'shadows' that he sees emanate from his mind rather than his eyes. Shadows and memories become interchangeable in the text, and are in themselves contingent

¹³⁷ Groth, p.24.

¹³⁸ Green-Lewis, p.92.

¹³⁹ This calls to mind the photographer famously quoted by Henry Mayhew: 'People don't know their own faces... [D]irectly they see a pair of eyes and a nose, they fancy they are their own.' 'Street Photography', *London Labour and the London Poor* (New York: Penguin, 1985) p.341, quoted in Novak, p.72. When he received his painted portrait by Art Scheffer in 1850s, Dickens expressed similar feelings of disorientation, stating it did not look like him, suggesting that "'it is always possible that I don't know my own face.'" John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. by J.W.T. Ley (London: C. Palmer, 1928) p.619, quoted in Novak, p.72.

upon his interpretation. When Scrooge first sees the 'shadow' of Marley's face on the door, it is not only as Nick Freeman says aptly, 'memorably horrifying', but also appears like a photograph, engraved on the silver knocker before him.¹⁴⁰ Scrooge ruminates obsessively on the encounter after it has passed: he stares at the pictured tiles by the fire: 'and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one' (p.65).

The original manuscript (Figure 12 below) shows that Dickens originally wrote 'there would have been old Marley's head [on every one]', but he has struck it out to add 'there would have been a copy of Marley's head on every one' (my emphasis). The notion of the 'copy' sounds quasi-photographic, like an array of photographic slides, repeating and multiplying on each tile. In fact, what Scrooge sees is not an image of the ghost just seen, but a memory of Marley's face. We are reminded that the face 'was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look; with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead' (p.63), which indicates there is a blur between ghosts, shadows and memories. What Scrooge sees is the product of 'the disjointed fragments of his thoughts' (p.65), that is, a resurgence of old memories that manifest themselves in 'pictures' that imprint themselves before him on solid objects – door knockers and tiles. His memories of the dead Marley are being projected in pictorial form onto shiny metal and copied, which brings to mind aspects of both the daguerreotype and calotype.

¹⁴⁰ Freeman, p.96.

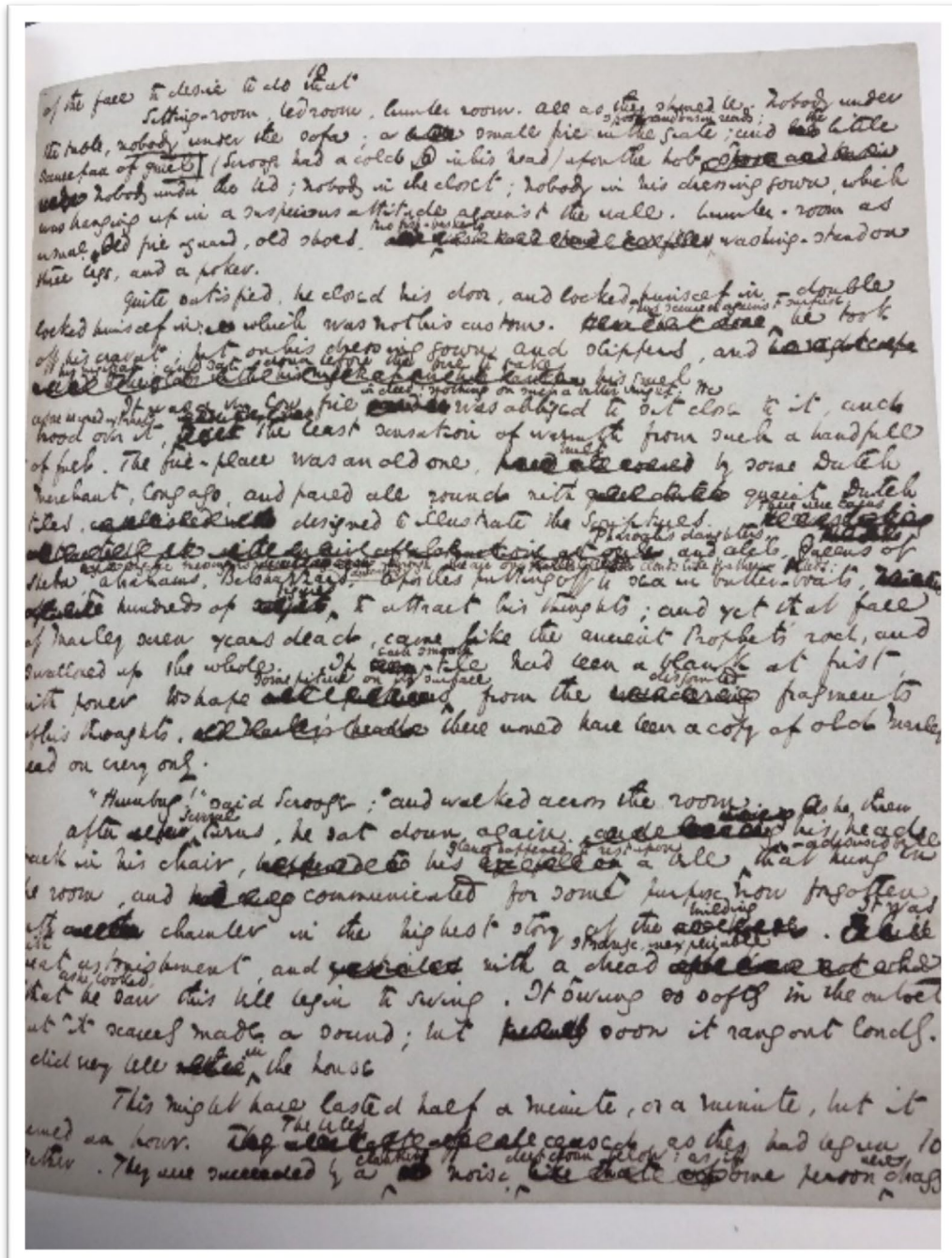


Figure 12. Photograph of Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, Original 1843 Manuscript (New York: Levenson Press, 2011), p.10.

Similarly, the Ghost of Christmas Past is described as a shadowy conglomeration of multiple faces from the past, 'with a face in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with it' (p.84). Scrooge's visual impression of the Ghost sounds like Dickens is looking ahead to the composite photographs of the future, or the cut and pasted photograph albums

created in the era of the carte-de-visite, which were not yet in existence.¹⁴¹ In both of these descriptions, the ghosts are associated with multiple faces, fragments and copies, which uncannily echoes Dickens's later views about the proliferation of photographs and his 'objection to the multiplication of my countenance' in shops, expressed in 'Looking in at Shop Windows' (1869).¹⁴² John Harvey comments that Marley's description sounds like Dickens is pre-empting the appearance of photographic spirit 'extras', that is, the spiritual faces that appeared unexpectedly in portrait photographs. Like an 'extra', comments Harvey, 'Marley's ghost was a face afloat in the dark', echoing its associations with photography.¹⁴³ In my reading of Marley as a 'photographic' ghost, I differ from Bann, who has argued that Marley represented the classic 'restricted' ghost, tied down by chains, ledgers and deeds, which tended to dominate prior to the arrival of Spiritualism in 1848.¹⁴⁴ Whilst I agree that Marley is not especially corporeal (he is said to be 'transparent'), and with his clanking chains, exhibits certain characteristic of an old-fashioned ghost, my reading of Marley's multiplied image on the tiles suggest that his ghost stands for more than being just a 'limited' ghost of the past. Along with the other Spirits, Dickens positions Marley within a fresh school of narration that is reliant on images and shadows, flashbacks and 'foreshadowing[s]' (p.115), which looks ahead to the photography-based narratives of the future (and ultimately film).

'A Christmas Carol' demonstrates the importance of past, present, and future 'shadows' for the development of moral identity. It is as if Scrooge has been compelled to observe a photographic magic lantern show of 'this is your life' in order to learn the nature of his mistakes. But the tale also implies that Scrooge will not undertake a moral improvement until he knows how to interpret the images that he is shown and assemble the narrative to which they relate. Remembering his past self, and the

¹⁴¹ Famous composite photographs, pictures containing numbers of different negatives joined together during development, are Oscar Rejlander's *The Two Ways of Life* (1857) or Henry Peach Robinson's *Fading Away* (1858). Cutting and pasting photographs into an album was a popular middle-class pastime; Novak, p.14.

¹⁴² Letter to William Kent, 24 December 1856, *Letters*, Vol VIII, p.245. In 'Looking in at Shop Windows,' in *All the Year Round*, 2.28 (1869) 37-43, the writer is horrified by the equality with which cartes de visite of celebrities are displayed in shops, with no attention to class, rank, or how they achieved fame (p.42).

¹⁴³ John Harvey, *Photography and Spirit* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007) p.124.

¹⁴⁴ Bann, p.663.

decisions he made which corrupted him, and being aware of the present that surrounds him (Cratchitt, the invalid Tim, his nephew) is key to understanding, and altering, his future. As the Spirit says “‘Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. [...] But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change’” (p.115). Scrooge has successfully read his past narrative, witnessed what it prefigures and begs for a chance to rewrite it, or as he puts it, “‘sponge away the writing on this stone!’” (p.115) (his gravestone): “‘Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me by an altered life?’” (p.115) In his case, successfully reading the ‘shadows’ of his past and the ‘foreshadowing’ of his future has allowed him to rewrite a different narrative for his life.

In his treatment of Scrooge’s shadows, I think Dickens is hinting at the importance of photography for preserving memories and writing (and rewriting stories), both individually and socially. Through the previsions of the future in ‘A Christmas Carol’ comes an awareness of what the present will look like to the future, what the legacy of that moment might be (for Scrooge, his unkind behaviour will be his legacy, his forgotten corpse his future). In her discussion concerning the evolution of photography into different forms, Green-Lewis discusses the motivation for such transitions as the ‘ongoing human desire for narration’ which pre-existed the Victorians, and will live on in generations to come.¹⁴⁵ In ‘A Christmas Carol’, we see how the photograph-like ‘shadows’ play a significant part in narrating to Scrooge (and us) the story that makes him who he is. In his desire to keep in touch with the “‘the Past, the Present, and the Future’”, Scrooge was ahead of his time. He was foreshadowing a photographic future.

Part IV — ‘An Awful Likeness of Himself’

Dickens returns to the theme of memory in ‘The Haunted Man’ of 1848, although as Michael Slater observes, whilst Scrooge blocked out memories of his past, Redlaw, a lonely chemistry teacher, ‘broods too much over his past wrongs and sorrows’.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Green-Lewis, p.xvi.

¹⁴⁶ Slater, pp.280-281.

Whilst Redlaw contemplates his sad past, a dark spectre (which he calls the 'Phantom'), looking identical to Redlaw, appears and offers him the ability to eradicate his memory of the past on condition that he passes this amnesiac 'gift' to all others whom he encounters. Redlaw consents and we observe how the characters whom he meets — the Swidgers, who serve Redlaw; a sick student; and the Tetterby family, who rent a room to the student — all lose their memories of the past following contact with Redlaw, and become bitter and ungrateful toward their loved ones as a result. The only characters who remain immune to his curse are the good Milly Swidger and a strange, wild, child, who lacks all happy memories so had none to lose. Upon witnessing the breakdown in the relationships around him, Redlaw begs the Phantom to reverse the bargain. In consequence, without her being conscious of it, Milly Swidger restores the memories for all the characters, bar Redlaw. Although he cannot fully recover his memories, he learns to accommodate his past and forgive those who have wronged him. In essence, the story highlights how important memories of the past (both good and bad) are for the construction of identity and the endurance of relationships. As Groth comments, the story 'insists on the civilising power of memory, its ability to suppress the chaos of individual desire and to foster social responsibility.'¹⁴⁷ The characters are better citizens when their memories have returned, aware of the ties that bind them.

Dickens admits 'heaping up' a 'quantity of shadows' into 'The Haunted Man', creating an atmospheric chiaroscuro of spectral shapes that dance around the protagonist, Redlaw, as he reflected on the sorrows of his life:

When twilight everywhere released the shadows, prisoned up all day, that now closed in and gathered like mustering swarms of ghosts. When they stood lowering, in corners of rooms, and frowned out from behind half-opened doors. [...] When they danced upon the floors, and walls, and ceilings of inhabited chambers, while the fire was low, and withdrew like ebbing waters when it sprang into a blaze. (pp.124-125)

Dickens explains that he added numerous shadows to the beginning of the tale in order to prepare for 'the appearance of the dark shadow of the Chemist'. According to Dickens, setting the appropriate atmosphere of 'gathering gloom and darkness' was

¹⁴⁷ Helen Groth, 'Reading Victorian Illusions: Dickens's Haunted Man and Dr. Pepper's "Ghost"', *Victorian Studies*, 50.1 (2007) 43-65, (p.43).

necessary to make the appearance of the Phantom credible.¹⁴⁸ As well as setting the scene, I consider that the shadows in 'The Haunted Man' provide a thematic backbone for the story and, as with 'A Christmas Carol', they function like photographs in the tale. My argument rests on two grounds: firstly, in their function as 'likenesses', and secondly, in their association with the past and more specifically, with memories. Whilst memories (and shadows) are ultimately validated in the story, the temporal uncertainties and distortions that the shadows bring with them suggest that, along with the excitement around the new invention, photography brought with it epistemological and ontological questions that required exploration.

THE SHADOW AS A 'LIKENESS'

When Redlaw meets the Phantom, the latter is described as 'this fearful shadow' (p.139), with a 'shadowy hand' (p.177), and in a lone soliloquy, Redlaw exclaims "'Shadow of myself! Spirit of my darker hours!'" (p.176). However, unlike a normal shadow, which would be a black and faceless silhouette, the Phantom is described as looking like an 'awful likeness of himself' (p.135), that is, a mimesis of Redlaw. In the 1840s, the term 'likeness' is likely to have been associated with the daguerreotype portraiture of the 1840s (note Dickens's reference to a 'Photographic likeness' in his letter to Burdett-Coutts of 1841 and Carlyle's reference to a 'Daguerreotype likeness' in his letter to Emerson of 1847, mentioned earlier).¹⁴⁹

More specifically, there are echoes of the daguerreotype in this image of shadowy likeness. The narrator speculates that the Phantom is a mirror image (like a daguerreotype):

Surely there had been no figure leaning on the back of his chair; no face looking over it. It is certain that no gliding footsteps touched the floor, as he lifted up his head, with a start, and spoke. And yet there was no mirror in the room on whose surface his own form could have cast its shadow for a moment; and Something had passed darkly and gone! (p.125)

¹⁴⁸ Letter to the Earl of Carlisle, 2 Jan 1849, *Letters*, V, p.466.

¹⁴⁹ Letter of 23 May 1841, *Letters*, II, p.284; and letter of 18 April 1847, *Correspondence*, p.395. Much later, in *Oliver Twist*, Mrs. Bedwin describes the camera as the "'machine for taking likenesses'", p.85; quoted in Novak, p.128, footnote 5.

The Phantom's reflective appearance calls to mind contemporary perceptions of the daguerreotype as a mirror, and one writer's description of it as a 'looking-glass in which he sees his own face reflected'.¹⁵⁰ The writer, Oliver Wendell-Holmes, later compared the daguerreotype to a 'mirror with a memory' in his article 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph' (1859) which, whilst written over ten years after the publication of 'The Haunted Man', indicates contemporaries' awareness of the reflective qualities of the new invention.¹⁵¹ Redlaw's ghost mimics what he does, replicating his pose and expressions, just like a daguerreotype would mirror the image of the posing subject:

As he leaned his arm upon the elbow of the chair, ruminating before the fire, it leaned upon the chair-back, close above him, with its appalling copy of his face looking back where his face looked, and bearing the expression his face bore. (p.135)



Figure 13. John and Charles Watkins, *Charles Dickens*, albumen carte-de-visite, 1861. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG Ax16252.

Even Redlaw's pose (leaning his arm upon the elbow of the chair) and that of the Phantom (leaning upon the chair-back) are both very much echoes of the standard 'posed' photograph from the daguerreotype studio of that time (indeed, Dickens

¹⁵⁰ 'Heliography', p.186.

¹⁵¹ Oliver Wendell-Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph' [1859], in Alan Trachtenberg, pp.71-82 (p.74).

himself later posed with his elbow on the arm of a chair for a photograph by John and Charles Watkins in 1861, see Figure 13). As noted earlier, leaning on furniture or being held by a brace were often necessary to the early photographic process, given the long exposure times and necessity for stillness. Consequently, Redlaw's pose in 'The Haunted Man' hints at a photographic cliché.

My contention that the Phantom is acting as a photographic 'likeness' of Redlaw is further supported by the narrator's suggestion that the image of the Phantom developed, through a 'process', in slow degrees, just like the latent image taken as a camera reacts to chemical development in a dark room: 'As the gloom and shadow thickened behind him [Redlaw], in that place where it had been gathering so darkly, it took, by slow degrees – or out of it there came, by some unreal, unsubstantial process – not to be traced by any human sense – an awful likeness of himself!' (p.135) It is no coincidence that Redlaw is said to be a chemist, bound up in cultural terms with the photo-chemists of that period (Daguerre, Talbot, Herschel), surrounded by 'the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids' (p.123) which could have been similar to those used for the development of images.

Despite indications it is acting like a daguerreotype, the Phantom's ontological status remains elusive. The text pulls us one way, suggesting the image is produced by a mirror reflection, and then another, towards a supernatural explanation, stating 'there was no mirror in the room' and 'Something had passed darkly and gone!' (p.125). More generally, the use of 'shadow' is laced with uncertainty. During Redlaw's second encounter with the Phantom, the latter shows him a 'shadow' image of events, which, as with those contingent images shown by the Ghost of Christmas Past in 'A Christmas Carol', might or might not occur. When Redlaw asks the Phantom if he can reverse the curse that he has put on the other characters, erasing their memories, the latter shows Redlaw an image of Milly beside him. Redlaw is confessedly uncertain whether the person is really Milly, or whether it is her 'shade' and 'picture' (p.177). In reply, the Phantom states that the image of Milly is "'but a shadow'" and enjoins, "'when the morning shines seek out the reality whose image I present before you'" (p.178). Despite being termed a 'shadow', the image of Milly bears enough detail to

evoke recognition and an emotive response, and like Redlaw's shadow (or the shadows in 'A Christmas Carol'), acts more like a photograph than a black silhouette:

The quiet head was bent a little, as her manner was, and her eyes were looking down, as if in pity, on the sleeping child. A radiant light fell on her face, but did not touch the Phantom; for, though close beside her, it was dark and colourless as ever. (pp.177-178)

Once the Phantom has shown Redlaw Milly's 'shadow' image, the former released her hand, and 'her shadow, still preserving the same attitude, began to move or melt away' (p.178). This suggests that Dickens is redefining the 'shadow' as a 'picture' or 'likeness' of the real, which comes and goes with the autonomy of a ghost (but is not, in fact, a ghost). These are transient images, more like the 'dissolving views' of the panorama and diorama, or other photography-based entertainments like the stereoscope, which were popular around the mid-nineteenth century.

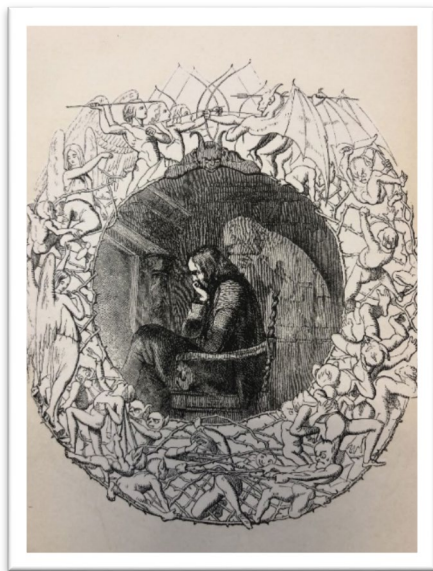


Figure 14. John Tenniel, *Frontispiece*, original illustration, 1848. Charles Dickens, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*.

Figure 15. J. Leech, *Redlaw and the Phantom*, original illustration, 1848. Charles Dickens, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*.

This lingering uncertainty concerning the ontological status of the ghost, which is described as being both a 'dark and colourless' shadow, and yet also an exact mirror image of Redlaw, is borne out by the different illustrations by Tenniel and Leech in the original version of *The Haunted Man* (see Figures 14 and 15). Tenniel's *Frontispiece*

shows Redlaw with a shadowy ghost behind him, looking like himself but significantly paler, possibly shrouded, and much more clearly a 'ghost'. Yet the circular frame that surrounds the image is connotative of a gilded mirror frame, which hints at the possibility that the image is a mirror reflection.¹⁵² Leech's illustration of 'Redlaw and the Phantom', by contrast, shows a mirror image of the protagonist with his exact double behind him in the same pose, with the same features and clothes, and the same colouring: an accurate likeness. The two images come across as different interpretations of how the Phantom appeared (ghost or mirror image), which reinforces the ambiguity of the text.

The shadowy image of the Phantom resembling Redlaw could be called a 'doppelganger'. Although this term first emanated in the late eighteenth century, the motif of double spirits and alter egos has frequently appeared in folklore and myth pertaining to different cultures over time. The doppelganger increased in popularity during the nineteenth century and was central to a number of ghost stories, such as Poe's 'William Wilson' (1839), a story in which the protagonist is perpetually followed, interrupted and eventually undone by another person of the same name, born on the same day and who looks the same as him.¹⁵³ Just before Dickens wrote 'The Haunted Man', Hans Christian Andersen also published a 'doppelganger' story called 'The Shadow' (1847). Dickens met with the Danish writer during the summer of 1847, when the latter came to London to stay with the Countess of Blessington. The two formed a strong friendship and continued to correspond for the following decade, until Andersen visited Dickens at his house at Gad's Hill Place in 1857 (after which point the friendship abated).¹⁵⁴

In Andersen's tale, the protagonist, a learned professor, releases his shadow following its request to observe something beautiful beyond its reach. The shadow returns many years later as a rich and successful man, whilst the professor has become

¹⁵² Such circular mirrors with gilded frames were popular at the time; such as that in Ford Madox Brown's, *Take your Son Sir*, 1851-1857: < <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/brown-take-your-son-sir-n04429> > [accessed 26 Sep].

¹⁵³ Edgar Allan Poe, 'William Wilson', in *Complete Tales & Poems* (New Jersey: Castle Books, 2002), p.561.

¹⁵⁴ Reginald Spink, *Hans Christian Andersen and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p.83 and pp.89-94.

impecunious. Ultimately, the shadow ends up ascendant, marrying a princess and ordering the professor to be executed so that he cannot expose the shadow's true identity. The concept of releasing one's shadow to live its own life resonates with Barrett-Browning's image of the 'man... sitting down in the sun & leaving his facsimile in all its full completion of outline & shadow, stedfast [sic] on a plate, at the end of a minute & a half!!' Given the coincident timing of this story with Dickens's 'The Haunted Man', it is feasible that Dickens and Andersen may have discussed the idea of shadows, either in their meeting that year or in their subsequent letters. Either way, as Andersen was a keen traveller, by 1847, he would have been exposed to the exciting phenomenon of photography, whether in Denmark or during his trip to London or his numerous trips to other countries, and therefore it is feasible that the idea of releasing a shadow into the world may have emanated from photographic influences.¹⁵⁵

Other critics have argued that the popularity of the doppelganger motif may have been inspired by, or linked with, the invention of photography. Lindsay Smith contends, with reference both to fiction from the mid- to late nineteenth century and psychoanalysis by figures such as Jacques Lacan, that:

There occurs a major redefinition of the place of the double in mid to late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century culture [...] the invention and early development of photography coincides with the prevalence of the figure of the double in fictional texts and with the development of psychoanalytic theories.¹⁵⁶

Smith cites various other stories from the late nineteenth century which are centred upon the idea of a 'doppelganger' or 'double' of the self. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Guy de Maupassant's *The Horla* (1887) and Wilde's *Dorian Gray* all feature concepts of doubling, the manifestation of the darker side of the self, projected upon the shady, and in some cases terrifying, spectre of the 'other'.

¹⁵⁵ Sven Hakon Rossel reports that Hans Christian Andersen was 'one of the greatest travellers of the nineteenth century', quoting numerous countries he travelled to: see *Shadow Pictures from a Journey to the Hartz Mountains, Saxon Switzerland, etc. etc. in the Summer of 1831*, translated by Anna Halager, ed. by Sven Hakon Rossel and Monica Wenusch (Copenhagen: Praesens Verlag, 2011), p.11.

¹⁵⁶ Lindsay Smith, 'Photographic Portraiture and the forgetting of colour', *Journal of European Studies*, 30 (2000), 91-110 (p.99).

As Smith explains, photography united the mirror image and the shadow image, both of which were ‘well established doubles of the subject.’¹⁵⁷ The photograph (especially once the calotype took over from the 1850s and 1860s) allowed people to see themselves as objects for the first time – not as a lateral inversion (a mirror), a fictional doubling device, but the right way round, as they appeared in life. As a result, photography contributed to a new way of seeing the self as ‘other’, which was reflected in the creation of characters, who are separable from, and yet part of, the protagonist.¹⁵⁸ Talbot’s process also allowed for the reproduction of the image for the first time (where Daguerre’s process did not), which increased the sense of ‘doubling’ and repetition that photography facilitated, which in turn could have provoked a fear of losing control of one’s image (so terrifyingly depicted in Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘The Shadow’). As Smith says, ‘after photography people had different things to say about duality because the double could be conceptualised and represented differently’.¹⁵⁹

Dickens’s letters reflect that he recognised the imaginative potential of the shadow as a doppelganger. In the year following his publication of ‘The Haunted Man’, Dickens discussed the idea for a new periodical with his friend (and later, biographer), John Forster: ‘I want to suppose a certain SHADOW, which may go into any place [...] and be in all homes [...] and be supposed to be cognisant of everything, and go everywhere, without the least difficulty’.¹⁶⁰ Dickens perceives the ‘SHADOW’ to be like an agent of the author himself, an alter ego, upon which the novelist can project his own interests and concerns without specifically identifying himself. Yet at the same time, like the malevolent shadow in Andersen’s tale, he also imagines the ‘SHADOW’ to be a separate individual, with his own distinct personality, free to roam where Dickens could not:

I want to open the first number with this Shadow’s account of himself and his family. [...] I want him to issue his warnings from time to time [...] or to expose such and such a piece of humbug [...] I want him to loom as a fanciful thing all over London; and to get up a general notion of ‘What will the Shadow say about this, I wonder? What will the Shadow say about that? Is the

¹⁵⁷ Smith, p.96

¹⁵⁸ Smith, p.96.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, p.97.

¹⁶⁰ Letter to John Forster dated 7th October 1849, *Letters*, V, pp.622-623.

Shadow here?’ and so forth [...] it is the Thing at everybody’s elbow, and in everybody’s footsteps.¹⁶¹

Dickens was therefore attuned to the idea of the doppelganger and attracted to the idea of representing a different dimension of the self in his writing. It is therefore no surprise that in ‘The Haunted Man’, Dickens wished to explore the idea of a character encountering ‘an awful likeness of himself’, which articulates the protagonist’s deepest desires, enacts his wishes and yet appears to be separate to himself.¹⁶²

SHADOWS, MEMORIES AND CONFUSED TEMPORALITY

Whilst ‘The Haunted Man’ was not an outlier in its exploration of the ‘doppelganger’ theme, unlike the ‘shadow’ in Andersen’s tale, or William Wilson’s namesake and double, who are active agents living in the present, the Phantom (and the shadows associated with it) is predominantly associated with the past. The shadows are said to bring ‘the likenesses of forms and faces from the past’ (p.125), and Redlaw curses the fact that it is his doom to ‘remember’ these pictures of the past ‘too well’ (p.137). Following the terms of the bargain, the Phantom is able to wipe the ‘recollections’ (p.139) of Redlaw and all those whom he comes into contact with. Mrs. Tetterby describes how she could not remember the emotions and memories that bound her to her husband: “‘I can’t think what came over me [...] I couldn’t call up anything that seemed to bind us to each other, or to reconcile me to my fortune’” (pp.152-153). Without memories of his past relationship with his wife, Mr. Tetterby alters from a cheerful man to one who is resentful and dissatisfied, speaking ‘roughly’ to his children and ‘musing heavily and sullenly’ (p.155). When the Phantom wipes these characters’ memories, it ruptures their understanding of who they are and who they love.

Redlaw fails to understand the pleas of his sick student and is uninterested in the latter’s claims to have known him years ago: “‘The past is past,” said the Chemist. “It dies like the brutes. Who talks to me of its traces in my life? He raves or lies!’” (p.159). Eventually, Redlaw realises with horror the negative consequences of a society

¹⁶¹ Letter to John Forster dated 7th October 1849, *Letters*, V, pp.622-623.

¹⁶² A theme later explored by Robert Louis Stevenson in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* [1886], ed. by David Stuart Davies (Ware.: Wordsworth Editions, 1999).

without memories. He begs the Phantom to restore the memories of those who have lost them:

‘I do not ask for restoration to myself, said Redlaw. ‘What I abandoned, I abandoned of my own free will, and have justly lost. But for those to whom I have transferred the fatal gift; who never sought it; who unknowingly received a curse of which they had no warning, and which they had no power to shun; can I do nothing?’ (p.178)

He comes to understand that the strange and wild child who does not feel the curse is an embodiment of a human without memory, lacking any empathy, feeling or compassion – “the perfect type of what it was your choice to be” (p.180).

Although Redlaw is not able to retrieve his power of memory in the story, he learns to appreciate the importance of forgiveness as an alternative to the deletion of memories. He also learns to appreciate how ‘precious to old age such recollections are’ (p.192) and to value happy and sad memories alike. This theme of valuing memories is reiterated at the beginning and end of the tale by old man Swidger (p.134 and p.171) and summarised by the old portrait: “Lord, keep my memory green” (p.134 and p.198). The message of the story is that our memory and knowledge of the past is key to our ability to empathise with and love each other, and that without it, we are in danger of losing both our identity and our bonds with others. In this way, the Phantom, with his power to enable people to remember or to forget, embodies the power of a photograph, which is a technological invention that allows us to record, neglect or distort the past, which in turn conditions who we are, individually and socially.

Whilst the Phantom is predominantly associated with the past, at times it is tinged with a nightmarish vision of the future. This eddying between past and future echoes the temporal distortions of ‘A Christmas Carol’, and resonates with the photographic themes I have discussed in this earlier tale. In a foreshadowing of Redlaw’s future death (and a reminder of the visions shown by the Ghost of Christmases to Come), the Phantom is described as corpse-like, ‘the animated image of himself [Redlaw] dead’ (p.135). The features are ‘ghastly and cold’, its face and hands are said to be ‘colourless’ and its pose ‘motionless’ (p.135). The Phantom here sounds like an embodiment of what Carlyle termed a ‘dead shadow’ or a ‘bad Photograph’,

embodying the confused temporality of a photograph: he appears to be living and present as a 'likeness' yet is simultaneously associated with Redlaw's future corpse. It is interesting that in a later article in *All the Year Round*, 'Since This Old Cap Was new' (1859), one of Dickens's writers describes how photography has 'taken giant strides from its little dim cradle, full of misty shadowings of corpse-like colour, and distorted parts called daguerreotypes.'¹⁶³ The fact that photography is described as 'corpse-like' in its black and white colourings, and conflated with 'shadowings' reinforced the possibility that photography is implicated by the shadows in 'The Haunted Man'.

Groth argues persuasively that Dickens's association of memory with melancholy 'reflects a growing awareness on the part of the author and Victorians more generally that the continuous self might be an illusion produced by fallible memory's creative reinvention of the past.'¹⁶⁴ Redlaw has manipulated his memories into a narrative of sadness and disappointment, and allowed this interpretation to dominate his understanding of the past. Groth suggests that Victorians were starting to be aware that they too could be vulnerable to charges of a fallible memory. Richard Terdiman argues that during the nineteenth century, the Victorians underwent a 'memory crisis', that is, a 'sense that their past had somehow evaded memory.'¹⁶⁵ He posits the chief cause to be the huge disruptions of the European revolutions in the late eighteenth century, along with the industrial revolution, which caused a rupture with the past and a sense of insecurity. He argues that the invention and proliferation of photography was a response to the memory crisis, but was also its embodiment and reiteration.¹⁶⁶ Green-Lewis expands on this, claiming that in the nineteenth century there was a 'heightened fear of forgetting', stimulated by new findings about the extent of human history that existed prior to the century, which came about following new discoveries of the antiquity of the planet and knowledge concerning the age of fossils.¹⁶⁷ The evidence suggested that the world was much older than the Victorians,

¹⁶³ 'Since This Old Cap Was New', *All the Year Round*, 30 (1859), 76-80 (p.79).

¹⁶⁴ Groth, 'Reading Victorian Illusions', pp.47-48.

¹⁶⁵ Terdiman, p.4.

¹⁶⁶ Terdiman, p.28.

¹⁶⁷ Green-Lewis, p.25.

and the generations prior to them, had previously thought.¹⁶⁸ This sense that the past had ‘evaded memory’, triggered a greater interest in preserving history and archiving and retaining historical sources and souvenirs to preserve them for future generations.¹⁶⁹

Such an insecurity concerning the lost knowledge of past history, and the perils of faulty record keeping, is endorsed by contemporary evidence. When the NPG was established in 1856 (which I will discuss further in Chapter 2), one writer for the *Art-Journal* observed in 1857 that, ‘we are compelled to say, that history has not always kept her records as fully and faithfully as might be desired’ and that the opportunity to set up a museum, of images of famous names, was an opportunity to make ‘certain rectifications in her written page.’ The writer also demonstrates an awareness of the role that the new invention of photography might have in preserving national history, and in the ‘multiply[ing]’ and ‘distribution’ of copies of portraits to current and future generations.¹⁷⁰

Other contemporaries shared their vision of how photography could play a key role in preserving history going forward, providing a ‘kind of repository for national memory,’¹⁷¹ such as Wills and Morley of *Household Words*, who state in ‘Photography’ (1853) that ‘history will be indebted to photography for fac-similes of documents and volumes that have perished; travellers may bring home incontestable transcripts of inscriptions upon monuments or foreign scenery.’¹⁷² Prior to this, in 1843, *The Edinburgh Review* had claimed that ‘every [photographic] picture’ could become ‘an authentic chapter in the history of the world.’ The writer muses wistfully on the things that photography could have captured and archived, had it been invented: ‘Could we

¹⁶⁸ During most of the eighteenth century, it was commonly believed that the world dated from around 4000 BC. From the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, new evidence emerged which suggested that the world was very much older than had previously been thought; such as that articulated by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in his *Botanical Encyclopaedia* (1783) and *Zoological Philosophy* (1809), and Charles Lyell in his *The Principles of Geology: Being an Attempt to Explain the Former Changes of the Earth’s Surface* (1830-33); see Batchen, p.59. Gillian Beer first articulated this argument and the effect it had on Victorian literature in her influential *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, third edition 2009).

¹⁶⁹ Terdiman, p.4.

¹⁷⁰ ‘National Portrait Gallery’, *Art-Journal*, 26 (1857) 37-39 (p.37).

¹⁷¹ Green-Lewis, p.14.

¹⁷² ‘Photography’, p.61.

now see in photogenic light and shadow [...] Brutus at Pompey's statue bending over the bleeding Caesar – or Paul preaching at Athens [...] The heroes and sagas of ancient times, mortal though they be, would thus have been embalmed with more than Egyptian skill.' ¹⁷³ The writer suggests that having photographs would have enriched our history, which echoes the theme that Dickens is propagating in 'The Haunted Man', regarding the importance of memories for understanding and strengthening our social attachments.

However, if memories are associated with photographs in the tale, then the photograph is also implicated in the kind of subjective distortions in which Redlaw has indulged. The tale therefore reflects shades of ambivalence about photographic power and the new kind of 'haunting' that it offers. In the initial scene, when Redlaw sits surrounded by an abundance of shadows, he is said to be 'haunted' by them to an uncomfortable degree: his manner was 'taciturn, thoughtful, gloomy, shadowed by habitual reserve [...] with a distraught air of reverting to a bygone place and time, or of listening to some old echoes in his mind' (p.122). In the context of a story in which shadows and phantoms blur with mnemonic reflections, the idea that Redlaw is made miserable by a profusion of shadows of the past, suggests reservations about the contemporary abundance of photographs, and the way that images of the past could impose too heavily on the present. In an article in *All the Year Round* (1859), the writer notes:

Photography is everywhere now. Our trustiest friends, our most intimate enemies, stare us in the face from collodionised surfaces. Sharp detectives have photographs of criminals of whom they are in search [...] People are photographed on their visiting cards, or have tiny albuminised portraits of themselves in the crowns of their hats. There are photographs so minute as to be invisible, save under the microscope. They photograph infants and dead people.¹⁷⁴

The writer echoes this idea of photographic 'haunting', in that, like the shadows surrounding Redlaw, photography is 'everywhere now'. The writer displays concern about the multiplication (and cheapening) of the photographic image and the way that it has spread into nearly all aspects of Victorian life. The suggestion that 'sharp detectives' use photographs to identify criminals, suggests an anxiety about the

¹⁷³ 'History and Practice of Photogenic Drawing', *Edinburgh Review*, p.330.

¹⁷⁴ 'Since This Old Cap Was New', p.79.

photographic image being used to convict someone falsely of a crime. The writer mocks the self-absorption and self-promotion that photography has induced, in his derision of those who have photographed visiting cards or tiny photographs in the crowns of their hats (suggesting a narcissistic obsession with the self and the image). Lastly, the writer's juxtaposition of 'infants and dead people', in a short, blunt sentence at the end of a long list of photographic practices that have become increasingly ridiculous, implies that photography has not only encouraged stupidity but also triggered an unnatural and even necrophiliac obsession with the past. It is therefore arguable that Redlaw's musing on the shadows of the past has had a similar effect on him as, becoming obsessed with photographs, he has become self-absorbed and macabre, surrounded and obsessed by memories of the past. The moral steer of 'The Haunted Man' appears to be that whilst possessing image-memories is a good thing ("“Lord, keep my memory green”"), they must be handled appropriately, which appears in tune with the views of the writer in *All the Year Round*. Otherwise, the past can haunt the present to an uncomfortable degree.

The shadows in 'The Haunted Man' also appear insidious in their power to distort reality. They are not what they appear to be: 'the shadow of his [Redlaw's] shaded lamp' is said to resemble 'a monstrous beetle on the wall, motionless among a crowd of spectral shapes raised there by the flickering of the fire upon the quaint objects around him' (p.123). The shadows exaggerate everyday items, giving them malevolent personalities and features:

When they fantastically mocked the shapes of household objects, making the nurse an ogress, the rocking-horse a monster, the wondering child, half-scared and half-amused, a stranger to itself – the very tongs upon the hearth, a straddling giant with his arms akimbo, evidently smelling the blood of Englishmen, and wanting to grind people's bones to make his bread. (p.125)

The ability of the shadow to distort and make normal things look fantastic, such as converting the nurse to an ogress, the rocking horse to a 'monster', indicates the autonomous nature of the photographic-shadow in this tale, to wield power and change the way things appear. As I mentioned earlier, in the narrator's description of this opening scene, the ghostly shadows in the room converge with the thoughts in Redlaw's mind, an effect which is increased by the suggestion that the room is like a

veritable Plato's cave. A profusion of captive shadows brings to mind the story of the prisoners in the cave, staring at the shadows on the wall, believing that they are real. As in a cave, Redlaw is said to be 'listening to some old echoes in his mind' (p.122) and the room is said to be full of echoes: 'so thundering with echoes when a distant voice was raised or a door was shut – echoes, not confined to the many low passages and empty rooms, but rumbling and grumbling till they were stifled in the heavy air of the forgotten crypt when the Norman arches were half-buried in the earth' (p.123). Even the repetitious nature of the shadow descriptions, especially those sentences commencing 'when', act as a continuous echo of sound within the text: 'When twilight everywhere released the shadows, prisoned up all day, that now closed in and gathered like mustering swarms of ghosts [...] When they stood lowering, in corners of rooms, and frowned out from behind half-opened doors' (p.125). The 'echo' of Plato's cave creates uncertainty as to where the shadows of the room end and those in his mind begin, highlighting the subjective nature of these shadows and the interplay between mind and environment. The focus upon subjectivity is clearly deliberate, as indicated at the conclusion of the story, in which it is suggested that the tale is in fact imagined by Redlaw in the firelight:

Some people have said since that he only thought what has been herein set down; others, that he read it in the fire, winter night about the twilight time; others, that the Ghost was but the representation of his gloomy thoughts, and Milly the embodiment of his better wisdom. / say nothing. (p.198)

This question about whether the Phantom is the product of the chemist's mind was later played out by the famous adaptation of 'The Haunted Man' by Henry Pepper at the Royal Polytechnic Institution in 1852, using painted backdrops, lighting effects and mirrors to construct illusions of ghosts. In the case of Redlaw, the real actor sat in his chair, while the chimerical reflection of the second actor wandered around the stage independently of Redlaw (using the ingenious optical device invented by Henry Dircks), so not parasitic like a shadow. Groth has argued that Pepper's exhibition of Redlaw's spectre, which made no effort to hide the optical illusions used to achieve the desired 'supernatural' effects, promoted an anti-Spiritualist message, suggesting that the shadows seen by the protagonist were in fact indicators of the 'mutually reinforcing fallibility of memory and perception'; in other words, they were all in

Redlaw's head.¹⁷⁵ However, whilst I agree that Pepper and Dircks's interpretation posits the question about subjectivity, I would argue contrary to Groth that the effect would have been more ambiguous than she suggests, as the very presence of a separate person playing the Phantom suggests there may be an independent 'ghost' haunting him (as opposed to his own reflection, which points to a subjective interpretation). Notwithstanding the explanations available on the construction of the optical illusion, there is an uncertain ebb and flow between what is real and what is imagined in Pepper and Dircks's production, which echoes the ontological uncertainty of the text.

