

# The Fantastic of the Fin de Siècle



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Edited by

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## INTRODUCTION:

# (RE)SEARCHING FOR THE FANTASTIC OF THE FIN DE SIÈCLE

ZDENĚK BERAN AND IRENA GRUBICA

Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraints, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the enclosures of regularity.

Samuel Johnson

The title of the present volume suggests two fundamental questions to be considered at the very beginning: What is the fantastic? and What specific role does the fantastic play in the literatures and cultures of the English speaking countries at the end of the nineteenth century? Answering the first question seems quite straightforward since there has been much critical debate concerning the term over the last century, starting with works such as Dorothy Scarborough's *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (1917), and it has grown in intensity during the last four or five decades. Tzvetan Todorov's seminal study *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*<sup>1</sup> played a key role in this context. Its prominent position was ensured by the author's famous definition of the fantastic and by the overall conception in which he presented this kind of literature. No one coming after Todorov could neglect him: there have been several attempts to revise his theory of the fantastic, but none of the critics has rejected Todorov entirely, and the revisions eventually turned out, for the most part, to be only minor. Which does not mean they were unjustified.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published in French as *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970). The English translation was first published in 1973.

Several chapters in this collective monograph refer to Todorov's idea of hesitation, on which his definition rests: "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event." (Todorov 1975:25) This interpretive ambiguity includes both the character and the reader, although the character's participation may not always take place. Even here, in this attempt to provide a brief initial characteristic of the term, some objections arise. First of all, it is striking and perplexing that a structural analysis should depend on such an extra-textual aspect as the reader's response to a situation which is purely textual. Todorov saves his face, true, by claiming that he does not mean an actual reader but the implicit one ("the role of the reader implicit in the text" (1975:31)), but this does not make things clearer. The reader must finally decide between two options: either the event the characters are confronted with can be explained by the laws of nature, and then the reader experiences the uncanny; or the event cannot be explained by such laws and the reader experiences the marvellous. But is it really this implicit reader who decides about the shift in the genre, or is it the narrative strategy applied in the text – and thus the function of the narrator as an inherent part of the textual matrix – that is responsible for the final categorisation of what was believed to be a supernatural phenomenon? Is not the reader's decision a mere consequence of this? Furthermore, when the decision is made, the fantastic is abandoned, as we learn, for one of the adjacent genres, either the fantastic-uncanny or the fantastic-marvellous, which means that the fantastic can only exceptionally exist in its pure form. This is problematic especially in terms of generic classification, and Todorov indeed opens his study insisting that the fantastic "is a name given [...] to a literary genre" (1975:3). But if you find yourself in the fantastic only temporarily and then slip into something else, it indicates that what has changed was perhaps the method of representation rather than the entire genre. And so on and so forth.

The point of such objections is not to discredit Todorov's otherwise valuable and inspiring conception but to show in what way it has kept provoking other theorists of the fantastic ever since. Thus Christine Brooke-Rose, in her *Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (1981), believes that it is more practical to view the fantastic as an evanescent *element* rather than an evanescent genre (Brooke-Rose 2010:63). She does so primarily in order to discuss the fantastic in a broader historical context than Todorov does, arguing that the total ambiguity between two interpretations is a feature which applies to non-fantastic texts as well. As a result, we must either narrow our hesitation to supernatural occurrences only, "or treat such other



non-‘fantastic’ texts as a displaced form of the fantastic, which is what I shall be doing in this book” (Brooke-Rose 2010:65). This conception allows her to argue against Todorov’s third requirement of the fantastic, which is the rejection of both poetic and allegorical readings (in favour of a “literal” one), and eventually to raise questions concerning the more general nature of the act of the reader’s hesitation:

Is not the pure fantastic, with its absolute ambiguity, a (historical) prefiguring of many modern (non-fantastic) texts which can be read on several and often paradoxical contradictory levels, and which would thus all be modern developments of medieval allegory? Is not the very condition that defines the pure genre (or evanescent element) merely a particular (historical) manifestation of a more general feature (at least two contradictory readings) which can and perhaps should be found in all sophisticated (complex) narrative, at any time, with varying degrees of predominance and various types of manifestation according to the period? (Brooke-Rose 2010:71)