If, as I contend, shadows are associated with photographs in this tale, these descriptions of the way that shadows blur and twist reality in turn create questions about photographic distortions, a doubt expressed by Dickens himself in his letters to Burdett-Coutts. Lady Eastlake similarly calls attention to photography's flawed mimetic properties, claiming in 1857 that it is 'subject to certain distortions and deficiencies for which there is no remedy.'¹⁷⁶ Barthes reminds us that a photograph cannot be a memory, 'but it actually blocks memory', quickly becomes a 'counter-memory'. It can violently take over what was in our minds before.¹⁷⁷ A photograph could pretend to offer a factual narrative whilst in reality be a work of fiction. Equally it could interfere with our own internal narratives of the past, causing fact to be blurred with fiction.

Dickens was not alone in expressing scepticism about the camera's power to reflect reality, yet, ironically some of his contemporaries compared his writing style to that of photography. As Juliet John argues, Dickens's writings 'fuse photographic with filmic tendencies' and comments that he was 'so adept [...] at the symbolic framing of the visual that several contemporaries compared his artistic technique to the new art of photography'.¹⁷⁸ George Eliot famously criticised both 'sun-pictures' and Dickens's

¹⁷⁵ Groth, 'Reading Victorian Illusions', p.55.

¹⁷⁶ Lady Eastlake, 'Photography', in Trachtenberg, p.59.

¹⁷⁷ Barthes, p.91.

¹⁷⁸ Juliet John, *Dickens and Mass Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.197.

writing style in her essay on realistic fiction, 'The Natural History of German Life' (1859):

We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population... But while he can copy Mrs. Plornish's colloquial style with the delicate accuracy of a sun-picture [...] he scarcely ever passes from the humorous and external to the emotional and tragic, without becoming as transcendent in his unreality as he was a moment before in his artistic truthfulness.¹⁷⁹

Eliot regards Dickens's style to be 'photographic', which she perceives to be a fault. The implication is that whilst a 'sun-picture' could provide detailed accuracy on people's appearance and mannerisms, in actuality it (and subsequently, Dickens) provided a profusion of unselected detail, thereby failing to convey a true impression of the interior lives of characters. Other contemporaries also identified Dickens's style with photographic practices. In 1845, one critic in *The North British Review* (mostly focusing on *Martin Chuzzlewit*) observed that:

The frequent recurrence of such ludicrous minuteness in the trivial descriptive details induces us to compare Mr. Dickens' style of delineation to a photographic landscape. There, everything within the field of view is copied with unfailing but mechanical fidelity.¹⁸⁰

The writer is especially critical of Dickens's lavishing 'as much attention on what is trivial or useless as on the more important part of the picture', which suggests that like a camera, he is unselective with detail. Similarly, in a review of 1853, the critic George Brimley criticised Dickens's *Bleak House*, comparing it unfavourably with the daguerreotype:

So crowded is the canvas which Mr. Dickens has stretched and so casual the connexion that gives to his composition whatever unity it has, that a daguerreotype of Fleet Street at noon-day would be the aptest symbol to be found for it: though the daguerreotype would have the advantage in accuracy of representation.¹⁸¹

Brimley suggests that although Dickens's style is photographic, it is less accurate than a photograph, because his composition is too 'crowded' and lacking in unity to be representative of real life.

¹⁷⁹ George Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 260-295; p.264. The same passage is quoted by Flint (p.155) and Novak (p.63).

¹⁸⁰ Thomas Cleghorn, 'Writings of Charles Dickens', *North British Review* (1845), 186-191, in Philip Collins, *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971) p.190.

¹⁸¹ 'Dickens's *Bleak House*', *Spectator*, 24 Sep 1853, in *Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1858) p.294, quoted in Kate Flint, *Dickens* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), p.155.

On a more positive note, in 1853, H.F. Chorley said that Dickens ‘possess[ed] the immediate power of the daguerreotype’, and in 1870 the critic R.H. Hutton associated Dickens’s genius with a ‘power of observation so enormous that he could photograph almost everything he saw’.¹⁸² Dickens also consciously compared his mind to that of a camera. In 1858, ten years after publishing ‘The Haunted Man’, he wrote a letter to his friend W.H. Wills comparing his memory-taking process to a photograph:

I walked from Durham to Sunderland, and made a little fanciful photograph in my mind of Pit-Country, which will come well into H.W. one day [*Household Words*]. I couldn’t help looking upon my mind as I was doing it, as a sort of capitally prepared and highly sensitive plate. And I said, without the least conceit (as Watkins might have said of a plate of his) ‘it really is a pleasure to work with you, you receive the impressions so nicely’.¹⁸³

Dickens suggests that his mind functions like a sensitive plate in a camera, able to receive impressions of the outside world and record them for later perusal. Such an analogy indicates that he upheld photography as an important and positive practice, a way of recording the past that the mind could only aspire to replicate. Even though Dickens no doubt would have disagreed with his contemporaries’ criticism, the fact that he and they compared his style with photography suggested that the latter is something that he engaged with and sought to emulate (even if not in the ways that his contemporaries ascribed to him). As Green-Lewis observes, metaphors are useful for revealing the societies that generate them, and the fact that Dickens, along with other contemporaries, compared his thought process and writing to photography, demonstrates contemporary awareness of photography and its influence on literature.¹⁸⁴ This makes it all the more likely that in ‘A Christmas Carol’ and ‘The Haunted Man’ Dickens was exploring the new medium of photography as a means of keeping in touch with the past and recalibrating the relationship with the future.

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Years after the publication of these two ghostly tales, in 1880, one of the pioneering psychologists, James Sully, described memories as ‘shadowy phantoms’ and ‘shadowy recollections’, and utilised the lexicon of the supernatural to illustrate how

¹⁸² H.F. Chorley, ‘Bleak House’, *Athenaeum*, 17 Sep 1853, and R.H. Hutton, ‘The Genius of Dickens’, *Spectator*, 14 June 1870, both quoted in Juliet John, p.197.

¹⁸³ Letter to W. H. Wills, 24 September 1858, *Letters*, VIII, p.669.

¹⁸⁴ Jennifer Green-Lewis, p.9.

memory functioned: 'memory is a kind of resurrection of the buried past: as we fix our retrospective glance on it, it appears to start anew into life: forms arise within our minds which, we feel, faithfully represent things that were.'¹⁸⁵ Memory, it is suggested, acts like the Ghost of Christmas Past, showing our minds the 'things that have been', reviving that which was dead. Similarly, in *The Gay Science* (1866), the psychologist Eneas Sweetland Dallas picked up the mnemonic metaphor used by Dickens a few years previously: 'Absolute as a photograph, the mind refuses nought. An impression once made upon the sense, even unwittingly, abides for ever more.'¹⁸⁶ The sharing of metaphors between Dickens and these nineteenth-century psychologists suggests the cross-over between shadows, ghosts, memories and photographs, and the cross-fertilisation of interests between the novelist and the psychologists.

Dickens's tales of shadows and ghosts may have inspired Sully and Dallas and provided a helpful vehicle through which Sully and Dallas could explore their ideas. As Green-Lewis comments, 'authors had to engage with new technologies that relocated the site of memory's production from human beings to machines', which was a project shared with those whose vocation it was to understand the workings of the mind. Victorian literature helped define the meaning of the past, at the same time that photography provided a variety of new ways to view it.¹⁸⁷ Or, perhaps more likely, these cross-overs were a natural result of the multi-faceted influences of photography, which affected the way that people thought about the past, the present and the future — even the way they thought about thought itself. As I have argued, particularly in relation to 'The Haunted Man', the ambiguity regarding these shadows (photographs, memories; real, not real) suggested that Dickens was probing the nature of photographic haunting, or at the very least, working out how we should understand and manage memories in a post-photographic world, which was a preoccupation naturally shared with psychologists like Sully and Dallas.

¹⁸⁵ James Sully, 'Illusions of Memory', *Cornhill Magazine*, 41:244 (1880), p.416.

¹⁸⁶ Eneas Sweetland Dallas, *The Gay Science*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866) in *Embodied Selves*, ed. by Jenny Bourne-Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); pp.216-7. Also quoted by Green-Lewis, p.33.

¹⁸⁷ Green-Lewis, p.5.

Carolyn Dinshaw observes that the word 'contingent' emanates from the Latin, 'con' (together with) and 'tangere' (to touch), that is, the meaning of something is conditioned by what it touches.¹⁸⁸ What emerges from these tales is, what Tucker terms, 'the contingency of photographic truth' and, in addition, the contingency of what I term 'mnemonic truth'.¹⁸⁹ The photographic 'shadows' in 'A Christmas Carol' are contingent upon the narrative told (or indicated) by the Spirits. They are images of what 'had been' but also what 'could be', and the nature of those images is in turn contingent upon the behaviour and future actions of Scrooge. In 'The Haunted Man', the characters' memories are literally touched, and then changed, by Redlaw's presence, and their relationships are contingent upon their memories. Dickens's engagement with photographic shadows in these tales dramatises this contingency. Whilst in many respects, he signals the significance of the photographic monument, highlights the way that an image can tell its own story, and hints at the importance of photographic memories for social stability and cohesion ("Lord, keep my memory green"), he also gestures to its uncertain ontological status. Its meaning can be distorted, changed by the narrative that surrounds it or the interpretation of the beholder. Dickens's thought-provoking use of the shadow motif highlights some of the gains and losses of living in a photographic age, showing how narrative can be both aided and distorted by its presence. He highlights how photographic haunting could help us keep in touch with the past, yet at the same time, keep us at arm's reach from understanding its true meaning. At the end of 'The Haunted Man', we are left with a heap of phantasmagoric shadows, which collect around the old portrait, but 'which the shadows did not obscure or change':

Deepened in its gravity by the firelight, and gazing from the darkness of the panelled wall like life, the sedate face in the portrait with the beard and ruff, looked down at them from under its verdant wreath of holly, as they looked up at it; and clear and plain below, as if a voice had uttered them, were the words, 'Lord, keep my memory green'. (p.198)

The fact that the portrait remains unchanged by the shadows implies that it is the symbol of history and permanence, ostensibly the preserver of memory. Yet, Dickens also teases the reader with hints of its instability, or hauntedness, emphasising its 'like

¹⁸⁸ Dinshaw, pp.2-3.

¹⁸⁹ Tucker, pp.69-70.

as life' demeanour, its active eyes, and the imagined voice that utters the words. The portrait is not, therefore, the voice of stability, but one that also speaks of fictive haunting and change, albeit in a different way. How it is that memories should be kept 'green' in a world of social and technological change therefore remains an unanswered, but pressing, point.

2 'THE VERY SANCTIFICATION OF PORTRAITS': AUTHENTIC LIKENESSES AND MAGIC PICTURES

We come to the house, and it is an old house, [...] grim portraits (some of them with grim legends, too) lour distrustfully from the oaken panels of the walls.¹⁹⁰

It [the daguerreotype] is the very sanctification of portraits [...] I wd [sic] rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest Artist's work ever produced. I do not say so in respect (or disrespect) to Art, but for Love's sake. Will you understand?¹⁹¹

The invention of photography coincided with, in the words of the critic Kerry Powell, the arrival of a 'curious efflorescence of novels and stories dealing with "magic pictures"', including tales of painted portraits that change appearance, talk and even step physically out of their frames.¹⁹² The magic portrait claims its birth from the Gothic novels of the eighteenth century, notably Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), in which there is a picture that 'uttered a deep sigh and heaved its breast', then 'quit its pannel [sic]', ushering the protagonist, Manfred, to follow him.¹⁹³ Whilst the magic portrait pre-dated photography, unlike many of the other Gothic trappings, such as waxed corpses, decaying alpine castles, and secret passages, its popularity increased in the nineteenth century, forming a sub-genre of ghost stories dedicated to it. Dickens obviously regarded it as such a sufficiently established ghostly motif that he poked fun at it in 'A Christmas Tree' (1850), in which the narrator stays in a haunted house, unnerved by the grim portraits, especially one of a 'cavalier in green', whom he describes as 'wicked-looking' and imagines to be advancing towards him and reviving in the 'flickering light' of the candle.¹⁹⁴

So why did magic portraits become so popular in the nineteenth century?

Susan Williams claims that the 'appearance of the daguerreotype produced a renewed interest in the portrait', arguing that the new technology marked a fundamental shift

¹⁹⁰ Charles Dickens, 'A Christmas Tree', p.293.

¹⁹¹ *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford*, II, 357-8.

¹⁹² Powell, p.148.

¹⁹³ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. by Michael Gamer (London: Penguin Classics, 2001) pp.24-25.

¹⁹⁴ 'A Christmas Tree', p.293.

in the production and popularity of images, especially portraits.¹⁹⁵ Prior to photography, most readers did not have access to a likeness of themselves, and most read about pictures through words. As images (daguerreotypes, or lithographs or engravings based on daguerreotypes) became more widespread, both in middle-class homes and periodicals and magazines, demand for images increased, and writing had to adapt to compete with this demand. Williams says that writers responded to the threat of the image by seeking a realm 'beyond mimetic representation' in their writing. The lively Gothic portrait could not be reproduced in the illustrated press, it must be written about, which enabled writers to take back control of the fictional portrait by way of magic portrait stories.¹⁹⁶ Whilst I agree with Williams that the invention of photography had a large impact on attitudes to portraiture, which contributed to the popularity of the magic portrait story, I think there were other factors in play in Britain, which contributed to this fictional phase. In particular, I regard the debates and discourses that led to the establishment of the NPG in 1856 to have been an added trigger for inspiring magic portrait stories, which, in turn, were generated in a post-photographic context.

Unlike supernatural painted portrait fiction, Victorian stories containing magic photographs were relatively rare, and when they did appear, they offered a different type of haunting.¹⁹⁷ Here I depart from Williams, who does not identify any significant differences in the haunting offered by fictional daguerreotypes and painted portraits in the antebellum American fiction she has explored (albeit she notes that painted portrait stories tended to foreground issues related to their creation and production, with which I agree).¹⁹⁸ Williams contends that as photography became more naturalised in American society, magic portraits generally lost their magic.¹⁹⁹ Yet this could not be said of Britain, which continued to enjoy supernatural portrait stories at the fin de siècle, even after photography had become fully absorbed in society, as

¹⁹⁵ Williams refers to the daguerreotype specifically as the calotype was not popular in America until the 1850s-1860s, after wet collodion had been invented and the process became more efficient; p.183.

¹⁹⁶ Williams, pp.1-3.

¹⁹⁷ In this Chapter I will use the term 'magic photographs' or 'haunted photographs' to describe photographs which conveyed some species of supernatural power, differentiating them from 'spirit photographs' and 'supernatural photographs,' referred to in Chapter 4.

¹⁹⁸ Williams, pp.66-67.

¹⁹⁹ Williams, p.183.

Wilde's *Dorian Gray* and a number of other contemporary 'magic portrait' stories testify.²⁰⁰ Moreover, where there are stories involving haunted photographs, I argue that these offered a supernatural power which was mostly engendered by touch and best described as 'auratic'.

In her well-known letter of 1843 (to which I referred in Chapter 1), Barrett-Browning compares the recent invention of photography to the art of portrait painting, describing it as 'the very sanctification of portraits', and observing that 'I wd [sic] rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest Artist's work every produced.'²⁰¹ Her use of the word 'sanctification' here, in the same paragraph in which she has likened photography to the 'Mesmeric disembodiment of spirits', suggests that to Barrett-Browning, the photograph produced a 'holier' and more magical portrait than a painting. For her, photography felt like a particularly intimate and emotive representation of a loved one because it offered a physical connection to the past moment: 'it is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases but the association, & the sense of nearness involved in the thing', she claimed. I read Barrett-Browning's claim regarding 'sanctification' to be in a sense defining a photograph as a relic, offering a spiritual power which emanates from the fact that, as Barthes put it, '*the thing has been there*', in the past moment.²⁰²

Structuring my thoughts around Barrett-Browning's musings on 'sanctification', I will explore 'magic picture' haunting in the nineteenth century. Firstly, I will interrogate the nature of the haunting which emerged in the painted picture stories I have studied, and how it coincided both with the discourse around the burgeoning art of photography and the debates concerning the NPG. Secondly, I will discuss the different type of haunting that emerged from the magic photograph stories of the later nineteenth century, suggesting that in these stories, photographs act like relics, in contrast to the iconic power of a magic portrait story like *Dorian Gray*. In this discussion, I intend to come to fresh conclusions about the different types of fictional

²⁰⁰ Powell lists a large number of 'magic portrait' stories from 1880s-1890s, see pp.151-2.

²⁰¹ *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford*, II, p.358.

²⁰² Barthes, p.76.

haunting that photography inspired, or at least participated in, during the nineteenth century.

Part I — Capturing ‘Life Itself’: Magic Painted Portrait Ghost Stories

Photography brought about a radical shift in the way that people understood and engaged with portraits. Where the portrait had previously been the domain of the aristocracy, the daguerreotype (initially the dominant media, given the patent limitations for the calotype in England and America) enabled the middle classes to obtain likenesses and observe their own features reflected in the shiny surface, making it an ‘everyday feature of middle-class culture’.²⁰³ I mentioned that Williams suggests that the popularity of the daguerreotype indirectly encouraged writers to renew their interest in the Gothic magic portrait, so as to reclaim the literary portrait in the face of challenge. Whilst that may be true, I would argue that certain writers engaged directly with the daguerreotype and the discourse associated with the new invention. One common focus of these early ‘magic picture’ stories is the artist’s uncanny ability to reflect ‘life itself’, which echoes the discourse of wonder surrounding photography and its ability to produce a perfect and detailed mimesis of a subject.

In 1840, Poe wrote an effusive article on ‘The Daguerreotype’, which he described as ‘the most extraordinary triumph of modern science’, comparing the ‘distinctness’ of the image with the reflection of a ‘mirror.’²⁰⁴ Poe’s sense of wonder at the verisimilitude of the daguerreotype is conveyed through the hyperbolic terms he uses, such as ‘miraculous beauty’, ‘infinitely’ and ‘perfection’:

For, in truth, the Daguerreotyped plate is infinitely (we use the term advisedly) is *infinitely* more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear – but the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented. The variations of shade, and the gradations of both linear and aerial perspective are those of truth itself in the supremeness of its perfection.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Williams, p.1.

²⁰⁴ Poe, ‘The Daguerreotype’ [1840], in Trachtenberg, pp.11-13 (p.38).

²⁰⁵ Poe, ‘The Daguerreotype’ (p.38).

His superlative vocabulary even hints at the presence of the godly (the concept of infinity and ‘perfection’ usually being associated with matters spiritual). Poe had his own daguerreotype taken six times between 1841 and his death in 1849, which further indicates his interest in the new process. One example would be the daguerreotype in an ‘oval portrait’, which he obtained just before his death (Figure 16).²⁰⁶



Figure 16. Unknown maker, *Daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe*, 1849. The Paul Getty Museum, Object No. 84.XT.957.

Shortly later, Poe wrote ‘The Oval Portrait’ (1842), in which an injured soldier sheltering in an abandoned house becomes fascinated by the portrait of a young woman.²⁰⁷ The painting is so life-like that the soldier feels he is looking at the head of a ‘living person’:

But it could have been neither the execution of the work, nor the immortal beauty of the countenance, which had so suddenly and so vehemently moved me. Least of all, could it have

²⁰⁶ Williams, p.42.

²⁰⁷ The story was originally published in 1842 in *Graham’s Journal* in America, and revised for publication in *The Broadway Journal* in 1845.

been that my fancy shaken from its half slumber, had mistaken the head for that of a living person. (p.202)

The soldier learns from a book that the artist desired so strongly to create the likeness of his wife that he forced her to sit for the portrait for weeks in a dark high turreted chamber. His obsession with attaining perfection (a quality that Poe has already ascribed to the daguerreotype) was so all-consuming that he failed to see that she was fading as he painted her. He finished the painting in a flash of madness, declaring, “‘This is indeed *Life itself!*’” (p204) and then realised his young wife was dead.²⁰⁸

The soldier’s description of the life-like nature of the portrait echoes and anticipates the discourse around early photography. The daguerreotype had arrived in New York in 1839 through Samuel Morse, who was one of the first to set up a daguerreotype studio, and had been ‘immensely popular’.²⁰⁹ When Morse first saw the daguerreotype, he said ‘the exquisite minuteness of the delineation cannot be conceived. No painting or engraving ever approached it.’²¹⁰ Echoing the discourse of Talbot and Daguerre, Morse claimed daguerreotypes were not “‘copies of nature’” but “‘portions of nature itself’” (which sounds similar to Poe’s “‘*Life itself!*’”).²¹¹ I have explored in Chapter 1 how the daguerreotype’s ability to depict objects with startling accuracy was regarded, by many British contemporaries, as something approaching the ‘marvellous’. The scientist, Sir John Herschel, for example, praised the ‘miraculous’ nature of the daguerreotype: “‘The most elaborate engraving falls far short of the richness and delicacy of execution, even gradation of light and shade is given with a softness and fidelity which sets all painting at an immeasurable distance.’”²¹² Another contemporary writer likewise noted the lifelike nature of the images obtained from the daguerreotype, which are ‘fixed in the minutest details, and with an exactitude and delicacy truly wonderful.’²¹³ For some, the amazing power of the new invention to

²⁰⁸ This prefigures Dorian’s bodily attachment to his picture in Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*.

²⁰⁹ Donald D. Keyes, ‘The Daguerreotype’s Popularity in America,’ *Art Journal*, 36. 2 (1976), 116-122 (p.116).

²¹⁰ Samuel Morse, letter dated 9 March 1839, as quoted in Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *L.J.M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), p.89. Also quoted in Batchen, pp.136-137.

²¹¹ Morse, in Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 7. Quoted in Williams, p.49.

²¹² Letter from Sir John Herschel to Fox Talbot, 9 May 1839; quoted in Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Golden Age of British Photography 1839-1900* (London: Aperture, 1984), p.22.

²¹³ ‘Heliography’, p.186.

depict life crossed into the godly. As one writer put it, ‘No one can arise from reading a page of Nature’s mighty volume [...] without feeling himself to be a “wiser and a *better* man.”’²¹⁴

However, some contemporaries were disquieted by the way in which the process produced such startling verisimilitude and some regarded ‘the taking and fixing of a photographic image’ as ‘a kind of scientific magic’ which had dark overtones.²¹⁵ In its article on ‘America’s First Look into the Camera’, the US Library of Congress discusses contemporary reactions to the invention of the daguerreotype, commenting that, despite its popularity, many people were wary: ‘it was photography’s almost magical ability to reproduce life that elicited fear and suspicion from many people’.²¹⁶ As Williams observes, in relation to the early reception of the daguerreotype in America, ‘writers were both attracted to and threatened by the mimetic powers of the photograph.’²¹⁷

In Poe’s ghost story, the portrait’s depiction of “*Life itself*”, which we see rehearsed in contemporary discourse concerning the daguerreotype, is articulated in supernatural terms. As a result of its ‘absolute life-likeness of expression’, the observer feels that it casts a magic ‘spell’ – which he found ‘at first startling,’ then ‘finally confounded, subdued and appalled me’ (p.203). The literary volume that he finds in the room reflects that others felt the portrait’s power too, speaking of the resemblance of the painting to the original as a ‘mighty marvel’ (p.203), which echoes the terms Poe used to describe the daguerreotype (‘miraculous’, ‘infinitely’). It is as if the soldier is staring at a photograph, a portrait that seems so life-like that it appears to be a miraculous revival of the dead.

However, if the oval portrait possessed photographic characteristics, Poe presents a nightmarish version of the photograph. It is a travesty of Barrett-Browning’s

²¹⁴ ‘The Chemical Power of the Sunbeam’, *The Ladies’ Repository*, 15 (1855), 238. Quoted in Williams, p.49.

²¹⁵ Keyes, p.116.

²¹⁶ ‘America’s First Look into the Camera: Daguerreotype Portraits and Views, 1839 – 1862’, <<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/daguerreotype/history.html>> [accessed 26 Sep 2019]

²¹⁷ Williams, p.13.

(yet unuttered) praise of the daguerreotype as ‘the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever’, captured within the frame:

And when many weeks had passed, and but little remained to do, save one brush upon the mouth and one tint upon the eye, the spirit of the lady again flickered up as the flame within the socket of the lamp. And then the brush was given, and then the tint was placed; and, for one moment, the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next, while he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice, ‘This is indeed *Life itself!*’ turned suddenly to regard his beloved: *She was dead!*’ (p.204)

The subject is sickeningly and appallingly ‘near’ to the watching soldier – it is as if she is still there, absorbed into the frame. In a vampiric twist, even her life blood seems to have been absorbed within the image: we are told that the painter ‘*would* not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sate [sic] beside him’ (pp.203-4). As the art historian Joanna Woodall observes, the terminology of portraiture (whether painted or photographic) implies that the price of personal representation is self-sacrifice. To ‘capture,’ ‘catch’ or ‘nail down’ a person’s likeness also has implications for the person so ‘caught’, and in this case, the woman’s life is absorbed into the canvas in such a way that leads to her death.²¹⁸ It is as if Poe wanted to take the established concept of ‘capturing’ a likeness and demonstrate how literally that idea could be played out in a post-photographic world.

Like Poe, Robert Browning explored the lifelike portrait in ‘My Last Duchess’ (1842), in which a Duke shows a lifelike picture of his previous, deceased, Duchess to an envoy representing the newest suitor. Whilst not a ‘magic portrait’ story per se, the poem offers a similar suggestion that a wife had been ‘captured’ in a picture frame through the actions of a malicious husband.²¹⁹ In an uncanny echo of ‘The Oval Portrait’, we learn that the last Duchess is ‘painted on the wall/ Looking as if she were alive’, and even the Duke’s explanation regarding the ‘spot / Of joy’ and ‘blush’ in the Duchess’s cheek is a reminder of the ‘tints’ on the cheeks of the dead heroine of ‘The Oval Portrait’. The verisimilitude with life is again emphasised, the Duchess is frozen on

²¹⁸ Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.22. In an interesting short story by E.W. Hornung, ‘The Camera Fiend’ (1911), the writer enacts this discourse of capture through an ambitious spirit photographer who is determined to capture an image of the soul on its way to death. The spirit photographer uses a camera with a pistol embedded, which fired at the same time as the camera took the image.

²¹⁹ Robert Browning, ‘My Last Duchess’, *Robert Browning: Selected Poems* ed. by Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 25-27.

canvas like the heroine of 'The Oval Portrait', and in both cases it is implied that the women were killed (wilfully or recklessly) by the transgressions of their husbands. The parallels potentially indicate a shared preoccupation with photographic themes.

A number of ghostly stories in periodicals around the mid-century focus on the surprisingly lifelike features of portraits. In the humorous and supposedly magical story 'The Unfinished Picture' (1845), the narrator is attracted to an incomplete picture, due to his fascination with the subject's lively eyes. Their 'mysterious intelligence of expression' sparkles until the narrator observes her coming alive, 'beaming with an intensity of intelligence almost supernatural.' She goes on to tell her story, at one stage reporting that she was complimented for the "lifelike resemblance" of the portrait. In the end, it transpires that the narrator is dreaming, and has imagined the entire interaction. However, the motif employed reiterates the trend for the haunting, 'lifelike resemblance', which offers its own retelling of the past, like a photograph.²²⁰ Similarly, in the American writer Helen Irving's 'The Two Portraits' (1850), a girl dies after being painted in a portrait. When the mother sees her portrait after her death, she emphasises the realism of the depiction, feeling like she is standing in front of her living daughter: "[T]here, full of life and beauty as though she had never left me, she stood before me."²²¹ The lifelike portrait appears to bring back the dead girl, mimicking the resurrector qualities of the photographic image. Lastly, in 'The Portrait's Warning' (1868) by H. Savile Clarke, the portrait is often called the sitter's 'double' due to its uncanny similarity to the original (and as discussed in Chapter 1, the new, mid-century awareness of the 'doppelganger', which bled into contemporary fiction, was arguably linked with photography).²²² Through these ghostly stories, it is as if writers were engaging with the new invention, which achieved such dazzling verisimilitude and appeared to resurrect the dead, whilst appearing to focus on the well-established medium of painted portraiture.

²²⁰ Charles Kenney, 'The Unfinished Picture', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 18 (1845) 411-424, (p.412 and p.417).

²²¹ *Graham's Magazine*, 36 (1850) 122, quoted in Williams, p.79.

²²² Savile H. Clarke, 'The Portrait's Warning', *Belgravia*, 4 (1868), 429-37 (p.429).

Part II – The National Portrait Gallery and the Quest for Authentic Likenesses

Whilst the daguerreotype (and to a lesser extent, the calotype) were being absorbed into both British and American societies in the 1840s and 1850s, debates were afoot to ascertain the role of painted portraiture in preserving historic images and cultivating social morals. Carlyle (a photograph of whom, by Juliet Cameron, is at Figure 17 below) was ‘an outspoken advocate of the importance of the historical portrait’, who stated that ‘of all kinds of excellent Pictures, in Galleries or elsewhere, unspeakably the usefulest and most interesting to ingenuous souls are excellent Portraits of Historical Men.’²²³ Along with Philip Henry Stanhope, 4th Earl of Stanhope and Thomas Babington Macaulay, Carlyle persuaded the House of Lords in 1856 that (in the words of the *Art Journal*) a ‘great Portrait Collection of the Worthies of Britain’ would serve an instructive purpose in providing an ‘illustration of our national history’.²²⁴ He believed that ‘historical portrait galleries’ provided a positive influence on the public to emulate the success of the ‘Great Men’ of history.²²⁵ Carlyle and the other founders’ ideas were sufficiently persuasive to cause the House of Lords to vote, nearly unanimously, to establish a gallery which, for the first time in Britain, formally posited works of art as historic sources. A recent photograph of the NPG in its current location is at Figure 18 below.²²⁶

The main criteria for admission to the NPG was based on authenticity, in the sense that the artist must have been present when painting the sitter. In a letter from Sir Charles Eastlake, President of the Royal Academy, quoted by Stanhope in the House of Lords debate of 1856, he articulated a desire for ‘authentic likenesses of celebrated individuals’, which he regarded would be a ‘not unimportant element of education’ for the public.²²⁷ Authenticity, as one contemporary expressed it, involved ‘admitting

²²³ David Stewart, ‘Reality, Artifice and the Politics of Evolution: Watts and Carlyle in the Earnest Age’, *Victorian Poetry*, 33 (1995), 476-498 (p.479); and Letter of 8 September 1853 from Carlyle to Lady Ashburton, *Letters*, XXIII, p.264.

²²⁴ ‘National Portrait Gallery’, *Art Journal*, 26 (1857) 37-39 (p.37).

²²⁵ Carlyle was quoted by Earl Stanhope in the House of Lords debate, see ‘Gallery of National Portraits’, *Hansard*, 140 (4 March 1856), pp.1771-1774 < <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1856-03-04/debates/c8c31eda-278d-4605-a74e-910800a631ca/GalleryOfNationalPortraits> > [accessed 23 Sep 2019]; and *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840) p.1.

²²⁶ ‘The National Portrait Gallery’, *Art Journal*, 26 (Feb 1857) p.37.

²²⁷ *Hansard*, p.1771.

strictly contemporary, and as far as can be judged, faithful representations (not of course artists' made-up pictures).'²²⁸ As Paul Barlow puts it, the intention of the founders was that a viewer should be able to stand in the painter's shoes, and travel back in time to the moment when the sitter lived.²²⁹ In a famous letter that Carlyle wrote to the celebrated biographer, David Laing, in 1854, which Stanhope read to the House of Lords, Carlyle underlines the importance, for him, of an authentic encounter:

It has been and always is, one of the most primary wants to procure a bodily likeness of the personage inquired after; a good *Portrait* if such exists; failing that, even an indifferent if sincere one. In short, *any* representation, made by a faithful human creature, of that Face and Figure, which *he* saw with his eyes, and which I can never see with mine, is now valuable to me.²³⁰

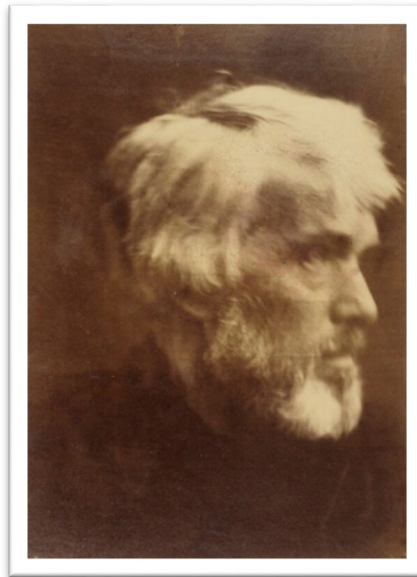


Figure 17. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Thomas Carlyle*, albumen print, 1867. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG P122.

Whilst Carlyle did not regard the quality of the art to be important, he did place value on whether or not the artist had managed to capture the character and soul of the person. In his celebrated work, *On Heroes* (1840), Carlyle described his conception of 'Portrait-painting' by analogy with Shakespeare's art: he praised the playwright's talent in relation to 'delineating of men and things, especially of men [...] The thing he

²²⁸ 'The National Portrait Gallery', *Literary Gazette* (4 Sep 1858), 306-307 (p.307).

²²⁹ Barlow, Paul, 'Facing the past and present: the National Portrait Gallery and the Search for "Authentic Portraiture"', in Woodall, p.221.

²³⁰ Letter of 2 May 1854 from Carlyle to David Laing, *Letters*, XXIX, p.76.

looks at reveals not this or that face of it, but its inmost heart, and generic secret'.²³¹ Carlyle believed that a portrait could say more about a person's character and motivations than a written record. In his letter to Laing of 1854 he observes: 'often have I found a Portrait far superior in information to half a dozen written Biographies'.²³² Carlyle's philosophies on depicting the 'inmost heart' of the person were absorbed into expectations for the NPG. One contemporary writer displays this presumption, commenting enthusiastically on the opportunity that Victorians will have to 'learn the innermost being, the springs of action, the motives, designs and principles of our ministers and mistresses, pastors and masters!'²³³

This notion of capturing the 'inmost heart' of the sitter coincided with the traditional, Gothic role of the portrait artist as prophet, with legendary ability to show hidden depths behind a character or predict a person's future. This was a central theme behind various portrait stories, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Prophetic Pictures' (1837), Henry James's 'The Story of a Masterpiece' (1858), and later, Wilde's *Dorian Gray* (1890). In the wake of photography (especially following the invention of collodion and popularisation of albumen prints in the 1850s), artists were forced to re-evaluate their aims. As one contemporary writer commented:

The discovery of Daguerre and its numerous improvements, and the unrivalled precision attained by Photography, render exact imitation no longer a miracle of crayon or palette; these must now create as well as copy, bring out the soul of the individual and of the landscape, or their achievements will be neglected in favour of the fac-similes obtainable through sunshine and chemistry...²³⁴

As Robert Browning puts it in 'Fra Lippo Lippi' (1855), 'Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!'²³⁵ Woodall endorses the view that Victorian portraits of men, in particular, were focused on depicting 'the essential inner quality which was considered to justify his privileged place,' which idea of the 'portrayed exemplar' was perpetuated through national portrait galleries like the NPG.²³⁶ According to Barlow, such a

²³¹ Carlyle, 'The Hero as Poet', in *On Heroes*, p.123.

²³² Letter of 2 May 1854 from Carlyle to David Laing, *Letters*, XXIX, pp.76-77; and *Hansard*, p.1771.

²³³ 'About Portraits and Portrait-Painting', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 50 (1861), 411-421 (p.418).

²³⁴ 'Something about Pictures', *Atlantic Monthly*, 1 (1858), 404. Quoted in Williams, p.46.

²³⁵ Robert Browning, 'Fra Lippo Lippi', in *Robert Browning: Selected Poems*, ed. Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin Books, 1989) 62-72; p.67.

²³⁶ Woodall, p.5.

development, in focusing on the individual person rather than universal qualities, signalled a departure from eighteenth-century attitudes, which regarded portraiture and its emphasis on the individual to be a 'relatively lowly form of painting.'²³⁷ Thus, the debates around the establishment of the NPG, along with magic portrait fiction, helped to perpetuate the view that painted portraits could offer a species of (magical) insight into the individual soul that a photograph (apparently) could not. The photograph, so the argument ran, could provide perfect mimesis of the features, whilst the heart and soul of a person could only emerge via the paintbrush.



Figure 18. National Portrait Gallery, *Portrait of the Day*. National Portrait Gallery website, London.

Interestingly, it appears that at no point did those planning the establishment of the NPG consider that photographs had a role to play in inspiring emulation. This is despite the photograph's supposed authenticity and powers of mimesis (in the sense that the photographer would have been present when an image was taken, which could not be guaranteed in a painted portrait). What Carlyle was seeking with the painted portrait could have been articulated by Barrett-Browning's comment about the daguerreotype: 'it is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases but the association, & the sense of nearness involved in the thing'. For Carlyle, the value of the painting was contingent upon its having been there, in front of the sitter, which Barthes famously articulated (concerning the photograph of Napoleon's youngest

²³⁷ The celebrated Sir Joshua Reynolds famously regarded portraiture as a low form of art in his *Discourses*; Barlow, p.224.

brother Jerome taken in 1852) as: “‘I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor.’”²³⁸ Despite not engaging with photography in the discussions around the NPG, Carlyle appears to desire portraits that display photographic qualities.

According to the NPG website, although it started acquiring photographs in 1856, photographs did not officially enter the collection until 1932.²³⁹ This is despite some public pressure. In an article in *All the Year Round* (1867), the writer questions why there was not a National Collection of Photographic Portraits. Photographs are authentic, the writer argues, in the sense that ‘a mechanical contrivance, like the photographic process, can neither invent nor omit’ and it is, undoubtedly, ‘a reproduction of a face presented at a certain moment to the surface of a mirror which retained the image reflected upon it’.²⁴⁰ The writer regards a photograph to be a more frank portrayal than many of the flattering portraits currently residing in the NPG: ‘most of us would rather see a photograph of someone concerning whom our curiosity has been powerfully excited than a painted portrait.’ He suggests that the NPG should commission photographs of ‘modern illustrious persons’ now, ‘for the benefit of future ages’, in particular, it is suggested, of ‘a great author’ (implied, presumably, to be the ‘conductor’ of the periodical, Dickens).²⁴¹ The writer clearly recognises the role that photography could play in record-making and inspiring future generations. He may have been aware of photographic works like John Mayall’s *New Series of Photographic Portraits of Eminent and Illustrious Persons* or Maull & Polyblank’s *Photographic Portraits of Living Celebrities*, which as Groth has argued, supported the culture of hero-worship espoused by Carlyle (albeit in photographic form).²⁴²

The fact that the founders did not respond to such photographic requests suggests they did not regard the camera to be qualified to depict the ‘inmost heart’ of the subject. One contemporary criticised the daguerreotype’s inability to capture a person’s likeness. He claimed that it was invaluable for depicting motionless landscape,

²³⁸ Barthes, p.3, p.76.

²³⁹ ‘Photography: A Living Art – Then and Now’, NPG website:

<<https://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/display/2018/photography-a-living-art-then-and-now>> [accessed 30 Sep 2019].

²⁴⁰ ‘A New Portrait-Gallery’, *All the Year Round*, 18.436 (1867), 229-232 (p.229).

²⁴¹ ‘A New Portrait-Gallery’, p.230.

²⁴² (London: Mavor & Son, 1864) and (London: Messrs Maull & Polyblank, 1859); quoted in Groth, p.36.

but it would always be 'useless' for taking portraits, as it "'tries to represent as still what never yet was still for the thousandth part of a second: that is, a human face.'" ²⁴³ Like Dickens, Lady Eastlake emphasises the 'distortions and deficiencies' inherent in the photographic process, turning 'brilliant' cheeks into 'dark stains' and blue eyes into 'colourless' orbs. ²⁴⁴ Even the writer of 'A New Portrait-Gallery' who propounded the value of photographs conceded that photographs do not always do justice to the subject, as most people who have sat for a photograph end up either possessing a portrait with 'murderous tendencies' or that of a 'simpering humbug.' ²⁴⁵ Contemporary photographers like Julia Margaret Cameron would have disagreed that photography was resigned to producing static, sterile portraits. In a letter to Carlyle, concerning his photographic portrait (Figure 17 above), she states that her aim was to capture the 'greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer'. ²⁴⁶ The evidence suggests that there were mixed feelings about the capacities of paint and plate for capturing a likeness. Moreover, whilst the discourse of the founders of the NPG appeared to focus exclusively on the painted portrait, the values that they upheld regarding close mimesis and authenticity appeared to have evolved through engagement with photography.

Notwithstanding some contemporary criticism about its choice of pictures, the NPG captured the imaginations of visitors, inviting them to think of portraits in 'magical' terms. ²⁴⁷ One writer from the *Leisure Hour* suggests that the lifelike portraits took on ghostly qualities. Of the portrait of Dryden he claims, 'while gazing on that anguished countenance, we think we hear the cry which burst from his tortured breast', or of the portrait of Keats, 'his fixed and melancholy downgazing countenance seeming to presage his early and lamentable doom'. ²⁴⁸ Similarly, another writer feels that the eyes of the portraits were following him around the room, describing the

²⁴³ 'About Portraits and Portrait-Painting', p.414.

²⁴⁴ Lady Eastlake, 'Photography', p.59 and p.61.

²⁴⁵ 'A New Portrait-Gallery', p.231.

²⁴⁶ Helmut Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron: Her Life and Photographic Work* (New York: Aperture, rev. edn. 1975) p.182 and p.189; quoted in Victoria Olsen, *From Life: Julia Margaret Cameron and Victorian Photography* (London: Aurum Press, 2003) p.203.

²⁴⁷ The *Art Journal* was especially critical of the selection of portraits on display, pointing out omissions and criticising the presence of some who it did not perceive were sufficiently important in national history to merit being placed there. 'The National Portrait Gallery', *The Art Journal*, 44 (1858) 243-244.

²⁴⁸ 'National Portrait Gallery', *Leisure Hour*, 4 May 1860, pp. 331-334.

‘spell that is exercised on our spirits by the pictorial occupants of a portrait-gallery’. He quotes a poem by the writer Tom Hood, ‘The Haunted House’, in which the portraits seem to be alive:

From their tarnish’d frames dark Figures gazed,
And Faces spectre-pallid.
Not merely with the mimic life that lies
Within the compass of Art’s simulation;
Their souls were looking thro’ their painted eyes
With awful speculation.²⁴⁹

The uncanny atmosphere of the NPG is possibly implicated by the fact that it was the location of a murder and suicide in 1909.²⁵⁰ Therefore it is plausible that the NPG contributed to the reinvigoration of the Gothic portrait, which followed you with its eyes, told its narrative, and showed you its soul through ‘painted eyes.’

Victorian ghost story writers (especially those writing at the mid-century, when the NPG was established) would have been aware of the discourses around photography and authentic portraiture which were circulating at the time. Indeed, some of the magic picture stories in the decades that followed focused their narrative on the ‘authentic’ encounter between artist and sitter and the artist’s ability to reflect the ‘inmost heart’ of the sitter. In ‘Cain’ by Amelia Edwards (1865), the story concerns an artist who becomes obsessed with copying a picture in a gallery of ‘Cain after the murder of Abel’. Bound as he is to viewing and reproducing the picture, his obsession approaches madness: ‘I felt as if I could not live away from it. Cain became for me as a living man, or something more than man, having possession of my will, and transfixing me with the bright horror of his eyes.’²⁵¹ The artist is rescued by a bystander, who tells him the story of the ‘fatal picture’, about the villain who killed his brother out of jealousy concerning a woman, and who felt compelled to depict the event on canvas.²⁵² In this story, the haunting quality of the image stems from the fact that it

²⁴⁹ ‘About Portraits and Portrait-Painting’, pp.418-420.

²⁵⁰ The then Director of the NPG, James Milner, reported a man murdering his wife and then committing suicide on 26 Feb 1909. According to *The Telegraph* (3 Feb 2010), the report suggests he was especially concerned about the damage to the floor: <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-news/7147540/Gruesome-murder-suicide-revealed-in-National-Portrait-Gallery-archive.html>> [accessed 23 Sep 2019].

²⁵¹ Amelia B Edwards, ‘Cain’, *All Saints Eve*, ed. by David Stuart Davies (Ware: Wordsworth, 2008), p.28.

²⁵² Cain, p.30 and p.32.

depicts an authentic encounter, the artist's murder of his brother. The negative feelings around the event and the creation of the picture somehow exude from the painting. In a twisted interpretation of Carlyle's aspirations, the portrait's depiction of the 'inmost heart' of the sitter has a damaging influence on an innocent artist.²⁵³

The 'authentic encounter' between artist and sitter forms an important feature of Wilde's later magic portrait story, *Dorian Gray*.²⁵⁴ In this famous novella, the artist, Basil Hallward, paints a dazzling portrait of the young, handsome Dorian, who admires his image so much that he wishes that his picture would experience the ravages of life and ageing instead of him. His bargain is made, and Dorian lives an evil, sinful life, but his body and face remain beautiful, whilst his portrait, representative of his soul, becomes aged and loathsome. The 'authentic' encounter between Basil and Dorian is foregrounded, as the artist confesses that "'the visible presence'" of Dorian has a huge impact on him and his art, influencing him to create "'the best work of my life'" (p.17). Dorian's presence is essential to the creation of his image.

However, the portrait's 'authentic' status is put into doubt following Dorian's bargain, which situates the true Dorian as the portrait not the man, which Basil seems to pre-empt, by alluding to the portrait as "'the real Dorian'" (p.38). Nancy Armstrong similarly argues that whilst the portrait begins life as an 'authentic' copy of Dorian, it becomes a 'bad copy', in the sense that the portrait starts to depart from the original. The picture ends up reflecting the authentic Dorian, and the Dorian-in-the-flesh becomes the fake. Armstrong claims that Wilde is positioning the picture as a photograph, thereby making a case for 'the pervasive and irreversible triumph of photographic realism'. Whilst I agree with Armstrong's argument in positioning the portrait in relation to photography, I am not sure that I necessarily agree that 'realism' emerges triumphant, given that the (photographic) portrait ends up destroyed, along with the protagonist.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p.97.

²⁵⁴ Going forward, references to *Dorian Gray* will appear parenthetically in the text.

²⁵⁵ Armstrong, p.159.

Contrary to Armstrong, Daniel Novak regards Dorian's body as a metaphor for a photograph (rather than his portrait), as it appears to be photographically frozen and preserved in time:

In one sense, Dorian's body represents a fantasy about the innocence and inviolability of the photograph and photographic 'truth'. In this theory of the photograph, neither the past nor the future would be legible on Dorian's body, because, like the photograph, he represents the record and reproduction of a single moment in time and space.²⁵⁶

As Andre Bazin observes, the photograph 'embalms time' and, according to Novak, Dorian's body is the essence of time standing still – like a photograph.²⁵⁷ Whilst both Armstrong and Novak's arguments are valid, their conflicting nature demonstrates the intrinsic ambivalence of Wilde's text. Which image is supposed to be the original and which the copy? Which is authentic, and which is photographic, and are these the same things? In any event, both arguments support the fact that issues of authenticity are foregrounded in this tale, along with themes concerning the mismatch between appearance and reality.

Moreover, the story dramatises Carlyle's aspiration to capture the 'inmost heart' and the 'secret' character of the sitter. As Dorian becomes more depraved, his portrait reflects his conscience, which is not visible to the eye. After his rejection of the young actress, Sybil Vane, he sees the 'cruelty round the mouth as clearly as if he had been looking into a mirror after he had done some dreadful thing' (p.105). The picture 'held the secret of his life, and told his story' (which is what Carlyle wanted national portraits to do), it was the 'visible emblem of conscience' (p.107). Portrait and protagonist also appear to have an ontological connection: Dorian admits that the picture is "'part of myself'" (p.36), Basil teasingly refers to the portrait as 'you', as if Dorian and the portrait are interchangeable (p.36), and the real Dorian dies when he stabs the picture. The portrait appears to embody the criteria espoused by the NPG, in that it is ostensibly an 'authentic' image, in the sense that it reflects an encounter between artist and sitter (although issues of authenticity are obviously a site of tension in the novella). Further, it reflects the 'inmost heart' of the sitter, albeit it is a travesty

²⁵⁶ Novak, p.138.

²⁵⁷ Andre Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' [1945], in Trachtenberg, pp.237-244 (p.237 and p.242).

of the ideals behind the NPG, given Dorian's portrait reflects his vicious character rather than inspiring heroism.

Returning to Barrett-Browning's concept of 'sanctification', there are suggestions that for Dorian and for Basil, the portrait acts like a religious icon, or even idol. An icon (from the Greek *eikon*, 'image' or 'resemblance') is a religious image, popular in Roman Catholic and certain Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions since the fifth century, which transmitted sanctity. Icons were not supposed to have been 'created' per se, by the imagination of the artist, but to exist from God (*Acheiropoieta*). An 'idol' is a false icon, which is worshipped but does not emanate from God. Both Dorian and Basil admit to worshipping the portrait image. Dorian looks at it obsessively and confesses he is "'in love with it'" (p.36), even kissing the portrait 'in a boyish mockery of Narcissus' (p.123) and an echo of saintly worship.²⁵⁸ When asked why he will not exhibit it, Basil replies that "'without intending it, I have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry'" (p.18). Basil's closing scene is rich with references to religion and the worship of false idols, as he admits how he "'worshipped'" Dorian excessively, and thought him 'an ideal' (p.181): "'I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it. You worshipped yourself too much. We are both punished'" (p.181). In a mocking imitation of an iconic miracle, the portrait produces a 'loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening, on one of the hands, as though the canvas had sweated blood?' (p.199).²⁵⁹

The etymology of the 'idol' also stems from the notion of the shadow image, descended from the root '*eidolon*', which originates from Greek myth, and is defined as 'an unsubstantial image, spectre, phantom' in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). According to the OED, one of the first notable references to the word '*eidolon*' was by Carlyle, in 1828. He uses the word again in *On Heroes* in 1841, when he referred to the connection between '*eidolon*' and an 'Idol', which he describes as a 'symbol' of a

²⁵⁸ Dorian's action also appears to echo Charles Baudelaire's famous criticism of the 'lunacy' of those rushing out to obtain daguerreotypes of themselves: 'our loathsome society rushed, like Narcissus, to contemplate its trivial image on the metallic plate.' See 'The Modern Public and Photography' [1859], in Trachtenberg, pp.83-89 (pp.86-87).

²⁵⁹ For example, the mystery of the weeping Virgin Mary in Chicago:
<https://www.indy100.com/article/virgin-mary-statue-church-miracle-chicago-derry-girls-9100521>
 [accessed 23 Sep 2019]

worshipped object or person.²⁶⁰ It is therefore ironic that Wilde's story about false idols is connected etymologically to Carlyle's concept of heroic '*eidola*'. It also suggests that, whilst presenting differing views on the portrait's influence (Carlyle wanting it to inspire emulation, Wilde showing how it can be a repulsive reflection of a sinful life), both Wilde and Carlyle recognised the iconic properties of the portrait and its charismatic ability to influence others (to the good or the bad). Both also regarded painted portraits as pertaining to the gallery and the wall, emitting power through vision rather than touch. This visual power distinguishes them from the haunting power of the photograph which, as I will argue in the next parts of this Chapter, in the ghost stories I have explored which concern magic photographs, behave more like relics.

Part III — Photographic Relics

The relic works without representation [...] It does not rely on physical presence sublimated into art, as the icon does. It is the thing itself, the physical presence of the saint, or a part of it, real, not an imitation of presence. It is a part of the person left behind (relictum).²⁶¹

In traditional Christian belief, people used to worship the corpse (or part of the body, such as finger, bone, foreskin) belonging to a saint or venerated person, and in Medieval times, relics (usually fakes) were often bought and sold. Saints' relics became less popular in the Elizabethan age, with the growth of Protestantism, but from this point on grew a new tradition of the secular relic. Victorian Britain saw a resurgence in relic culture, which became increasingly secular, personal and private. Mourners would often retain parts of the body of those they had lost as consolation, most commonly, hair (braided into objects like bracelets, integrated into locket and watches) or sometimes a tooth. As Deborah Lutz puts it, 'the sacred moved from the flesh of the saint to that of the beloved individual.'²⁶² Unlike an icon, which is a representation of

²⁶⁰ 'The Hero as Priest', *On Heroes*, p.143.

²⁶¹ Stephen C. Jaeger, *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p.125

²⁶² Deborah Lutz, 'The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39 (2011), 127-142 (p.128).

the saint, a relic descends from the thing itself, which can evoke veneration through its 'aura', which Stephen Jaeger defined as 'the sum of associations that collect on an object' which 'exist strictly in the mind of the beholder or in the collective mind of a community of believers'.²⁶³ It is a memento, not a representation. It invites us to imagine the whole from a part, like a synecdoche.

Whilst traditionally a relic is not an image, in the nineteenth-century ghost stories that I examine below, I contend that the photograph assumes relic qualities. The notion of the relic as being something 'left behind', a remnant of a past moment, is a reminder of Barrett-Browning's shadow being left on the ground. As Barthes observed, one cannot deny that '*the thing has been there*'. That moment has occurred, the photographer stood in that space before the subject, and it is this sense of being in touch with the past moment which crowns its status as relic.²⁶⁴ For the bereaved Barthes, the Winter Garden photograph of the mother whom he had lost, represented 'truth' to him, because it not only captured his idea of who she was, but it also captured the reality that she had been there. Its indexicality distinguishes it from the painted portrait which has been mediated through the hands of an artist. Barthes's presentation of indexicality has its critics, such as John Tagg, who regards attempts to present photography as the resurrection of a prior reality to be problematic. Instead, he claims, it offers a 'new and specific reality'. The photograph is not a magical 'emanation', he claims, but a 'material product of a material apparatus'.²⁶⁵ Whilst I agree that Barthes's grief may have drawn him to seek a physical connection with the past, I cannot quite agree with Tagg that photography is simply an emanation of technology and political power. It is undeniable that a photograph makes us feel emotionally connected to the subject, and the fact that such connectedness is created by a material entity born of a material apparatus does not reduce its affective power.²⁶⁶

Moreover, the photograph's status as relic is implied by its association with death. Barthes famously said that 'death is the *eidos* of the photograph', and in that

²⁶³ Jaeger, p.132.

²⁶⁴ Barthes, pp.76-77.

²⁶⁵ Tagg, pp.3-4.

²⁶⁶ Tagg, pp.4-5.

sense, a photograph is always mourning a moment in the past, pointing to the subject's own future death.²⁶⁷ Eduardo Cadava has similarly described a photograph as 'a mode of bereavement' which 'speaks to us of mortification' and the 'return of the departed.'²⁶⁸ As Warner observes, photographs often appear in funeral rituals, positioned on the cover of a funeral booklet or placed above the coffin.²⁶⁹ The photograph's role, as a '*memento mori*', was especially evident in post-mortem photography, which according to Audrey Linkman, played 'a significant role in shaping the contents of the Victorian family album.'²⁷⁰

In my contention that the photograph behaves principally like a relic, I offer a different interpretation to Cynthia Freeland, who in her essay on 'Photographs and Icons' positions the photograph as an icon.²⁷¹ In this, she emphasises the 'manifestation' function of the photograph, the way that it provides the viewer with a sense of 'contact or presence with the represented subject' and the way it is treated as if it is the subject (rather than a depiction of the subject).²⁷² Whilst I agree, I find that Freeland's criteria could more easily be ascribed to a relic, especially her emphasis on the 'sense of ongoing contact' which the photograph can supply, the feeling that the 'real person is made present' through their photograph.²⁷³ The differentiation between relic and icon is clearly blurred, in that Freeland admits that 'icons function much more like relics, as virtual (or in many cases literal) pieces of a lost saint or holy figure.' She also positions the photograph as 'acheiropoietic', because it was not made by man, and hence is like the icon.²⁷⁴ Barthes makes a similar argument, linking the photograph with 'acheiropoietos' in *Camera Lucida*: 'Photography has something to do with resurrection: might we not say of it what the Byzantines said of the image of

²⁶⁷ Barthes, p.15.

²⁶⁸ Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) p.11.

²⁶⁹ Warner, p.201.

²⁷⁰ Sontag, p.266; and Audrey Linkman, *Photographing the Dead* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p.8.

²⁷¹ Cynthia Freeland, 'Photographs and Icons', in Scott Waldren, ed., *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008) pp.50-70.

²⁷² Freeland, pp.51-52.

²⁷³ Freeland, p.56, p.62.

²⁷⁴ Freeland, p.56, p.64.

Christ which impregnated St. Veronica's napkin: that it was not made by the hand of man, *acheiropoietos*?'.²⁷⁵

Whilst this reading of photography accords with the discourse of the proto-photographers, who often minimised the human agency behind photography, this belies the reality of the photographic process, in which a person focused, shot the image and processed it by means of human hands and chemicals. In any event, the existence of the debate between icon and relic endorses the fact that both concepts blurred into each other, which demonstrates Jaeger's opinion that 'neither relic nor icon is a 'pure form' of either; the concepts are porous; each can contain elements of the other.'²⁷⁶ Taking into account their porosity, I would therefore argue that whilst at times photographs can assume iconic properties, the principal power that they emit in the ghost stories that I discuss below is more customarily associated with the materiality of the photograph and released through the haptic engagement of the beholder, which places it more naturally within the category of relic.

In my emphasis on the materiality of the photograph, I am supported by a variety of critics, such as Elizabeth Edwards, who claims that 'Photographs are both images *and* physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience'.²⁷⁷ Like relics, Victorian photographs usually needed to be touched, held, and seen to be appreciated, which involved a more haptic engagement than the one we have now in the digital age. Photographs were held in the hand, drawer, album, exhibition; sometimes they were creased from folding, faded by the sun, marked with finger prints, offered as cartes de visite, framed, hidden, carried in paper bags, cherished in the pocket, locket or wallet; all of which contributed to their meaning and interpretation. As Joan M. Schwartz argues, in the early days of photography's invention, the daguerreotype was a very tactile item, necessitating a 'haptic experience'. Often encased in fine leather or in covers with elaborate designs to protect its delicate surface, tilting at the right angle was necessary for the full viewing

²⁷⁵ Barthes, p.82.

²⁷⁶ Jaeger, p.98.

²⁷⁷ Elizabeth Edwards, *Photographs, Objects, Histories*, p.1.

experience.²⁷⁸ Green-Lewis concurs that 'our engagement with any given photograph has as much to do with its material circumstances (paper, pewter, framed, screen-shotted) and the circumstances of our possession of it (how it is netted into our lives, bought, made, inherited, found) as with its original content'. It is, in this way, 'made', 'it grows a material presence over time'.²⁷⁹

For the most part this haptic identity was not shared with painted portraits, which were usually displayed in large size in public galleries or on walls. A painting 'does not invite handling, stroking, combing, adorning, robing or disrobing, touching or kissing' as relics do.²⁸⁰ This kind of treasured daguerreotype box was not dissimilar to the 'brass-handled oak box' containing relics of the artist Thomas Lawrence, including his death mask (see Figure 20 below), a lock of his hair and his pencil (see Figure 19 below), described by Marcia Pointon in her essay about death masks and artefacts.²⁸¹ Both death masks and photographs invited a haptic relationship with the viewer, having a role as artefacts, 'things', as well as images.

In fact, critics have often compared photographs with death masks, both positioned as indexical imprints of their subject. Sontag comments that a photograph is 'a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask'.²⁸² Warner regards the death mask to be a 'psychological precursor of photography' and Robert Pogue Harrison calls the photograph the 'modern descendent of the death mask'.²⁸³ However, Pointon rightly advises caution when connecting photography with death masks, as she indicates the large variety of different death masks in existence through the ages, which had differing amounts of contact with the dead.²⁸⁴ Lindsay Smith is also tentative about comparisons between the death mask and the photograph, emphasising the reality of the 'double' image

²⁷⁸ Joan M. Schwartz, 'Un Beau Souvenir du Canada: Object, image, symbolic space', in *Photographs Objects Histories*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2004) pp.16-31 (p.18).

²⁷⁹ Green-Lewis, p.32 and pp.84-85.

²⁸⁰ Warner, p.26.

²⁸¹ 'Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things: Artefacts at the Edge', *The Art Bulletin*, 96.2 (2014), pp.170-194 (p.185).

²⁸² Sontag, p.154.

²⁸³ Warner, p. 24; and Pogue Harrison, *Dominions of the Dead* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) p.148.

²⁸⁴ Pointon, pp.172-3, and pp.174-178.

created via the camera, contrary to the ‘fictional’ double inherent in the death mask or other plastic representations.²⁸⁵ However, even when taking into account the different processes behind their production and the differing outcomes achieved, both photographs and death masks are connected, to some extent, through their indexicality or physical connection to the past moment, and through this, they evoke the presence of the dead.

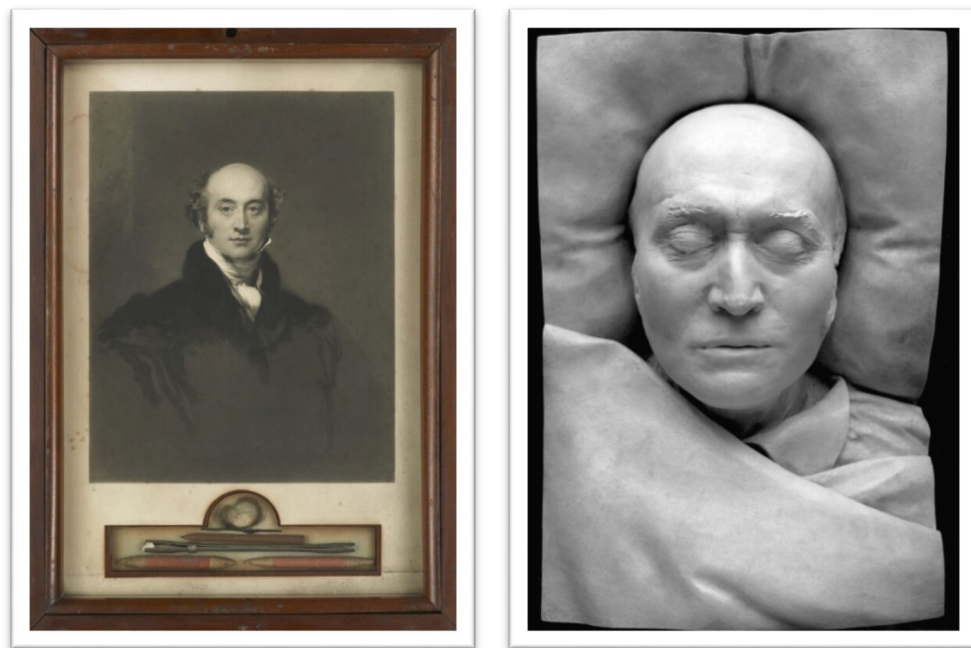


Figure 19. Samuel Cousins, *Sir Thomas Lawrence*, mezzotint, published by Walter Benjamin Tiffin, 1830. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 1634b.

Figure 20. Unknown artist, *Sir Thomas Lawrence*, photograph of plaster cast of death mask, 1830. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 1634.

As a result of their authentic encounter with the past, photographs have been said to emit a certain aura or magnetism. Wendell-Holmes compared the daguerreotype to the ‘forms, effigies, membranes or *films*’ that the Ancient Greeks thought emanated from all bodies in ‘The Stereoscope and the Stereograph’ (1959).²⁸⁶ This spectral way of understanding a photograph, in which the photographic image

²⁸⁵ Smith, ‘Photographic Portraiture and the Forgetting of Colour’, p.99.

²⁸⁶ Oliver Wendell-Holmes, ‘The Stereoscope and the Stereograph’ [1859], in Trachtenberg, pp.71-82 (p.72).

seems ontologically connected with the subject, like its shadow or eidolon, suggests it is imbued with an 'aura' or personal 'sanctity' – like a relic — which Jaeger described as the 'sum of associations that collect on an object'.²⁸⁷ As Jaeger suggests, it is not just the physical object that provides the aura, but the engagement of the beholder is required to fill in the gaps (imagining the whole from the part), a consent to being haunted, so to speak. The photograph offers what Pointon terms 'an illusion of unmediated access to the subject', a sense that a percipient could feel connected with the subject (even if now dead or absent), just as a physical remnant of a loved one could make a mourner feel literally 'in touch' with the departed.²⁸⁸

In my understanding of photographs as relics, emitting an auratic power, I offer a counter narrative to that offered by Walter Benjamin in his 'The Little History of Photography' (1931) and 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935), in which he argues that the photograph's auratic power ended when it could be technologically reproduced. Benjamin regarded an original work of art as unique, implying duration, and a copy as reproducible, and hence transient. Reproducing the image, he argues, is 'the peeling away of the object's shell' which is 'the destruction of the aura'.²⁸⁹ Whilst Benjamin's arguments are well established, for me they do not explain the evocative power and magic that a photograph can offer, notwithstanding the fact that it has been reproduced from an original. As John Berger comments, 'the very principle of photography is that the resulting image is not unique, but on the contrary infinitely reproducible'.²⁹⁰ What has been said by others about the photograph's ability to provide a sense of 'unmediated access to the subject', or the strong feelings engaged when coming across the image of a loved one (notwithstanding that it has been reproduced), which Barthes relates, with the 'Winter Garden' image of his mother which so moves him to reverence, suggests that a level of

²⁸⁷ Jaeger, p.99.

²⁸⁸ Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013) p.17.

²⁸⁹ 'Little History of Photography' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Others, 3rd edn, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1999) II, 507-530 (p.519).

Also, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Others, 3rd edn, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1999) IV, 251-283.

²⁹⁰ John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph* (London: Penguin Books, 2013) p.18.

‘sanctification’ or magic is inherent in the photograph and is not dissipated upon reproduction.²⁹¹ Drawing on my reading of photographs as relics, which is supported by the critical arguments I have rehearsed above, I will argue that the photographs featured in the three Victorian ghost stories that I discuss below emit an auratic connection, which differs from the more ostentatious style of haunting offered by the magic painted portraits. In this more subtle, haptic style of haunting, these stories indicate a trend towards tactility which became more marked by the turn of the century and which, I argue, is influenced by photography.

Part IV – Magic Photographs

Firstly, in Wilkie Collins’s ‘Miss Jeromette and the Clergyman’ (1875), touching the photograph of the French Miss Jeromette prompts the arrival of her ghost.²⁹² In short, the protagonist, who later becomes a clergyman, falls in love with Miss Jeromette, but is prevented from marrying her due to the existence of a prior connection on her side. Later, an unpleasant young man begs the clergyman to take him on as a pupil, explaining that he fears being tempted to do evil against another who stands in his way. One morning, his pupil rushes off to London without explanation. A photograph of Miss Jeromette is found in the pupil’s bedroom after he leaves, and the clergyman realises that the person who prevents the pupil’s worldly progress must be his own Miss Jeromette. He sends a telegram to warn her, but it fails to reach her in time. When returning from the telegraph office, he becomes aware that he is being accompanied by a ‘pillar of mist’ (p.239) which travels home with him to the rectory. Whilst in his study, the pillar of mist stops opposite him, behind the photograph of Miss Jeromette. The mist then materialises into the ghost of the French lady, showing a bloody neck. The story later unfolds that she had married a man privately. He had then strayed to another, discord had followed, and a man had been seen leaving her lodgings the night of the murder. The clergyman is convinced that it

²⁹¹ Barthes, pp.90-91.

²⁹² Wilkie Collins, ‘Miss Jeromette and the Clergyman’, in *The Haunted Hotel & Other Stories*, ed. by David Stuart Davies (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2006). Further references will be to this edition and made parenthetically in the text.

was his pupil who had murdered her, but the trial was inconclusive due to lack of evidence.

Miss Jeromette is associated with photography from the start, as we learn that she makes money 'colouring miniatures for the photographers' (p.226). We know then that she is used to having a detailed, forensic, and haptic relationship with photographs every day, touching them, adding colour to the smallest parts, helping them to tell their story. It is therefore no surprise that when she dies her ghost arises in connection with her photograph and that her image aids her in narrating her story. Even the image of her ghost – the 'pillar of white mist' – has photographic elements to it, as we are told that 'the white colour of it was the white colour of the fog which I had seen over the river on the night when I had gone to bid her farewell' (p.239). Similarly, when Miss Jeromette appears from the mist, 'she stood before me as I had last seen her, in her purple-merino dress, with the black-silk apron, with the white handkerchief tied loosely round her neck [...] in the gentle beauty that I remembered so well; and looked at me as she had looked when she gave me her last kiss' (p.240). The ghost the narrator sees is a photograph-like image of their last encounter – she wears the same clothes, the same expression, even the mist is like the one he recalls from the Thames. The ghost even comes into view like a developing negative, the pillar of mist clarifying by degrees from a shadow into a 'human form':

It lengthened slowly, until it reached to the ceiling. As it lengthened, it grew bright and luminous. A time passed, and a shadowy appearance showed itself in the centre of the light. Little by little, the shadowy appearance took the outline of a human form. Soft brown eyes, tender and melancholy, looked at me through the unearthly light in the mist. The head and the rest of the face broke next slowly on my view. Then the figure gradually revealed itself, moment by moment, downward and downward to the feet. (p.240)

The ghost seems to appear, slowly, and in conjunction with the photograph, as if the two are ontologically connected.

The spirit of Miss Jeromette promptly uses her photograph to communicate her message: 'She lifted her hand, and pointed to the photograph on my desk, with a gesture which bade me turn the card. I turned it. The name of the man who had left my house this morning was inscribed on it, in her own handwriting' (p.240). Whilst the photograph is initially important for showing identity and the image of the subject, a

significant part of the information it holds (the identity of her murderer) is inscribed in the back. The photograph does not 'come alive' in this story as per the magic portrait stories – but it frames the beginning, middle and end to the ghostly appearance. The ghost appears in conjunction with the photograph, it is used as a prop by the ghost itself to convey information, and at the end of the ghostly appearance, the last image we are left with is 'the photograph lying face downward on my desk' (p.241).

This last, poignant image of the reversed photograph, with her handwriting on it stating the identity of her killer (why? Isn't it more customary to put the name of the sitter?) also constitutes the last stage of a significant journey for this photograph. The 'curious' (p.237) housekeeper was the one who found the image, and when asked to put it back, she is affronted, asking "'Must I put it back, sir, on the floor, between the bed and the wall? [...] *That's* where the girl found it when she was sweeping the room'" (p.237). From this we can infer that the image was hidden somewhere close to (if not in) the bed and that it must have fallen out of the bed by the wall (if not hidden, one assumes the staff would have found it sooner). Hiding the photograph of Miss Jeromette in the bed suggests an illicit sexual connection. The photograph of this unacknowledged spouse had been close to him at night, possibly even touching his body, like a proxy for the real subject.

When the housekeeper hands the photograph over to the clergyman, his reaction suggests that he conflates her image with the original: 'my heart was beating wildly – my head turned giddy – the housekeeper, the furniture, the walls of the room, all swayed and whirled round me' (p.237), indicating his strong feeling for Miss Jeromette. Once calm, he places the photograph at arm's length on his desk: 'I had sent the housekeeper out of my study. I was alone, with the photograph of the Frenchwoman on my desk' (p.238). In subtle recognition of the fact of her being intimately involved with his pupil, it would appear, the clergyman puts the photograph at a physical distance from himself. Despite this physical distance established by the narrator, the possession of the photograph from the bed of the pupil to the desk of the clergyman symbolises that some kind of patriarchal exchange has taken place. Miss Jeromette's ghost easily identifies her photograph from his desk. She uses it to give the information that she needs to impart, and it then stays on the clergyman's desk as if it

belongs there, mimicking their original meeting, in which he rescues her from an offensive drunk, taking her arm and escorting her home.

The photograph of Miss Jeromette is therefore interesting in various ways. It helps Miss Jeromette relate the identity of her murderer, it offers an authentic artefact which tells the narrator what he needs to know in order to try and help her and, when touched, it appears to conjure her spirit. The fact that she had previously touched the photograph in order to write on it means that it is imprinted with Miss Jeromette's presence and her fingerprints. Her photograph acts like her relic, and the way this 'part' of her is touched and positioned (first by the bed of her husband, then on the desk of the clergyman) is symbolic of the whole.

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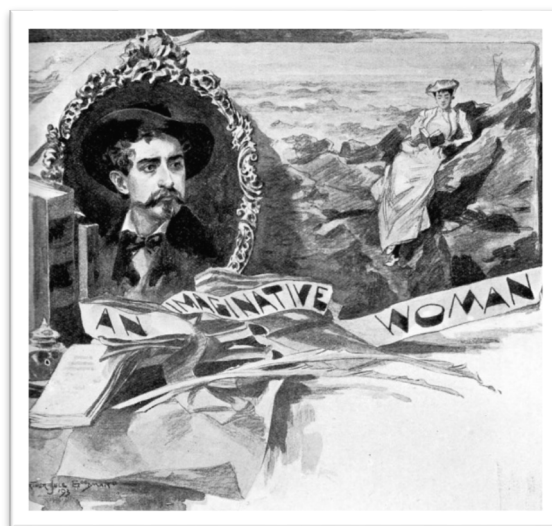


Figure 21. Arthur J. Goodman, *Introductory Plate for 'An Imaginative Woman'*, lithograph, 1894. *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 2.951 (1894).

Although often not regarded as a 'ghost story' per se, Thomas Hardy's 'An Imaginative Woman' (1893) offers an insight into the power of photographic haunting and implies that the aura of a photograph could affect an unborn child.²⁹³ Ella, a young, sensitive, 'impressionable' (p.7) woman is married to a man she does not love

²⁹³ In Hardy, *Life's Little Ironies*, ed. by Simon Gatrell (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). References to this edition will be made parenthetically in the text. Warner reported that such a possibility of a 'maternal impression', that is, the idea that a mother's mental experience can affect the development of a foetus, is mentioned by Athanasius Kircher in his *Ars magna* (1646); p.140.

and who lacks imagination and intellect. During a seaside sojourn she stays in the lodgings of a poet, Robert Trewe, whom she admired, having read and engaged with his work whilst being an aspiring poet herself. She becomes obsessed with Trewe and his poetry, especially once she sees his photograph, which captures her imagination and keeps it beside (and at one point in) her bed. The two never meet and her attempts are constantly thwarted by circumstance and bad luck. Tragically, Trewe commits suicide. In classic Hardy-esque irony, in his suicide note to a friend he says that if he had had a strong connection to a 'mother, or a sister, or a female friend' he might have thought it worthwhile to live – and this longed for female friend ('the imaginary woman', p.27) inspired his recent verse. Ella ends up dying in childbirth and her child, conceived with her husband whilst indulging in fantasies about the poet, and whilst Trewe's photograph was in her bed, looks like Trewe (a 'Trewe' likeness so to speak).

The photograph plays a key role in the story, as the illustration for the 1894 version demonstrates (Figure 21), dominating the introductory plate for the story. Seeing Trewe's photograph triggers Ella's obsession. Prior to that she is interested in Trewe and his poetry, but the photograph strengthens the attachment, as the process of discovering and unveiling it suggests. Even before Ella has seen the image, the landlady paves the way for Ella's imaginative engagement with the photograph, discussing it as if it were a proxy for the poet.²⁹⁴ When Ella asks to see a photograph, the landlady mentions there is one in the "ornamental frame on the mantelpiece" (p.17) in Ella's bedroom, which Ella denies, claiming that there is an image of the Royal Duke and Duchess. In her response, the landlady easily falls into synecdochic language, calling the photograph 'he', 'him' and 'himself':

'Yes, so they are; but he's behind them. He belongs rightly to that frame, which I bought on purpose; but as he went away he said: "Cover me up from those strangers that are coming, for God's sake. I don't want them staring at me, and I am sure they won't want me staring at them." So I slipped in the Duke and Duchess temporarily in front of him, as they had no frame, and Royalties are more suitable for letting furnished than a private young man. If you take 'em

²⁹⁴ Hardy has imagined a photograph as a proxy in his poetry. In 'The Photograph', he imagines a portrait photograph being burned, which the narrator finds distressing: 'Then I vented a cry of hurt, and averted my eyes; | The spectacle was one that I could not bear'. He imagines the flame 'eating' her 'breasts, and mouth, and hair'. 'And nothing was left of the picture unsheathed from the past | But the ashen ghost of the card it had figured on'. He says 'I felt as if I had put her to death that night!' and wonders, if alive, 'Did she feel a smart, and with vague strange anguish strive?' *Thomas Hardy Selected Poems*, ed. Tim Armstrong (London and New York: Longman, 1993) pp.217-18. Editor notes that this was most likely an image of his cousin, Tryphena Sparks.

out you'll see him under. Lord, ma'am, he wouldn't mind if he knew it! He didn't think the next tenant would be such an attractive lady as you, or he wouldn't have thought of hiding himself perhaps.' (p.17)

Similarly, Trewe reportedly did not say 'cover *my photograph* up' but 'me', as if the two were synonymous. He suggests that his photograph was an active, rather than a passive subject, asserting that eye contact could be reciprocal. His not wanting a personal photograph lying about in rooms occupied by strangers is understandable, but his expression suggests, as Michal Peled Ginsberg observes, 'he treats the photograph as literally equivalent to himself.' Ginsburg observes that due to the lack of intervention of 'art', a photograph is commonly perceived as an 'unmediated document of the presence of its subject' thus 'collapsing the image with the living person who is its referent.'²⁹⁵ Instead of simply asking the landlady to take the photograph away, he reportedly built the instruction into a fantasy of exchanged and intrusive gazes, in which his photograph plays an active role on his behalf.

Such an assumption that a photograph acts as a proxy for the sitter is not, of course, new. Swapping subject and image was an essential part of the 'magic portrait' motif. However, what is different in the photographic stories I have explored is the nature of the haunting that accompanies this assumption. Where in magic portrait stories, the proxy element is usually accompanied by a vivifying of the portrait or at the least a physical change to the portrait that narrates a story, in the photographic stories I have studied, the photograph remains unchanged, whilst the haunting occurs through a seemingly invisible influence over the beholder, an engagement with their imagination, or in the case of 'Miss Jeromette', the arrival of a separate ghost (which does not mimic the appearance of the photograph). Whilst Trewe may be hinting at the idea of a living portrait here, there is no suggestion his photograph will actually come alive. Instead, he, along with the other characters in the stories, seem to presume that the photograph possesses an ontological connection with the subject, which enables it to act as a 'double'.

Ella also regards Trewe's photograph as a proxy for him, or at least an object through which she is able to worship him. Her first unveiling of the photograph is like

²⁹⁵ Michal Peled Ginsburg, 'Imagination, Poetic Creation, and Gender: Hardy's "Imaginative Woman"', *Modern Philology*, 110.2 (2012), 273-288 (p.281).

an encounter with the real person. She spends all day contemplating her approaching vision of the photograph, like a romantic liaison, 'with a serene sense of something ecstatic to come' (p.18). She considers her appearance, the atmosphere, the time of day, and instead of 'incontinently rushing upstairs and opening the picture-frame' she patiently waits for an appropriate occasion to view her prize, 'preferring to reserve the inspection till she could be alone, and a more romantic tinge be imparted to the occasion by silence, candles, solemn sea and stars outside, than was afforded by the garish afternoon sunlight' (p.18). She makes copious 'preparations' before gratifying her 'passionate curiosity' in looking at the photograph. In a parody of a real sexual encounter, she rids herself of 'superfluous garments' and puts on 'her dressing-gown' (p.18). She reads several pages of 'Trewé's tenderest utterances', and then she puts the picture in front of her at her dressing table (p.18). It is as if her encounter with the image is akin to her encounter with the real Trewé.

Although Trewé is not dead, there are elements to Ella's behaviour with the photograph that are suggestive of relic worship. As Jaeger points out, a key aspect to the relic is the important role played by the imagination of the beholder, in that it 'reconstructs or evokes stories from the fragmentary clues still surviving in the present' and asks us to 'imagine the whole from a part'. He notes that the 'visible aura of the reliquary' can aid the process for imagination and memory to trace the aspects of the original that are beyond reach; setting up the photograph with candles, placing it on an intimate table, all suggest religious investment.²⁹⁶ In this scenario, there is a definite blur between Ella's worship of the image as relic and as icon (also suggested by Hardy's choice of name, Trewé – so the Trewé icon is like a variant of 'Veronica's Veil' – as Veronica means 'true icon'). This not only demonstrates the 'porous' nature of relic and icon (they can both act like the other), but I would also suggest that there is no need to identify which is in play here, given that the important point is that Ella is responding imaginatively and spiritually to the photograph of Trewé. We know that her first encounter with the photograph is a tactile one, as she needs to take the photograph out of its frame before she can see it: she 'took out the likeness, and set it up before her' (p.18) and after looking at it a short while, 'touched the cardboard with

²⁹⁶ Jaeger, pp.125-6, and pp.130-131.

her lips' (pp.18-19). As she touches it, she even notes the cardboard material on which it lies. The delicate way in which Hardy avoids saying 'kissed' but instead says, 'touched with her lips', makes the action seem slower, more sensual, but also more innocent. It also sounds more connotative of a relic than an icon (icons are usually kissed, whereas relics are usually touched). Once she has caressed the photograph, she realises it was 'wicked' to 'let her mind stray to a stranger in this unconscionable manner' (p.19), yet despite this, she continues to look at the photograph and address it as if it were the poet, in her 'lowest, richest, tenderest tone' (p.18). She proceeds to 'imagine the whole [of Trewe] from a part', that is, his presence, from the image of his face in the photograph.²⁹⁷

Ella then puts the photograph near her bed (in a position of intimacy) and 'contemplated it as she lay' (p.19), as if it were Trewe himself. The feelings engendered by the photograph surround her even when she no longer looks at it, and as Lutz has said of relics more generally 'the piece of the person can bring the presence of the whole.'²⁹⁸ Her imagination fills in the gaps. She feels physically and mentally surrounded by the man's presence. His poetic inscriptions are inscribed on the wall by her head, his clothes are in the wardrobe, and she even tries on his mackintosh because 'his heart had beat inside that coat, and his brain had worked under that hat at levels of thought she would never reach' (p.15). Ginsburg has argued that the story is about a 'woman's attempt to establish herself as a poet' and concerns 'the relation between gender, the imagination and literary creation'. He reads her trying on the coat as an attempt to become Trewe, to aspire to his poetic greatness, which is supported by her euphoric description of the coat as "'The mantle of Elijah!'" and her crying out: "'Would it might inspire me to rival him, glorious genius that he is!'" (p.15).²⁹⁹ Ella's perception that she is receiving the mantle from Trewe certainly suggests that she is trying to emulate his poetry. However, I think the more significant reason that Ella tries on the coat is haptic. She wants to feel the poet more closely, to touch where his heart

²⁹⁷ Jaeger, pp.125-6.