Brooke-Rose revises Todorov’s view – making a nuance on his constraint, as she calls it – to be able to justify a rhetorical analysis of even more recent texts of the fantastic (which Todorov would very probably exclude from the genre), since this strategy fits her theory of the loss of significance of the real, a tendency that intensifies throughout the twentieth century. Thus the fantastic is for her one of the characteristic strategies by which we escape the burden of an unbearable, meaningless situation and delve into an alternative reality endowed with significance by our desire. In her 1981 study *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, often quoted by the authors of the following chapters, Rosemary Jackson also employs the word “desire” when she asserts that the fantastic “traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’”. For her “[t]he movement from the first to the second of these functions, from expression as manifestation to expression as expulsion, is one of the recurrent features of fantastic narrative, as it tells of the impossible attempt to realize desire, to make visible the invisible and to discover absence” (Jackson 2003:4). Using the terms “fantastic” and “fantasy” rather promiscuously, Jackson believes that this kind of writing is produced within, and determined by, its social context, and she considers the lack of attention to the social and political implications of literary forms in Todorov’s book to be a major drawback of his structuralist approach. She therefore sets out to extend his investigation “from being one limited to the *poetics* of the fantastic into one aware of the *politics* of its forms” (Jackson 2003:6); yet what she does is, basically, elaborate the methodological framework suggested by

Todorov and apply its tenets, in a more or less modified way, to a number of fantastic tales from Gothic fiction to Pynchon.

If we eventually learn only a little about the specific conditions that have determined concrete works of the fantastic, her discussion of other features of this literary form is nevertheless illuminating. Developing Irene Bessière's conception of "relationality", i.e. fantasy texts' position in relation to the real (Bessière uses Sartre's terms "thetic" and "non-thetic" narratives), Jackson introduces the metaphor of a paraxial area to show that the fantastic exists in a symbiotic relation to the real, "suspended between being and nothingness" (Jackson 2003:20); in other words, that it cannot exist as absolutely isolated from the actual world. Her approach thus provides a more complex view than some previous theories which were based on a simple binarism, such as Eric Rabkin's concept of the ground rules.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this vantage point enables Jackson to include other aspects of the fantastic: polysemy, the dialogical character as opposed to the monological character of the "realistic" novel, non-signification (the inability to name a mysterious phenomenon versus a proliferation of names referring to no actual objects; in short, a disruption between signifier and signified, which prompted Sartre to define the fantastic as "a *language* of peculiarly empty utterances"). She also expresses dissatisfaction with Todorov's polarisation of the marvellous and the uncanny (the uncanny not being a literary category) and proposes a different dichotomy, that of the marvellous and the mimetic. This leads her, significantly, to the rejection of Todorov's idea of the fantastic as a genre; instead, she argues that the fantastic should be understood as a mode: "It is possible [...] to suggest a definition of the fantastic as a *mode*, which then assumes different generic forms." (Jackson 2003:35) The implication is that it seems no more possible to employ the reader's hesitation as a defining factor, and that representation should be discussed instead. Though making an important step ahead in this respect, Jackson is still close to Brooke-Rose, as far as her critical method is concerned. In fact, both critics acknowledge their dependence on Todorov: while one evades the word "critique" as being too strong "for an author I admire" (Brooke-Rose 2010:62), the other only admits her intention "to modify Todorov's scheme slightly" (Jackson 2003:35). And modification is in principle what both of them do.

In the following decade, the Canadian literary critic Nancy H. Traill announced her decision to revise Todorov's theory of the fantastic

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<sup>2</sup> Rabkin defines the fantastic in the following way: "One of the key distinguishing marks of the fantastic is that the perspective enforced by the ground rules of the narrative world must be diametrically contradicted." (Sandner 2004:170)

substantially. Her study *Possible Worlds of the Fantastic: The Rise of the Paranormal in Fiction* (1996) is methodologically anchored in the theory of possible worlds of fiction, as developed by the Toronto school of literary criticism and in particular by its founder Lubomír Doležel.<sup>3</sup> Traill first dismisses Todorov's idea of hesitation as unsubstantiated: she maintains that the hesitation of the implicit reader is a mere *consequence* of the dynamism of what Doležel calls the "alethic opposition", i.e. the opposition of physically possible and physically impossible worlds. What characterises these oppositions is their modality: the physically *possible* world is not the actual world but one submitted to the same laws as the actual world. This brings Traill to her definition in which the model of the fantastic is based on a global semantic feature: "a work is fantastic if the fictional world is made up of the two alethically contrastive domains, the natural and the supernatural" (Traill 1996:9). To avoid abstraction, Traill considers it necessary to create a typology of fantastic modes which would enable her to compare and distinguish various narratives of the fantastic depending on the genre and historical period (since she believes that the rise of each mode is conditioned by a specific cultural situation). The basic criterion of her typology is *authentication*, the degree to which the narrator is able to authenticate fictional existence of the supernatural region; in this respect, the omniscient third-person narrator is granted the highest authority, while the first-person narrator the lowest.

Traill's typology distinguishes five modes: the disjunctive mode (in which the natural and the supernatural have the same status of fictional existence); the fantasy mode (with the predominance of the supernatural); the ambiguous mode (where the supernatural exists as a potential explanation); the mode of supernatural naturalised (where the supernatural is in the event explained rationally); the paranormal mode (in which the supernatural is a latent part of the natural, such as clairvoyance etc.).<sup>4</sup> Rather than being a radical departure from Todorov's conception, this classification relates to it in two ways. First, it circumvents the problem of the fantastic as an evanescent genre: what Todorov defines as the

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<sup>3</sup> For the theoretical basis of his conception, see his *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (1998).

<sup>4</sup> It is clear that Traill understands the term "mode" in a more specific sense than Jackson. At the same time she rejects Todorov's conception of the fantastic as a genre – because the fantastic cuts across genres – and proposes to approach it as "a *universal aesthetic category* [which] may take any of a number of artistic forms" (Traill 1995:7; original emphasis). This only testifies to the fact that the ruling tendency of the critique of Todorov's theory is to grant the fantastic a more universal status.

marvellous and the uncanny as the two adjacent genres into which the reader may slip becomes part and parcel of Traill's typological diapason of the fantastic. Second, it attempts to solve the methodological flaw of Todorov's book, with which Traill seems dissatisfied: instead of showing the intensity of the reader's hesitation and its causes, Todorov swerves, in the second half of his book, to a different topic, a discussion of the themes of the self and the themes of the other as the basic thematic distinction in the works of the fantastic. The concept of narrative authentication substitutes for this omission.

Traill's study might have signalled a new development of the critical history of the fantastic, but instead it seems to have remained a solitary attempt. David Sandner did not include a passage from it in his *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (2004), and as Elisa Bizzotto demonstrates in her discussion of the term, recent critics tend to develop Jackson's conception rather than Traill's. Similarly, Farah Mendlesohn perhaps only tacitly numbered Traill among "other definers" of the fantastic in her *Rhetoric of Fantasy* (2008); she herself vaguely echoes Todorov saying: "I believe that the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief" (Mendlesohn 2008:xiii), though she supports her historicising view with a quotation from Wayne C. Booth. Nevertheless, as this brief (and very selective) survey shows, the term still challenges contemporary critics in the same way as the genre/element/mode challenges new authors of fantastic tales.

The second question posed at the outset is even more intriguing and perhaps also more difficult to answer. Todorov believes that the fantastic is a typical nineteenth-century genre, which "appeared in a systematic way around the end of the eighteenth century with Cazotte; a century later, we find the last aesthetically satisfying examples of the genre in Maupassant's tales" (Todorov 1975:166). The reason for its decline can be found, Todorov believes, in the rise of psychoanalysis which replaced the fantastic as a vent for people's sexual desires and moral inhibitions. In this sense, the fin de siècle may be viewed as the period when fantastic writings reached their zenith, or, to alter Mario Praz's notorious title, the time of "fantastic agony". Rosemary Jackson explains why the nineteenth century invited the fantastic as one of its productive literary expressions: fantastic tales proliferate during the nineteenth century as an opposite version of the realistic narrative, giving utterance to those elements which are absent within a dominant "realistic" order (see Jackson 2003:25). This implies that the fantastic played a subversive role *vis-à-vis* the

monopolising bourgeois voice of the monological realistic novel; or, in Todorov's words, it was "the bad conscience of this positivist era" (Todorov 1975:168). Nicholas Ruddick notices that the Victorian fin de siècle produced a higher concentration of fantastic fiction than any period before or after and offers a specific reason: Darwinism. "In fin de siècle Britain," he argues, "novelists who wanted to address questions about essential nature and fate of the human animal tended to encrypt their fictions in the fantastic mode." (Ruddick 2007:191) This is perhaps too narrow a view. We may agree that Darwinism played a central role in the general sense of crisis which was then projected into fantastic tales, but there was more to it: the process of the socio-economic transformation of the country, industrialisation, was completed at the end of the nineteenth century and Britain definitely became an industrialised, urbanised, modern *Gesellschaft* society – fragmented, anonymous, heterogeneous, with escalating class conflicts and other hostilities; traditional certainties had disappeared in almost all spheres of life, including language<sup>5</sup>; the value system was thus increasingly ambiguous (where exactly was a position of the Darwinian human creature on the scale of life?); the traditional realistic novel became outmoded towards the end of the century and new literary forms were sought to replace its popularity; rapid scientific progress, including such disciplines as psychology, brought new challenges. The nightmares of the times materialise in various ways and the intensity of fantastic images in literature and art reflects the intensity of real nightmares. The British fin de siècle is in a sense an apocalyptic time; its fantastic literature is its Apocalypse.