²⁹⁸ Lutz, p.131.

²⁹⁹ Ginsburg, p.275 and p.280.

has beat and his brain has worked is an attempt to connect with him through some auratic power, like that which emanates from a relic.

For Ella, the auratic power of the photograph seems to conjure up the presence of the man, which is conflated with the poetry she reads around the walls. Combined, they give her a sense that he physically surrounded her: 'it seemed as if his very breath, arm and loving, fanned her cheeks from those walls, walls that had surrounded his head times and times as they surrounded her own now' (pp.13-14). As if acknowledging the physical connection (and with a subconscious pun on his name), she regards his words as 'touching and true' (p.19). The scraps of poems around the room are also like relics (remnants of a past moment), traced in the wall which impression is developed in the reference to 'Shelley's scraps': 'There they were – phrases, couplets, *bout-rimes*, beginnings and middles of lines, ideas in the rough' (p.19). The reference to Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) slightly later in the text supplies an interpretation of what 'Shelley's scraps' is intended to mean in this context: 'These inscribed shapes of the poet's world | "Forms more real than living man, | Nurslings of immortality"' (p.19). This allusion suggests that the scraps of writing are like ghosts, relics, which carry the promise of immortality.

The reference to 'Shelley's scraps' is also poignant as there was a famous cult of relic worship surrounding Shelley himself in the nineteenth century. Shelley died in 1822 and legend has it that Mary Shelley seized the poet's heart from the pyre (it apparently refused to burn). She retained possession of the relic heart and brought it home, placing its ashen remains in a book now owned by the Bodleian Library. Additionally, his friend Trelawney reportedly kept parts of his bone and skull and gave them to Shelley's friends. The British Library has retained a lock of his hair, along with that of Mary Shelley (see Figure 22 below). Lutz notes that 'many of the activities and fantasies that developed around Shelley's remains call to mind the kind of reverence to be found in the Catholic cult of saints.' She adds that this kind of relic worship was not unusual in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but that it also stimulated a kind of imaginative engagement with the remains: 'not only did death bring the tragedy of turning people into things – of subject into object – but it might also start

inanimate objects to life, cause them to travel, move about, generate meaning.³⁰⁰ Therefore, whilst the reference to 'Shelley's scraps' is superficially explained as a reference to his poetry, in the context, given that the stories about Shelley's relic remains and the culture around them would have been widespread, one suspects a deeper analogy is being made between poems and the 'scraps' of relics.



Figure 22. Lock of Percy Bysshe Shelley's hair and an alleged fragment of his ashes, together with a lock of Mary Shelley's hair, 1822. British Library, London, Ashely MS 5022.

The photograph becomes even more important in relation to the conception of Ella's child. When her husband returns, she instinctively hides Trewe's photograph under the pillow and pushes it out of sight (p.20). The image lies in the bed underneath Ella and her husband, buried in the sheets. Hardy suggests that Ella became pregnant with her fourth child that night, with the photograph lying under her pillow. Some years later, her husband happens to find Trewe's photograph after Ella's death and he is taken by the similarities between photograph of Trewe and child. He calculates the exact dates and considers that Ella had "'played me false'" (p.32). We know that

³⁰⁰ Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp.16-17.

physically this was not the case, and that any likeness between them must be a coincidence or paranoia on behalf of the husband.

However, despite this, Hardy seems to conspire with the husband that Trewe in some way fathered the child. The way that Hardy describes the encounter between Ella and the photograph as a quasi-supernatural, sexual encounter further reinforces the idea that something uncanny has occurred involving the photograph in the creation of the child. We are told that Ella is 'impressionable' (p.7) and has a sensitive 'cast of soul' (p.8) (that is, easily impressed upon). We know that on the night she regards Trewe's image, she imagines it a proxy for the poet, emitting a power that seems akin to sexual contact: his lines were said to be 'so intense, so sweet, so palpitating, that it seemed as if his very breath, warm and loving, fanned her cheeks from those walls' (p.19). The words 'sweet', 'intense', 'palpitating', 'warm', and 'loving', when mixed liberally with physical references to 'hair', 'breath', 'cheeks' in the same sentence, produce an image of bodily intimacy between them. This is intensified by her imaginative awareness that she is sleeping where he usually sleeps. The two are virtually touching and the rhythm of the writing gathers pace and intensity in simulation of the sexual climax: 'and now her hair was dragging where his arm had lain when he secured the fugitive fancies; she was sleeping on a poet's lips, immersed in the very essence of him', culminating in the action akin to penetration: 'permeated by his spirit as by an ether' (p.20). As Ginsburg has noted, 'the traces of Trewe's poetic creation inspire in Ella a sense of intimacy that is both spiritual and erotic; poetic creation and erotic desire come together in the intimate space of the bed'. It does seem that the reader is invited to assume that Ella's thoughts, in contact with the photograph, have produced the semblance of an erotic relationship.³⁰¹

The photograph under her pillow has participated in the strange procreation, seeming to possess its own 'aura' which, in combination with the 'sum of associations' we know she has already absorbed (the clothes, books, writings), along with the consenting force of her own fantasy (the fervent belief of the worshipper), has impregnated her and imprinted upon the boy the likeness of Trewe. The very idea that

³⁰¹ Ginsburg, p.280.

a child could be 'imprinted' with a likeness of another, sounds reminiscent of photography, as if the unborn child is the blank but sensitised canvas, and the mind of the woman constitutes the camera, which imprints an image upon the developing foetus. She has fallen in love with a photograph (having never met the man) and has arguably produced another photograph in having a child who resembles the poet that she adores.

After Trewe's death, Ella's grief is focused on her lack of opportunity to have touched him: "'O, if I had only once met him – only once; and put my head upon his hot forehead – kissed him – let him know how I loved him – that I would have suffered shame and scorn, would have lived and died, for him!'" (p.27) Her solace from this emotion is to ask the landlady for his photograph and an acknowledged relic – a lock of his hair: 'she would be obliged if Mrs. Hooper would obtain a small portion of his hair before his coffin was closed down, and send it to her as a memorial of him, as also the photograph that was in the frame' (p.28). On the face of it, this is a bizarre request from a woman who has never met the poet – to ask, not only for a photograph, but also a piece of a man's body as a 'memorial' of him.

Furthermore, it is interesting that she requests the lock of hair and the photograph at the same time, as if they were associated in her mind, conjoined in their status as indexical relics of the dead. When she receives them, she puts the portrait in her 'private drawer' (after having 'wept over the portrait') and 'the lock of hair she tied with white ribbon and put in her bosom, whence she drew it and kissed it every now and then in some unobserved nook' (p.28). Ella displays the need to have a physical connection with the dead man. She kisses his hair, keeps it close to her body, touches and spills tears over the photograph, keeping it in a 'private' place. Hardy wrote about the desire for a relic in his poem, 'Thoughts of Phena at News of her Death' (1898), in which the poet expresses sadness that he has no material remnant of Phena, no 'line of her writing' nor a 'thread of her hair', nor any image of the lady at the end of her life. He concludes that all he has remaining is the 'phantom' as his relic.³⁰² This

³⁰² According to Hardy's diary entry of 5 March 1890, he regarded this as an instance of 'sympathetic telepathy' as he wrote the first lines of the poem in a train, whilst at the same time the cousin of whom he was thinking, was dying. She died six days later. The cousin was Tryphena Sparks, who died on 17 March 1890. *Thomas Hardy Selected Poems*, pp.65-66.

reiterates Hardy's interest in relics and the mourning practices around them, which suggests a sympathy for Ella's desire for a remnant of the dead poet.

Batchen has elsewhere commented on the significance of photography when combined with bodily mementos of the dead, such as hair, in his article on photographic jewellery. In his examination of a locket containing a photograph on one side, and a lock of hair on the other, he argues that the two different types of memento complemented each other. The photograph offers an indexical trace of the past, a visual memory of what Barthes has termed, *"That-has-been"*.³⁰³ For Batchen, the hair serves as 'a metonymic memorial function, standing in [...] for the body of the absent subject', reminding the person of how they felt as well as how they looked.³⁰⁴ In its very essence, in surviving death, the hair also implies an insight into the future and to eternal life, whereas the photograph shows a record of the past. Batchen argues that the locket containing the hair and the photograph constitutes two indexical traces of the subject, 'at once optical and haptic', and consequently, the locket is like an indexical sign twice over, or as he terms it, it possesses 'doubled indexicality'.³⁰⁵

Batchen's comments provide an apt description of Ella's experience. Whilst the photograph provided her with sustenance for her imaginative longing, she craves physical contact with the absent Trewe as well. Touching the photograph, kissing it, keeping it beside her in her bed, trying on the poet's clothes, writing him letters (which also provide physical as well as mental satisfaction), creates for her a multiplicity of physical traces, a situation of multiple indexicality, which fuels her fantasy and enables her to imagine his response. Even after Trewe's death, she continues to seek physical remnants, the relic of his hair, the necklace that contains his photograph, and kissing it provides her with some satisfaction (even though manifestly disloyal to her husband). The combination of photograph and lock of hair may well provide that 'doubled indexicality' that strengthens the connection and feeling of presence and assuages her

³⁰³ Barthes, p.77.

³⁰⁴ Geoffrey Batchen, 'Ere the Substance Fade: Photography and Hair Jewellery' in *Photographs Objects Histories*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.32-46 (p.39).

³⁰⁵ Batchen, 'Ere the Substance Fade', pp.40-41.

grief. Batchen describes how, with the addition of the hair, the photograph is turned into a 'potentially sacred' item.³⁰⁶ It has become a fetish item, sacred in its ability to create presence from absence. Whilst in Ella's case the photograph and lock of hair are not constantly touching, as they are in a locket (they are kept separately), it is easy to see how the presence of the hair does something to reify the photograph in her imagination and hence make it more 'sacred' and holy in her mind.

In addition to seeking a relic of hair, once Ella has received the photograph, she writes the date of their trip to Solentsea on the back, which seems a strange act, given that the photograph belonged to Trewe (or his estate after death) and usually the writing on the photograph pertains to when or where it was taken (rather than in Ella's case, when and where it made an 'impression' on her). It is as if she has overwritten the original information on the photograph and imprinted the information relevant to her, in reciprocation for allowing Trewe to imprint his image on her unborn child. To have written on it, she must have touched the image, turned it over, made it her own. Referring back to Pointon's discussion of death masks, writing on an artefact reconfigures it 'as record', changing its character from the image of Trewe, to a record of her knowing Trewe.³⁰⁷ Ella appears to be mimicking Trewe's own desire to overwrite his poems on the landlady's walls. This process of writing, overwriting and procreating that is played out between them is continued when Ella tries to trace the movement of Trewe's hand as he wrote on the wall by the bed: "'he must often have put up his hand so'" (p.22).³⁰⁸ In this process of writing and overwriting, both on the wall and on the photograph, she is again trying to add to the intimacy with Trewe, and increasing the auratic power, by touching what he has touched. By adding her own historic details onto the photograph, she confirms its status as a relic of the past.

Further, Ella's handwriting, which exerts its own physical trace over the image, provides an extra layer of indexicality to the photograph. It is this multiplying of traces, layer upon layer, adding the date to the back of the photograph, in conjunction with

³⁰⁶ Batchen, 'Ere the Substance Fade', p.41.

³⁰⁷ Pointon, 'Casts, Imprints and the Deathliness of Things', p.183.

³⁰⁸ Ginsburg, p.280.

the lock of Trewe's hair, which leads her husband to infer that she has been unfaithful to him:

But when she had been buried a couple of years it chanced one day that, in turning over some forgotten papers that he wished to destroy before his second wife entered the house, he lighted on a lock of hair in an envelope, with the photograph of the deceased poet, a date being written on the back of his late wife's hand. It was that of the time they spent at Solentsea. (pp.31-2)

He regards the photograph of Trewe, and the lock of hair to act as proof of paternity. He notes that the 'dreamy and peculiar expression of the poet's face sat, as the transmitted idea, upon the child's, and the hair was of the same hue', which suggests that traces of Trewe must have written themselves onto the child. Ella's imagination must have acted as camera, imprinting the image of Trewe upon her unborn child. The child has been over-written by Trewe's features, just as Trewe had written over the walls of his lodgings, and just as Ella had written her own record on his photograph. The boy is part of a web of writing and over-writing, which is all made possible through the auratic presence of the photograph.

*

In the last part of this Chapter, I will discuss the photographic haunting within Henry James's 'The Friends of the Friends' (1896).³⁰⁹ Whilst the photograph does not play as big a part in the plot as it does in 'An Imaginative Woman', it reiterates the key themes that I have described above in relation to photographic haunting: firstly, that a haptic relationship with a photograph can connect characters who do not meet in life; secondly, that a photograph can emit an auratic power which engages the beholder's imagination; and lastly that a key aspect of the photograph's power is the writing on the back. In this story, the narrator relates how her fiancé, whom she calls 'him', forms an uncanny relationship with her friend, whom she terms, 'her'. We are told that they were destined to like each other, as they have certain things in common, for example, both had a ghostly experience, and both had an intense distaste for being photographed (she refuses to be 'taken', p.87). After much mischance and some thwarting intervention on the part of the narrator, the two do not meet in life.

³⁰⁹ 'The Friends of the Friends' was originally published as 'The Way it Came' in the *Chap Book* of 1 May 1896 and *Chapman's Magazine of Fiction*, May 1896, then later revised for *Embarrassments*, 1896.

However, after 'her' death, 'she' haunts the fiancé, which disrupts the engagement and causes the couple to part. As Virginia Woolf famously commented in 1921, the meeting of the two characters after death is 'beautiful' and James's employment of the ghostly gives us 'the queerest of shocks – tranquil, beautiful, like the closing of chords in harmony; and yet, somehow, obscene.'³¹⁰ The obscenity lies in the transgression on the part of the narrator's friend, who determined to meet 'him' notwithstanding death's obstruction.

Their common antipathy to photography helps to establish the affinity of 'him' and 'her'. We know that 'she' has taken a vow that 'she' will 'live and die unphotographed' (p.89) and 'he' is resistant, but the narrator shows a worldly interest in having the images displayed on her mantelpiece in expensive frames. She says of her fiancé: 'I had so loudly complained of this; him in particular I had so vainly desired to be able to show on my drawing-room chimney-piece in a Bond Street frame' (p.87). 'He' only concedes to her request for an image as a condition of their marriage, and the narrator is thrilled when she 'had him at last, in his high distinction, on the chimney-piece' (p.89). As with 'An Imaginative Woman', the narrator conflates the gain of the photograph with that of the man, merging the image into a proxy for the sitter. As Sontag observes, 'one can't possess reality but you can possess images', and one feels that the narrator's gain of his photograph is a substitute for the real.³¹¹ Edwards has emphasised the importance of the choice of frame and where it is placed, which has implications for self-presentation (or presentation of the subject) and on the social dynamics behind exchanging photographs.³¹² His 'fall' in conceding to the demand for an image underlines the dynamics of their relationship, which are weighted on her side, she being more aware of 'his' merits than he was of hers (pp.83-84).³¹³ The fact that it is a 'Bond Street' frame emphasises the narrator's opinion of its

³¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'Henry James's Ghost Stories', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* (London: Hogarth Press, 1921), ed. Andrew McNeillie, IV, 319-326; p.322; quoted in *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Henry James*, ed. Christina E. Albers (New York: G.K.Jall & Co, 1997).

³¹¹ Sontag, p.163.

³¹² Elizabeth Edwards, pp.12-13.

³¹³ Edward L. Schwarzschild suggests that like 'he' and 'she' in the story, James was 'uncomfortable with and resistant to photography'. When he had his first daguerreotype taken with his father at Brady's studio in 1854 he felt "'somehow queer'" and "'crushed by it'" - Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others, Autobiography* [1913] ed. by F. W. Dupee (London: Macmillan and Co Limited, 1913), pp. 91-94, quoted

material and social value, and her worldliness in comparison to the other two. The narrator's lack of delicacy is highlighted by her thoughtless request for the 'companion piece' from her friend, who tactfully declines, suggesting that the true companion should be the image of his wife (p.89).

In fact, it is ironic, given 'his' and 'her' initial resistance to being photographed, that it is the photograph that provides the sought for link between the elusive pair. When 'she' visits, we learn that '[she] looked a long time at his picture, about which she made no memorable remark, though she even turned it over to see the back' (p.89). Initially, the narrator says that 'she' looked at the photograph dispassionately, telling the fiancé "'it provoked her to no demonstration. She doesn't care so much as all of that'" (p.94). But later the narrator confesses that her jealousy of the pair began on that first encounter between 'her' and his photograph: 'I see now that she gave me no pretext and that I only found one in the way she looked at the fine face in the Bond Street frame' (p.89-90). Following this encounter, the narrator decides to arrange a meeting between them, and from the point of seeing the photograph, the narrator becomes aware that the fiancé and the friend are 'approaching, converging': 'They were like the seekers for the hidden object in the game of blindfold; they had one and the other began to "burn"' (p.91). For the narrator, 'she' seeing 'his' photograph, touching it and turning it over, was enough to spark a connection between them, which I read to be an indication that the photograph emits some kind of auratic power. In this moment, the narrator refers to the picture synecdochally as 'the fine face in the Bond Street frame', which makes her appear disconnected, unaware of the spiritual properties of the photograph (and hence implicitly unaware of the value of the man), seemingly focused on the material status of the photograph in its expensive frame.

There is also an echo between the friend's treatment of the photograph and the way that 'she' regards the chair that 'he' usually sits in: 'She looked at it in silence, just as she had looked at the photograph' (p.90), as if 'she' can picture him in the chair. The chair has touched him, and therefore it offers a similar power to the photograph of '*that-has-been*'. Similarly, when the fiancé and the friend 'meet' at his chambers

in 'Revising Vulnerability: Henry James's Confrontation with Photography', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 38.1 (1996), 51-78 (p.52).

(‘she’, the narrator suspects, is visiting him as a ghost after her death), their encounter is conspicuously silent and coloured only by their optical exchanges; just as when ‘she’ observed his photograph: “‘She said nothing. She only looked at me as I looked at her’” (p.98). The repeated reaction of ‘looking’ that occurs in these different encounters (the photograph, the chair, the ghost) suggests that a connection has arisen between the characters, or what Pamela Thurschwell describes as a ‘telepathic effect’ between ‘he’ and ‘her’, which all commenced with the original act of studying and handling the photograph.³¹⁴ Whilst these are small, subtle aspects to the dynamic, James confesses in his notebook to wanting the story to be brief and ‘with every word and every touch telling’, which suggests that such details are essential to the import of the story.³¹⁵

Further, it is through ‘her’ handling of ‘his’ photograph that the friend learns where ‘he’ lives, which becomes relevant when the ghost ‘visits’ his chambers later on. The narrator realises that ‘she’ must have discovered the address when ‘she’ looked at the back of his photograph: ‘she looked at your photograph, she even turned round the back of it, on which your address happens to be inscribed’ (p.94). Ironically, we know that it was the narrator who enabled the address to appear in this way, consciously leaving “‘the little label the shop people happily left sticking to the frame I had had made for my photograph’” (p.102). By turning the image around, ‘she’ is undoubtedly touching it (carefully, tenderly, one imagines), engaging with the photograph as a physical, material object, learning the details about it that enable her to pursue the ‘fine face’ in the frame. The photograph is therefore important, not just as an image of ‘him’, but in the way that it enables the haunting by conveying the address, and in its role as the site of haptic exchange for the haunted characters.

As with Collins’s and Hardy’s stories, James’s tale suggests the underlying power of the photograph, which elicits a connection between two people who have never met and which results in a ghostly haunting. Whilst the photograph in James’s tale has a lesser role in the plot than the previous two, it is perhaps ‘her’ subtle, hardly

³¹⁴ *Magical Thinking*, p.11. Thurschwell explores the ‘telepathic effect’ in Henry James’s *In the Cage*, in the context of James’s secretary Theodora Bosanquet, who reportedly ‘channelled’ James’s spirit after his death.

³¹⁵ Appendix – ‘The Friends of the Friends’, *Henry James’s Notebooks* (5 Feb 1895, 21 Dec 1895, 10 and 11 Jan 1896), III, in *Turn of the Screw*, p.241.

noticeable engagement with the image, which is the precondition for the later haunting, which makes its power more telling. The aura of the photograph, one might argue, does not need stating, it is assumed. In this view, I differ from Green-Lewis, who argues that following the daguerreotype's retreat in favour of the reproducible photograph, literary descriptions of the photograph do not convey the sense of 'nearness and association' referred to by Barrett-Browning: 'in late-century novels photographs are more likely to emphasise a public than a private relationship, and embody distance rather than intimacy', she claims, with 'The Imaginative Woman' forming an exception.³¹⁶ Whilst that may be true of other fictive works (Green-Lewis mentions *Jude the Obscure* (1895), in which photographs are exchanged between the protagonist and his first suitor, Arabella, heartlessly), in the other two ghost stories I have explored, the aura of the photograph is enhanced by private handling, creating the intimate connection between the characters that precipitates the haunting.

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Magic portrait stories grew from the fissure created by the interaction between painted portraits and photographs. Discussions concerning authenticity and mimesis took place in the context of the new invention of photography, as did the exploration of the image as a vehicle for relating personal narrative and national history, which ideas were articulated by the founders of the NPG. It is therefore hardly surprising that writers were inspired to rehearse these themes within their ghostly fiction, exploiting the excitement and fears that the new visual technology generated. The different types of haunting that these media offered reflected society's accommodation of photography and the discourses around it. Photography challenged the Victorians to interrogate the nature of an authentic portrait. Was it one that depicted the features exactly, or one that captured the essence of the person? Did the artist's mediation make it a more authentic image, or was a painted portrait inferior to the perceived 'objectivity' of the camera? Moreover, as I noted in Chapter 1, the 'memory crisis' of the nineteenth century caused Victorians to re-assess their understanding of the past, and specifically, their storage of national memories. Consequently, Carlyle's valuing of

³¹⁶ Green-Lewis, p.99.

the 'excellent Portraits of Historic Men' coincided with a new conception of the image as historic record, a way of keeping in touch with the past, which ideas were articulated in parallel with contemporary views that photography could write 'an authentic chapter in the history of the world'.³¹⁷ Therefore, the fact that issues of narration and history are foregrounded in both magic painted portrait and photograph stories suggests that they were symptomatic of the debates pertaining to these issues which were in play at the time.

As I have shown, a small number of ghost story writers also explored the supernatural potential of the photograph. Magic photographs displayed different qualities to their painted brethren. Where the power of painted portraits tended to lie in their active, visual exterior, which was usually situated in a public place and focused on an unwilling observer, the magic photograph was static, with little attention given to the details of its appearance (mimesis was assumed), and with primary focus falling on the haptic encounter with the percipient. With the magic photograph, haunting seemed to occur through a willing engagement on the part of the beholder, usually in a private context and usually when 'Love' united percipient and photographic subject.³¹⁸ Using 'sanctification' as my theme, I have linked the magic painted portrait to an icon and the photograph to a relic (whilst recognising the porosity of these terms). Further, it is noteworthy that these different types of haunting relied on contrasting methods of narration. The painted portrait tended to be imbued with charisma and to speak for itself, whereas the magic photograph relied on more subtle methods to communicate, such a haptic connection, or the writing on the back of the image, which provided the material detail needed to perpetuate the haunting or to interpret the truth.

The new type of photographic haunting which emerged from these tales, and the belief that a photograph emitted an aura, illuminated feelings about photography which were being expressed by contemporaries and are still retained by many of us today (as critics like Barthes, Sontag and Bazin have made explicit). Such a view of the ontological connection between sitter and image is epitomised by the words of the

³¹⁷ 'History and Practice of Photogenic Drawing', *Edinburgh Review*, p.330.

³¹⁸ *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford*, II, p.358.

French writer and journalist, Jules Renard, who wrote in his diary, 'How many people, after deciding to commit suicide, have been satisfied with tearing up their photograph!'³¹⁹ From the mid-century onwards, ideas concerning the 'personal magnetism' of the photograph, and its connection to its subject, were also being explored by Spiritualists, who, as I will discuss in the next two Chapters, believed that photographs could facilitate a haunting connection with the departed and provide a means of communicating with them.³²⁰

³¹⁹ Jules Benard, *The Journal of Jules Renard*, edited and translated by Louise Brogan and Elizabeth Roget (New York: George Braziller, 1964), entry from November 1888, p.21; quoted by Eugenia Parry, in *The Short Story and the Photograph 1880s-1980s*, ed. by Jane Rabb (Albuquerque: New Mexico Press, 1998), p.xiii.

³²⁰ Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and A Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co, 1902), II, p.86.

3 THE MEDIUM AS CAMERA: SPIRITUALISM AND PHOTOGRAPHIC THINKING

My brain apparently becoming a sort of whispering gallery where the thoughts of other persons resolved themselves into an embodied form and resounded as though actual substantial objects.³²¹

Following the discoveries of the Fox sisters in 1848, what Doyle described as the 'spiritual telegraph' spread quickly.³²² Spiritualism attracted much criticism. It was compared to the 'grippe' or the 'cholera-morbus' by one writer in the *Illustrated London News* (1853), 'humbug' by *Household Words* (1855), and a 'foolish' and 'misleading' sect led by 'maniacs' by *Chambers Journal of Popular Literature* (1856).³²³ However, it also grabbed wide public attention, and the interest of various important nineteenth-century literati, such as John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Brownings, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Charles Dickens, who were all reported to have attended séances.³²⁴ Whether or not they believed in the spirits is another matter. High profile figures led psychic investigations, such as the scientist Sir William Crookes, William James (the renowned philosopher and brother of the writer, Henry James) and Doyle. Although estimates indicate that only a small number of Victorians were official Spiritualists, large numbers would have been aware of Spiritualist ideas, such as table-turning and rapping, and may have participated in informal séances, which filtered through into mainstream conceptions of the supernatural and emerged in ghost stories.³²⁵

³²¹ Elizabeth D'Esperance, *Shadow Land, or Light from the Other Side* (London: George Redway, 1897) p.160.

³²² Doyle, *History*, p.32. As Jolly points out, Samuel Morse invented the electrical telegraph four years before Spiritualism begun, and the 'extraordinary idea of telegraphy, where messages turned into an immaterial code and invisibly transmitted over enormous distances, deeply structured Spiritualist thought' (Jolly, p.33).

³²³ 'The Mystery of the Tables', *Illustrated London News*, 18 June 1853, 481-2, p.481, quoted in Bown, Burdett and Thurschwell, in *The Victorian Supernatural*, p.26; 'Latest Intelligence from the Spirits', *Household Words*, 11.275 (1855), 513-515 (p.513); and 'The Spirit Faith in America', *Chambers Journal of Popular Literature*, 110 (1856) 81-83 (p.81).

³²⁴ See Katherine H. Porter, *Through a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1958), quoted in Owen, p.21.

³²⁵ Oppenheim estimates the number of Spiritualists as 10,000 to 100,000 in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (pp.49-50), although states how difficult it was to estimate exact numbers, as

Four years after writing 'The Friends of the Friends', Henry James wrote a short story about Spiritualism, 'Maud-Evelyn' (1900). In this ghostly tale, the grieving parents of a dead girl persuade the young Marmaduke to marry the spirit of their daughter during a séance.³²⁶ Such literary interest in Spiritualism remained even after the number of practising Spiritualists diminished, with mainstream authors like Agatha Christie, H.D. Everett and Lettice Galbraith all incorporating Spiritualist séances into their novels or ghost stories.³²⁷ Therefore, whilst this movement may not have been universally perceived (as Doyle did) as 'the most important in the history of the world since the Christ movement,' equally, Spiritualism should not be dismissed as a madcap, inconsequential movement propagated by "'idiots,'" as Lady Emma in 'Maud-Evelyn,' coins them.³²⁸ Spiritualists introduced fresh ways of understanding the afterlife and a new, proactive means of keeping in touch with the dead.

Further, Spiritualism contributed to the growing discipline of psychology and ideas about telepathy. Spiritualists triggered the creation of a serious platform for notions that had previously been regarded as superstitious: such as those articulated by Tess in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), when she tells the dairyman of her belief that souls could be "'made to go outside our bodies when we are alive.'" She explains that the easiest way to feel the soul go, "'is to lie on the grass at night and look straight up at some big bright star; and by fixing your mind upon it, you will soon find that you are hundreds and hundreds o' miles away from your body, which you don't seem to want at all.'" ³²⁹ Whilst Tess is not referring directly to Spiritualism, she echoes ideas that were being explored and articulated by Spiritualists at the time that Hardy was writing, such as those of the Spiritualist Florence Marryat,

so many people participated informally, often in their homes. Joseph McCabe estimates there were around one million followers in the mid-nineteenth century; see 'Scientific Men and Spiritualism', *The English Review* (May 1920), 439-448 (p.439).

³²⁶ Henry James, 'Maud-Evelyn', in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis, in 12 vols (London: Soho Square, 1964) pp.43-76.

³²⁷ Christie wrote various stories which featured Spiritualists or séances, including: 'The Tragedy at Marsdon Manor' (1923), 'The Red Signal' (1924), *The Sittaford Mystery* (1931), *Peril at End House* (1932), and 'Motive v. Opportunity' (1932). See also H.D. Everett's 'The Death Mask' [1920] in *The Crimson Blind and Other Stories*, ed. by David Stuart Davies (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2006); and Lettice Galbraith, 'In The Séance Room' [1893], in *The Shadow on the Blind and Other Stories*, ed. by David Stuart Davies (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007).

³²⁸ 'Maud-Evelyn', p. 56.

³²⁹ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p.175.

who believed that the souls of the living could depart from their bodies and convey messages or make things happen: 'the spirits of people still living in this world can leave the body and manifest themselves either visibly or orally or others in their normal condition.' In her book, *There is No Death* (1891), Marryat described a number of occasions on which her friends had reportedly seen and interacted with her spirit whilst she was asleep.³³⁰

Following the findings of the Spiritualists, the SPR became interested in thought transference and visions.³³¹ In an uncanny echo of Tess's ideas, William James, who was president of the SPR between 1895-6, defined 'Telepathy' in an entry to *Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia* (1895) as follows: 'one may, by exerting one's will to that effect, cause one's self to appear present to a person at a distance.'³³² As Martha Banta has noted, in 1890 Henry James delivered a paper prepared by the absent William concerning the famous medium, Mrs. Piper, before the SPR, in an apparent enactment of such telepathy, his voice articulating the words of his distant brother.³³³ Therefore, whilst the Spiritualist movement was the subject of derision by various contemporaries, I would agree with Thurschwell, who commented that Spiritualism, table-turning and manifestations formed 'an integral part of Victorian culture'. Furthermore, Spiritualist ideas contributed to the formation of early psychology, inspired ghost stories and consequently influenced popular notions concerning the supernatural.³³⁴ Our modern conceptions of ghosts, death and the afterlife, and the means by which spirits of the dead might communicate with us, were formed from the legacy of the Spiritualists.

³³⁰ For example, see Marryat, p.34.

³³¹ The SPR was set up in 1882 by the philosopher Henry Sidgwick, his ex-pupils, psychologist Frederic Myers and Edmund Gurney, A.J. Balfour and Eleanor Balfour (soon to marry Sidgwick), physicist Oliver Lodge and physician William Barrett, and others, in order to ascertain the truth about the spirits. Edmund Gurney's *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) and Frederic Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival After Bodily Death* (1903), both address telepathy and thought-transference. See Warner, p.234-5, and Thurschwell, *Magical Thinking*, p.15.

³³² *Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia*, ed. by C.K. Adams [1895] (New York: D. Appleton, 1899), VIII, pp.45-47.

³³³ 'Henry James and "The Others"', *The New England Quarterly*, 37.2 (1964), 171-184 (p.173).

³³⁴ Thurschwell, 'Refusing to Give up the Ghost: Some Thoughts on the Afterlife From Spirit Photography to Phantom Films', from *The Disembodied Spirit*, 21-31; p.21. In 'Freud, Ferenczi and psychoanalysis's telepathic transferences', in *Magical Thinking*, Thurschwell explores Freud's equivocal relationship with thought transference and the SPR, pp. 115-150.

At the same time that Spiritualism was spreading in the mid-nineteenth century, as Nancy Armstrong comments, the ‘rise of the photograph was under way’.³³⁵ As I outline in the first Chapter, due to technological developments and the relaxation of Talbot’s patent, calotype photographs, which could produce copies, were more widely available from the mid-century onwards than previously. There was a sudden ‘ubiquity of photographic images in the culture at large’, which is indicated by the proliferation of private portraits, family photograph albums, public exhibitions and cartes de visite, which circulated around shops, galleries and middle-class drawing rooms at that time.³³⁶ It was therefore unsurprising that photography played a part in the burgeoning Spiritualist movement. They were two movements growing up together, and often the same people (the upwardly mobile middle classes) were engaged with both practices.

In this Chapter, I will argue that the Spiritualists consciously positioned themselves in alliance with photography, in an attempt to move Spiritualism in the direction that it wanted to go – towards science, technology and tangibility. I will outline the ways that ‘photographic thinking’ helped to support the Spiritualist movement, in facilitating spiritual connections, inspiring spirit mediums’ ‘visions’, and detecting fraudulent mediums. I will also show how, in the production of ‘spirit faces’, automatic writing and physical ‘manifestations’, the medium was mimicking the behaviour of a camera. In the quote at the beginning of this Chapter, the medium, Elizabeth D’Esperance, describes in, *Shadowland, or Light from the Other Side* (1897), the experience of being haunted by the ‘whispering gallery’ of spirits, which she was able to project into ‘embodied form.’³³⁷ As Spiritualism became ever more photographic in its behaviour, it brought the dead tantalisingly close, which, in turn, increased the urge to gain tangible proof of the afterlife. As noted in my Introduction, in Christie’s ‘The Last Séance’, Madame Exe wants the medium Simone to produce the image of her dead daughter, so that she can “‘stretch out [her] hand and touch her’”.³³⁸ In this Chapter, I will demonstrate how Madame Exe’s desire became

³³⁵ Armstrong, pp.6-7.

³³⁶ Armstrong, p.6.

³³⁷ D’Esperance, p.160.

³³⁸ Christie, ‘The Last Séance’, p.235.

symptomatic of the Spiritualist movement. By bringing the dead visually and physically closer, Spiritualist mediums incited the desire to literally keep in touch with the dead.

Part I – ‘Photographic Thinking’ in the Séance

The first mediums to operate in Britain were the Americans, Daniel Dunglas Home, Mrs. Hayden and Mrs. Roberts, but, as news of the movement spread, other mediums began operating in various parts of the country. Séances varied depending on those present, their social class, sex, geographical location and whether the séance was private (they commonly took place in a home setting) or in a public location (often a club or hall, and payment was usually required). The traditional format involved a medium, the leading force in the group through which the spirit communicated, and a number of participants or ‘sitters’. As Owen has shown, mediums were usually women, due to Victorian perceptions about female passivity and sensitivity in spiritual matters.³³⁹ Sitters were usually of mixed gender and age, mostly formed of the same social grouping as the medium. Sometimes mediums came from lower class backgrounds and visited the wealthier classes to perform séance services. Home, a Scottish orphan of small financial means, who moved to Britain from America, gave séances to established celebrities such as the scientist Sir David Brewster, the Brownings, Thackeray and Ruskin, and abroad, to Napoleon III, Tsar Alexander II of Russia and Queen Sophia of Holland.³⁴⁰ According to contemporaries and recent critics, Home was one of the only mediums never to be caught for fraud.³⁴¹

Initially, the most common form of spiritual ‘phenomena’ experienced were table-tilting and table-rapping (following the Fox sisters) or the projection of ‘spirit’ voices (spontaneous speech which issued through the medium). Over time, mediumship became more physical, moving from an initially audial experience to the expectation of touching spirits or being touched by objects imbued with spiritual

³³⁹ Owen, pp.7-10.

³⁴⁰ Podmore, p.25 and pp.143-143; and Oppenheim, p.10 and p.12.

³⁴¹ The historian Theodore Besterman said that Home was ‘the only medium for physical phenomena who was never caught cheating’, in *Some Modern Mediums* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1930), p.2. Oppenheim said that ‘no one ever proved that Home was a charlatan’; p.11.

energy. Musical instruments seemed to play themselves, hands were felt on faces and 'apports' were often received from the spirits. One medium, Mrs. Guppy, specialised in the latter, and at her séances, sitters were showered with flowers, bread, grapes, even live eels and lobsters.³⁴²

One particular prop which became increasingly utilised by Spiritualists was the photograph. Images were often introduced during séances to stimulate spiritual communications or prove that contact with spirits had occurred. In the *Spiritualist* of 1873, one sitter described attending a Spiritualist séance organised by a Church of England clergyman, noting the 'religious pictures and photographs of lost loved ones' hung on the wall of the séance room to encourage the arrival of the spirits.³⁴³ The Spiritualist, Robert Cooper, recorded uses of photographs to stimulate communication with the spirits. In one séance, Cooper reportedly 'placed on the table a photograph, enclosed in an envelope, of a dear, deceased relative'. He reports that 'her name was instantly spelt out accompanied by the benedictory words *Joy Be With You*.'³⁴⁴ The suggestion is that the spirits could identify the person in the photograph, despite its being face down, and could convey that identity via table-tapping. In another séance, a man asked to know the identity of the person in an enveloped photograph, and in another, the spirits apparently gave views on 'an array of photographs being displayed of different members of the family' as to which portraits were the best for each individual.³⁴⁵ These feats implied both the strength of the spirits' power (to see through physical objects), but also indicated a belief, on the part of Spiritualists, in the auratic power of the photograph (which became a theme in later ghost stories, as discussed in Chapter 2). That photography might assist with communications with the departed is endorsed by funeral and burial practices all over the world today, such as the tradition of putting photographs on gravestones or orders of service.³⁴⁶

The medium, David Duguid, used photographs in his séances to connect with spirits. In his history of Spiritualism, the author and member of the SPR, Frank

³⁴² Oppenheim, p.13; Podmore, p.67; and Owen, p.42.

³⁴³ 'An Orthodox Spirit Séance', *Spiritualist*, 1 October 1873, p.339.

³⁴⁴ Robert Cooper, *Spiritual Experiences, including Seven Months with the Brothers Davenport* (London: Heywood & Co, 1867), p.5.

³⁴⁵ Cooper, p.97 and p.86.

³⁴⁶ Linkman, pp.124-5.

Podmore, described how Duguid could produce paintings during a séance (with his eyes closed) using photographs. At the beginning of the séance, which Podmore observed in 1878, Duguid produced 'some ordinary photographer's cards, carte-de-visite size', containing portraits of people who had passed away, and put them on the table during the séance. He stated that 'the sitters were not allowed to touch these cards, lest they should interfere with the personal magnetism with which the cards were saturated'. To ensure that the photographs were not substituted, a small corner was removed from each photograph and placed in a sitter's hands. After fifteen minutes, the lights were turned up, to reveal that two small oil paintings had replaced the photographs, one of a stream, another of a mountain lake. Podmore commented that 'the paintings, though obviously executed with some haste, were hardly such as one can imagine to have been done in such a short interval and in almost complete darkness.'³⁴⁷ Podmore later speculated that the medium practised a substitution, by putting into the sitter's hands the torn corners from the oil painted pictures (rather than from the photographs). Although Podmore probably regarded this as an instance of fraud, this does not detract from showing how naturally photographs were accepted and integrated within séance culture. A medium like Duguid was successful partly because he was able to leverage the presumption on the part of the sitters that photographs had imbibed the 'personal magnetism' of their subject and hence were suitable vehicles through which the dead could get in touch.

Photographs were also used as a means of identifying spirits who appeared in séances. Marryat recalls an occasion when she saw a spirit of a man with a 'rather sinister and unpleasant appearance', wearing a white shirt with black trousers. Shortly afterwards, an acquaintance informed her she was concerned for her brother with whom she had lost touch. Marryat reports that, 'she then produced his photograph, and to my astonishment I recognised at once the man who had appeared to me some months before.' His photograph showed him in the same outfit in which he had appeared in spirit form. Whilst Marryat presents the photograph as 'proof' that she had seen the spirit of an identifiable person, there is also an interesting merger here between photograph and ghost – the ghost appears as he did in his photograph, as if

³⁴⁷ Podmore, pp.86-87.

there is some ontological affinity between them.³⁴⁸ Did the creation of the photograph facilitate the haunting in some way? Did it release the spirit? Marryat does not answer these questions, but there is a lingering sense that both ghost and photograph are connected.

So how and why had such a presumption arisen? As I have discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, from its inception, photography was regarded as a magical and miraculous process, which many associated with the supernatural. Even to us in the modern age, there is something uncanny about the way that a photograph shows an image of people and places in the past, thus facilitating what Barthes termed, a 'return of the dead'.³⁴⁹ It is therefore small wonder that many contemporaries were persuaded that a photograph contained 'personal magnetism' which could help with communicating with the departed.