The aim of this collective monograph is to delineate various relations between the fantastic and the fin de siècle, and to contextualise their historical and cultural significance. The essays included in this collection, therefore, encompass a wide range of approaches to the fantastic. They seek to explore the ways in which the fin de siècle reflects the fantastic and its relation to the genesis of aesthetic ideas, to the concept of terror/horror, the sublime, the concept of evil, to Gothic and sensation fiction, to the Aesthetic Movement and the Decadence. They also raise the following question: in what ways does fantastic literature reflect the dynamic and all-too-often controversial development of the concept of the fantastic? At the same time, most of the essays investigate a broader context of specific social, political and economic conditions that frame the fantastic of the fin de siècle. The topics of the essays presented in this

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of some of these frustrations, see e.g. Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957) or Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (1986).

collective monograph range from various theoretical considerations of fantastic literature to analytical approaches to its genres and sub-genres. They explore the relation of the fantastic to the predominant aspects of fin de siècle aesthetics as it features in some of the canonical works of the period. Many of them problematise the fantastic in relation to the issue of gender and the construction of identity, in particular female identity, and elaborate on the figure of the *doppelgänger* in that context. Furthermore, they examine how fantastic genres use narrative manipulations, how they incorporate various ideas of scientific development and progress by highlighting the role of religion, cultural anxiety and social crisis, as well as the use of the fantastic for various purposes of cultural and social subversion. Fin de siècle fantastic literature is also explored across cultures, as reflected in Scottish, Canadian, Australian, American and British writing, with particular emphasis on some of their predominant cultural or generic aspects, the genesis of the fin de siècle fantastic in some of these cultures and literatures and their relations to a wider historical and cultural framework.

The monograph opens with reflections on one of the central figures of the fantastic and the supernatural, that of the ghost. In his essay, Tamás Bényei problematises the role of the ghost and ghost stories in an age when the concept of spectrality features as a predominant trope in theoretical discourse. Adopting a theoretical and historical approach, he addresses the issue of the apparent irrelevance of ghosts and the contested significance of ghost stories in contemporary culture in which theorising ghosts, as he says, prevails over the interest in ghosts proper. One of his basic arguments is that, beginning with Walter Benjamin's meditations about photography and with Horkheimer and Adorno's unfinished sketch about "The Theory of Ghosts", a theoretical climate has been created "in which there is hardly any aspect of modern existence and culture that has not been theorised as spectral". Bényei establishes historical relations between fin de siècle and modern theoretical concerns about the ghosts by underscoring the connection between the revival of theoretical interest in ghosts and an increasing interest in the Gothic themes of Victorian literature which both exert an unprecedented cultural fascination. However, he maintains that ghosts proper (and the ghost story) seem to have been left out of this interest, "both apparently subsumed into a general concern with the Gothic, the uncanny and an extended cultural sense of spectrality". He structures his essay around the question: what happens to ghosts and ghost stories in this age of spectrality? In response, Bényei proposes a close reading of two fin de siècle ghost stories, Oscar

Wilde's "The Canterville Ghost" (1887) and Richard Marsh's tale "A Set of Chessmen" (1890).

Aiming at further extension of the theoretical insight into the fantastic, as well as at historicising some specific aspects of the fin de siècle fantastic, the following essay by Elisa Bizzotto elaborates on the concept of "the aesthetic fantastic". According to her, "the aesthetic fantastic" relies on the codified devices of the fantastic modes "such as the motifs of the double, of diabolical pacts and vampirism, or of bodily fragmentation and dissemination, but also, more dogmatically, the carnivalesque-like subversion of hierarchical structures and social, political and genderic order" employed "as vehicles for aesthetic ideas". Bizzotto argues that "the aesthetic fantastic" emerged from the proliferation of fantastic literature in the British fin de siècle, a historical period which saw "an urgency to redefine the nature and role of art and the artist". She contextualises her ideas in the historical importance of the Aesthetic Movement and its influence on the development of fantastic literature. Her propositions are in line with those theoreticians that consider the fantastic a mode rather than a genre. Therefore, she proposes to examine "the aesthetic fantastic" as a submode of fantastic literature intertwined with the poetics of Aestheticism. According to Bizzotto, what lies at the core of "the aesthetic fantastic" is the contention that the fin de siècle fantastic can assume (meta)aesthetic functions, as suggested by Rosemary Jackson who claimed that the fantastic also embodied strong social and subversive potential. In her essay, Bizzotto delineates an initial corpus of texts that, as she maintains, exemplifies "aesthetic fantastic" fiction, and focuses on presenting some of their most illuminative features. The three major texts she refers to are the imaginary portraits "Denys l'Auxerrois" (1887) by Walter Pater, "Dionea" (1890) by Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), in which the expression of aestheticism is closely related to the fantastic. She also discusses John Meade Falkner's *The Lost Stradivarius* (1895) and Aubrey Beardsley's *Under the Hill* (1896). While she considers the former to be a paradigmatic example, she discusses the latter with some reservations, arguing that the novel should be approached in light of Beardsley's outspoken concerns with the grotesque, and therefore should be classified as a variation of "the aesthetic fantastic".

The two authors, Wilde and Lee, whose works Bizzotto considers as the pillar of "the aesthetic fantastic", are again brought into focus in Elena Pinyaeva's essay, which continues to explore intricate and abundant fin de siècle relations to aestheticism. Her essay constitutes a shift in the monograph from an overtly theoretical engagement with the fantastic to an

extended analytical approach. Pinyaeva examines “the reworking of the forms and contents of modern myths and the deployment of the Faustian theme in its connection with the cult of beauty” in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Vernon Lee’s “The Virgin of the Seven Daggers” (1927). Her essay reveals interesting parallels and intersections between the expression of fin de siècle ethical anxieties conveyed through the combined myths of Faust and Don Juan, and similar challenges imposed on the representation of individualism in modern society, particularly those related to the subversive use of irony.

While the opening essays discuss canonical authors of the Aesthetic movement who made considerable contributions to fantastic fiction, the following essay by Michal Peprník takes a detour from it, but still focuses on a canonical fin de siècle author unavoidable in the discussion of the fantastic and the Gothic, Robert Louis Stevenson. The link between tradition and modernity, which Pinyaeva also explores in her analysis of the fin de siècle reworking of the modern myths of Faust and Don Juan, remains one of the concerns of Peprník’s essay. Yet, this link is highlighted not from the thematic and ideological, but from a narratological point of view. On a broader level, Peprník explores multiple versions of nuanced narrative manipulations that stem from the intrinsic development of the fantastic and are closely related to its subversive textual, cultural and social potential. He traces the contours of the relations between tradition and modernity by analysing Stevenson’s narrative experiments, and credits him for the invention of a new and modern narrative technique in his short stories *New Arabian Nights* and *The Dynamiter* – the narrative mosaic. He defines the technique of the narrative mosaic as “a series of relatively autonomous but at the same time interconnected tales told from different narrative perspectives. These tales are independent in the sense that each of them can stand on its own and be printed or reprinted separately because they are not episodes of a serial novel”. Stevenson’s technique also reveals the extent to which some features inherent in the fantastic could be engaged with the play of chance in order to actively involve the reader in an intricate and deceptive play of the imagination. Stevenson’s narrative playfulness and subversive textual games reflected in the treatment of the real and unreal, as Peprník amply illustrates in his essay, anticipate similar narrative experiments of modernism.

The fin de siècle canon of fantastic literature is further explored in Sophie Mantrant’s analysis of Arthur Machen’s major works, as well as in Philip Healy’s and Claire Bazin’s essays on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Facing the bulk of existing criticism on these canonical works,



their essays seek to add some innovative approaches. Sophie Mantrant briefly revisits the relevance of aestheticism and the Decadent Movement for the fantastic literature of the fin de siècle in order to position Machen's works in relation to them. Her main interest, however, is not the expression of the fantastic in relation to the theme of beauty, but to the theme of evil and to what is often referred to as the thread of diabolism in Machen's works. In her exploration of the "sacraments of evil" in his fiction, Mantrant focuses on the word "sacrament", which designates "an array of symbols pointing to higher spiritual realities". The mysterious signs "intimate the presence of the other 'real' world but without revealing it". She explores the recurrent image of the veil interwoven in Machen's fictional world through an abundance of puzzling signs, cryptograms and codes that need to be deciphered. Her main concerns therefore include the relation of the fantastic to the mysticism which reflects the new spirituality and the quest for transcendence that marked the fin de siècle. Mantrant also elaborates on Machen's use of the pagan myths and legends as well as religious symbolism.

Catholic symbolism, which is often embodied in a number of recurrent motifs in fin de siècle fantastic literature, is further explored in Philip Healy's interpretation of Stoker's *Dracula* from both linguistic and historical points of view. Healy focuses on the consecrated Host as the main innovative motif that Stoker introduced in dealing with vampirism, which was quickly adopted in other fin de siècle vampire stories. He also examines very closely the reworking of the Scholastic doctrine of transubstantiation in Stoker's novel. The starting point of Healy's discussion is the fact that the religious dimension of Stoker's language has been largely overlooked by critics, which encouraged him to explore it as the central theme of his essay. He discusses it in close relation to scientific progress and the development of technology, which fostered the fin de siècle intellectual climate. Healy is particularly keen to explain why Catholic symbolism permeates Stoker's novel despite his Irish Protestant background and, moreover, why it assumes such a positive function in the novel. These two basic questions, in his view, call for a historical approach. His essay as a whole seeks to contextualise historical changes and new attitudes towards Catholicism in British society at the fin de siècle as they reflect in the use of Catholic symbolism for the expression of the fantastic.

In contrast, Claire Bazin adopts a significantly different approach to Stoker's *Dracula* and introduces another thematic concern of this volume, the relations between fin de siècle fantastic literature and issues of gender. Taking into account geographical, cultural and racial readings of Stoker's

novel, Bazin's essay sets out to explore the geography of *Dracula* in terms of territorial conquest and geographical conflict between the East and the West, i.e. the periphery that attempts to colonise the centre, through various metaphorical extensions that embrace very complex gender conflicts, sexual transgression and trans-gendering. In line with Rosemary Jackson's contention that the oxymoron is the basic trope of fantasy, Bazin also elaborates on the oxymoronic patterns, the pattern of paradox and inversion in Stoker's novel, reflected in gender constructions, by examining various identifications in the novel which challenge gendered boundaries. However, Bazin's main aim is to "discuss how the novel goes from order (West) to chaos (East) back to order (West)".