Moreover, many Spiritualists were keen to include photographs in séances, as it helped to position Spiritualism in association with photography. The latter was considered, by many, to be a shining example of a recent Victorian invention that had effectively harnessed the powers of chemistry and technology and triumphed through the perseverance of its inventors. In a lecture to fellow Spiritualists in the 1860s, Cooper encouraged belief in Spiritualism by comparing it to the marvels of photography: 'The sun paints our likeness with marvellous fidelity [...] who would have contemplated the probability of a portrait being taken with, in some cases, an almost objectionable accuracy, in the space of a few seconds? Yet such is the case'. He advised the audience that they should not limit their belief in what was possible by their own standard of experience and knowledge, as technology was changing fast.³⁵⁰ When one writer campaigned for a new British National Association of Spiritualists in the Spiritualist press, he fends off arguments that a national association would be unhealthy, calling upon photography as a positive example: 'Another science – photography – has spread all over the world with the same velocity as Spiritualism, but it is not on record that the Photographic Society has done any harm to the "divine

³⁴⁸ *There is No Death*, pp.45-46.

³⁴⁹ Barthes, p.9.

³⁵⁰ Cooper, p.103 and p.106.

truths” of photography’.³⁵¹ Many considered Spiritualism and photography to be natural bedfellows, and an organisational principle that worked well in one could act as a model for the other.

The imagery of light and shadow was also essential to both photography and Spiritualism, in different ways. In Chapter 1, I outlined Talbot’s emphasis on light and shadow in the formation of the calotype. The imagery of light and darkness was, of course, already an established part of religious iconography from the Bible, and so it is hardly surprising that this imagery was also utilised by the Spiritualists to express concepts of religious importance.³⁵² My contention is that Spiritualists reinterpreted the vocabulary of light and shadow and utilised it in different ways, which suggested photographic influence. However, patterns of light and darkness were not employed consistently by Spiritualists. The medium, Home, drew frequently on concepts of ‘light’ and ‘shadow’ in his aptly-named autobiographical work, *The Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism* (1878), to describe the authentic and fraudulent aspects of Spiritualism.³⁵³ For example, he advocated that séances should not take place in ‘deepest darkness’, so as to avoid suggestions of corruption; suggesting instead that ‘if we wish that our belief should conquer, and its truth be made manifest, let us court examination, and do all things in the light.’³⁵⁴

Yet in *Shadowland*, D’Esperance incorporated the imagery of light and shadow in different ways. She describes the spiritual visitors she sees as ‘shadow friends’ and ‘shadow people’, which accords with the imagery implied by the title, perceiving spirits as shadows (and, implicitly, the ‘light’ being the world of the living).³⁵⁵ Yet by the end of the book, D’Esperance reverses the metaphor, talking about life as ‘this dim shadowy world of unrealities through which the light could scarcely penetrate’, and the land of the spirits as ‘a world of radiant light’.³⁵⁶ She is conscious of the reversal she has made: ‘strange how the shadow and the reality change places’, and comments

³⁵¹ ‘National Organisation’, *Spiritualist*, 6 March 1874, 109-110 (p.109).

³⁵² For example, Matthew 4.16: ‘The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned’.

³⁵³ D.D. Home, *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism* (London: Virtue & Co, 1878).

³⁵⁴ Home, p.289 and p.291.

³⁵⁵ D’Esperance, p.26, p.35, p.81.

³⁵⁶ D’Esperance, p.219.

that she would have expected the earthly scenes to be the reality and the spiritual world as the 'dream-world'.³⁵⁷ This changing of metaphors demonstrates a blur between what is dark and light, what is positive and negative, which brings to mind the positive/negative process of the calotype (in which the shadow in the negative becomes the subject in the positive print) which, by the point when D'Esperance wrote and published her autobiography, was established photographic practice. As Wendell-Holmes observes in 1864, when he developed a negative: 'for where there was light in the picture we have shadow, and where there was shadow we have light.'³⁵⁸ The Spiritualists had to reinterpret the semiotics of light and shadow and position them in positive terms and, even if they were not directly invoked, photographic principles of reversing negative and positive provided a helpful precedent for this.

At times, Spiritualists harnessed light and shadow in ways that appeared mindful of photographic principles. At one of Home's séances in 1869, a sitter described, by reference to the light and shadow in a room, an occasion upon which Home apparently levitated high in the air during the séance. The sitter claims to have put Home 'in the middle of the room and placed a candle in front of him, so as to throw a shadow on the wall' which he marked. When Home awoke he measured the medium as against the shadow on the wall, so proving the fact of the levitation.³⁵⁹ In the absence of actual photographic evidence (which had not yet occurred in a British séance), drawing Home's shadow offered an element of objective proof or record that something had occurred, like the Corinthian maid drawing her lover. Whilst photography was probably not in the sitter's mind at this point, his act of drawing the shadow suggests a 'will to photograph' and a post-photographic awareness that shadows and outlines could be harnessed to record something that happened in the past.

'Photographic thinking' may have also underwritten methods of exposing fraudulent mediums. Home reports that various Spiritualist committees hit upon the

³⁵⁷ D'Esperance, p.220.

³⁵⁸ 'Doings of the Sunbeam', pp.242-3.

³⁵⁹ Podmore, p.259. According to Doyle, McCabe's reading of this is that the spectators looked at the shadow and not at Home; hence Home appeared to be levitating as the shadow had increased in size. Doyle defends Home, claiming that three eyewitnesses could not be so easily duped; *History*, p.95.

plan of secretly placing paint on the musical instruments used at dark séances. If the said instruments were swung and sounded by the medium, stains of paint would be found on the medium's hands, which would 'expose' them.³⁶⁰ Similarly, another writer in the *Spiritualist* (1873) reports an experiment conducted by 'squirting ink' onto 'spirit-hands', which, after scrutiny in the light, was then found upon the medium, thus proving them to be the same person.³⁶¹ At another séance, the suggestion was to use flour on the instruments.³⁶² Such a process is reminiscent of painting collodion onto a glass plate before an image is taken. Like the light-sensitive collodion, the paint provided the means of receiving impressions and recording what had occurred, which could be captured and exposed by the power of light. In Home's experiment, the medium is like the receptive glass plate 'medium' within the camera, waiting for the light to 'expose' them.

Links with photography are further implied by the fact that photographic experimenters (amateurs who had been dabbling in photography in its early days after Talbot had produced the calotype) during the 1850s were recognisable for the black marks on their hands and face, which ensued as a result of the staining power of silver nitrate. In 1839, Talbot warned his aunt, Lady Mary Cole, about the danger of using silver nitrate in her experiments, because of its power to create permanent stains, and encouraged the use of gloves. In the first decades after photography was invented, photographers used to rub Cyanide of Potassium on their hands to remove the stains, which proved fatal for one photographer who died after a piece of cyanide entered his skin where it was cut under his fingernail.³⁶³ This practice appears to have continued even after technological improvements over the years.

³⁶⁰ Home, p.285.

³⁶¹ 'Spirit Faces', *Spiritualist*, 1 February 1873, pp.82-83 (p.83).

³⁶² Dion Boucicault reports that "'During the above occurrences in the dark, we placed a sheet of paper under the feet of these two operators, and drew with pencil an outline around them, to the end that if they moved it might be detected. They of their own accord offered to have their hands filled with flour, or any other similar substance, to prove they made no use of them, but this precaution was deemed unnecessary'" ; quoted in Doyle, p.106.

³⁶³ *Punch*, vol. XXV, July-December 1853, p.48, which shows a picture of a young lady with dark spots on her face, being taken to an apothecary, after being careless with her "'Photographic Chemicals'" ; letter from Henry Fox Talbot to Lady Mary Cole, 9 August 1839; and Bill Jay, 'The Black Art' <www.billjayonphotography.com> ; all quoted in Roger Watson & Helen Rappaport, *Capturing the Light* (London: Pan Books, 2013), pp.245-6.

Writers and commentators sometimes described photographic stains in terms that spoke of guilt and exposure. In a short story by E.W. Hornung, 'A Spoilt Negative' (1888), he describes how a photographer would emerge from his darkroom, 'wearing on his hands the stains – not, indeed, of blood, but of some virulent chemical compound far less easy to expunge.'³⁶⁴ Wendell-Holmes similarly drew a comparison to Lady Macbeth's hands which were stained with blood, advising his readers to 'cover your hands with gauntlets of Indian-rubber, if you would not utter Lady Macbeth's soliloquy over them when they come to the light of day'.³⁶⁵ He suggests, jokingly, that photographic stains could provide some kind of testimony of guilt, just like conscience: 'Conscience and nitrate of silver are tell tales that never forget any tampering with them, and the broader the light the darker their record'.³⁶⁶ It is therefore possible that Spiritualists who promoted this kind of detective work had been inspired by the inky stains which 'exposed' practising photographers.³⁶⁷ Whilst Home and other fraud investigators make no reference to photography, it is feasible that they may have absorbed tenets of 'photographic thinking', which was natural in an age in which more and more amateurs and professionals were experimenting with photographic techniques and development. An awareness of light, over-exposure, smudges and stains is likely to have translated itself into understanding of other, seemingly unrelated fields.

Moreover, if the Spiritualists' impulse to photograph at this point was largely subconscious, there were plenty of Spiritualists, like D'Esperance, who consciously referred to photography (and went on to take photographs in their séances, which I will discuss in Chapter 4). As Owen argues, the use of darkness was rationalised on the grounds that 'light was thought to be inimical to the phenomena as well as possibly

³⁶⁴ E.W. Hornung, 'A Spoilt Negative', in Rabb, p.3.

³⁶⁵ Wendell-Holmes, 'Doings of the Sunbeam', *Soundings from the Atlantic*, ed. by Oliver Wendell-Holmes (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1864) 228-281 < <https://archive.org/details/soundingsfromatl00holm/page/n4> > [accessed 30 Sep 2019] p.237.

³⁶⁶ 'Doings of the Sunbeam', p.238.

³⁶⁷ The conception that a 'stain' had the ability to identify that someone had done (or not done) something was central to the plot of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* [1868] (New York: Penguin, 1986), published at the time that Home was a practising medium. In this novel concerning the theft of a diamond, detection of the culprit is based on finding a stain on his or her nightclothes, which would have been brushed with wet paint after stealing the jewel. See discussion by Srdjan Smajic, 'Stains, smears and visual language in *The Moonstone*' in *Ghost-Seers*.

injurious to the entranced medium.'³⁶⁸ Even Podmore, who represents himself as largely a sceptic of matters supernatural, defended the widespread practice of having séances in the dark by reference to photography:

Darkness is not, perhaps, in itself an unreasonable condition. Light is, of course, a mode of motion, in photography, in bleaching processes, and other familiar reactions we can see that light produces permanent physical effects. It cannot therefore fairly be held as antecedently improbable that light should prejudicially interfere with the operation of such an exquisite physical agency as is supposed to be at work in the production of spiritualistic phenomena.³⁶⁹

If light could produce a permanent change on photographic paper, Podmore reasons, then it could also interfere with the operation of a supernatural agency, thus making a direct comparison between the making of a photograph and the appearance of a ghost. Spiritualism, the argument went, was a scientific phenomenon which required investigation, just like photography. Endorsing the physical effects of light, D'Esperance complains about the strong magnesium light which accompanied séance photography, which 'acted very injuriously on [her] nerves' and caused her to 'screw up [her] eyes and features till they presented an extraordinary spectacle.'³⁷⁰ This view echoes Talbot, who in the *Pencil of Nature*, states that 'Light, where it exists, can exert an action, and in certain circumstances, does exert one sufficient to cause changes in material bodies.'³⁷¹ Photography heralded a revolution in the way that contemporaries understood light and the way that it could enact physical change upon an object. This new 'photographic thinking' is therefore likely to have played a part in the behaviour and explanations provided by Spiritualists.

Part II — Spiritualism and Visual Culture

As well as exhibiting 'photographic thinking,' Spiritualists were inclined to conflate spiritual 'visions' with contemporary visual culture, which suggested a desire (whether or not consciously held) to align their supernatural experiences with actual photographs. In *From Matter to Spirit* (1863), the Spiritualist, Sophia De Morgan,

³⁶⁸ Owen, p.69.

³⁶⁹ Podmore, p.195.

³⁷⁰ D'Esperance, p.180 and p.188.

³⁷¹ Talbot, *Pencil of Nature*, pp.4-5.

frequently compares the 'vision' that a medium might experience in a trance to popular visual entertainment, such as the 'panorama' or to 'dissolving views'.³⁷² The term 'panorama' was coined by Robert Barker at the end of the eighteenth century to describe an immersive entertainment composed of vast circular pictures surrounding the viewer, often amplified by the use of lighting and props. The 'diorama' worked on similar themes, although the vast pictures usually rotated around the viewer, sometimes painted with different scenes on each side, which could be cleverly lit to highlight different vistas. The historian Steve Humphries observes that around the mid-nineteenth century, 'dissolving views' was a term often associated with the fading images of a panorama, diorama or magic lantern. Magic lantern operators often produced 'dissolving views' by placing two magic lantern slides side by side and projecting their images onto the same point, which caused them to blur into each other, so that as one picture faded, another replaced it.³⁷³

Whilst De Morgan does not explicitly compare 'visions' to photographs, her field of reference is implicitly photographic. The historical consensus is that whilst panorama, diorama and magic lantern slides initially would have used painted plates or pictures, from the mid-century onwards, images were usually made from photographs, due to the ease and cheapness of their reproduction compared with hand-painted plates.³⁷⁴ A contemporary article reporting on the Great Exhibition of 1851 endorsed this transition, reporting that the 'magic lantern or dissolving views [...] which have hitherto been done clumsily by hand, may be executed faithfully in all their details as the photograph from which they are taken.'³⁷⁵ Castle similarly concludes that 'photographic transparencies – as in the modern slide projector – gradually took the places of painted glass slides.'³⁷⁶ It is therefore likely that references to 'dissolving views', and the panorama, diorama and stereoscope from the mid-century onwards, relate chiefly to a photographic discourse. This is endorsed by the fact that some

³⁷² Sophia De Morgan, *From Matter to Spirit: The Result of Ten Years' Experience in Spirit Manifestations* (London: Longman and Others, 1863), pp.149-150 and p.179.

³⁷³ Steve Humphries, *Victorian Britain Through the Magic Lantern* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1989), p.20.

³⁷⁴ Humphries, p.25.

³⁷⁵ 'The Great Exhibition', *Daily News*, 4 June, 1851.

³⁷⁶ Castle, p.154.

Spiritualists specifically compared their visions to photographs. The *Spiritualist* (1874) quotes the experiences of Baroness von Vay, who claimed to see visions of scenes and persons by gazing at a glass of water: “sometimes they looked like photographs, at others like *chiaroscuros*.”³⁷⁷

The alignment with visual entertainment was not just visible in the way that Spiritualists described the ‘visions’ they experienced, but also in what they saw. It is likely that Spiritualists’ visions may have been influenced by actual photographs that circulated in Victorian society. In particular, they are likely to have been exposed to contemporary photographic images of colonial and ‘Oriental’ locations, which circulated in shops, galleries and periodicals, along with products from far-flung outreaches of the colonies. As the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum website states in its article about ‘The Victorian Vision of China and Japan’: ‘The newly invented medium of photography played an important role in creating and disseminating an image of the East. To armchair travellers at home, photographs provided a wonderful way of viewing far-away places such as China.’³⁷⁸ Humphries reports that most magic lantern shows usually included a travelogue and that ‘views of faraway places were often a source of wonder to Victorian audiences.’³⁷⁹ In one article of 1859, the writer refers to ‘series of dissolving views of the Holy Land [...] are about the most beautiful and interesting pictures of the kind we have seen, and vividly recall to mind the unrivalled scenes and sacred associations connected with the far-famed holy places.’³⁸⁰ Another article of 1857 reports that the Royal Polytechnic Institution showed ‘dissolving views’ of the rebellion in India and included ‘the most important objects illustrative of Indian architecture’.³⁸¹ Fascination with the East predated photography (as Thomas De Quincey’s opium dreams of 1821 can testify) but these feelings were invigorated by

³⁷⁷ ‘Review’ of Adelma von Vay, *Studies from the Spirit World*, *Spiritualist*, 22 May 1874, pp.243-245 (p.244).

³⁷⁸ < www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-victorian-vision-of-china-and-japan/ > [accessed 25 Sep 2019]

³⁷⁹ Humphries, p.66.

³⁸⁰ ‘Easter Amusements &c’, *The Times*, 26 April 1859, p.9.

³⁸¹ ‘Royal Polytechnic Institution’, *The Times*, 5 October 1857, p.8.

the newly available photographs and travelogues, which inspired Victorian imaginations and informed Spiritualist encounters and séances.³⁸²

Spiritualists frequently referred to experiencing 'oriental' scenes in their 'visions', and given the prevalence and popularity of visual entertainments at the time, it is certainly plausible that photographs and travelogues may have played a part in influencing their substance.³⁸³ In one example, De Morgan provides an account of an oriental vision of 'dissolving' views, experienced by the medium, 'Jane', in which she described a 'church of emeralds':

The pavement is inlaid and of the richest colours [...] The ends of the pews are arched, and all of precious stones [...] Now I see a beautiful altar, not a crescent. The top is inlaid with marble of beautiful colours, highly polished. The windows are purple and gold. In the centre of each window is a large precious stone; it is as large as a dinner plate. The first is bright gold, the second is ruby or carbuncle, the third is bright blue [...] Everything is dissolving, and a bright light coming again. (p.59-60)

This description (and other references to the 'Orient') sounds suggestive of the Holy City in Revelation.³⁸⁴ Whilst this would appear to be the overt source for the description (thereby aligning Spiritualism with conventional Biblical teaching), I would argue that contemporary photography and travel writing play a part in inspiring this experience, too. The image sounds distinctly similar to the photographs of the famed oriental palaces of India, such as the Taj Mahal, published and popularised at the time of De Morgan's text, by the photographer, John Murray (see Figure 23 below).³⁸⁵

³⁸² Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* [1821] (New York: Dover Publications, 1995). As the V&A reports, 'Chinese and Indian art and architecture were extremely popular in the early 19th century', citing examples of blue and white ceramics, adorned with dragons, willows and elephants: <www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/style-guide-chinese-and-indian-style/> [accessed 30 Sep 2019].

³⁸³ A girl described 'an Oriental scene' before dying; De Morgan, p.183. Podmore referred to a medium's visions as 'exotic and oriental visions'; Podmore, p.321.

³⁸⁴ By way of example, see Revelation 21.18-21.

³⁸⁵ John Murray's photographs were exhibited in Hogarth's Gallery in December 1857 and subsequently published in a book, *Photographic Views in Agra and its Vicinity*, and as stereoscopic views for sale, in 1858. See 'Distant Views of the Taj from the East,' British Library website, <<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/d/019pho000000101u00009000.html>> [accessed 30 Sep 2019]

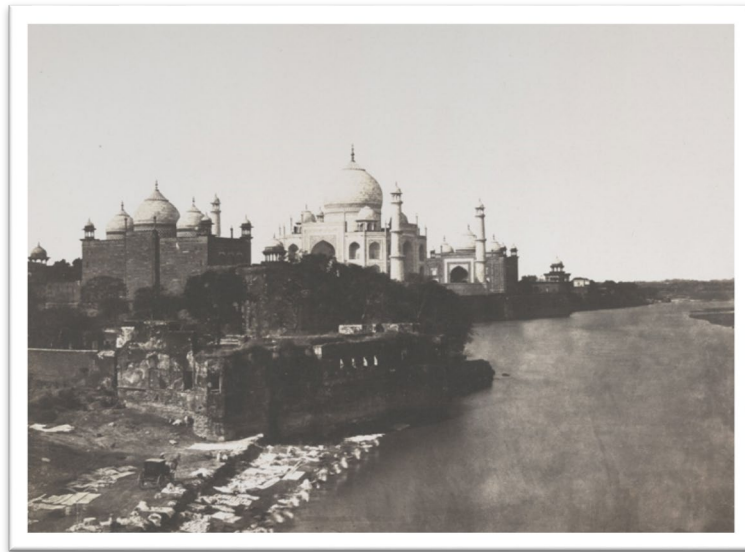


Figure 23. John Murray, *Distant Views of the Taj from the East (Agra)*, 1855. British Library Online Gallery.

A contemporary journalist's account of the Taj Mahal of 1856 not only illustrates that descriptions of the monument were circulating around the time that Jane experienced her 'vision', but it also demonstrates the affinities between Spiritualists' 'visions' and the discourse of contemporary travel-writers:

The unrivalled Taj Mahal. It is impossible to do justice to this exquisite specimen of art... [and] the dazzling purity of the marble tomb. The terrace on which it stands is of marble [...] A gorgeous tracery of flowers is produced by varied stones – cornelian, agate, lapis-lazuli, bloodstone [...] Yet in all that costly profusion of stones, in that luxuriant fancy of the sculptor, in that richness of colouring, [...] there is nothing [...] which is not pure, exquisite, classical, correct.³⁸⁶

The resemblances between this passage and the description of the 'church of emeralds', in their attention to detail, fascination with contrasts of colour and light, and specific identification and description of each of the materials and decorative gemstones, suggest that 'visions' of the spirit world could also be inspired by, or at least resonate with, contemporary images and descriptions of Britain's exotic colonies.

Cooper acknowledges the association between visual entertainment and supernatural experience finding, to his disappointment, that many of those attending Spiritualist events were in fact there for the former rather than the latter. He describes how, on giving a lecture on Spiritualism, the people cried out in disappointment that

³⁸⁶ W.S. S-K, 'Six Months in India', *Fraser's Magazine*, 53:314 (1856), p.206.

no ghost had been 'raised' on the platform 'after the style, I presume, of Pepper's Ghost.'³⁸⁷ Given 'Pepper's Ghost' was consciously marketed as an optical illusion (and as this later poster at Figure 24 demonstrates, was proactive in informing spectators how the illusion was created), it suggests that the audience attending Spiritualist events were composed of a mixture of believers and those who were simply seeking a 'jolly good show'.³⁸⁸



Figure 24. *Poster Advertising Pepper's Ghost 'Exhibited and Explained', c.1885. Royal Polytechnic Institution, Westminster. British Library, Evanion Catalogue.*

Cooper reiterates that the public's expectations were conditioned by those of contemporary visual entertainments, referring again to the phrase, 'dissolving views':

I have already stated the difficulty I experienced at my lectures on account of my inability to illustrate them by experiments. Where [*sic*] I went there was a demand for manifestations. The public seemed to be under the impression [...] that I could "call spirits from the vasty deep" at will and that the manifestations were under my control; that the spiritual phenomena in fact could be exhibited with as much facility as dissolving views.³⁸⁹

Cooper suggests that the public not only associated Spiritualism with visual entertainment, but also that they believed he could control the appearance of spiritual phenomena, like a puppeteer or conjurer. The public's expectation that a Spiritualist event would yield visual entertainment probably stemmed partly from associations with the phantasmagoria. It was also generated by Spiritualists themselves and their

³⁸⁷ Cooper, p.31.

³⁸⁸ Oppenheim, p.25.

³⁸⁹ Cooper, p.108.

liberal use of a discourse customarily associated with visual entertainment, along with occasions on which Spiritualist subjects were enhanced by the use of visual technology. One Spiritualist, Enmore Jones, apparently delivered a lecture on Spiritualism in 1873 by 'illustrating his remarks by the aid of magic lantern pictures, projected on the screen by the aid of the oxycalcium light.'³⁹⁰ This implies that Spiritualism was associated in the public mind with other performative spaces in which photography played a key part.

The Spiritualists' use of metaphors pertaining to visual culture suggests that they were not only conscious of associations with photographic visual culture, but also happy to cultivate them. When Cooper wrote about his audience's expectation that he would conjure 'spirits from the vasty deep' (quoting Shakespeare's *King Henry IV*, Part I), he may have been aware that Lady Eastlake had used the same phrase to describe the development of the photograph: 'pictures are summoned from the vasty deep', in her essay on photography published ten years previously.³⁹¹ An interesting aspect of this corollary between Spiritualism and visual culture, implied by Cooper's comparison with the well-known play, is that it also introduced a theatrical element to spiritual experience. Likening spiritual experiences to those of visual entertainment made them appear more tangible and easily imagined. However, it also introduced the suggestion there was a (human) controlling force behind the phenomena, which made Spiritualism feel like a performance – and hence less credible. For many it became associated with acting and conjuring, and it is no surprise that some mediums blurred the boundary between Spiritualist messaging and performing. D'Esperance compared a séance to 'theatre' and being 'on stage', and 'very much the same as a scene in a play.'³⁹² As Kontou has said, theatricality is 'inextricably bound up with the proceedings of the séance.'³⁹³

Christie dramatised the theatrical aspect of séances in her short stories, 'Motive v Opportunity' (1932) and 'The Red Signal' (1924), although, interestingly, in her fiction theatricality is not conclusively linked to fakery. In the former, a Spiritualist

³⁹⁰ 'The Gower-Street Meetings: The Photographing of Spirits', *Spiritualist*, 15 October 1873, p.361.

³⁹¹ III. 1.1596; and Lady Eastlake, 'Photography', in Trachtenberg, (p.55).

³⁹² D'Esperance, p.78.

³⁹³ Kontou, p.10.

medium appears to be playing the part of medium in accordance with established practice: “‘As soon as I saw her my worst apprehensions were fulfilled. She was a stout woman of middle age, dressed in a flamboyant style. Very full of cant phrases about ‘Our dear ones who have passed over.’”³⁹⁴ It turns out that she was an “‘out and out swindler””, who tried to convince an old man to leave his money to her, and her theatricality is a sign that she is playing a part. In ‘The Red Signal’, the medium is again described in theatrical terms, ‘atrociously dressed in magenta velvet, with a loud rather common voice’, and following an expected formula: ‘Dermot had heard it often before. Everyone was happy, very happy. Messages were given from vaguely described relatives, the description being so loosely worded as to fit almost any contingency.’³⁹⁵ Despite the performance being unilluminating and hackneyed, the medium rightly warns that there was a “‘death in the air tonight”” and tells one of the characters not to go home, and it turns out that upon going home, he becomes embroiled in a murderous plot.³⁹⁶ Whether she received this message from the spirits, or simply intuited it from the social dynamics, is not clear. However, it suggests that, at least for Christie, whilst theatricality was an expected characteristic of a séance, it did not compute that all mediums were all fake.

One consequence of associating Spiritualist phenomena with theatre and entertainment was that it encouraged sitters to seek more tactile contact with the spirits. As Kontou remarks, the ghost in the séance is ‘always threatening to realise its promise and become fleshy, whole and powerful’, and from the 1870s onwards, sitters sought to realise the fleshy connection with the dead that was promised by the sights they had seen.³⁹⁷ Whilst it is of course a natural human instinct to touch something as a way of proving its reality, I think there is something more at stake here: something engendered by Spiritualism’s relationship with the photograph, and the inherent theatricality which underpinned them both. As noted in Chapter 2, Barthes observes that ‘death’ is the subject (or ‘eidos’) of all photographs (we will eventually die), and ‘however “lifelike” we strive to make it [the photograph] [...] Photography is a kind of

³⁹⁴ ‘Motive v Opportunity’, in *The Thirteen Problems* (London: Harper Collins, 2016) p.69.

³⁹⁵ ‘The Red Signal’, in *The Hound of Death*, pp.34-35.

³⁹⁶ ‘The Red Signal’, p.36.

³⁹⁷ Kontou, p.10.

primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead.’ Given that séances also purported to be a kind of spiritual ‘tableau’, with protagonists from the past, they seem to have common aims.³⁹⁸ Both made the dead appear ‘lifelike’ and within reach, yet at the same time, tainted by fakery, like actors on a stage. Both séances and photographs revived the dead, which in turn, encouraged beholders to seek a more tangible affirmation of presence, or as Dinshaw put it, to ‘touch across time’.³⁹⁹

Part III — The Medium as Camera

From the 1870s onwards, Spiritualist séances in Britain became more focused on ‘sensational and palpable phenomena’ such as spirit writing, spirit faces and full ‘manifestations’ of the departed, along with spirit photography and ectoplasm.⁴⁰⁰ Whilst the last two will be discussed in Chapter 4, my focus in the rest of this Chapter is on the mediums’ production of spirit faces and bodies, in which, I argue, the medium acted like a camera. The fact that the Spiritualist medium was a passive vehicle through which supernatural phenomena supposedly manifested themselves is, of course, implied by the term, ‘medium’. However, the production of more visible, corporeal manifestations made her role seem more obviously aligned to that of a particular medium: the camera. As Tom Gunning observes, Spiritualism and photography relied on similar processes, both requiring a sensitive medium (or sensitised plate) to pass through, in order to produce an image; cameras were also mediums, through which another visual entity, the photograph, was created.⁴⁰¹

The behaviour of mediums first started becoming more ‘photographic’ when they started producing writing or pictures which they claimed to emanate from the

³⁹⁸ Barthes, pp.31-32. Michael Fried has argued that photography is situated within tensions concerning antitheatricity and theatricality, suggesting that whether the subject knows it is being seen or not contributes to the overall meaning of the picture. Similarly, the interpretation of a séance depends on whether the beholder is ‘seeing’ something or ‘being shown’; see *Why Art Matters as Never Before* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2008) p.100.

³⁹⁹ Dinshaw, p.3.

⁴⁰⁰ McCorristine, p.16.

⁴⁰¹ Tom Gunning, ‘Haunting Images: Ghosts, Photography and the Modern Body’, in *The Disembodied Spirit*, Alison Ferris (curator) (Maine: Bowdoin College, 2003) 9-19; p.11; and ‘Phantom Images’, p.56.

spirits, in the form of 'automatic writing' or 'automatic drawing', which became popular in the 1870s. These were skills claimed by various mediums, such as Stainton Moses, Henry Slade, and D'Esperance.⁴⁰² The latter talks about the 'tingling, prickling, aching' sensation she experienced when holding the pen. She describes how 'the hand' (that is, her hand) 'began to move slowly and laboriously, imitating the motions of writing; it made repeated attempts to form letters and, after a while, succeeded in writing a few large ill-formed, ill-spelled words.'⁴⁰³ She felt and observed the process as if the hand was not her own, and a power was operating through her. Similarly, the celebrated scientist and Spiritualist, Alfred Russel Wallace, quoted the experiences of one of the sitters at a séance in his *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1875), who encountered the "'most wonderful music without any human agency'" and "'a shadow hand, not that of any one present which lifts a pencil and writes with it'".⁴⁰⁴ Green-Lewis observes that photography was originally presented by proto-photographers as a form of 'automatic writing', in that it was said to be provided by nature ('photography' means writing with light, or as Wendell-Holmes described it, the 'pencil of fire').⁴⁰⁵ Whether consciously or not, D'Esperance and other automatic writers were echoing the narrative of the early photographers.⁴⁰⁶

Like a camera, mediums usually developed images in the dark. D'Esperance describes how, during a séance, she felt inspired to draw a likeness of a spirit, and did so, asking a friend whether he agreed it was good. "It's hard to tell in the dark", he replied, "we must get a light in order to judge." She then realised that she had produced the sketch entirely in the darkness, which her fellow sitters found mystifying. She regarded the procedure to be almost involuntary: she saw the image and she sketched it in a dream-like state: 'All I knew was that it was not dark to me. I saw the child, I saw the paper and the pencil, but gave no thought to anything or anyone

⁴⁰² Podmore on Slade's automatic writing on slate, pp.87-89; Doyle on Moses, pp.72-3 and D'Esperance, p.85.

⁴⁰³ D'Esperance, p.85.

⁴⁰⁴ Alfred Russel Wallace, *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism: Three Essays* (London: James Burns, 1875), p.155. The sitter he quotes is Dr. J. Lockhart Robertson, one of the editors of the *Journal of Medical Science*.

⁴⁰⁵ Wendell-Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', in Trachtenberg, (p.82).

⁴⁰⁶ Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, pp.60-61.

else.⁴⁰⁷ In this process, it is as if she is developing a photograph, first seeing the spirit (exposing the image on the plate), developing (sketching) in the dark, and then identifying the image at the end in the light.

The next stage for the medium-as-camera was the production of physical materialisations, that is, spirit faces and bodies. These were usually attempted through a 'spirit cabinet', which Owen described as 'essentially a device which shielded the medium from public gaze and maintained the dark conditions thought necessary for the production of spirit forms.'⁴⁰⁸ Spirit cabinets were usually dimly lit, box-like structures, sometimes small rooms or curtained alcoves, and usually the medium would be tied to a chair within them. D'Esperance claimed to have been reluctant to attempt this new process, recalling the 'fear' and claustrophobia she experienced in the spirit cabinet. She disliked the 'indescribable sensation of isolation and loneliness which seemed to place me at an immeasurable distance from the others.'⁴⁰⁹ This suggests that, as well as the physical discomforts of the cabinet, mediums like D'Esperance felt huge pressure to produce identifiable spirits, which made her feel ill, nervous and alone.

The use of the dark cabinet increased the similarity with the camera (also a black, box-like shape which produced images), which affinity was, on occasion, recognised by Spiritualists. One writer in the *Spiritualist* (1873) reports how, when Mr. Guppy (amateur photographer and spouse of the well-known medium, Mrs. Guppy) first heard about the practice of creating 'spirit faces' in America, he wanted to emulate it at home: 'He accordingly turned a photographic dark room into a cabinet, by cutting square openings in its wooden sides, out of which the spirits might thrust their head if they could make them.'⁴¹⁰ Observers state that 'spirit faces were seen', although only feebly at first.⁴¹¹ Even before Spiritualism had become established, in the aforementioned article 'Photography' from *Household Words* (1853), the writer describes how a photographic dark room felt ghostly, commenting, 'our sense of the

⁴⁰⁷ D'Esperance, p.96.

⁴⁰⁸ Owen, p.46.

⁴⁰⁹ D'Esperance, pp.132-133.

⁴¹⁰ 'Spirit Faces', *Spiritualist*, 1 Feb 1873, pp.82-3.

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*

supernatural, always associated with dark closets, was excited strongly in this chamber,' and terming it (as mentioned in Chapter 1) 'the very head quarters [*sic*] of spectredom and the necromancer's den'.⁴¹² As Clayton comments, in the context of Dr Jekyll's cabinet in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* (1886), 'the darkroom was a space in which no one could be seen, and in which monstrous things could be created', associating photography, privacy and creation in a strange nineteenth-century blend.⁴¹³

Around the 1870s, the demographic of the typical medium changed from the more common stereotype of the matronly woman (Mrs. Hayden, Mrs. Guppy) and the delicate, feminine-looking men (Eglinton and Home), towards a younger, more attractive, usually female model, who introduced 'a theatrical style of mediumship which emphasised visual spectacle and display'.⁴¹⁴ The most famous of these was Florence Cook, from North London, who was born in 1856 and became a medium around 1871. She claimed to be controlled by the spirit of 'Katie King', the daughter of an eighteenth-century buccaneer, John King, a popular spirit who emerged frequently during Victorian séances.⁴¹⁵ Initially she produced a static 'death-like face, with staring eyes' which appeared from between a gap in the cabinet's curtains.⁴¹⁶ Reports in the *Spiritualist* (1873) described Cook's 'spirit faces' as a 'systematic appearance of spirit faces', appearing one after another, very much like the 'dissolving views' of the photographic panorama and magic lantern shows mentioned previously.⁴¹⁷ One observer wrote to the *Spiritualist* with an account of his séance with Ms. Cook in November 1872. He reports that after some initial singing, the sitters waited in the dark: 'Then Katie showed her face, which, as usual, was much like the medium's, only paler. A little later a very lively black, or dark olive face, with twinkling eyes, came to the opening in the cabinet, and bore the full light of the gas'. The sitter claims that the spirit Katie was 'much smaller, and fair, with light eyes; whereas the medium is very

⁴¹² 'Photography', p.56 and p.58.

⁴¹³ Clayton, p.81.

⁴¹⁴ Owen, p.41.

⁴¹⁵ Owen, p.43 and p.45.

⁴¹⁶ 'Spirit Forms', *Spiritualist*, 12 December 1873, p.451.

⁴¹⁷ 'Spirit Faces', *Spiritualist*, 1 February 1873, pp.82-83.

dark with brown eyes.’⁴¹⁸ The writer then records how she progressed to a smoother series of images:

The second face was smaller, resembling the face of a Hindoo child, about five or six months old. The next face of a female appeared to be about thirty years of age, with a broad flat face, which appeared to be in pain [...]. The fourth face which I think was termed the Parsee, with the white head-dress, seemed to partake of the features of the medium.⁴¹⁹

The notion of the medium performing as camera, in producing images of faces, was enhanced by certain effects. In 1873, one sitter reported that spirits apparently produced ‘an artificial phosphorescent light to reveal their features to the observers’, which again made the cabinet seem quasi-photographic in harnessing strong artificial light to produce an image (like the use of flash, which was at that time in the development stages).⁴²⁰ Another observer at a séance in 1872 suggests that the ‘spirit faces’ on display worked with proximity and light to create the desired effect on the audience, as would a magic lantern operator producing ‘dissolving views’ of photographic images:

Nearer and nearer to the opening came the face, and slowly was the light increased or lowered, in obedience to the directions of the spirit, until at length the room was brilliantly lighted, the full glare of the direct light from the burner, however, being shaded from the opening in the cabinet by a small hand-screen.⁴²¹

Equally, Spiritualists were aware that as in photography, too much light could have a detrimental effect on spirit manifestations. In an article on the displays of ‘spirit faces’ in the *Spiritualist* (1873), the spirits apparently reported that ‘both light and the intense gaze of the eyes of the spectators give them a burning sensation while manifesting, and cause them to feel tired.’⁴²² Whilst it is clear that a show of bright light may have been disliked by mediums, as it may have exposed too much of the detail of the ‘spirit faces’ and opened them to accusations of fraud, it shows again the embedded nature of ‘photographic thinking’. Spiritualists instinctively understood and explained these phenomena by implied reference to photographic processes.

⁴¹⁸ ‘Private Seances’, *Spiritualist*, 15 November 1872, p.6.

⁴¹⁹ Letter from W. Brooks to the editor, ‘Private Seances’, *Spiritualist*, 15 November 1872, p.7.

⁴²⁰ ‘Spirit Faces’, 1 Feb 1873, p.82.

⁴²¹ Letter to the editor from Theo Taunton, ‘Seances at Mr Henry Cook’s’, *Spiritualist*, 15 Dec 1872, p.39.

⁴²² ‘Spirit Faces’, 1 Feb 1873, pp.82-83.

In 1873, 'spirit faces' progressed to the appearance of full form 'materialisations'. The medium was able to produce the whole body of the spirit, who would usually walk around the room whilst the medium remained in the cabinet, usually tied up, with a shawl covering the face. The *Spiritualist* (1873) reported on one of the earliest of these manifestations, which occurred through the lesser-known medium, C. E. Williams of Lamb's Conduit Street, who apparently produced the full form manifestation of John King outside the cabinet: 'light began to shine [...] and the spirit, John King, came out, robed in white drapery, holding the light in both hands [...] so as to illuminate his face.'⁴²³

D'Esperance describes the appearance of these full-form materialisations in very similar terms to that of a photographer observing the development of an image from a light-sensitive plate. She quotes one sitter's description of the materialisation of a spirit, from drapery to an embodied form:

'First a filmy, cloudy patch of something white is observed on the floor, in front of the cabinet. It then gradually expands, visibly extending itself as if it were an animated patch of muslin, lying fold upon fold, on the floor [...]. Presently it begins to rise slowly in or near the centre, as if a human head were underneath it [...]. By the time it has attained two or more feet, it looks as if a child were under it and moving its arms about in all directions as if manipulating something underneath.'⁴²⁴

She even records the dematerialising process, stating that it 'occupies from two to five minutes, while the disappearance of the drapery occupies from a half to two minutes'.⁴²⁵ The exactness of the description makes it sound more akin to a chemical development process like photography.

A few years prior to this, in 1864, Wendell-Holmes had described the development of a photographic image in supernatural terms which register the wonder of the image appearing, part by part, shadow by shadow, so chimerical that it even threatens to fade again at the end:

Stop! What is that change of color beginning at the edge, and spreading, as a blush spreads over the girl's cheek? It is a border, like that round the picture, and then dawns the outline of a head, and now the eyes come out from the blank as stars from the empty sky, and the lineaments define themselves, plainly enough, yet in a strange aspect - for where there was

⁴²³ 'Spirit Forms and Lights', *The Spiritualist*, 1 August 1873, pp.280-281 (p.280).

⁴²⁴ D'Esperance, p.148.

⁴²⁵ D'Esperance, p.149.

light in the picture we have shadow, and where there was shadow we have light. But while we look it seems to fade again, as if it would disappear.⁴²⁶

Green-Lewis argues that Wendell-Holmes described the picture-making process like a creation myth, with the head like the sun rising, the eyes like stars, and the developing shadows bringing the image closer to reality. He invites comparison with the supernatural, describing the image as a 'ghost we hold imprisoned in the shield we have just brought from the camera' and muses how the plate doesn't look any different, yet contains a 'potential image' or 'a latent soul, which will presently appear before its judge.'⁴²⁷ Whilst I do not suggest Wendell-Holmes believed in ghosts or spirits, his use of a supernatural discourse to describe photographic processes invites us to consider the process in ghostly terms, whilst D'Esperance's more literal manner causes us to think of materialisation in photographic terms. Through their borrowing of different discourses (moving from the supernatural to the technical, and vice versa), some surprising similarities emerge between the two types of image-development.