Željka Švrljuga's essay further explores the relations between the gothic-fantastic genre and gender politics. A relatively little-known story, "The Giant Wistaria" (1891) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, provides a substantial platform for her in-depth analysis. She adopts the widely accepted assumption that the Gothic genre with its roots in the uncanny (as Švrljuga notes, in Freud's *unheimlich* whose "German etymology is embedded in the concept of home" but also bears "the meaning of 'mysterious' and 'cryptic'") offers rich material for examining the representation of gender relations. Švrljuga's essay addresses the themes of femininity, female sexuality, motherhood, and patriarchy, which also lie at the heart of Lizzie Harris McCormick's, Emma Domínguez-Rué's and Enrichetta Soccio's essays. What distinguishes her approach is the analysis of the gender politics of Gilman's text in relation to the story's resistance to the law of the genre and to the narrative procedure that makes the narrative cryptic. Švrljuga therefore considers the story's gender dynamics and structure, as well as its lexicon and mechanism of signification, and adopts "a cryptonymic approach". In addition, she explores the culture/nature dichotomy through, as she notes, "the mystery of the house/wistaria nexus".

While both Bazin and Švrljuga briefly mention hysteria, which was originally considered a female disease at the time, but deal with it only in passing, in the next essay, Lizzie Harris McCormick examines more extensively the relations between fantastic fiction, female imagination and medical discourses that "frequently aligned women's imaginative process with psychiatric illness", including hysteria. In her analysis of Mathilde Blind's romance *Tarantella* (1885), Vernon Lee's ghost story "Oke of Okehurst" (1890) and Una Ashworth Taylor's "Truce of God" (1896), McCormick amply illustrates how all these authors, whom she addresses as proto-feminist, use the fantastic as a subversive vehicle for conveying their radical ideas about femininity, imagination and artistic creation. As

she notes, “in much of the era’s mainstream fantastic fiction, female characters displaying imaginative or creative power are coded as hysterics, a move that frequently emphasises the ‘pathology’ of their creativity while marginalising its agency”. McCormick argues that the authors she discusses, each in her own distinguished way, work against the grain and use fantastic and complex supernatural scenes as means of female empowerment.

Female rebellion against patriarchal principles, gender and class hierarchies, as well as hegemonic discourses of reason expressed through the subversive potential of Gothic fiction, are the main thematic concerns of Emma Domínguez-Rué’s essay which analyses Ellen Glasgow’s stories “Dare’s Gift” (1917) and “The Past” (1920). She deals with the conventional motifs of the Gothic house and the Gothic doubling of the self in Glasgow’s story by exploring the ways in which their representation challenges the patriarchal definitions of women. Pursuing similar thematic interests in her essay on the short stories by Charlotte Riddell, Anna Enrichetta Soccio explores those conventions of Gothic fiction that describe the ongoing changes in society and in the family. The focus of her essay is the motif of haunted houses and the incumbent supernatural. She explores them as more than mere settings where the supernatural resides. In an era when women’s writing gains power through the fantastic, they can be considered as *topoi* through which social and class relations are projected into “an alternative social scenario in which fantasy is free to express its destabilising and creative power”.

Fin de siècle fantastic literature boasts a plethora of genres, some of which overtly thematise the turn-of-the-century socio-economic changes and scientific advancements. The science fiction of H. G. Wells and Edward Bellamy encapsulates these changes and articulates their utopian projections in the future. Éva Antal’s essay examines the oscillation in their narratives between the mimetic and the marvellous, i.e. between the ways in which these narratives convey the realities of their time, and their utopian projection into nightmarish visions of England and the United States in the distant future, visions that haunt these texts as a persistent spectral presence. Utopianism tallies with the overall intellectual and social atmosphere of the fin de siècle, a period that was burdened with high expectations raised by the ongoing scientific progress, while facing deep frustrations and social anxieties. Given its equivocal ontological status, the fantastic offered a possibility to express these profound ambiguities.