Around the same time as Williams, in August 1873, the young Florence Cook managed to create her first full-form materialisation, which was relayed by the *Daily Telegraph*, with Cook referred to as 'Miss B.':

'And, lo and behold, though we had left Miss B. tied and sealed to her chair, and clad in an ordinary black dress somewhat voluminous as to the skirts, a tall female figure draped classically in white, with bare arms and feet, did enter at the open door [...] and stood statuelike before us, spoke a few words, and retired; after which we entered the Bedouin tent and found pretty Miss B. with her dress as before, knots and seals secure, and her boots on! This was Form No.1, the first I have ever seen. It looked as material as myself [...] The difficulty I still felt, with the form and the faces, was that it seemed so thoroughly material and flesh and blood like.'⁴²⁸

For sceptics, like the writer of *Daily Telegraph*, the whole episode was clearly a performance, in which the 'spirit' appeared to be a 'material' being, but in fact was the medium dressed up (having escaped her bonds or been released by a co-conspirator). However, for believers, this was a high point in Spiritualist achievement, constituting 'the final empirical evidence for the reality of spirit life and the existence of an unseen world.'⁴²⁹ It heralded a supernatural revolution: an embodied spirit had appeared,

⁴²⁶ Wendell-Holmes, 'Doings of the Sunbeam', pp.242-243.

⁴²⁷ Wendell-Holmes, 'Doings of the Sunbeam', p.242

⁴²⁸ 'Spirit Forms', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 August 1873, p.3.; also quoted in Podmore, pp.98-99.

⁴²⁹ Owen, p.48.

which looked as ‘material’ as any living person. Another sitter, William Stainton Moses, reportedly commented on how “‘intensely human’” Katie looked, emphasising again her ‘materiality’: “‘indeed it is very hard to believe that the bright smiling face one sees is not flesh and blood, but only a materialised something about to be resolved into immaterial nothing.’”⁴³⁰

‘Full -form manifestations’ progressed quickly from visual to tactile experiences. Spiritualists were keen to obtain proof of the existence of the spirits. In addition, various sitters sought close contact with lost loved ones. Marryat describes numerous physical materialisations achieved through Cook, Eglington and Mary Rosina Showers, amongst others. In particular, she recalls the appearance of her lost baby, Florence, through Cook, whom she recognises from a known ‘scar upon her lip’ which was extremely rare. She recalls the physical contact she had with ‘Florence’: ‘I have known her come in the dark and sit on my lap and kiss my face and hands, and let me feel the defect in her mouth with my own.’⁴³¹ A journalist writing for the *Examiner* (1876), quoting the Spiritualist Catherine Berry, reported that a common trick of the spirits was to “‘touch people and pull them about,’” emphasising the tactility that was now a part of the séance dynamic.⁴³² Cooper also talks in material terms about the ‘hands and arms’ he had seen materialised in séances: ‘these hands are, for the time, real, palpable material hands, and possess the qualities and properties of living, human hands. I have seen the veins and felt the nails on them.’⁴³³

One consequence of producing this new corporeal spirit was the physical strain on the mediums, as if their body was somehow being shared or utilised by the spirits. According to Marryat, the medium Eglington used to become ‘terribly exhausted’, ‘his face white as a sheet’ and used to tremble violently when manifesting his spirit guide.⁴³⁴ D’Esperance felt that her spirit-guide Yolande was ‘dependent’ on her for her material existence. ‘I seemed to lose, not my individuality, but my strength and power

⁴³⁰ Notebooks of William Stainton Moses, quoted in R.G. Medhurst, ‘Stainton Moses and Contemporary Physical Mediums’, *Light*, 83 (1963), 73-4; quoted in Oppenheim, p.17.

⁴³¹ Marryat, *There is No Death*, p.80 and p.82.

⁴³² ‘A Spiritualist on Spiritualism’, *The Examiner*, 3567 (1876) 652-653; p.653.

⁴³³ Cooper, p.118.

⁴³⁴ Marryat, *There is No Death*, p.102.

of exertion, and though I did not know it, a great portion of my material substance.’⁴³⁵ The medium recalls experiencing a physical sensation when her spirit guide was materialised. As well as tiredness, she experienced headaches and voices in her head: ‘my brain apparently becoming a sort of whispering gallery where the thoughts of other persons resolved themselves into an embodied form and resounded as though actual substantial objects.’⁴³⁶ Here she describes a process of transformation in which her brain received information from the whispering of the spirits and projecting the images in ‘embodied form’ to the sitters. Not only do mediums seem to be acting like cameras, but the invasion of their bodies suggests a highly physical experience of haunting.

Whilst D’Esperance admits that she is ‘not [...] a photographer’ (p.223), she not only refers to photographic experiments and technicalities, but she also seems to understand and articulate her spiritual experiences in photographic terms, as if she is aware that her brain is acting like a camera.⁴³⁷ She describes having two selves, spiritual and bodily, referring to the former (in a presumably unconscious repetition of ‘The Haunted Man’) as ‘this shadowy likeness of myself’ (p.219). She relates a vision in which she desires to make the shadow part of herself (the spiritual side) ‘a counterpart of a living reality’, but apparently feels she has failed, creating merely a ‘miserable counterfeit’ (p.220) which could not be animated.⁴³⁸ Whilst her meaning is not entirely clear, as her explanation becomes dream-like, conflating lights and shadows, it suggests she is describing a kind of identity crisis, in which the spiritual side of her is frustrated and the worldly side prevails. Despite this lack of clarity, it becomes apparent that her confused identity is best expressed through reference to ‘shadows’, ‘counterparts’ and ‘likenesses’, which were terms commonly associated with the lexicon of photography.

⁴³⁵ D’Esperance, p.160.

⁴³⁶ D’Esperance, p.160.

⁴³⁷ She refers more than once to the ‘magnesium light’ used in experiments (p.180, p.188) and experiments done with Mr Guppy, who broke the photographic plate (p.223); and refers to the ‘new camera and all the necessary outfit’ for the experiments, and talks about how they all had ‘much to learn’ about photography, spending three days getting ‘a little accustomed to the camera, focussing, developing, printing, and so forth’ (p.227).

⁴³⁸ D’Esperance, p.220.

She also discusses her confusion in producing a spirit-guide who appeared to be her double. Rather unusually amongst mediums, D'Esperance claims to have been able to see the spirit-guides she produced.⁴³⁹ On one occasion she reports that she 'came face to face with – myself! Or so it seemed to me.' Even though she can distinguish physical differences between her and the spirit guide, in height, colour, size, yet 'looking into the face, I might have been regarding my own reflexion in a mirror, so great was the resemblance.'⁴⁴⁰ It is a reminder not only of an ordinary mirror, but that of the feeling we get when see a likeness of ourselves – or as Wendell-Holmes famously put it in relation to the daguerreotype, 'a mirror with a memory.'⁴⁴¹

Her disorientation in seeing her spirit-guide Anna, who appears like her, reminds me of Barthes's view of the photograph as 'the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity'.⁴⁴² She is unclear how to distinguish herself from Anna, which confusion manifests itself in distinctly physical terms:

'I feel somebody's arms round me although I sit on my chair alone. I feel somebody's heart beating against my breast [...] It must be my own heart I feel beating so distinctly. Yet those arms around me? Surely never did I feel a touch so plainly. I begin to wonder which is I. Am I the white figure or am I the one on the chair? [...] Shall I be 'Anna', or 'Anna' be I?'⁴⁴³

Her sensations and consciousness have become unrooted from her identity – is she the medium or the spirit guide? In the same way that, according to Barthes, 'photography transformed subject into object', D'Esperance, the medium (the subject) becomes 'Anna', the spirit-guide (the object).⁴⁴⁴ In an apt metaphor which corresponds to the metamorphosis of medium-to-spirit, Barthes suggests that in the moment that subject becomes object, there is a 'micro-version of death' – in which 'I am truly becoming a specter.'⁴⁴⁵ D'Esperance similarly experiences a moment when she doubts her senses, unsure whether she is the ghost 'Anna' or the living person. Acting as a camera, and producing images which mirror her own, has triggered an identity crisis which she feels

⁴³⁹ D'Esperance, p.200.

⁴⁴⁰ D'Esperance, p.171.

⁴⁴¹ 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', in Trachtenberg, (p. 74).

⁴⁴² Barthes, p.12.

⁴⁴³ D'Esperance, pp.203-204.

⁴⁴⁴ Barthes, p.13.

⁴⁴⁵ Barthes, p.14.

rather than understands. She feels physically invaded by the spirits that haunt her. Given D'Esperance's and other mediums' haptic experience of haunting, it is hardly surprising that Spiritualists' desire to touch the spirits in return became ever more pressing.

Part IV - Touching Spirits

Barthes famously described the impact we feel from a photograph that interests us in physical terms. He calls the 'something' that we find moving or unexpected, and seemingly unintended by the photographer, the 'punctum' of a photograph, meaning something that pricks us, touches us.⁴⁴⁶ Similarly, Barthes emphasises the physicality that connects us to the photograph, which, he claims, is caused by it being an 'emanation of the referent'. The 'real body' (or subject of the photograph) emitted radiations which touch him, the viewer, and 'a sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze; light, though impalpable here, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.'⁴⁴⁷ If a photograph makes the beholder feel physically connected to the past, and helps them to pretend that a person is still alive, then Spiritualist mediums fulfilled a similar job. Like cameras, mediums offered a 'sort of umbilical cord' to the past.

The desire to touch the spirits was driven by various motivations. For most Spiritualists, touching satisfied their curiosity, providing more information about spirits. Sceptics thought it necessary in order to identify fraud, alleging that a so-called 'spirit' was really the medium in costume. For others, the desire may have been at least partly triggered by lust, given the youth and femininity of the most famous 'physical manifestation' mediums. Sir William Crookes shared that desire to locate tangible (touchable) proof of the existence of the spirits. The latter was a renowned chemist, physicist, and Fellow of the Royal Society since 1863, plus the editor of *Photographic News* between 1858 and 1861.⁴⁴⁸ However, in 1867 he was crippled by grief when he lost a much-loved younger brother, and from then on repeatedly tried to

⁴⁴⁶ Barthes, p.27.

⁴⁴⁷ Barthes, pp.80-81.

⁴⁴⁸ Tucker, p.42.

communicate with him through Spiritualist circles. After his papers on Spiritualism were rejected by the scientific community, Crookes embarked on further research, publicising it through the Spiritualist press. In March 1874, he publicly supported Cook by appearing with her in a séance, taking her spirit-guide Katie by the arm and walking around the room with her. He asked permission to 'clasp' the spirit in his arms, and she agreed. Apparently, he then went to the spirit cabinet and observed the medium stretched out on the floor and saw the spirit stood behind her:

She [Katie] was robed in flowing white drapery as we had seen her previously during the séance. Holding one of Miss Cook's hands in mine, and still kneeling, I passed the lamp up and down so as to illuminate Katie's whole figure and satisfy myself thoroughly that I was really looking at the veritable Katie whom I had clasped in my arms a few minutes before and not at the phantasm of a disordered brain.⁴⁴⁹

Presumably for Crookes, holding Cook's hand was an essential part of verifying that he had both medium and spirit together, and separately, before him. Marryat was also fortunate to be allowed to touch the spirit-guide produced by the young medium, Mary Rosina Showers, called 'Lenore', who according to the former, asked Marryat to 'put my hands up her skirts and convince myself that she was half-dematerialised.' Marryat complied and 'felt that she had *no legs*, although she had been walking around the room a few minutes before.'⁴⁵⁰ A report in the *Spiritualist* (1874) suggests that Marryat was also permitted to touch Katie King:

'Who desired me to place my hands inside the loose single garment which she wore and feel her nude body. I did so thoroughly. I felt her heart beating rapidly beneath my hand; and passed my fingers through her long hair to satisfy myself that it grew from her head, and can testify that if ever she be "of psychic force", psychic force is very like a woman.'⁴⁵¹

As manifestations became more physical, and yet sight alone failed to deliver certainty, touch became a key investigative tool. How something felt became another piece of evidence that could be obtained to prove, or disprove, the existence of the spirits.

⁴⁴⁹ William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London: James Burns, 1874), p121 and p.126.

⁴⁵⁰ Marryat, *There is No Death*, p.111.

⁴⁵¹ 'The Farewell Séance of Katie King, the Spirit', *The Spiritualist*, 1 May 1874, pp.258-259; also quoted in Owen, p.228.

Touching spirits could be controversial. In December 1873, the spirit 'Katie King' was seized, without her consent, by a sitter at a séance in Hackney. There was an article in the *Spiritualist* newspaper called 'Gross Outrage at a Spiritualist Circle', in which the Spiritualist William Volckman took hold of Katie's hand, 'rose up, grasped her round the waist with both arms, and tried to throw her down with his feet.'⁴⁵² She was rescued by others, returned to the cabinet, and then five minutes later Cook was found within the cabinet, shaken, but still tied up with the original securing tape. Apparently Volckman later married Mrs. Guppy (following the death of Mr. Guppy), which suggests that he may have had an interest in exposing Cook.⁴⁵³ Like Cook, D'Esperance experienced a similar 'exposure', which she reports experiencing in physical terms as 'agonizing pain'. She was in the cabinet and felt a 'horrible excruciating sensation of being doubled up and squeezed together' and she later understood that her spirit-guide, Yolande, had been seized and declared to be the medium. She says that this blow triggered a serious illness which took months to recover from.⁴⁵⁴

The reason touch was so significant and potentially dangerous for mediums was because many Spiritualists believed that the image of the spirit was created from the substance of the medium, that he or she exerted spiritual energy or corporeal material to create the image, which was later called 'ectoplasm'. This was often the explanation offered for spirits who looked the same as the medium. For example, Mr. Guppy reported in the *Spiritualist* (1873):

I saw [...] the spirit face of Katie at Miss Cook's [...] But in all these cases, as far as I can trust my eyes, there was a likeness in each case to the eyes, nose, and forehead features of the medium sitting. The reason is, that as the mould of spirit hands is taken from the hands of the medium, so is the mould of the face from the medium's face.⁴⁵⁵

Equally, the reason provided for inadequate or patchy materialisations was a lack of power on behalf of the medium. When asked about why she had 'scarcely any nose', Katie King reportedly explained how she 'only had a little dab of stuff left, and stuck it

⁴⁵² *Spiritualist*, 12 Dec 1873, p.461.

⁴⁵³ Owen, pp.66-67.

⁴⁵⁴ D'Esperance, p.176.

⁴⁵⁵ 'Spirit Faces', *Spiritualist*, 1 Jan 1873, p.63.

on for a nose'.⁴⁵⁶ Marryat records how, in a séance with Showers, the latter had shrunk 'to half her usual size', so that her dress hung loosely on her body and she looked, for all the world, like the mummy of a girl of four or six years old.' She apparently disliked Showers's spirit-guide, 'Lenore', who was often improperly formed and created an unsettling atmosphere, sometimes bringing with her a terrible smell.⁴⁵⁷ Paradoxically, Spiritualists increasingly saw immaterial spirits in material terms, demonstrating awareness of the physicality of their features, size and smell.

Owen argues that séances were at times charged with erotic undertones, with semi-naked spirits, who often sat on the laps of (usually male) sitters, who would kiss and touch the sitters. Annie Fairlamb's spirit control 'Minnie' was prone to kissing men. James Burns, the editor of *Medium and Daybreak*, reported in 1878 that, "'our lips met firmly, a fervent kiss was recorded on the surrounding atmosphere. I was distinctly conscious of two impressions: the peculiar thrill of affection which passed through me, and the physical conformation of 'Minnie's' lips'".⁴⁵⁸ Earlier I mentioned D'Esperance's physical experience with the spirits referring to, "'somebody's arms round me'" and "'somebody's heart beating against my breast'", which verges on the erotic, in the caressing, intimate touch she feels close to her body.⁴⁵⁹ Owen comments on the seeming contradiction between this corporeal, and even carnal, contact with the spirits, which jars with the seemingly 'spiritual' agenda of the Spiritualists: 'Spiritualist materialisation, the evocation of the physical manifestation of a spirit, re-enacted corporeality – and with it the erotic – in the very place (spirit) where both must be denied.'⁴⁶⁰ This conflict between the immaterial and the material lay at the heart of Spiritualism.

The photographic impulses behind full-form manifestations, along with the physical relationship with the spirits which the former seemed to incite, are dramatised in Christie's 'The Last Séance', to which I referred in the Introduction. Simone's materialisation of Amelie, the dead child of Madame Exe, is described like a

⁴⁵⁶ 'Spirit Faces', *Spiritualist*, 1 Feb 1873, p.82.

⁴⁵⁷ Marryat, *There is No Death*, pp.110-111. Also quoted in Alex Owen, p.53.

⁴⁵⁸ *Medium & Daybreak*, 7 June 1878, p.362; quoted in Owen, p.221.

⁴⁵⁹ D'Esperance, pp.203-204.

⁴⁶⁰ Owen, pp.222-223.

developing negative, initially appearing in “a kind of nebulous haze”, but then forming into an “actual living child of flesh and blood” (p.231). The urge to touch immediately follows the achievement of the lifelike image. In the previous séance, Raoul admits he touched Amelie, “but seeing that the touch was acutely painful to you, I would not permit Madame Exe to do the same” (p.231). Despite this, Madame Exe continues to desire to touch her (p.235), which Raoul explains is forbidden, because the spirit of the child is created from ‘ectoplasm’ which is ‘the actual physical substance of the medium’, and that touching Simone is likely to result in ‘danger and pain’ or even ‘death’ (p.235). The sitter is clearly not satisfied. She desires tactile contact. She articulates the relationship between medium and spirit as that of a parent/child, asking when the materialisation will progress so far that it is “capable of detachment from its parent, the medium” (p.236).

The notion of medium (parent) and spirit (child) echoes Barthes’s concept of the ‘umbilical cord’ which links ‘the body of the photographed thing to my gaze.’ Light has intervened and linked the referent with the viewer, harnessing them together into a fleshly, parental relationship just as in this story, the spiritual power of the medium has physically linked the dead child (the referent) with the viewer (the mother) in this scene. They even describe the manifestation of the image in similar terms: Barthes claims that photography’s ‘inimitable feature’ (it’s ‘noeme’) is that someone has seen the referent ‘*in flesh and blood*’.⁴⁶¹ The chimerical spirit Amelie is also described as appearing to emanate from “flesh and blood” (p.231). The idea that a biological link could exist between medium and spirit was in fact suggested by a writer to the *Spiritualist* (1874), who asks, ‘may we not find some analogy of the intermingling of this likeness of the spirit and the medium, in materialised spirit forms, with the ordinary double resemblance of the child to its parents?’⁴⁶²

The materialisation of Amelie is astonishingly successful: “Now, surely it was a real child, a real flesh and blood child standing there” (pp.238-9). Simone has successfully acted as a camera, in producing the image of a dead girl from her dark cabinet. Despite desperate warnings from Raoul, who is bound to his chair, Madame

⁴⁶¹ Barthes, pp.80-81 and p.79.

⁴⁶² ‘The Analogy of Knowledge’, Letter from Henry G Atkinson FGS, *The Spiritualist*, 31 July 1874, p.59.

Exe says “‘I must touch her [...] My little one, I must touch her’” (pp.239-240). She grabs the child which, we presume, causes the death of the medium, as it is promptly followed by a scream and the ‘thud of a body falling’ (p.240). The umbilical cord has been snapped; the child has been freed from its mediumistic parent. The photograph walks free of its referent. In a graphic exchange, the spiritual child becomes flesh whilst the medium’s own flesh and blood are diminished, becoming “‘half her usual size’”, covered in blood (p.241).

Whilst this story was published in 1933, sixty years after physical manifestations first emerged in Victorian séances, it provides a dramatic illustration of the themes in this Chapter regarding the mediumship of the 1860s and 1870s. The story exemplifies the photographic impulses behind the ‘manifestation’ of spirits, showing the medium acting as a camera, and illustrating how it stimulated the ‘will to touch’ the spirits. The ghostly little girl that Simone produces really is a ‘materialisation’, in the sense that she is a material entity borne of a photographic act (the medium producing an image). There is something in the act of medium-as-camera (mediumistic mother) which produces a material being (child). With its focus on the creation of a ‘lifelike image,’ the emphasis on spiritual materialisations formed of ‘flesh and blood,’ and the spotlight on the physical suffering of the medium, the story provides an appropriate avenue into Chapter 4, in which I explore spirit photography and ectoplasm.

4 MATERIALISATIONS OF THE IMMATERIAL: SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE GHOST STORY

Some persons may be disappointed in the [spirit] photographs themselves, because they do not come up to their imagination of spirits, but what we have to do with is truth, not fancy, but they will at any rate prove that spirits are not shapeless airy nothings, but have bodies really as substantial as our own.⁴⁶³

Already has this new development [spirit photography] in Spiritualism begun to show itself in the literature of the day, literature which the people tacitly accept as more real than granite stone or earthly dust.⁴⁶⁴

As Green-Lewis comments, ‘by mid-century, to be visible was to be photographed and photographable’, and therefore it was simply a matter of time before a camera would appear in the séance.⁴⁶⁵ Before Mumler had produced his first ‘spirit photograph’ in 1861, interest had already been sparked in the camera’s ability to create ‘supernatural’ images. In his article on ‘The Stereoscope’ (1856), Sir David Brewster famously suggested how photography could be used to create the appearance of ghosts:

For the purposes of amusement the photographer might carry us even into the realms of the supernatural. His art enables him to give a spiritual appearance to one or more of his figures, and to exhibit them as “thin air” amid the solid realities of the stereoscopic picture.⁴⁶⁶

As Clement Cheroux and the curators of the 2005 exhibition on spirit photography, *The Perfect Medium* commented, photography had thus far been employed to ‘record the visible, material world with truth and accuracy’ and it did not take long for it to be enlisted to ‘provide proof of the immaterial’.⁴⁶⁷

The first ‘spirit photographs’ to emerge in Britain in the early 1870s were those of a portrait containing a spirit ‘extra’, similar to those by Mumler, by the Spiritualist, Georgiana Houghton, and the photographer, Frederick Hudson. In this type of image,

⁴⁶³ Houghton, p.23.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Spirit Photographs in Literature’, *Banner of Light*, 20 December 1862, p.4; quoted in Kaplan, p.47.

⁴⁶⁵ Green-Lewis, p.94.

⁴⁶⁶ *National Magazine*, 1.2 (1856), 108-110; (p.110).

⁴⁶⁷ Clement Cheroux and others, ‘Foreword’, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

no spirit was evident to the eye, but appeared in the photograph as an unexpected addition. The second type was the 'séance photograph', an image of the manifested spirit which appeared whilst the medium was in the spirit cabinet, which was initiated by Crookes. In this Chapter, I will use these terms except when I am referring to both types of image, when I will use the term 'supernatural photograph'.

My intention in this Chapter is to explore the impact of supernatural photography upon the way that people imagined, and envisaged communication with, ghosts, coming into the twentieth century. Whilst the intention of Houghton and Crookes and other supernatural photographers may have been to provide tangible proof that the spirits of the dead existed, this function quickly became blurred with its role as a medium of communication with the spirit world. This elision becomes apparent not only in Houghton's interpretations of spirit photographs, but also in the contemporary ghost stories I have examined that concern supernatural photographs. These stories depict a new kind of haunting, a pictorial way of communicating with the absent and the dead, in which the camera played a key part. Moreover, I will explore how the appearance of ghosts in supernatural photographs (especially their spirit drapery and corporeality) started to alter popular expectations of ghosts more generally. The supernatural photographs realised a new kind of 'material' ghost, in which drapery, and later the physical, fleshy, ectoplasm, played a significant role, which emerged in various ghost stories, especially those of M.R. James. In tandem with Spiritualism, spirit photographs established a new way for the dead to keep in touch with us.

Part I – Spirits on Camera

‘A spirit-photograph cannot be argued out of sight; it must take the first place as evidence.’⁴⁶⁸

For Spiritualists, supernatural photography represented tangible proof of communication with the dead. There was a strong presumption in the nineteenth century that photography could provide a veridical record that something had occurred, and from the 1860s, photographs became used in American legal trials by way of evidence: as one American judge put it, ‘we cannot conceive of a more impartial and truthful witness than the sun; [...] it would be more accurate than the memory of witnesses’.⁴⁶⁹ As Sontag comments, ‘photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it.’⁴⁷⁰ Whilst some contemporaries voiced doubts about the accuracy of a likeness, or the potential distortions of the camera (as did Dickens, see Chapter 1), on the whole, many Victorians would have assumed that a photograph captured what was in front of it and, therefore, that it was a credible source of ‘proof’.⁴⁷¹

Following Mumler’s discovery of the spirit ‘extra’ of his cousin in a portrait, which I outline in the Introduction, the American Spiritualist press responded euphorically, declaring that ‘no single phenomenon could possibly awaken deeper interest than will follow this revelation.’⁴⁷² In 1862, *Banner of Light* commented:

This new phase of spiritual manifestations [...] is exciting a great deal of attention and wonder in those who take an interest in the grand and beautiful subject of spirit communion. [...] If this phenomenon in spirit manifestations be genuine, it is the greatest and the best yet given to outside perception in the catalogue of a long variety which bear incontrovertible evidence of

⁴⁶⁸ John Beattie, ‘Philosophy of Spirit Photography’, *Spiritual Magazine*, January 1873; quoted in Houghton, pp.102-106 (p.105).

⁴⁶⁹ *Franklin v. State of Georgia*, 69 Ga. 36; 1882 Ga, quoted in Aaron Meskin and Jonathan Cohen, ‘Photographs as Evidence’, in *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature*, ed. Scott Waldren (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp.70-90 (p.70).

⁴⁷⁰ Sontag, p.5.

⁴⁷¹ The view that a photograph provided undisputed fact or testimony was not universally agreed, as contemporary critics of spirit photography attested. Tucker has shown how the objective status of photography in the nineteenth century was very much under debate, especially the truth or otherwise of spirit photographs (Tucker, pp.65-84). Green-Lewis has also demonstrated how the photograph as ‘testimony’ (from a legal and policing perspective) was challenged (*Framing the Victorians*, pp.187-226).

⁴⁷² C.M.P., ‘Spirit Photographs: A New and Interesting Development’, *The Spiritual Magazine*, 1 December 1862, pp.562-3, reprinted from *Herald of Progress*, New York, October 1862; quoted in Kaplan, pp.35-38 (p.38).

the truth that spiritual communications are what they claim to be, viz.: actual manifestations of the 'dead' to the 'living'.⁴⁷³

The faith in photography's testimonial function is evident from the writer's belief that photographs provided 'incontrovertible evidence' of the existence of spirit phenomena.



Figure 25. William H. Mumler, *Mary Todd Lincoln with the Spirit of her Husband, President Abraham Lincoln and Son Thaddeus*, 1872. College of Psychical Studies, London. Plate 1, in Louis Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler Spirit Photographer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) p.170.

Further, timing was essential to Mumler's success. His first spirit photograph was discovered just after the outbreak of the American Civil War, 'an event which had profound effects on American photography'.⁴⁷⁴ With its horrifyingly high death toll, the war not only increased the numbers of grieving families but also introduced gruesome photographs of the battlefield (such as those published by the American photographer, Matthew Brady). These images touched people deeply, bringing home the raw and conclusive nature of death.⁴⁷⁵ Mumler had a receptive audience and it followed that he had numbers of grateful clients, including Moses A. Dow, the editor of

⁴⁷³ 'Spirit Photographs', *Banner of Light*, 8 November 1862, p.4; quoted in Kaplan, p.39.

⁴⁷⁴ Jolly, p.16.

⁴⁷⁵ Jolly, pp.16-17. Jolly refers to Oliver Wendell-Holmes's shock on seeing photographs of the war dead for the first time. Wendell-Holmes, 'Doings of the Sunbeam', pp.266-267.

Boston's *Waverly Magazine*, and the wife of Abraham Lincoln, who came to Mumler for a sitting in 1872 using a fake name. Mumler claimed not to have known it was Mrs. Lincoln until he processed an image of her husband as a spirit 'extra' (Figure 25).⁴⁷⁶

Whilst Mumler's images were popular and regarded by many clients as credible testimony to the presence of the departed, many Spiritualists and non-Spiritualists were sceptical of his supposed abilities. After receiving complaints and accusations of fraud, the Mayor of New York commenced an investigation. Mumler ended up on trial for obtaining money by deception and larceny. The trial was a media and tabloid sensation, making it (in the words of Louis Kaplan) 'a hot item in all the New York daily newspapers' and also in the British Spiritualist press.⁴⁷⁷ The trial involved the evidence of photographers, conjurers and Spiritualists. As Kaplan comments: 'Mumler's ghostly developments were a contentious and contested story that skeptics and believers disagreed passionately about, for it was felt that the larger implications of this sensational and strange case had put "Spiritualism in court" and on trial.'⁴⁷⁸

The prosecution enlisted various witnesses and interrogated them on their religious beliefs, and the closing arguments focused more on the validity of Spiritualism itself than on Mumler's actual photographs.⁴⁷⁹ In the end, Mumler was acquitted by the judge on the basis of a lack of evidence against him: claiming that although he was "'morally convinced that there may be fraud and deception practiced by the prisoner'", on the basis of the evidence before him, "'the prosecution has failed to make out the case'".⁴⁸⁰ Many Spiritualists were disappointed that spirit photographs had failed to provide the sought-after testimony. Many more managed to explain away the suggestions of fakery, certain clients insisting that they recognised images of dead loved ones. The report on the hearing took up the entire front page of the popular *Harper's Weekly* edition of 8 May 1869 (see Figure 26), and part of the back page for a cartoon and therefore would have been likely to have attracted attention in Britain.

⁴⁷⁶ Mumler, 'Personal Experiences', see Kaplan: on Lincoln (pp.92-93) and on Moses A. Dow (pp.93-107).

⁴⁷⁷ Kaplan, p.14. e.g. 'Spiritual Photography', *Saturday Review*, 27.712 (1869), 802-803.

⁴⁷⁸ Kaplan, p.14.

⁴⁷⁹ Crista Cloutier, 'Mumler's Ghosts', in *The Perfect Medium*, p.22.

⁴⁸⁰ 'The Triumph of the Ghosts', *New York World*, 4 May 1869, p.2; quoted in Kaplan, pp.205-206, (p.206).

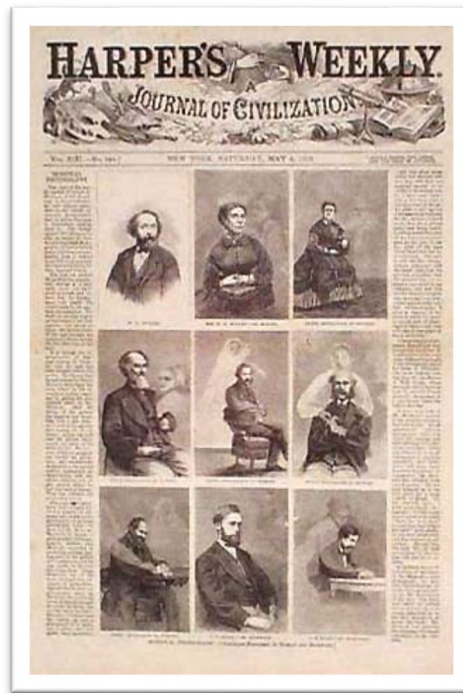


Figure 26. *Mumler's Trial*, *Harper's Weekly*, 8 May 1869. American Museum of Photography, U.S.A.

Following the trial, Mumler continued to practice spirit photography, although he was no longer profitable and retired in obscurity some years later.

Strangely enough, Mumler's ignominious fall did not impede the development of spirit photography in Britain. Houghton, originally from the Canary Islands but living most of her life in London, was one of the key advocates of supernatural photography in Britain.⁴⁸¹ In her *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye* (1882), she describes the occasion on which her friends the Guppys (referred to in Chapter 3) showed her three spirit photographs produced by Hudson. On seeing the images, she and Guppy decided to visit Hudson that afternoon and Hudson managed to produce a spirit photograph of a 'veiled figure with the hand advanced almost to my shoulder', whom Houghton recognised as her mother.⁴⁸² This marked the beginning of a successful pairing, in which Hudson took the

⁴⁸¹ Houghton displayed 150 spirit drawings in the New British Gallery in 1871: A 'Public Exhibition of Spirit Drawings', *Spiritualist Magazine* (1871), 263-71; and 'Mrs. Houghton's Spirit-Drawings', *Spiritualist*, 1 (1869): 175; quoted in Tucker, p.85. A number of Houghton's spirit drawings were displayed at the recent exhibition at the Courtauld Gallery in 2016. See *Georgina Houghton: Spirit Drawings* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016).

⁴⁸² Houghton, pp.1-2.

photographs and Houghton provided the mediumistic power to engage the spirits. As Warner observes, photography proved an appropriate medium through which to visualise spirits: not only did it import decades of wonder and the spice of the supernatural (to which I refer in earlier Chapters) but physically, the black and white photographs, light traces and blobs and streaks could be said to appear ghostly. Details were lost because of the flash of magnesium, and the lack of clarity left more scope for imaginative engagement.⁴⁸³ In her *Chronicles*, Houghton produced numerous images and provided copious explanations of the mysterious blobs and shapes she noticed on spirit photographs, identifying a 'hovering dove,' 'stars,' 'cones' and even an 'illuminated flying bird.'⁴⁸⁴

Moreover, Houghton was invested in the idea of photographs possessing an aura, or 'personal magnetism'.⁴⁸⁵ She often asked sitters to bring photographs of dead loved ones to facilitate the connection: 'for whatever we have *touched* receives an impression from that contact that does not pass away, therefore it is easier for spirits to manifest themselves when they can be within the atmosphere of something appertaining to a portion of their earth-life', she explained.⁴⁸⁶ On another occasion she said that she observed a 'stream of light' rise 'towards the spirit-likenesses from their earthly prototypes', which she thought evidenced the fact that photographs attracted the spirits, through 'vibrations' on an 'invisible wire'.⁴⁸⁷ In the *Chronicles*, Houghton engaged with the medium of photography, importing its characteristics into her understanding of spiritual communication.

Houghton was convinced that spirit photographs provided testimony of the presence of the dead, quoting the photographer John Beattie, who said that: "'a spirit-photograph cannot be argued out of sight; it must take the first place as evidence.'"'⁴⁸⁸ Many eminent Victorians, like Wallace, and later Doyle (in his *The Case for Spirit Photography*) concurred with Houghton and argued strongly in favour of its

⁴⁸³ Warner, p.243.

⁴⁸⁴ Houghton, p.34 and p.45.

⁴⁸⁵ Podmore, pp.86-87

⁴⁸⁶ Houghton, p.166.

⁴⁸⁷ Houghton, pp.186-187.

⁴⁸⁸ John Beattie, 'Philosophy of Spirit Photography', *Spiritual Magazine*, January 1873; quoted in Houghton, p.105.

credibility.⁴⁸⁹ However, the new movement also attracted plenty of critics and amused sceptics. One journalist from the *Saturday Review* (1872) commented that: 'the spirits themselves, after a good deal of ghostly coquetry, have been at least wheedled into coming fairly to the front [...] [and] are good enough to take material form, and to allow themselves to be seen of mortal eyes and photographed in common carte-de-visit'. However, he noted that, to 'mortal eyes', the 'spirit' identified in one image, 'would rather suggest a couple of broomsticks draped in a white sheet.'⁴⁹⁰ Dickens's *All the Year Round* (1863) referred to spirit photography mockingly in its review of the Spiritualist, William Howitt's enormous tome, *The History of the Supernatural*, implying that supernatural photography was yet another far-fetched claim of the Spiritualists, along with table-tapping, levitation and 'visions'.⁴⁹¹ In 1863, the *Photographic News* claimed it was a 'pitiable delusion originating in shameful fraud or mischievous trickery', opining that photography had been 'prostituted to purposes of imposture'.⁴⁹² Some professional photographers offered explanations of how the photographs were double exposures, the result of 'the smudgy trace of a former image on an imperfectly cleaned plate'.⁴⁹³ Therefore, whilst many Spiritualists thought they had finally achieved testimony proving the existence of the spirits, this was a much contested claim, which put the veridical claims of photography more generally into doubt.

At the same time that Houghton and Hudson launched their spirit photography enterprise, Crookes was undertaking investigations of his own. In Chapter 3, I mentioned that Crookes was an advocate for the medium, Florence Cook. Driven to prove Cook's innocence following the Volckman scandal (when a sitter seized Cook's spirit-guide during a séance and claimed it was a real woman), Crookes set out to produce photographic proof of the existence of 'Katie King' in 1874. In his *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1874), Crookes describes how he used his own

⁴⁸⁹ Wallace stated that spirit photography offered 'unanswerable proof' that human witnesses were telling the truth when they report seeing apparitions in séances, in *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism Revised Edition, with Chapters on Apparitions and Phantasms* (London: George Redway, 1896), p.xiii – xiv; and Doyle stated that he 'firmly believ[ed]' that 'spirit photographs were 'produced by discarnate intelligences', *The Case for Spirit Photography*, p.81.

⁴⁹⁰ 'Peeps at Spirits', *Saturday Review*, 33:863 (1872) 595-597, (p.596).

⁴⁹¹ 'Rather a Strong Dose', *All the Year Round*, 9.204 (1863) 84-87, (p.85).

⁴⁹² 'Spirit Photographs', *Photographic News*, 13 Feb 1863, pp.73-4; quoted in Tucker, p.80.

⁴⁹³ 'Spirit Photographs', *Photographic News*, 14 May 1869, pp.231-232; quoted in Tucker, p.83.

library as a dark cabinet for the medium, which had folding doors opening onto a laboratory, in which a select group of sitters were placed. He had five cameras, with different plate sizes in each. He set up five sensitising and fixing baths, and plates were cleaned in advance to make sure there was no hitch or delay in the operations. He used electric lamps to light up the room sufficiently to take a photograph. Each evening that he experimented, Crookes claims to have produced three to four exposures of plates in the five cameras, giving at least 15 separate pictures at each séance and producing 44 negatives in total.⁴⁹⁴

Crookes asserts that, during the photographic séance, Katie 'muffled her medium's head up in a shawl to prevent the light falling upon her face'. However, he states that he and his friends saw the medium's feet and hands within the cabinet and heard her moan occasionally: 'I have one photograph of the two [Katie King and Cook] together, but Katie is seated in front of Miss Cook's head'. Crookes also explains that after the séance, he dressed Miss Cook up as Katie and then replicated the position, taking photographs in the same light, so that he could establish key differences between them:

Katie is half a head taller than Miss Cook, and looks a big woman in comparison with her. In the breadth of her face, in many of the pictures, she differs essentially in size from her medium, and the photographs show several other points of difference.⁴⁹⁵

Wallace endorses the veracity of the photographs and concurred that there were differences between Cook and King, such as those of height:

The photographs (which I have had the opportunity of examining) are to all appearance those of a human being, whose features are like those of Miss Cook, as a sister might be like, but by no means identical; dressed in white flowing robes, while Miss Cook was always dressed in ordinary black clothes; and by measurement, as well as by comparison with Mr. Crookes, who is photographed by the side of both, very much taller.⁴⁹⁶

He observes that the 'photographs are so clear and distinct' and the 'form and features of the spirit are so well known to a considerable number of people' that if an imposter

⁴⁹⁴ Crookes, pp.108-110.

⁴⁹⁵ Crookes, p.109 and p.110.

⁴⁹⁶ Wallace (1875), p.183.

were pretending to be a spirit, they would be discovered and could not feasibly have avoided detection for years.⁴⁹⁷

In Crookes's eyes the photographs successfully provided testimony of the spirits' presence, although he does note, wistfully, that:

Photography is as inadequate to depict the perfect beauty of Katie's face, as words are powerless to describe the charms of manner. Photography may, indeed, give a map of her countenance; but how can it reproduce the brilliant purity of her most mobile features, now over-shadowed with sadness when relating some of the bitter experiences of her past life, now smiling with all the innocence of happy girlhood when she had collected my children around her, and was amusing them by recounting anecdotes of her adventures in India?⁴⁹⁸

Whilst the reference to her beauty suggests that Crookes's emotions about Cook were not entirely platonic (Jolly reports that rumours circulated that they were having an affair), it also implies that, for Crookes at least, the excitement of obtaining photographs of the spirits was laced with a desire for further contact.⁴⁹⁹ Whilst photographs could provide a 'map of the countenance,' they could not bring back the character, movement or material presence of the spirit who appeared in a séance, or as Barthes put it when seeking an image of his mother, 'the truth of the face I had loved'.⁵⁰⁰ Crookes's disappointment appears to be aptly expressed by Green-Lewis's observation that, 'no effort, however extraordinary, will ever yield access to a photograph and permit us, Alice-like, to climb through its frame into another world'.⁵⁰¹ The image promises to evoke the physical presence of the subject, but for Crookes, it failed to deliver the somatic connection that he sought with the spirit.

As well as contributing to a desire for haptic contact with the dead, both types of supernatural photographs appeared to offer testimony of spiritual presence. In Chapter 3, I discussed the erotic charge that some historians claim ran through certain séances, which emerged from accounts by sitters and mediums and the observations of Crookes, who admitted having 'clasped' the spirit in his arms a few moments before.⁵⁰² In Figure 27, the photograph reflects that Crookes has linked arms with the

⁴⁹⁷ Wallace (1875), p.183.

⁴⁹⁸ Crookes, pp.108-110.