As Iva Polak’s essay shows, utopianism was not a phenomenon unique only to European fin de siècle literature – it was also a common

phenomenon in other cultures at the turn of the century. Polak's essay is the first among the three concluding essays that examine the fantastic across these different Anglophone cultures. She delineates two opposing literary strands in Australian literature in the final decades of the nineteenth century; one grounded in documentary realism and related to the promotion of nationalist mythology, and the other dealing with lost civilisations, alien invasions and utopian societies relying on the conventions of the late nineteenth-century scientific romances that appeared in England and France. Her essay focuses on G. Firth Scott's *The Last Lemurian* (1898), a novel which belongs to the genre of "Lemurian" or "lost race novels". She examines it through the lens of Propp's morphology of the folktale in order to illustrate the way in which early Australian science fiction maps the Australian hinterland with the Victorian belief in the prehistoric continent of Lemuria. In a similar fashion, Klára Kolinská's essay singles out one of the most prominent representatives of Canadian fin de siècle fantastic literature, James de Mille, in order to discuss the most recognisable characteristics of his writing in the light of the development of the Canadian science fiction novel, but also, at a broader level, in order to interpret de Mille as an early precursor of postmodernism. The monograph closes with Tom Hubbard's essay, an extensive survey dealing with a wide range of authors, offering a comprehensive landscape of fin de siècle Scottish art and its relation to the fantastic. It also brings us back to the beginning of our discussion, to the problem of defining the term "fantastic" given the implied range of potential meanings in such an extensive survey. Hubbard understands the fantastic in a very broad sense and interprets it in the light of Todorov's conceptualisation of the fantastic as "hesitation". He relies on the Scottish word "unco" which approximately translates as "uncanny," and argues that it is quite compatible with Todorov's "fantastic". Given the relevance of "unco" for Scottish culture, the fantastic, in this extended sense, implies also some of its defining cultural features.

Arguably, the conceptualisation of the fantastic has been constantly modified in a century-long theoretical debate and its unremitting search for the most appropriate definition. This collective monograph has no pretensions to be definitive. On the contrary, it reflects the fact that the search and re-search for the fantastic of the fin de siècle is an ongoing and fascinating endeavour which first and foremost needs to emphasise the rich diversity of fin de siècle fantastic literature. (Re)searching for the fantastic of the fin de siècle, these essays as a whole represent the work of scholars from a diverse range of fields, so that the main topic is presented in a versatile, yet homogenous way. We hope that the present book will

provide a fresh and stimulating platform for further rethinking of the concept of the fantastic and its relation to fin de siècle literature, its theoretical, philosophical, generic, and other implications within a broader literary, social and cultural context.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# GHOSTS IN THE AGE OF SPECTRALITY: THE IRRELEVANCE OF GHOSTS AND LATE VICTORIAN GHOST STORIES

TAMÁS BÉNYEI

Dinah M. Mulock's 1856 ghost story, "The Last House in C- Street", opens with a fairly typical disclaimer in which the narrator duly assures us of his scepticism concerning supernatural apparitions: "I am not a believer in ghosts in general, I see no good in them. They come – that is, are reported to come – so irrelevantly, purposelessly – so ridiculously, in short – that one's common sense as regards this world, and one's supernatural sense of the other, are alike revolted" (Mulock 1992:22).<sup>1</sup> What is interesting in this passage is that ghosts are dismissed not as a result of the speaker's scientific certainties, but because of what he refers to as their "irrelevance" to our life. To insist on their irrelevance is surely an odd way to dismiss ghostly apparitions, for spectres traditionally tend to be anything but irrelevant: they are ambiguous nodes of semantic saturation, Sphinx-like invitations to be deciphered, which, besides their usual business of terrifying or perplexing the living, provoke and urge us to disentangle all the meaning that they condense. Despite their phantasmatic nature, ghosts are traditionally associated with truth and authenticity. The messages they bring concerning past crimes, hidden treasures or imminent disasters always turn out to be correct. Ghosts are invariably *relevant* to the haunted place or person(s): that is their whole point. The message of a ghost is often exhausted in the silent announcement of its relevance to the situation that conjures it. In his survey of the cultural history of ghosts, Peter Marshall (2010:26) also talks about a "built-in bias in the written sources towards 'purposeful' ghosts, rather than the silent, baffling, haunted presences which are a feature of popular culture from medieval

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<sup>1</sup> For a thoughtful and original reading of the story, see Killeen (2010:89-91).

through to modern times". Anticipating the argument that follows, one could argue that silent ghosts, rather than being irrelevant or purposeless, invariably proclaim a mute appeal or injunction. What "means" is not the message they convey (their reference, as it were) but their sheer and very questionable presence: the announcement that there is a node of meaning, meaning that is important but difficult to access, meaning that has to be unpacked in a long and painful process.

For all their truthfulness, ghosts (in the technical sense of the returning dead) had already become somewhat irrelevant with the advent of Protestantism and modernity in general; as Keith Thomas argues in his *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), ghosts had been losing their traditional cultural function since the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it is precisely as a result of their overt cultural irrelevance and displacement that ghosts started to haunt "properly", becoming uncanny in the Freudian (and Heideggerian) sense of the word. Although ghosts are not the products of the Enlightenment, as Mladen Dolar (1991:7) or Christine Britzolakis (1999:72) suggest, their displacement clearly resulted in a new, "modern" type of haunting. We could argue that the literary relevance of ghosts started with the relative loss of their cultural prestige, and that literature became the terrain where ghosts acquired a novel kind of relevance. Although, as Julia Briggs argues,<sup>3</sup> the ghost story has a very long history, it became a busily cultivated genre only in the nineteenth century.