⁴⁹⁹ Jolly, p.34.

⁵⁰⁰ Barthes, p.67.

⁵⁰¹ Green-Lewis, p.144.

⁵⁰² Crookes, p.106.

spirit 'Katie King', very much like a perambulating couple in Cremorne Gardens. Crookes records that 'she took my arm when walking', and he felt that he had a 'living woman' by his side. He also admits being strongly tempted to 'repeat a recent celebrated experiment [the Volckman seizure]', that is, to grab the medium and check whether she was formed of flesh.⁵⁰³



Figure 27. William Crookes, *William Crookes and Spirit in Electric Light*, albumen silver photograph, 1874. Barlow Collection, British Library, London.

Similarly, many of the spirit photographs obtained by Houghton and Hudson involved the spirits touching the living sitter in the portrait, or merging with them as if they were physically attached. In Figure 28, Houghton includes a number of photographs which offered varying degrees of contact with spirits. In the fourth picture, 'Zilla standing with her hand in mine', the spirit and sitter stand opposite each other, as if involved in 'deep conversation'. Houghton explains: 'we are standing face to face, her right hand is within mine, while with the left she gathers the drapery under her chin.' Houghton claims to be puzzled by what appeared to be an arm passing

⁵⁰³ Crookes, p.106.

around her left shoulder, which could not physically be there, as her hands were 'occupied'.



Figure 28. Frederic Hudson, *Plate 1*, in Houghton's *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye* (London: E.W. Allen, 1882).

Her friend Mrs. Tebb, another medium, opines that it is "a ray of coloured light, flowing from her to you." Mrs. Tebb apparently goes on to say "it is the link binding you to each other, it flows from the heart," calling it a bodily link, and "arterial blood".⁵⁰⁴ The proximity to the ghost is explained in corporeal rather than spiritual terms. Ultimately, Houghton concludes that there was a "togetherness of the spirit and the mortal", no doubt linked by the physical touch between them, that she finds reassuring.⁵⁰⁵ In the eighth picture, 'Charlie Embracing me', the sitter and spirit are so close they even appear to be kissing. Houghton explains, 'my face is pressed against

⁵⁰⁴ Houghton, pp.25-26.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.27.

the spirit, whose veil falls partly over me, so that I am *within* it, and we seem locked in a mutual embrace.’⁵⁰⁶

Further, Houghton quotes an account in the *Spiritualist* of 15 May 1872, from a Mr. Slater, who visited Mr. Hudson. Slater claims to have obtained a photograph of his mother, describing ‘a fine female figure draped in white, standing before me with her hand resting on my head; the drapery merely covers the whole of my body, leaving only the head and one hand visible.’⁵⁰⁷ Whilst this photograph was not included by Houghton in her book, it indicates that having the spirit pictured touching or appearing to touch the sitter, or placing a hand on their head or shoulder, was a common phenomenon in spirit photographs. Following the appearance of supernatural photographs, and in tandem with the full-form manifestations created by the medium-as-camera, a new iconography was beginning to appear which made ghosts seem corporeal and physically close to the living.

Part II – Touching Testimonials

‘Have you seen any of these spirit-photographs, brother?’

‘What are they?’ He ceased walking, looking inquiringly at her.

‘There are photographers, nowadays, who fix the shadows of souls as well as bodies so they say! The spirit of the deceased friend wished for appears beside the picture of the sitter, faint and shadowy, as becomes a spirit, but still quite palpable.’

‘You smile, Caroline; are you jesting?’

‘No, I am only relating the last marvel of Spiritualism.’⁵⁰⁸

In December 1862, the Spiritualist newspaper *Banner of Light* declared that supernatural photography, ‘this new development in Spiritualism,’ had ‘begun to show itself in the literature of the day, literature which the people tacitly accept as more real than granite stone or earthly dust.’⁵⁰⁹ This statement was issued barely two months after the publication of Mumler’s first spirit photograph in the *Herald of Progress*. The writer supported his claim by quoting an example of an American story by Francis A.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., p.93.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p.17.

⁵⁰⁸ Seely Register, ‘The Spirit Photograph’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 27 (1863), 122-124 (p.123).

⁵⁰⁹ ‘Spirit Photographs in Literature’, quoted in Kaplan, p.47.

Durivage, called 'Mysterious Occurrences in East Houston-street, N.Y.', which apparently:

Tells about the wicked life of a young man, who sat for his photograph, and there came with his own picture the spirit picture of an old man he had murdered for his money, with one hand pointing to his cut throat, and the other to the picture of the young man, who was the guilty murderer. When he saw the picture he confessed the deed.⁵¹⁰

This brief article demonstrates how quickly spirit photography crept into the popular imagination. Whilst supernatural photographs were mostly described or published (or reproduced by way of sketches or engravings) in Spiritualist journals like the *Spiritualist* newspaper, or *Light*, there were also articles and some images circulating in more mainstream press. Jennifer Tucker cites various articles from *Photographic News* from the 1860s discussing (and mostly criticising) spirit photography.⁵¹¹ I noted above that the mainstream journal, *Harper's Weekly*, ran the story about Mumler's trial on its front page, including drawings of the spirit photographs concerned, which numbers of Atlantic-minded British readers would have read, and mainstream journals such as *All the Year Round* displayed knowledge of the phenomenon.⁵¹² Supernatural photography intervened in the public consciousness and became a subject for discussion, derision, and fiction.

The ghost stories that I have discovered which focus on spirit photographs, ranging from the 1860s to 1900, highlight some of the major themes that accompanied this new discovery. Firstly, the stories engaged with the idea of photograph-as-testimony, in different ways, coming to different conclusions about truth or fakery and thus illuminating the unstable relationship that the supernatural photograph maintained with truth. Secondly, all of the stories endorse the idea that supernatural photographs could convey a message, and that images could be an impactful way that the dead (or living) could get in touch. Thirdly, and closely linked to the second point, there is something in the physical immediacy of this new type of photogenic, communicative ghost, which made it seem peculiarly 'material' and receptive to touch.

⁵¹⁰ 'Spirit Photographs in Literature', quoted in Kaplan, p.47.

⁵¹¹ For example, 'Spirit Photographs', *Photographic News*, 13 Feb, 1863, pp.73-4; and 'Spirit Photographs', *Photographic News*, 9 Jan 1863, pp.19-20; quoted in Tucker, pp.79-81.

⁵¹² 'Rather a Strong Dose', pp.84-87.

Belief in the supernatural photograph's ability to provide 'testimony' is manifest in the Durivage story quoted above. Seeing the spirit of the dead man he murdered forces the young man to confess. The dead man provides visual testimony of what occurred, by pointing to his throat and accusing the man. Not only is the spirit presumably meant to be genuine in this photograph, but additionally, the medium in which this 'message' has been sent has a profound impact on the young man. He might have secretly felt guilty about his deed, but seeing the dead spirit adjacent to him shocks him into confessing in the most effective way. A similar theme, involving the testimony value of supernatural photographs, was explored years later by the fiction writer, Richard Marsh, in his story 'The Photographs' (1900), in which a man, imprisoned for murder, is haunted by the image of his wife, who persisted in appearing in each prison photograph that is taken, despite not being visible to the camera. Her actions, such as concealing the prisoner's name, rubbing it out, and then changing the writing to another's name, along with finally inducing the guilty party to appear in the photograph as a 'spirit' extra, all help to prove the innocence of her husband and the guilt of the man who framed him. Whilst the 'spirits' that appeared were not those of the dead, the theme coincides with that of Durivage's story, which is that spirits could act as witnesses, providing evidence that something had occurred.⁵¹³

However, in other ghost stories which feature spirit photographs, the truth-telling powers of the camera are challenged. 'The Spirit Photograph' (1863) by the American, Seely Register, was published in the popular *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, New York, only months after the first spirit photograph had been taken. In this story, whilst testimony of spiritual presence is sought, what was most desired was some kind of communication from the departed. The camera is expected not just to take pictures of what may or may not have appeared from the spiritual world, but to proactively assist with the conveyance of a 'spiritual telegraph'. A grieving husband, Dudley, is persuaded by his friends to visit a spirit photographer, after admitting that he awaits a 'message' from his dead wife. A perfect spirit photograph, showing the beautiful wife, Eleonora, is produced, and Dudley apparently receives the proof he desires of her spiritual existence. However, the message (and twist to the story) is that

⁵¹³ Richard Marsh, *The Seen and the Unseen* (Chicago: Valancourt Books, 2007) p.22.

Eleonora is not, in fact, dead. A friend who heard news of her survival suggested she appeared to her husband as a spirit 'extra' in a photograph, in order to soften the shock of her reappearance. By eliminating the spirit, the story returns to a 'real' footing, thereby appearing to conclude on the side of the sceptics. Supernatural photography, the story appears to say, is a tricky business and appearances may be deceptive.

Notwithstanding the fact that the image obtained is not a genuine spirit photograph, the narrator does not reject spirit photography out of hand. When he is asked what he thinks of spirit photography, he is non-committal: 'It's rather a new thing, even with the Spiritualists themselves. I have not made up my mind about it'. But he does opine that a message received in this way would be highly 'acceptable' and 'convincing', which suggests he is open to receiving spiritual messages in this form.⁵¹⁴ Ultimately, the fact that there was no spirit does not detract from the fact that the image conveyed a powerful message, albeit it changed from one proving spiritual presence to one which spoke of marital love.

When Eleonora appears, the wife is described in romantic, ethereal terms, echoing the discourse of wonder utilised by Spiritualists to describe séances:

She seemed almost to float, so light was her poise as she bent over his shoulder. Her golden hair, for which she had been so admired in her life, wandered about her throat and shoulders as if the breezes of heaven were at that instant stirring them. She appeared to be robed in some ethereal texture, clasped by a girdle at the waist, and flowing in full folds about her limbs.⁵¹⁵

The description pre-empts Crookes's account of séance photographs with King, in which he similarly emphasised the ethereal beauty of her presence, and describing her 'robed in flowing white drapery'.⁵¹⁶ Even though we later find out that Eleonora is no ghost, the supernatural atmosphere is not so easily suppressed. The narrator's style conjures up a ghostly atmosphere. There is a 'peculiar influence permeating our very souls', and 'each of us perceived an intangible *something* which thrilled us beyond speech'.⁵¹⁷ In describing the photographic process, the narrator uses awed tones,

⁵¹⁴ Register, p.123.

⁵¹⁵ Register, p.124.

⁵¹⁶ Crookes, p.106.

⁵¹⁷ Register, p.123.

which echo the mystical language of proto-photographers like Talbot or social commentators like Wendell-Holmes. The narrator seems surprised by the photographer's 'matter-of-fact air' given he was about to 'catch and fix the fleeting shadow of the immortal soul divested of its garment of earth.' The narrator observes the 'strange mixture of the material and spiritual', in the 'preparation of chemicals' and the 'arrangement of screens and burnishing of glass' juxtaposed with the 'ethereal light' and spiritual atmosphere.⁵¹⁸ This blur between the discourses of the photographic and the supernatural, the worldly and the other-worldly, is symptomatic of this new type of haunting, which began with Spiritualism and was perpetuated by supernatural photography. However, the fact that Eleonora turns out to be alive, means that the integrity of the spirit photography, and its indexicality (testifying to '*that-has-been*') have been compromised. The image appeared to be a spirit photograph but in fact was simply a photograph.

In the later story, 'The Spirit Photograph' (1888), by Cyril Bennett, the writer similarly sports with the possibility that a spirit photograph has been taken – although this time by accident.⁵¹⁹ Mansell reportedly dies whilst hiking in the Himalayas, leaving his distraught wife, Fanny, who laments that she does not even have a photograph of him. A neighbour, Lord Undercroft, makes overtures to the widow and separately encourages her to take up photography. One morning the amorous Lord shows her some 'spirit photographs' and they discuss the Spiritualists' view, that "'we are constantly surrounded by spirits, invisible to the naked eye, yet sufficiently substantial to affect the highly sensitised photographic plate.'" ⁵²⁰ When the photographer-medium takes the image, he explains, "'the bereaved sitter then sees in the completed picture the spirit whose presence he was unconscious of when the likeness was being taken'" ⁵²¹ Although he appears sceptical of their veracity, Undercroft suggests that for Spiritualists, the chief value of spirit photographs lay in their provision of testimony concerning the existence of the departed. He also intimates his expectations of what a

⁵¹⁸ Register, p.123.

⁵¹⁹ *Murray's Magazine*, 3.15 (March 1888) 361-372.

⁵²⁰ Bennett, p.365.

⁵²¹ Bennett, p.365.

modern ghost would look like: no clanking chains or sheets, but embodied and “sufficiently substantial” to appear on a sensitised plate.

When Fanny takes three photographs of her house, she is surprised to see a curious ‘dark patch’ appearing in the centre of the house and foreground. Once developed she suddenly sees something else:

Great heavens! What was this? For an instant Fanny stood motionless as a statue, staring at the negative. The blood in her veins seemed turned to ice; her breath came fast; her brain reeled. The outline of the house formed a frame round a portrait. *She was gazing at her husband’s face.*⁵²²

She decides instantly that it must be a spirit photograph, and that the image is her husband’s ghost, returning to her in anger following her ‘friendship’ with Lord Undercroft. Awaking from a faint, she comes face to face with her flesh-and-blood husband, who is in fact alive, as he survived the accident and managed to return home. He apparently anticipated that his image might appear in the photograph and intended this shock to constitute revenge against poor Fanny for consoling herself with another man whilst he was away. In the end, the two happily reunite, Undercroft moves away and all is forgiven on both sides.

As with Register’s story of the same name, the spirit photograph does not turn out to be real, as Fanny is not in possession of all the facts (her husband is alive), which problematises the idea that spirit photography could provide credible proof of the afterlife. The image proves to be false testimony. However, the spirit photograph does function effectively as a means of conveying a message. The husband chose this bizarre way to get in touch with his wife, letting her know he was alive and that he disapproved of her relationship with her neighbour. There is something about the visual and supposedly supernatural form of the spirit photograph which made him think it would serve as an appropriate means of driving his point home. Echoing Register’s story, it must have occurred to the husband that his message ‘could hardly come in a more acceptable or more convincing shape than this.’⁵²³ This suggests that, at minimum, both characters are aware – one ready to exploit, one receptive to seeing

⁵²² Bennett, p.369.

⁵²³ Register, p.123.

– the new type of modern ghost, which conveyed a message or a story more strongly than words.

In Marryat's novella, *The Dead Man's Message* (1894), spirit photographs function both as testimony and as a means of gaining the attention of the living. After her unsympathetic father dies, Madeline is made aware of the presence of her dead mother by way of a photograph, in which she sees “two other figures, standing behind us.”⁵²⁴ Initially unaware of the identity of the figures, Madeline and her step-mother seek a medium who declares that it is the “spirit photograph” of Madeline's mother. The medium issues the following words, supposedly from Madeline's mother:

‘Assuredly it was I, my child. Who else could have imprinted my features on the camera, when, as you know, the only likenesses ever taken of me were locked away in your father's writing table? I did that as a test, as something that should startle you and arrest your attention, as nothing else could have done. People might have talked to you of Spiritualism (as they did to your poor father) and only made you more obstinately resolved to believe nothing but what you chose; but I knew the sight of my features would make you pause and think. And I have been successful.’ (p.92)

The mother describes how the spirit photograph was an effective means of communicating with her daughter, persuading her daughter that she was real (p.92). The idea that spirit photographs could be persuasive is reiterated by the medium Mrs. Blewitt, who owned that her own mother was converted to spirit photography by means of a supernatural image: “though she had been dead set against it before, but there was no going against her own eyes” (p.82). Whilst this is a simplification of the ‘seeing is believing’ argument, which by this point had become problematised (as the previous two stories indicate), the point remains that the image of the dead mother impacted on her more powerfully than words would have done.

Like the other spirit photograph stories, Marryat's story endorses the new model of ghost that Spiritualism and spirit photography brought to the fore: the active, corporeal ghost that ‘arrests your attention’, offers messages and even touches the living, uninvited. At the beginning of the story, when Madeline's unkind father, the Professor, dies and becomes a spirit, he is able to walk around, to touch and feel, just like he did on earth. In fact, his haptic sense seems sharper than ever, as he touches

⁵²⁴ Florence Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2009) p.71. Further references will occur parenthetically in the text.

the head of his own dead body, noticing the feel of the fabric on his skin: 'His hands wandered about the soft-cushioned velvet, as he spoke to himself, until they rested on the top of a man's head' (p.25). When uncovering the truth about the spirit photograph, the medium asks about the photographer who took the image, Reynolds, stating that he must be a 'powerful medium'. Madeline refutes this, claims that he was 'astonished' when he saw the 'extra', and was not a Spiritualist. The medium replies, "That won't signify, Miss, if so be as he has the gift. The spirits will find him out, sure enough. He won't be able to keep out of it. If they want his work, he'll have to give it to them" (p.83). The medium describes spirits that are proactive, tactile, agents, with the power to impose upon whomsoever they wish.

Whilst the ghosts in these stories are very different, they offer an insight into the recalibration of the image of the ghost, which was altering in the wake of Spiritualism and supernatural photography. Whilst the stories by Register and Bennett emphasise that there are no spirits involved, they both perpetuate (or at least, do not shut down) the possibility that spirits *could* appear in photographs – and the characters are easily convinced (at least initially) that such ghosts could appear in an image. These are false testimonies, not because of fraudulent photography, but due to a misunderstanding of the facts in each case. Moreover, these fictive spirit photographs demonstrate that, notwithstanding their position on the truth or otherwise of the images, the supernatural photograph can pack a powerful message. They offer a new kind of modern haunting, in which spouses, children, parents or law-enforcers, could get in touch with spirits through means of a photographic, 'spiritual telegraph' (like the equivalent of *Facetime* or *Instagram today*), which is a far cry from the often speechless communication of the insubstantial, white-sheeted ghost of old.⁵²⁵ Lastly, in each case, the spirits that appeared were recognisable, corporeal and physically close, at times even touching the living, which ideas appeared to echo (or in some cases, pre-empt) the images of Mumler, Houghton and Crookes, which were circulating at the time.

⁵²⁵ Doyle, *History*, p.32.

Part III — Material Materialisations

The other singular thing is the copious drapery in which these forms are almost always enveloped, so as to show only just what is necessary for recognition of the face and figure.⁵²⁶

As I have discussed in the previous Part, supernatural photography was ostensibly driven by the desire to obtain tangible proof of the existence of the spirits.

D'Esperance commented that her own attempts to gain spirit photographs were motivated by the desire 'to give [us] something tangible to our senses', and this aim to acquire tactile proof of the supernatural was a key driver behind Spiritualists' interest and preoccupation with 'drapery' – the flowing material which covered the ghostly faces and figures in the spirit photographs.⁵²⁷ Following the production of supernatural photographs, drapery could be analysed, interpreted and would, it was hoped, provide the key to understanding this new type of haunting. Moreover, from an iconographic perspective, drapery became synonymous with the new type of ghost which dominated in the wake of Spiritualism and supernatural photography.

The white-sheeted ghost had a longstanding position in British supernatural iconography. In his comprehensive history of supernatural culture, Davies reports that the existence of the clichéd ghost wrapped in white material stemmed from the ancient global practice of wrapping and burying the dead in winding sheets or shrouds, either with or without a coffin. Although this practice abated in the nineteenth century, during which the middle and upper-classes tended to bury their dead dressed in normal or specifically prepared mourning clothes, the cliché of the ghost in a white sheet persisted in literature and in pranks, which were perpetuated by Gothic literature, such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796).⁵²⁸ In Wilde's comic ghost story, 'The Canterville Ghost' (1891), a white-sheeted ghost attempts to terrorise an American family who move into a haunted house in an English stately home. In a twist on the usual ghost story, the ghost is in fact hounded and distressed by the family, who are impervious to his attempts to haunt them. In one scene, the Canterville Ghost is

⁵²⁶ Wallace (1875), p.198.

⁵²⁷ D'Esperance, p.15.

⁵²⁸ Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. by Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2016); Davies, p.20.

arrayed in his winding sheet, expecting to scare the inhabitants: 'For a moment he paused there, the wind blowing his long grey locks about his head, and twisting into grotesque and fantastic folds the nameless horror of the dead man's shroud.' However, the ghost is surprised by yet another apparition in a winding sheet. In terror he flees, 'tripping up in his long winding-sheet as he sped down the corridor'. He is then appalled to discover that the other apparition is in fact a fraudulent ghost, established by the children of the house with the assistance of 'a white dimity bed-curtain, with a sweeping-brush, a kitchen cleaver, and a hollow turnip.'⁵²⁹ The fact that the white-sheeted ghost is the subject of satire and fun indicates that, by the fin de siècle, it had lost its fear factor and was regarded chiefly as a prop for pranksters. Davies notes that, despite the persistence of this supernatural cliché, in fact 'only a minority of ghosts were seen in their winding sheet or shroud' in 'real life' sightings, and 'the image was more of a stereotype, exploited by hoaxers and used in literary and pictorial representations over the centuries.'⁵³⁰

In Mrs. Molesworth's 'Unexplained' (1888), a young girl describes her experience of seeing a ghost. She justifies that it must be real, on the basis that if it had emanated from her imagination (or 'fancy') she would have pictured what she perceived to be an orthodox, pre-Victorian ghost:

'If it had been a fancy ghost it wouldn't have looked like that – it would have had a long white thing floating over it, and a face like a skeleton perhaps. But to see somebody just like a regular gentleman – I could never have fancied that!⁵³¹

She expects to have seen the clichéd, white-sheeted entity of urban legend, perhaps with the face of a skeleton (sounding like the ghost in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, dressed in a hermit's cowl with the face of a skeleton) and the 'real' ghost that she sees – looking embodied and human – she regards to be evidence of a new type of modern ghost.⁵³²

⁵²⁹ Wilde, 'The Canterville Ghost', pp.216-7.

⁵³⁰ Davies, p.20.

⁵³¹ Mrs Molesworth, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Mrs. Molesworth* (Driffield: Oakpast Ltd, 2011) p.70.

⁵³² Walpole, p.92.

Given the existence of this stereotype, it is initially unremarkable that ‘extras’ in spirit photographs and ‘spirits’ in séance photographs usually appeared draped in white material. As well as aspiring to credibility by aping a known stereotype (people were more inclined to believe there was a ghost in a photograph if it looked as a ghost ‘should’ look), it was also a convenient and arguably credible uniform for photographed ghosts. It was easy to obtain, due to the success of importing and spinning cotton in Britain since the industrial revolution and, being a neutral costume, the sheet avoided the practicalities of presenting ghosts in historic costumes originating from the time in which they had supposedly lived.⁵³³

However, following the advent of supernatural photography, the amount of drapery and the detail around or upon it, assumed new significance, and it tended to be a favourite point on which Spiritualists’ descriptions would focus. Here I differ from Warner, who regards the ‘white, immaterial wraiths’ in which the spirits appeared in spirit photographs to be a continuation of the iconography of the Middle Ages.⁵³⁴ Whilst I agree that aspects of these spirits appeared similar (white, material, shroud), both photographs and observers’ accounts suggest that the drapery was more detailed and varied than the simple white sheet of the ancient ghost. In addition, percipients interpreted the drapery in a different way, which in turn, meant that the drapery told a more sophisticated narrative than that offered by the clichéd spectre of old. Observers frequently noted its qualities, quantities, fabric and the nature of the folds. In one of the images created by Houghton and Hudson, she identified a ‘veiled figure clad in white’, in which the drapery is beautifully transparent, and flows very gracefully, so that as an ‘artistic specimen it is charming’. In another plate, she described:

That of a female, a little in advance of me, with a sort of long narrow flowing veil touching the ground both at the front and back, but it is worn in a fashion very unlike anything I have ever seen, leaving an opening through which we have a glimpse of a dark robe.⁵³⁵

In a different photograph, Houghton notes how ‘the veil is delicately embroidered, and is so transparent that the twisted ornament of the chairback [sic] is seen through it as

⁵³³ Warner notes how cotton wool was invented by a doctor, Joseph Sampson Gamgee in the nineteenth century, which, along with cheesecloth, was the most used spirit substance (pp.230-231).

⁵³⁴ Warner, p.224.

⁵³⁵ Houghton, p.14.

it floats down to the ground on the right-hand side, and something of it seems to be seen *under* the chair'.⁵³⁶ In these examples, the transparent, flowing nature of the drapery sounds like that in Register's story: delicate, ethereal, capable of feats of intermittent transparency and opacity as suits the spirit in question and supposedly reflecting the fluctuating state of embodiment of the returned spirit. Houghton notes the 'great variety' of draperies produced by the spirits, and the 'exceedingly various' nature of the fabric, 'ranging from a gauze-like transparency to rich satin-like folds'.⁵³⁷

For Houghton, drapery did not just fulfil an aesthetic function. It also provided its own spiritual narrative. She regards the picture of 'a spirit without any covering except a cloth wrapped around his loins' as symbolic of his moral lack on earth:

I am told by my unseen teachers that it is one who, while upon earth, lived for *self* alone, weaving himself no garments for eternity by clothing the naked, therefore he is himself now naked and earth-bound; for one bare foot is planted on the ground, while the other is laid on that of the sitter, as if to implore his aid to rise out of his forlorn condition.⁵³⁸

The image reportedly tells a story, in which the clothing (or lack of) relays the moral fabric of the spirit, as does the position of the spirit in relation to the sitter. Wallace's writings belie a similar understanding of drapery as symbolic of the condition of the soul, when he says 'we are all of us, in every act and thought, helping to build up a "mental fabric", which will be and will constitute ourselves, more completely after the death of the body than it does now.'⁵³⁹ He envisages an afterlife in which a spirit's clothes tell of their earthly goodness.

Houghton also thought drapery could help elucidate whether the supernatural photograph was genuine or not. She comments that one of the key indicators of a 'sham' spirit photograph is 'the dead inertness of the drapery', which is 'so totally unlike the spirit garb, in which there is, if I may so term it, a species of *vitality* which is completely wanting in our earthy garments'.⁵⁴⁰ She also reads significance in the colour of the drapery, interpreting the appearance of blue drapery to mean 'devotion to Him', although she notes that the colour of the drapery could not be seen in a

⁵³⁶ Houghton, pp.62-63.

⁵³⁷ Houghton, p.38.

⁵³⁸ Houghton, p.38.

⁵³⁹ Wallace (1875), p.215.

⁵⁴⁰ Houghton, p.74.

photograph and must necessarily be added by real-time observers.⁵⁴¹ Houghton's comments on colour serve as a reminder that we are so naturalised to expect nineteenth-century photographs to be black and white that we often forget to question the colour that may have actually been seen at the time. The image we see is not a true 'double' of the reality beheld at that moment.⁵⁴² This point about colour is also a prompt to question what other information there is concerning the circumstances of the spirit photograph that we do not have visible access to.⁵⁴³ In any event, what emerges is that for Houghton and other Spiritualists, drapery was not merely aesthetic, it held the key to spiritual status, vitality, and the truth or otherwise of the spirit photograph.

The manifestation of Katie King by Cook nearly always involved copious white drapery, which dominated her appearances. The *Spiritualist* (1874) reports one sitter's observation that, 'in the case of Miss Cook's Katie it [the drapery] is always white as snow, and the dress varies in shape nearly every evening', commenting, 'it feels material enough.'⁵⁴⁴ Another observer, quoted in the *Spiritualist* (1873) thought that the spirit was connected to the medium by 'cloudy, faintly luminous threads'.⁵⁴⁵ A further sitter records in the *Spiritualist* (1872) that Katie said 'that the white fabric enveloping the head was spirit drapery, made in part from substances contained in the dress of the medium'.⁵⁴⁶ A writer in the *Spiritualist* (1872) quotes a sitter who claims that Katie apparently asked the gentlemen present at the séance to give her a pair of scissors, 'and she was seen cutting a piece off her white head-dress. She gave the piece to one of the sitters present, and told him to keep it, as it was sufficiently materialised to be permanent. It [the fabric] was something like calico, but excessively fine and soft.'⁵⁴⁷ Lastly, in another séance of 1874, the *Spiritualist* reports that the sitter went

⁵⁴¹ Houghton, pp.76-77.

⁵⁴² Lindsay Smith observes the 'naturalisation' of black and white and the 'forgetting of colour' experienced by the Victorians, and the huge impact that the introduction of colour had in the early twentieth century, in her essay 'Photographic Portraiture and the forgetting of colour', *Journal of European Studies*, 30 (2000) 91-110; pp.95-96 (p.102, pp.108-9).

⁵⁴³ As Berger comments, 'The immediate relation between what is present and what is absent is particular to each photograph.' What is left out of a photograph conditions its meaning; p.20.

⁵⁴⁴ 'Spirit Forms', *Spiritualist*, 1 May 1874, pp.205-208 (p.207).

⁵⁴⁵ 'Spirit Forms', *Spiritualist*, 1 Feb 1873, p.83.

⁵⁴⁶ 'Private Seances', *Spiritualist*, 15 Nov 1872, p.6.

⁵⁴⁷ 'Mr Henry Cook's Seances', *Spiritualist*, 1 Dec 1872, p.39.

and checked the nature of the material with a tailor but they reportedly said they could not match it, but believed it to be ‘of Chinese manufacture’.⁵⁴⁸

Drapery was often said to be produced in order to save spiritual power. In one séance in February 1873, the sitter reports that ‘some of the heads are bound up in white spirit drapery’ in order ‘to economise power, as the heads would not last so long were they bare, and wholly materialised.’⁵⁴⁹ Wallace concurs that the ‘human form is more difficult to materialise than drapery,’ and Houghton cites Wallace in arguing that the conventional “‘white-sheeted ghost’” was not, then, all fancy, but had a foundation in fact.⁵⁵⁰ Drapery therefore played an important role in Houghton’s philosophy of spirit photography in various ways. It allowed for the easier production of spirits (as it required less spiritual energy to produce than human matter), it provided a symbolic manifestation of the spirit’s moral qualities whilst on earth, and it could act as a helpful indicator of the photograph’s veracity. It becomes clear that for Houghton, the drapery in which spirit extras appeared was not merely a conventional trope or convenient costume. Instead, it was an essential part of the iconography of, and narrative behind, the supernatural photograph. For the first time, the material substance of the ghost became an important characteristic, one which could be analysed, interpreted and touched.

Part IV — The Ectoplasmic Medium

Ghostly manifestations progressed from material drapery to the flesh. Whilst spirit photographs had, arguably, advanced the claims of Spiritualism, Mumler and other suspected fraudulent practitioners had simultaneously discredited them. More tangible proof was required which must, of course, be photographable. As Warner comments:

Photographing ghosts, capturing souls, was a way of contacting the imponderable forces shaping the universe and ourselves as participants in its order; but visible evidence of light

⁵⁴⁸ ‘Spirit Forms’, *Spiritualist*, 1 May 1874, p.207.

⁵⁴⁹ ‘Spirit Faces’, *Spiritualist*, 1 Feb 1873, p.83; ‘Spirit Forms’, 12 Dec 1873, pp.451-454 (p.451).

⁵⁵⁰ Wallace (1875), p.198; quoted by Houghton, p.207.

traces did not satisfy the cravings for proof felt by experimenters who had adopted a laboratory model for psychical research.⁵⁵¹

From the 1890s, Spiritualists and psychic investigators believed that a substance called 'ectoplasm' was 'the basis of all physical phenomena.'⁵⁵² First coined by the French scientist (and later Nobel Prize winner), Professor Charles Richet, the word 'ectoplasm' came from the Greek, *ektos*, 'outside' and *plasma*, 'something that can be formed or moulded.'⁵⁵³ It was believed to be the material substance behind spirit forms, faces and drapery. At the end of the century, ectoplasm became an increasingly fleshy phenomenon, which Warner describes as 'strings and veils and folds of gooey, smelly, haptic ectoplasm, which flowed or dribbled from the medium's mouth or ear or even other orifices'.⁵⁵⁴ Whilst bizarre, grotesque and often horrifying, the development of ectoplasm marked an important stage in supernatural thinking, as it constituted a clear indication that perceptions of ghosts were becoming more corporeal. As Warner observes, the ectoplasmic movement existed on a paradoxical plain of 'making visible the invisible, of rendering material the immaterial.'⁵⁵⁵

The most well-known and accomplished of these ectoplasmic mediums was Marthe Béraud, who started mediumship in Algiers in 1905. After talk of an exposure, her mediumship ceased, until she emerged again, four years later, in Paris, practising under the name of 'Eva C', and enjoying the protection of a prominent French Spiritualist, Juliette Bisson. She developed a reputation for her unusual 'manifestations', which consisted of what Jolly termed 'the slow painful extrusion of wet organic matter from the visible body of the medium, which gradually formed itself into an entity,' usually from her mouth, navel or between her legs.⁵⁵⁶ She captured the attention of Richet and the celebrated doctor, Baron Schrenck-Notzing, who held a number of séances with her over years, taking numerous photographs and publishing 150 of these in his *Phenomena of Materialisation* (1914), which was translated and

⁵⁵¹ Warner, p.248.

⁵⁵² Doyle, *History*, p.10.

⁵⁵³ Warner, p.290.

⁵⁵⁴ Warner, p.291.

⁵⁵⁵ Warner, p.290.

⁵⁵⁶ Jolly, pp.64-65.

published in Britain in 1920.⁵⁵⁷ The psychic investigator Theodore Besterman describes Eva C's mediumship in his *Some Modern Mediums* (1930) as 'one of the most important in the history of the paraphysical phenomena of psychical research' on the basis that she was the first medium to produce this new type of organic spirit matter.⁵⁵⁸

There are many strange aspects to Eva C's mediumship, but the first to note is the 'material' nature of the ectoplasm she produced. At first, she apparently produced cloud-like masses, like cobweb, and then these later became more like paper or fabric in their texture, which Schrenck-Notzing described as 'fragments [...] mostly in drapery of veiling or cloth'.⁵⁵⁹ He initially thought that these cloth pictures had been tightly folded and smuggled into the cabinet and then produced from Eva C's body behind the curtain, under the cover of labouring moans and groans.'⁵⁶⁰ Yet he could not find evidence of how these had been achieved by means of fraud. He claims to have searched 'all the bodily orifices'. He experimented with the finest muslin and found he could only compress it to the size of a small apple, which he concludes that Eva C could not have imbibed. He gave Eva C bilberries to colour anything that was regurgitated, yet the manifestations did not emerge stained with the bilberry colour.⁵⁶¹ He ensured tight controls around the séance experiments, such as sewing Eva C into specially designed outfits to ensure she could not bring anything into the séance room.⁵⁶²

In 1920, Eva C came to London on the invitation of the SPR. The British psychic investigator and member of the SPR, Eric Dingwall, was an observer at a number of séances that took place and published a report on the experiments in 1922.⁵⁶³ Dingwall also commented on the 'material' or textile basis of a number of the manifestations. In one photograph (Figure 29), Dingwall describes how the medium

⁵⁵⁷ Alberto von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co Ltd, 1920). See also J McCabe, 'Scientific Men and Spiritualism', pp.444-445.

⁵⁵⁸ Theodore Besterman, *Some Modern Mediums* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1930), p.71. He follows this, however, with: 'Eva C's mediumship, if not conceived in deliberate fraud, was certainly continued in fraud, lived its life in fraud, and ended in fraud'.

⁵⁵⁹ Fischer, p.178.

⁵⁶⁰ *Phenomena*, p.26, p.269, p.111, p.131, p.213; and Jolly, p.67.

⁵⁶¹ *Phenomena*, p.275; and Jolly, pp.64-67.

⁵⁶² *Phenomena*, p.275; and Fischer, pp.179-180.

⁵⁶³ Eric John Dingwall, *A Report on a Series of Sittings with Eva C* (London: London S.P.R., 1922).

produced a 'ragged piece of light coloured substance' seemingly held by a 'white thread'.⁵⁶⁴

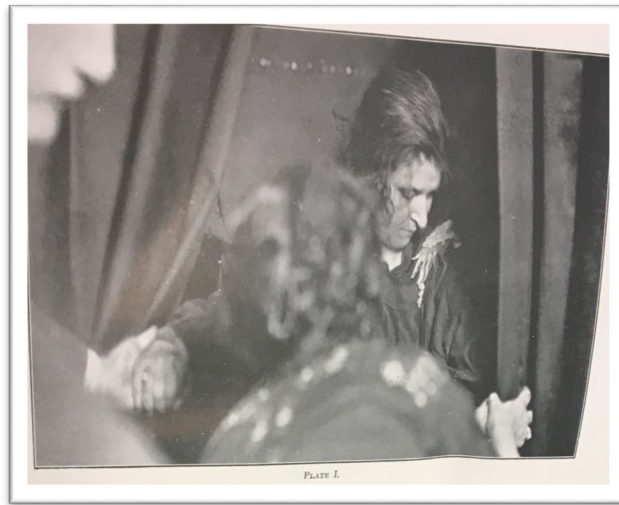


Figure 29. Eric Dingwall, *Plate 1*, in Dingwall's *a Report on a Series of Sittings with Eva C* (London: London S.P.R., 1922) p.232.

In another séance on 28 April 1920, he observes:

5.52pm: A dark sausage-shaped thing appears in front of the medium's face from her mouth. [...] W. says it is certainly solid. [...] It felt like fabric or material. W. says it appeared like a beard covering medium's mouth and chin with white strands at the bottom like a ribbon.⁵⁶⁵

Slightly later in the same séance (at 6.07pm), Dingwall reports how 'something appeared between medium's hands. B. feels it and says it feels like a soft veil.'⁵⁶⁶ The emerging spirit matter had truly become tangible, material, as if Eva C was regurgitating spirit drapery. The evidence of Eva C's material manifestations seems to contradict Kontou's argument that, following the SPR's investigations at the fin de siècle, 'phantasms became intimately linked to inner psychological states and desires'. Supernatural phenomena at this time appear to be more defined by their exteriorisation and materiality.⁵⁶⁷

One contemporary commentator, Joseph McCabe, was heavily critical of what he regarded to be the credulity of Eva C's supporters. In his article 'Scientific Men and

⁵⁶⁴ Dingwall, p.231.

⁵⁶⁵ Dingwall, p.234.

⁵⁶⁶ Dingwall, p.235.

⁵⁶⁷ Kontou, p.21.

Spiritualism' in *The English Review* (1920), he concludes that she must have used material in creative ways:

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle says, 'you see the ectoplasm pouring from the medium's nose, eyes, ears and skin.' [...] What you see at first are bits of chiffon or muslin, white gloves, possible inflated fish bladders, and other compressible and expansible articles, hanging from the medium's mouth or fastened to her hair or clothing or breasts or to the curtain.⁵⁶⁸

Similarly, he refers to a photograph in which Eva C appeared to be reaching for a cigarette. As both of her hands are visible, it is puzzling, but McCabe observes that the hand is in fact a bare foot, and what purports to be her face is a piece of muslin.⁵⁶⁹ He thinks it obvious that Eva C is a farce, and was using her stomach as a ruminant, and her other orifices to store light and compressible material.⁵⁷⁰

As McCabe suggests, these 'material' hauntings were not only the consistency of muslin but also felt fleshy to the touch. According to Bisson, who wrote up her own records of events, and often supplied Schrenck-Notzing with photographs and accounts, Eva C often operated naked, producing strings of bodily tissue and partially formed hands and fingers. In a strange mimicry of childbirth, she produced actual, tangible stuff from her body. Bisson apparently photographed 'a web of a substance, akin to intestinal connective tissue, stretched between her nipples and navel' (see Figure 30). In *Phenomena*, Schrenck-Notzing quotes Bisson, who records that on one occasion, she saw 'a thick thread emerge from the vagina' which moved 'with a sinuous serpentine motion of its own.' Bisson notes 'at one end of it the shape of an imperfectly materialised but quite recognisable hand.'⁵⁷¹ In these accounts, material merges with flesh (with an interesting hint of Genesis, with the medium Eve giving birth to a snake).

On other occasions, Schrenck-Notzing describes the effusions to have 'skin-like, hairy qualities' or be formed of a 'fur-like substance', although it is unclear if this is

⁵⁶⁸ McCabe, p.445.

⁵⁶⁹ McCabe, pp.445-6.

⁵⁷⁰ McCabe, p.447. Marina Warner examined a 'sample of ectoplasm' apparently 'captured' from the medium, Helen Duncan, from a séance in 1939, which, like the extrusions emanating from Eva C, was of a 'material' consistency: 'a folded heap of dressmakers' lining material, a cheap man-made fiber now yellowing white in colour'. It had been washed and ironed but the crumpled nature shows how tightly it had been wadded. It contained traces of blood; in 'Ethereal Body: The Quest for Ectoplasm', *Cabinet Magazine*, 12 (2003).

⁵⁷¹ Schrenck-Notzing, p.261 and pp.134-5.

man-made or human. 'The whole makes an impression more of rough fur or skin than of a woven fabric or a product of wood fibre', he explains.⁵⁷² Besterman is sceptical of Eva C and critical of Schrenck-Notzing and Bisson's reports, the latter of whom he thought was complicit in Eva C's fraud. Notwithstanding his scepticism, he reports that during the fourth sitting with the SPR in London, Eva C produced 'a small mass of hair, fibrous in appearance' which was photographed (although he regards this to be the result of faulty searching of the cabinet prior to the séance).⁵⁷³

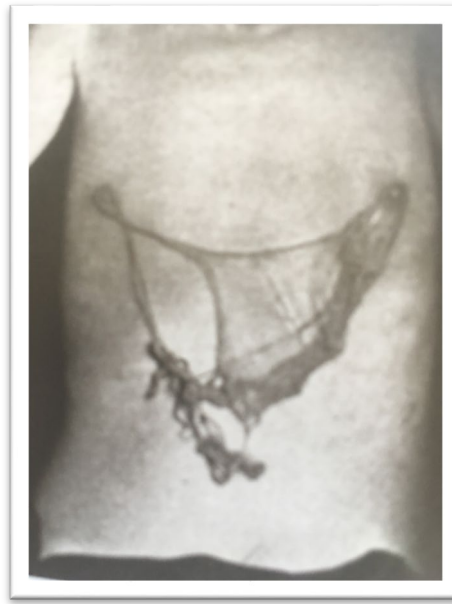


Figure 30. Juliet Bisson, *Figure 128: Flashlight Photograph of 5 January 1913* (retouched). Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisations* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co Ltd, 1920), p.216.

In a strangely metatextual commentary on the whole process, and a manifestation of the medium-as-camera, Eva C appeared to be producing images of spirits. The images which appear in Schrenck-Notzing's book are often supernatural photographs of supernatural photographs. Besterman describes how in the sitting of 8 May 1912, a face is clearly seen within the ectoplasm that Eva C produced:

The face is flat and in every respect like a print on paper. It has several unmistakeable creases where it was folded, and shows the marks of crumpling on its lower part. Surrounding it is a scrap of rag-like substance.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷² Schrenck-Notzing, pp.134-5.

⁵⁷³ Besterman, p.100.

⁵⁷⁴ Besterman, p.94.

He suggests the image may have been folded and rolled into the size of a cigarette and hidden on her body or in the back of her chair.⁵⁷⁵ Jolly describes the images she produced as 'mask-like, flat looking, crumpled, veiled with cloth, and often with real hair attached.'⁵⁷⁶



Figure 31. Eric Dingwall, *Plate IV*, in Dingwall's *a Report on a Series of Sittings with Eva C* (London: London S.P.R., 1922) p.260.

In 1914, Eva C was accused of reproducing images that appeared to have come from the illustrated magazine *Le Miroir*, as the 'ideoplasty' produced apparently showed the word 'miroir' and the images looked suspiciously like photographs of celebrities (such as President Woodrow Wilson, the King of Bulgaria and the actress Marie Leconte) from the magazine (see Figure 31 as an example). McCabe comments that:

The faces are quite obviously illustrations cut out of the French papers. The corners are sometimes curled, and they show the marks of scissors. One ghost is President Wilson, with a heavy cavalry moustache and a black eye; but the collar and tie correspond to a hair with the contemporary portrait of Wilson in *Le Miroir*, and the girl has not succeeded in entirely washing away even the tiepin (an American flag, apparently).⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ Besterman, p.94.

⁵⁷⁶ Schrenck-Notzing, p.111; quoted in Jolly, p.66.

⁵⁷⁷ McCabe, p.446.

He concludes by adding that the 'ghosts' created are so crude, 'so obviously flat paper-surfaces', that 'the effrontery of the medium is amazing.'⁵⁷⁸ Critics like McCabe thought that Eva C had sneaked the pictures into the cover of her chair, pinned them up whilst in the cabinet (he apparently found pin holes) and fished them out whilst in the privacy of the cabinet.

Uniting both material and photographic matter, Eva C also produced what appeared to be a photograph imprinted on material. In the séance, Dingwall reports that 'white threads' emanated from her body which together formed a 'white mass of indeterminate shape' and which presented the image of a child 'closely resembling a photograph'. It is as though, like a weaver or embroiderer, the medium has produced an image of a child — on fabric — or a supernatural entity has managed to imprint its image on the material and manifest itself through her.⁵⁷⁹ The notion that material could have a supernatural photograph 'imprinted' on it may have been inspired by the recent exciting publication of new photographs of the 'Turin Shroud'.⁵⁸⁰ This ancient relic was a strip of linen which, according to Roman legend, was the shroud used for Jesus's body after his crucifixion. In May 1898, Secondo Pia, an Italian lawyer and amateur photographer, took photographs of the holy relic for the first time (see Figure 32).⁵⁸¹ The photographs were revolutionary, in that they illuminated vivid marks which had previously been unseen by the naked eye. Formerly, the material shroud had provided a rough outline of the facial lines and body of Christ. Pia's black and white photographs showed 'a perfect representation of the face, hands and limbs of Christ, the general effect being that of a photograph of Christ and not of his shroud.'⁵⁸² The shroud was like a negative photograph, which had been transformed into a true 'positive' portrait. The findings triggered much debate at the time, which revived and re-emerged over various periods until eventually carbon dating in the 1980s proved it to be a 'fake', dating its actual origin as 1260-1390. Regardless, at the time that Eva C

⁵⁷⁸ McCabe, p.446.

⁵⁷⁹ Dingwall, p.246.

⁵⁸⁰ Warner also makes an analogy between the images received from the medium's body and the veil of Veronica. Warner, 'Ethereal Body'.

⁵⁸¹ David Sox, *The Shroud Unmasked: Uncovering the Greatest Forgery of All Time* (Basingstoke: The Lamp Press, 1988), p.12.

⁵⁸² 'The Holy Shroud', *Hull Daily Mail*, 15 June 1898, p.2.

was practising, there were significant numbers of people who believed that the shroud could have received the image of Christ through some means of supernatural photography. The discovery of the shroud would have made contemporaries more likely to have believed that material could be imprinted through a spiritual power.



Figure 32. Secondo Pia, *Photograph of the Turin Shroud*, 1898. Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne.

Returning to the images from *Le Miroir*, Schrenck-Notzing unsurprisingly disagreed with the sceptics, finding contradictions in their arguments and claiming that the actual magazine prints did not show the same details as the images produced by the medium. He argues that the images produced by Eva may have been the projection of her own memories, having observed the images in a publication before arriving at the séance. According to the historian, Fred Gettings, Schrenck-Notzing suggested that the images were two dimensional so as to economise on the use of the medium's teleplasmic matter, with which, Richet reportedly agreed: “the materialisation of a plaster head, or a lithographic print, is not in itself more absurd an idea than that of a human head, containing blood, movement and thought”.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸³ F. Gettings, *Ghosts in Photographs: The Extraordinary Story of Spirit Photography* (New York: Harmony Books, 1978) p.123; quoted in Jolly, p.69.

Richet's comment seems to look ahead to a kind of three-dimensional printer, with Eva C as the computer, producing ectoplasm as per spiritual instructions.

Doyle also agrees that Eva C's effusions are produced through supernatural power combined with Eva C's memory (as if her brain was acting like a camera in producing images of the past). He explains that the faces 'probably represent[ed] thought-forms from the brain of Eva C taking visible form, and a clear resemblance has been traced between them and pictures which she may have seen and stored in the memory.'⁵⁸⁴ Similarly, in *The Veil Lifted* (1894) the Spiritualist Andrew Glendinning suggests that:

The ghosts in the pictures might be images of dead people preserved in the memories of the living, or other images from their imaginations, mentally projected onto the photographic plate by the medium or by other participants in the experiment.⁵⁸⁵

The fact that Doyle and other psychic investigators think it feasible that the medium's brain could project a memory into a picture form demonstrates the way that memories were being blurred with photographs (which connects with my arguments in Chapter 1), and mediums with cameras (as per my arguments in Chapter 3). Like the supernatural photographs discussed earlier in this Chapter (albeit very different in composition), the images produced by Eva C not only ostensibly provided testimony as to the existence of spiritual power, but also provided a message, images which told their own story (and possibly that of *Le Miroir*). Gunning comments on the meta-textual nature of these pictures produced by ectoplasmic mediums: 'spirits are not simply captured in pictures; they communicate by a sort of picture language'. The fleshly extrusions they produced possessed faces and forms, which Spiritualists believed to be sent from 'the other world'.⁵⁸⁶ Gunning agrees that ectoplasmic mediums like Eva C were acting like cameras, with a negative spiritual body issuing forth a positive image from various orifices.⁵⁸⁷ Photographs, it appears, were perceived

⁵⁸⁴ Doyle, *History*, p.210.

⁵⁸⁵ 'Are they crystallisations of thought?' *The Veil Lifted*, ed. Andrew Glendinning (London: Whittaker & Co, 1894) p.34. According to Warner, there were mediums who claimed to be able to produce images of thought, or 'thoughtographs', by placing their hands on to a sensitised plate, without camera or lens; such as the doctor, Hippolyte Baraduc, who described his experiments with thoughtography in *The Human Soul, Its Movements, Its Lights, and the Iconography of the Fluidic Invisible* in Paris in 1896 (translated and published in England in 1913); Warner, p.259.

⁵⁸⁶ Reference to Oppenheim's text, *The Other World*.

⁵⁸⁷ Gunning, 'Phantom Images', p.58.

as viable objects through which the past could ‘keep in touch’ with us, even without the intervention of a camera.

Part V — The Material Ghost in M.R. James’s Fiction

By the early twentieth century, following the spread of Spiritualism and the circulation (through written articles, literature and images) of supernatural photographs, perceptions of how ghosts appeared had started to change. I have mentioned that as early as the 1860s, the press had described and printed images of spirit photographs (see Figure 26 of *Harper’s Weekly*). In the later part of the century, as Tucker has shown, the rise of the photographically illustrated press ‘expanded the culture of visual witnessing in new ways’ and ‘the trend of illustrating with photographs was radical as it opened up the archives of photography for all to see.’ Many regarded the dissemination of photographs as the birth of a new scientific visual culture and dozens of new illustrated magazines appeared in London in the 1890s.⁵⁸⁸ Therefore many contemporaries were exposed to spirit photographs in journals like *Pearsons* or in the celebrated journalist, W.T. Stead’s journal *Borderland*, which included articles on supernatural photographs which were accompanied by images.⁵⁸⁹

Moreover, there were public debates about the legitimacy of certain images, such as the ‘Cyprian Priestess’ of 1890 (Figure 33 below), taken by J. Traill Taylor via the medium, David Duguid, which was published in the *British Journal of Photography* (1893) and Glendinning’s *The Veil Lifted*.⁵⁹⁰ The ‘Cyprian Priestess’ was the image of a woman, which many Spiritualists believed to be a genuine spirit ‘extra’, until a Scottish solicitor discovered a remarkable similarity between her image and the photograph of a German painting called ‘Night’. Duguid denied knowing of this portrait and despite

⁵⁸⁸ Tucker, pp.111-113. Publications listed by Tucker include *Cassells* (1897), *Pictorial World* (1874-92), *Picture Magazine* (1893-6), *Pearson’s* (1896). Mainstream journals were interested in scientific photographs: including *The Strand* magazine, which published lightening photographs in 1893: Arthur Morrison, ‘Instantaneous Photographs’, *Strand*, 3 (1893) 182-189; quoted in Tucker, p.113.

⁵⁸⁹ Tucker, p.115-124.

⁵⁹⁰ See J Traill Taylor, ‘Spirit Photography, with Remarks on Fluorescence’, *British Journal of Photography*, 11.1715 (1893); and in Andrew Glendinning, *The Veil Lifted*, p.92; quoted in James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portraiture, and Other Rare but Allied Phenomena... With 90 photographs* (London: L.N. Fowler & Co, 1911) p.89, pp.94-102.

much publicity in the Spiritualist publications, *Light* and *Borderland*, he continued to claim her reality as a spirit extra.⁵⁹¹ Such controversies often permeated into commonly read journals and periodicals and thereby raised the profile of supernatural photography.



Figure 33. J. Traill-Taylor, *Cyprian Priestess, My Copy of the Enlarged Psychic Portrait*, from Andrew Glendinning, *The Veil Lifted*, in James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, p.85.

My contention is that, in the wake of Spiritualism and later supernatural photography, ghosts became more tactile, and were more likely to be defined by tangible haunting properties, such as drapery or flesh. This is apparent from the supernatural fiction of M.R. James, as I will show, but there are also suggestions of such a 'material turn' in the work of other writers. In terms of tactility, in Charlotte Riddell's 'Old Mrs. Jones' (1882), the malicious ghost of Mrs. Jones haunted by placing a cold hand on the shoulder: "'she came and touched me'", reported one child, and her brother agrees that, "'I saw her go up to Effie and lay her hand upon her.'" ⁵⁹² In Mrs. Molesworth's 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady' (1888), Lady Farquhar experienced a case of haptic haunting: "'I rushed down the staircase, brushing past the figure as I went: I use the word intentionally – I did brush past her, I felt her'", which she claims to be "'quite at variance with the sensations of orthodox ghost-seers.'" ⁵⁹³ The

⁵⁹¹ Coates, p.98.

⁵⁹² Charlotte Riddell, 'Old Mrs. Jones', *Night Shivers: The Ghost Stories of J.H. Riddell*, ed. by David Stuart Davies (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2008) p.182.

⁵⁹³ Molesworth, p.19.

percipient distinguishes her experience on the basis that its tactile nature seemed at odds with what she perceives to be the ghostly convention. Ghosts were starting to haunt with their bodies, with greater agency and impact than the pre-Victorian spirit had been perceived to possess.⁵⁹⁴ As Bann comments:

The ghosts of Spiritualism were no longer the dead, ethereal iterations of a type whose actions and motivations were determined by their metaphysical status [...] Their ability to act within a physical sphere evidence both their individuality and their liberation from the restrictions of mortality.⁵⁹⁵

H.D. Everett's ghost story 'The Death Mask' (1920) is a situation of 'material' haunting, which can be differentiated from the white-sheeted ghost, due to its sophistication and complexity. In the story the narrator is haunted by a handkerchief which, after being placed over his dead wife's face, was supernaturally imprinted with her features, in the manner of a death mask (or the Turin Shroud). The narrator describes how, when he put the handkerchief over her face, "it seemed to draw down over the features and cling to them, to nose and mouth and forehead and the shut eyes, till it became a perfect mask".⁵⁹⁶ The corporeality of the material ghost is emphasised (the material sounding like a second skin over the facial features), as is its malicious but determined power to alter familiar surroundings and oppress the haunted. Shortly later, he observes that "the handkerchief was moving [...] rapidly altering in shape [...] spreading and moulding itself into the features of a face. And what face should it be but the death-mask of Gloriana, which I had covered in the coffin eleven months before!" The ghost repeatedly emerges in material (embroidery, a napkin, a tablecloth), until eventually "some white drapery had been improvised and extended beyond it on the floor, presenting the complete figure laid out straight and stiff, ready for the grave". Horrified, the narrator's young fiancée cancels their engagement.⁵⁹⁷ Whilst the material 'death mask' has connotations of the Turin Shroud, it is also ontologically connected to the photograph, in the way that it appears

⁵⁹⁴ Another example of a mutually tactile haunting is, of course, Christie's 'The Last Séance', in which Madame Exe grabs the 'flesh and blood' child at the expense of the medium's body (see Chapter 3).

⁵⁹⁵ Bann, p.672.

⁵⁹⁶ Everett, p.12.

⁵⁹⁷ Everett, p.12 and p.14.

to imprint the features of the dead onto material in an indexical image that physically refers to its subject.

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The growth of this material, tactile ghost, along with the new iconography around spirit drapery and fleshy ectoplasmic forms, may have inspired the writer, M.R. James. Montague Rhodes James (1862-1936) was an English author, academic and provost of King's College Cambridge, celebrated for his ghost stories which usually reflect his antiquarian and Medievalist interests. However, as the critic Jacqueline Simpson observes, M.R. James is especially susceptible to 'particular aspects of the horrific', including spiders, thinness, hairiness, and hooded figures and 'linen drapery,' which emerge as recurrent supernatural themes.⁵⁹⁸ Simpson observes how a fear of material emerges in his autobiographical short story 'Vignette' (published after his death in 1936). In this story, M.R. James records how, as a child, he used to feel a sense of foreboding about a particular area of trees called the 'Plantation' after it turned to dusk and he thought he saw or sensed a cloaked presence in the trees. One afternoon he saw 'something white or partly white' and went to look through the hole in the door that led out to the Plantation. What he saw shocks him: 'it was not monstrous, not pale, fleshless, spectral. Malevolent I thought and think it was [...] and just above the eyes the border of a white linen drapery hung down from the brows.'⁵⁹⁹ The writer describes how 'horrifying' it is seeing a face looking out from its drapery frame. The boy fled but as he turned back, saw 'a draped form shambling away in the trees.'⁶⁰⁰ Simpson speculates that James may have experienced something along these lines as a child, which may have sparked a particular interest in draped figures and a sharp awareness of how a material exterior could provoke feelings of awe and terror. Whilst this may be a credible possibility, an obsession with the haunting possibilities of drapery is also likely to have come about following the circulation of increasingly

⁵⁹⁸ Jacqueline Simpson "'The Rules of Folklore" in the Ghost Stories of M.R. James', *Folklore*, 108 (1997), 9-18 (p.10).

⁵⁹⁹ M.R. James, 'Vignette', in *The Haunted Doll's House and Other Ghost Stories, The Complete Ghost Stories of M.R. James* (London: Penguin, 2006) II, p.210.

⁶⁰⁰ James, 'Vignette', p.210.

‘material’ ideas about the supernatural, which were perpetuated by supernatural photography and the effusions of the ectoplasmic mediums.



Figure 34. Frederic Hudson, *Florence Cook lying in a trance, with a spirit form behind her*, in Martyn Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography* (London: The British Library, 2006), Jolly, p.31.

Whilst, as I have mentioned, the image of the ‘white-sheeted ghost’ is an old established cliché, James does something more here in his invocation of the draped figure. Firstly, he uses the term ‘drapery’, which, as we have seen in the earlier part of this Chapter, became very associated with the discourse of spirit and séance photographers. Secondly, James is preoccupied with the very materiality of the ghost. He pays close attention (both in ‘Vignette’ and in other stories) to the type of material in question (cotton, linen, muslin), its texture, and the way it falls. As I will show, the part that drapery plays in his stories is distinctive. His ghosts are not supernatural beings that happen to be wrapped in white sheets, but they are defined by material: composed of it, killed by it, or absorbed in it after death. The very folds of the material in James’s stories are given emphasis and meaning — just as Houghton ascribed meaning to the vivacity and opacity of the drapery in the spirit photographs she contributed to. The ghost in ‘Vignette,’ with its ‘draped form shambling away in the trees’, calls to mind the images of drapery-wrapped ‘spirits’ propounded by Crookes

and Houghton, such as the Figure 34 of Katie King which, with its giant appearance, blur of drapery and covered face, appears reminiscent of the ghost in 'Vignette'. In James's stories, material has ghostly credibility and power, and its very materiality is a key part of its malignant identity – a far cry from the white sheeted ghost of folklore, mocked by Wilde in his 'Canterville Ghost'.

In the famous 'Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad' (1904), Professor Parkins is haunted by a material figure in the bed beside him.⁶⁰¹ After finding the whistle on the beach, he is pursued by a dark figure. After a night of unsettled dreams, the maid finds the bedclothes next to him in a dishevelled state: "'Why, all the things was crumpled and throwed about all ways, if you'll excuse me sir – quite as if anyone 'adn't passed but a very poor night, sir'" (p.74). The next day he finds the bedclothes ruffled whilst he was out: 'the clothes were bundled up and twisted together in a most tortuous confusion' (p.77). That night he is horrified to encounter a 'thing' in the bed next to him (p.79). After passing a frantic and terrified night, he throws the whistle back in the sea the following morning and the haunting subsides.



Figure 35. James McBryde, *It Leapt Towards Him Upon the Instant*, illustration for 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad' from M.R. James, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904).

⁶⁰¹ M.R. James, 'Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad', in *Collected Ghost Stories* (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2007). Further references to this story and the remaining M.R. James stories that I discuss below will be to this edition and will occur parenthetically in the text.

From first sighting, the spectral figure seen on the beach is associated with material, formed of 'pale, fluttering draperies' (p.73). Later, on the second night, when haunted by the undefined presence in the bed next to him, Parkins recalls seeing 'an intensely horrible, face of *crumpled linen*' (p.80). In short, it is a ghost composed of drapery, which is apparent from the illustration at Figure 35, which shows the spirit shaped in the 'material' form of the bedclothes. On the face of it, it appears to be another white-sheeted ghost. However, the malicious nature of the haunting, the specific mention of 'draperies' and the psychological effect it has on Parkins, suggests James is doing something far more sophisticated than regurgitating a cliché. Parkins's fear is very much focused on the feel of the fabric, and his horror is so great that it forces him to cry out and give away his position to the ghost:

With formidable quickness it moved into the middle of the room, and, as it groped and waved, one corner of its draperies swept across Parkins's face. He could not – though he knew how perilous a sound was – he could not keep back a cry of disgust, and this gave the searcher an instant clue. It leapt towards him upon the instant, and the next moment he was half-way through the window backwards, uttering cry upon cry at the utmost pitch of his voice, and the linen face was thrust close to his own. (p.80)

At the end of his encounter, Parkins faints and we are told that before him on the floor 'lay a tumbled heap of bedclothes' (p.80). On later investigation, Parkins observes that 'there seemed to be absolutely nothing material about it save the bedclothes of which it had made itself a body' (p.80). The idea that bedclothes could make up a body, with an invisible ruling spirit inside, is also reminiscent of a spirit photograph, in which drapery played such a significant part, dominating the form of the ghost, hiding the face and often providing the only clues as to identity and character (and in Houghton's thinking, spiritual condition). It is as if the ghost is a travesty of a spirit extra, turning on the passive sitter, who is disgusted by its 'material' form and terrified by the way that the linen hides its identity.

We are told that many years after his experience with the whistle, Parkins continued to be traumatised by the sight of a 'surplice hanging on a door quite unmoved' (p.81). Given that a surplice is usually a tunic of white linen or cotton (usually associated with Catholic worship), it sounds as if the Professor is unable to look at such a white tunic without being reminded of the terrifying being composed of

drapery that he encountered that evening. The narrator's pun in his description of there being nothing 'material' (substantial, based on matter) about the remains of the spectre save the 'bedclothes' (physical material, cotton, linen) asks questions about the nature of haunting: in the way that something can be both immaterial (on the basis that the spectre is invisible and intangible) and material (in the sense that it is composed of physical matter).

Drapery also features in a number of M.R. James's other ghosts. 'Canon Alberic's Scrapbook' (1894) is a story about an antiquarian who has a terrifying encounter with a devilish form that materialises from a drawing in an old book, sold to him by the sacristan of the church. The devil that appears is said to have 'black and tattered drapery about it' as well as 'coarse hair' (p.9).⁶⁰² Similarly, in 'Number Thirteen' (1931), the tale involves the mysterious appearance and disappearance of an extra room in the hotel. The inhabitant of the neighbouring room observes a shadow of someone inside the extra room thirteen, describing him as 'someone who covered his head with some kind of drapery before going to bed' (p.45). All that he can see is 'a fold of some light, perhaps white, material on the window-sill' (p.45). Eventually, the protagonist, along with his landlord and the occupant of a neighbouring room, manage to penetrate the room: 'in that moment the door opened, and an arm came out and clawed at his shoulder. It was clad in ragged, yellowish linen, and the bare skin, where it could be seen, had long grey hair upon it' (p.51). Again, the haunting is figured by drapery, in this case, ragged, yellow drapery, suggestive of linen that is old and frayed and associated with death – a nightmarish version of the white flowing drapery born by the 'extras' in Houghton's descriptions. It also manifests hair, which echoes of Eva C's ectoplasmic effusions, which are often formed of hair or fur.

In other stories, the drapery does not appear to be empowered by a human presence, but seems to kill on its own. In 'Two Doctors' (1919), one of the characters ends up being suffocated by his bedlinen. Doctor Quinn has dreams of his future death, in which he finds himself buried in what appears to be "'stuff, linen or woollen [...] shaped like the chrysalis of a moth'" (p.255). Following the dream, he feels

⁶⁰² M.R. James, 'Canon Alberic's Scrapbook'.

compelled to buy a new pillow and bed linen, and is found dead in the morning, suffocated, with a pillow over his face. His nightmare becomes a reality, in that he dies cocooned in fabric, swallowed up by supernatural powers formed of drapery. In 'An Uncommon Prayer-book' (1921), the book thief, Mr. Poschwitz, apparently dies following a poisonous bite by a 'great roll of old shabby white flannel' of four to five feet high. The association with spirit photography is compounded by the fact that Mr. Poschwitz poses as a photographer and uses his photographer's boxes to spirit away stolen books. A clerk, who watches the attack, describes his vision of the death in photographic terms: "'No, I only see it in a flash, but I took it in like a photograft – wish I hadn't.'" (p.279). It is as if he is the photographer, Mr. Poschwitz the unsuspecting sitter and the roll of material is the vengeful spirit 'extra' formed of drapery, that suddenly appears in the scene, seemingly out of nowhere, whilst Mr. Poschwitz's back is turned.

Lastly, in 'The Diary of Mr Poynter' (1919), M.R. James creates a ghost that has, literally, become part of the fabric. After Denton picks up some material from an old auction, new curtains are made which take on a terrible haunting power. He is chilled by a face peeping out between the curtains, and on another night, he is chased by a malevolent human creature formed of hair. It transpires that the material is formed of the 'rippling – almost curling – tresses of hair' (p.221) of a dead villain, which he had made into curtains in his room. Denton 'felt a soft ineffectual tearing at his back which, all the same, seemed to be growing in power, as if the hand, or whatever worse than a hand was there, was becoming more material as the pursuer's rage was more concentrated' (p.224). Again, James has punned here on the concept of 'materiality': in this context, meaning that the hand of the creature was gaining in strength and significance as the 'thing' became increasingly angry. But given that the beast had been part of the curtain material only minutes before and possessed the appearance of hair (like the fabric pattern), it appears that James is drawing the reader's attention to a double meaning of materiality which emanates, in this story, from a supernatural force. This story especially has resonance with the manifestations of Eva C, in the way the curtains became part of the haunting tale (an echo of the curtains in the medium's

cabinet) and, as I mentioned with 'Canon Alberic's Scrapbook' and 'Number Thirteen', in the association with the haunting, 'hair-like substance' that emerged from her body.

In each of these stories, M.R. James highlights the chilling nature of 'material' haunting. Ghosts could be formed of drapery, possess faces of 'crumpled linen', poison through fabric, envelop and suffocate like an insidious chrysalis, or chase by means of a hairy pair of curtains. Whilst it is unlikely that M.R. James was consciously referring to the drapery-clad figures of Houghton's *Chronicles* or the ectoplasmic mediumship practised by Eva C, there is a commonality in the type of haunting that is being written about by James and practised by mediums at a similar time. These parallels reinforce the idea that by the early twentieth century, a more 'material' type of haunting was being experienced, envisaged and had absorbed into fiction. James has of course transposed this materiality into a terrifying type of haunting, in which the living protagonists do not *choose* to be touched by the dead. I would therefore speculate that these stories by M.R. James respond, on some level, to the preceding decades of Spiritualism and supernatural photography and provide a nightmarish conclusion to the Spiritualist enquiries into the material reality of the dead.

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After the 1920s, spirit photographs and mediums began to diminish. There were other ectoplasmic mediums practising at the same time as Eva C, such as the American, known as 'Margery', or the Irish woman, Kathleen Goligher. The spirit photographer, Ada Deane, also continued to produce spirit images into the 1920s (including the controversial Armistice Day photographs of 1921-1924).⁶⁰³ However, most mediums ceased their photographic interactions with the spirit world in the 1930s.⁶⁰⁴ Popular interest in supernatural photography appears to have waned, perhaps due to the prevalence of accusations of fraud, and the improved technology (such as infra-red

⁶⁰³ For further information, see Jolly: on 'Margery' (pp.74-78); the Goligher circle (pp.79-84); and Ada Deane (pp.125-135).

⁶⁰⁴ As I mentioned in the Introduction, there are still isolated spirit photographs taken today, so the practice is still ongoing, but not to the same frequency, intensity or seriousness, as between 1870-1920.

light) which meant that séances no longer took place in total darkness and fraud was easier to spot.⁶⁰⁵

Photography (along with Spiritualism) helped to engender a more physical, material, and haptic understanding of haunting. In supernatural fiction, such as that of M.R. James, ghosts started to resemble spirit photographs. This potentially changing iconography is discussed in Mrs. Molesworth's 'Unexplained'. A little girl chats about the nature of haunting with an acquaintance, Mr Grenfell. She is puzzled by the apparently arbitrary appearance of the modern ghost, compared to what she regards to be the purposeful haunting that appeared in the 'thrilling ghost story'.⁶⁰⁶ Grenfell suggests she should think of a ghost as:

'Almost of the nature of a photograph, or the reflection of a looking-glass. I daresay we should have been terrified by these, had we not grown used to them, did we not know what they are. Somebody said lately what appalling things we should think our own shadows, if we had suddenly for the first time become aware of them.'⁶⁰⁷

Grenfell's explanation of ghosts maps the iconographic journey from shadows (the most basic), to mirrors, to the most recent metaphor for understanding ghosts: the photograph. His comments indicate that thinking of ghosts *as* photographs did not seem such a leap by the end of the nineteenth century, which had witnessed ghosts being photographed and numerous ghostly-looking photographs. The fact that the metaphor of ghost as photograph had become so natural and appropriate suggests how far the two had mutually haunted each other in the previous decades. Margaret replies, "I don't mind so much [...] when you speak of ghosts as a sort of photograph. But---" she hesitated⁶⁰⁸ – and the story ends with these words and her doubtful pause. Her ambivalence suggests dissatisfaction with the metaphor. Perhaps her fear of the supernatural had not been assuaged by the comparison with photography, or perhaps she was searching for something else, some other way to explain the unexplainable. We do not know. But for me, her uncertainty seems to symbolise that the period in which photography and the supernatural linked arms and marched

⁶⁰⁵ Fischer, *The Perfect Medium*, pp.182-183. However, note that Christie's stories on Spiritualist topics all date between the 1920s and the 1950s, which suggests that some popular interest remained in Spiritualism, at least as a subject for fiction.

⁶⁰⁶ 'Unexplained', p.82.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., p.84.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p.84.

together was coming to an end. Photography had provided a novel way of keeping in touch with the past and, along with Spiritualism and ghost stories, had contributed to the development of the complicated, tactile, material and 'flesh and blood' ghost which haunted the early twentieth century. But it stopped being a credible union.

There are various reasons why spirit photography remains an important chapter in supernatural (and photographic) history. I have drawn attention to the development from spirit photography's function as testimony toward that of communication and narrative which, helped by a context of supernatural associations from the phantasmagoria onwards, contributed to the development of film. As Jolly and Warner have both observed, the earliest films, such as G.A. Smith's *Photographing a Ghost*, and *The Mesmerist, or Body and Soul* (1898) or George Méliès' *The Spiritualist Photographer* (1903), were inspired by spirit photographs, using the same special effects of double exposure and superimposition which were reportedly employed by Spiritualists. Whilst poking fun at Spiritualism, they also relied on evoking the same kind of wonder at 'the uncanny visual world the new technology of the cinema was opening up'.⁶⁰⁹ Equally, Spiritualists seemed to invite this cinematic exposure, as they themselves ventured into the world of film, with Schrenck-Notzing reportedly taking a cinematograph of Eva C issuing ectoplasm.⁶¹⁰ Theories around mediums producing 'memory pictures externalised' indicates connections to new ideas about psychology and memory retention, but equally, could have been inspired by fin de siècle developments in film, which presented an exteriorisation of past memories.⁶¹¹ The relationship between ghosts and photographs continued in the new direction of the moving image, which continued to blur the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, the material and the immaterial.⁶¹² Therefore, whilst spirit photography is not so prevalent anymore, the images, stories and discourses that it engendered in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, show that it left a rich conceptual and iconographic legacy in its wake which, whether we realise it or not, underpins our relationship with the supernatural today.

⁶⁰⁹ Jolly, p.143; Warner, p.271.

⁶¹⁰ Doyle, *History*, p.211.

⁶¹¹ Jolly, p.123.

⁶¹² Davies, p.215.

CONCLUSION: “‘THINGS IN A DEAD MAN’S EYE’”



Figure 37. William Mumler, *Female "Spirit" standing next to a table with a photograph propped against a vase with flowers*. Albumen Silver Print, 9.8 v 5.7cm (1862-1875). The J. Paul Getty Museum.

In Rudyard Kipling's chilling story, 'At the End of the Passage' (1890), we are led to understand that a man dies with his last, haunting memory imprinted on his eyes.⁶¹³ Hummil, an engineer living in a remote outpost of the colonies, is disturbed by nightmares and shadows. When his friends discover him dead, they are most horrified by the appearance of his eyes. The narrator informs us that 'in the staring eyes was

⁶¹³ Rudyard Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', *The Penguin Book of Ghost Stories: From Elizabeth Gaskell to Ambrose Bierce* (London: Penguin Group, 2010).

written terror beyond the expression of any pen.’⁶¹⁴ The eyes convey a meaning and an impact more powerful than words. Hummil’s friend Spurstow, a doctor, studies them to see if he can identify any record of what Hummil saw before his death, commenting that, “‘Things in a dead man’s eye,’” are not something he can explain with “‘medical science’”. Having taken a photograph of the eyeball, he takes the Kodak camera to the bathroom and ‘after a few minutes there was the sound of something being hammered to pieces’ and then he emerged ‘very white indeed’.⁶¹⁵ He denies seeing anything but his pale, shaken demeanour, implies that he has seen something very horrible indeed.

Kipling is alluding to the photographic superstition that the retina could show a latent image of the last thing it saw before death, just like the film in a camera. In the late nineteenth century, this proposition attracted serious scientific interest. According to one contemporary article, Dr. Gamgee F.R.S., of Birmingham, experimented on a rabbit in 1877, and apparently successfully recovered an image. He fixed the animal’s gaze on a window, then swiftly decapitated the creature. On examining its eyeballs, they apparently exhibited ‘a nearly square sharp image with sharply defined edges’ of the size of about one square millimetre. This image was purportedly named an ‘optogram’.⁶¹⁶ Whilst this notion has no credibility today, it demonstrates the extent to which ‘photographic thinking’ had seeped into popular culture by the end of the nineteenth century, such that ‘optograms’ could be regarded by some as a potentially viable scientific development. This was no doubt due, in part, to supernatural photography, but also endorsed by photographic developments in the areas of astronomy, natural science and the human body (such as X rays and microscopic photographs), which made it an established possibility that the camera could elucidate the unseen. Kipling’s incorporation of this theme in the story is so delicately done, that it feels credible that the images of the past could be analysed through means of a camera and imprinted onto an eyeball.

⁶¹⁴ Kipling, p.220.

⁶¹⁵ Kipling, pp.222-223.

⁶¹⁶ ‘General’, *British Architect*, 7.9 (1877) 138.

Ghosts, memories and shadows are all implicated in this tale, as at one point Kipling describes the 'ghost' that haunts Hummil as 'the figure of himself', which then crystallises into the formation of a mnemonic photograph on the eye.⁶¹⁷ With its model of the brain-as-camera, this story could arguably be symptomatic of the internalisation of haunting which Terry Castle claims had occurred by the end of the century.⁶¹⁸ However, for me, this story more obviously gestures toward the graphic testimony that the body could provide as to the existence of *external* haunting. The 'eyeball' is the sensitive plate that has captured the image, which makes it a corporeal, exteriorised process, inspired by the technology of the Kodak. Moreover, the fact that this image is visible to the eye (with the assistance of the camera) proves that the ghostly shadows were not in Hummil's head. It enacts the theory that the ghost was a real and tangible thing, which was visible and photographable.

Returning to Groth's notion of the 'epistemic rupture' that took place when photography was invented in the nineteenth century, in this thesis I have argued that photography not only changed the way people saw the natural world, but also the way that they understood and engaged with that of the spirit. Photography helped to exteriorise the ghost, to release it from its nebulous, often white-sheeted state and make it flesh and blood. In the first decade following its arrival, the nascent photographic medium may well have inspired Dickens in his short stories, 'A Christmas Carol' and 'The Haunted Man', which both manifest a conceptual blur between memories and shadows, ghosts and likenesses. In these ghostly tales, we see how images of the past could articulate their own stories, and as a consequence, could change the course of the narrative of past, present and future. Dickens prefigures a world in which the photograph dominates the archives of national memory, a medium through which, like Hummil, people could tell surviving generations what had happened to them, after they had died.

Photographic ideas also infiltrated and regenerated ideas about portrait painting, contributing to a growing appetite for lifelike and authentic images, which influenced the formation of the NPG. In a seeming (albeit unstated) commentary on

⁶¹⁷ Kipling, p.219.

⁶¹⁸ Castle, p.144.

the daguerreotype, the popular 'magic portrait' of the mid-nineteenth century ghost story illustrated how portraits could capture 'life itself', telling their own stories, and in so doing, manifest a newly evolved creative partnership between art and the supernatural. Moreover, in certain other Victorian ghost stories, cameras contributed to a new kind of tactile haunting, in which characters appeared to meet and even fall in love by means of their photographs. In Hardy's 'An Imaginative Woman', we see how the photograph engendered what Dinshaw articulated (in reference to Barthes) as the 'somatic relation between bodies', in which a woman falls in love with a photograph and produces a child in the 'Trews' image of the man himself.⁶¹⁹ Touching a photographic image, these stories suggest, could give rise to an auratic connection with the subject, just as physical engagement with a relic provides a link to the worshipped deity. Photography helped shift haunting into something that was felt as well as seen, and in so doing, positioned the supernatural more firmly within our physical reach.

Photography was already ten years old when Spiritualism trembled into life. This ground-breaking religious movement of the mid-nineteenth century drew on photography to inspire its practices and validate its claims. Pictures of the dead were believed to be drenched with the 'personal magnetism' of the sitter, and drawing them into séances was believed to facilitate connection with the spirits. In Figure 37 above, Mumler's image of a spirit reaching out to touch a photograph neatly epitomises the popular belief that photographs facilitated a spiritual connection to the sitter, beckoning them from the land of the dead and into the middle-class parlour to join the séance. Elements of photographic culture presented themselves in the articulation of spiritual matters, such as metaphors of light, shadow, and exposure. Spiritualist visions seemed to echo contemporary photographs of exotic Eastern locations. The successful union of photograph and spirit in the nineteenth century facilitated the exteriorisation of the ghost, making it visible, touchable, and locatable.

The contemporary desire to draw the ghost out of the cabinet, literally and metaphorically, was evident in the transition toward spiritualist 'manifestations', in

⁶¹⁹ Dinshaw, p. 3, p. 51, and pp.80-81.

which spirit mediums purportedly acted as cameras, producing images of the dead. These new visitors to the Victorian séance, the 'spirit-guides' produced by mediums like Katie King or Elizabeth D'Esperance, appeared tangible, often described by sitters as 'flesh and blood' entities. Photographs of 'extras' that appeared in studio images spoke in a new language of drapery, with meaning articulated by texture, position and colour. They were analysed, touched, squeezed and prodded, prompting a new séance culture which redefined the concept of 'keeping in touch' with the dead.

In the early twentieth century, the 'materiality' of ghosts reached new heights. Spiritualism entered into the domain of 'ectoplasmic' phenomena, séance ghosts were formed of flesh and fur, or some appeared in picture-form, oozing from the medium's labouring body like a polaroid image from a camera. Ectoplasm may have inspired M.R. James in his creation of creepy spirits formed of ragged linen, haggard skin and hair. It became commonplace in mainstream supernatural stories for a ghost to touch the living, to invade our space, provide a cold embrace, to force their stories upon us. This was a new era of exteriorised haunting, in which spirits could constitute fleshy phenomena, that could not only be photographed, but could also take on photographic qualities (like Eva C's images, which were often 'printed' on material in a manner suggestive of the Turin Shroud). Reputable scientists like Schrenck-Notzing proposed that these ectoplasmic effusions were most likely ghostly visitors from the grave. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle suggested that, if not ghosts, ectoplasmic issue could constitute projected thought-forms emanating from the brain of the medium. His theory suggests that ideas around externalising the internal were not limited to the ghostly. Thought itself could potentially be captured on film.

Therefore, in the fin-de-siècle context of Kipling's story, in which many people believed that ghosts could be photographed and mediums could produce tactile 'manifestations' of the dead, it does not seem so incredible for the image of a ghost to be imprinted on the eyes of a dead man. Even now, although supernatural photographs are mostly relegated to the world of fiction, we are haunted more than ever by the shadow of photographic influence. Photographs have merged so effectively with our lives, that they dominate our communications, magnify our images of ourselves and shape our perceptions of what is real. Like Hummil, our eyes have

now become so overlaid by the ghosts of photographs, that we are frequently uncertain as to whether we are recalling memories or remembrances formed of photographs. In many ways, Mumler's spirit photograph of a female spirit standing by a table (Figure 37 above) epitomises both photography's promise to provide ontological certainty along with an insight into its limitations. Like the Ghost of Christmas Past, the spirit appears to gesture confidently to the 'shadows of the things that have been', as if the white-bordered photograph of the dead provided the key to spiritual truth and enlightenment. Yet, as the 'ghost' touches the photograph, the image of the spirit-extra and the photograph appear to melt into each other, white hand collapsing into white border, until they become indistinguishable, the real with the unreal, photographic evidence residing hand in hand with 'fake news'. Harnessing the haunting power of photographic media to keep in touch with the dead, our Victorian and Edwardian predecessors were therefore participating in a long and complex dialogue with photography, touching on matters of truth, reality and identity which has shaped (and continues to shape) our understanding of the world of the living and the dead to the present day.

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