The chapter that follows intends to explore some aspects of the relevance or irrelevance of ghosts in the late nineteenth century, a relevance that is inseparable from that of the genre of the ghost story. In a somewhat paradoxical way, this largely historical line of argument seems in turn closely related to the theoretical vicissitudes of ghosts and spectrality in the later twentieth century. Just as ghosts were going out of literary fashion, they started to make a spectacular theoretical comeback, beginning perhaps with Walter Benjamin's meditations about photography and with Horkheimer and Adorno's unfinished sketch about "The Theory of Ghosts", and resulting in a theoretical climate in which there is hardly any aspect of modern existence and culture that has not been theorised as spectral.<sup>4</sup> This theoretical comeback has been happening in parallel with

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of the cultural vicissitudes of ghosts, see, besides Davies's book, Thomas (1971:587-603), Marshall (2010:21-3), Castle (1995:123-33,140-67).

<sup>3</sup> See Briggs *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (1977).

<sup>4</sup> Derrida's extension of haunting, for instance, amounts to the elaboration of a full-fledged phenomenology of spectrality that sees human existence as haunted and spectral at the same time and the phenomenon in general as apparitional. For



an increasing interest in the Gothic themes of Victorian literature from which, however, ghosts proper (and the ghost story) seem to have been left out, both apparently subsumed into a general concern with the Gothic, the uncanny and an extended cultural sense of spectrality (cf. Smith 2010:121). The question, then, which is both historical and theoretical, could be formulated in the following manner, further abusing Walter Benjamin's already much-abused title: what happens to ghosts in the age of spectrality? If everything and everybody is a ghost, what is the fate of ghosts proper? Even the introduction to a book dedicated to spectrality starts with the editors' half-apologetic admission that ghosts indeed seem a little dated (Buse and Stott 1999:1). It is as if the demise of the literal (literary) ghost served as a precondition of its triumph as a theoretical and critical metaphor.

The genre that specialises in ghosts seems to have shared the fate of its spectral protagonists. Rephrasing the question above, we might ask: if, as Julian Wolfreys (2002:3) claims, "all stories are, more or less, ghost stories", what happens to ghost stories? Already in her 1977 book on ghost stories Julia Briggs claimed, if in a somewhat Darwinian manner, that, although the genre "managed to incorporate feelings of relevance, even importance" between 1850 and 1930 (Briggs 1977:15), the genre is practically defunct: "It no longer has any capacity for growth or adaptation" (Briggs 1977:14).<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, the nineteenth-century

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Derrida, as Ruth Parkin-Gounelas (1999:128) suggests, "everything is a ghost"; spectrality becomes simply one more deconstructive pseudo-concept, "mobilizing Derridian concepts such as trace, illustration, deferral of presence" (Buse and Stott 1999:11). For a critique of Derrida's position, see the editors' introduction to *The Victorian Supernatural*: "For Derrida, history is structurally and necessarily haunted, but where is the supernatural to be found in this kind of haunting? The problem is that the ghost is only one in a series of deconstructive tropes" (Brown, Burdett and Thurschwell 2004:12). The authors also point out the lack of historical considerations in Derrida's speculations: "such theories unify and flatten out the supernatural: they move too seamlessly over the supernatural into what it signifies" (Brown, Burdett and Thurschwell 2004:12).

<sup>5</sup> See also Thomas (1971:605). Briggs's prediction proved both right and wrong. Although the heyday of the traditional ghost story seems to be over once and for all, ghosts have made a spectacular comeback in contemporary literature, and this return is perhaps not unrelated to their theoretical triumph. Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1964) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) may justifiably be called ghost stories. Revenants seem to be ubiquitous in magic-realist and postcolonial novels like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) or Isabel Allende's *The House of Ghosts* (1982) as well as in other kinds of mainstream fiction from Charles

ghost story – except for Henry James – has until very recently remained a relatively neglected form, with ghosts upstaged by other kinds of undead creatures, and haunting subsumed into a plethora of Gothic motifs. Although the ghost story was a thriving genre between the 1840s and the 1930s, in retrospect, by the late nineteenth century its cultural significance seems to have paled into insignificance compared to that of the Gothic.

Among the external factors that contributed to what might be seen as the increasing cultural irrelevance of ghosts and ghost stories towards the end of the nineteenth century one ought to mention – besides detective fiction<sup>6</sup> – the rise of spiritualism, which made “ghosts perceived as a real part of the everyday lives of thousands” (Cooper 2010:119)<sup>7</sup> and, as Owen Davies (2007:9) suggests in his social history of ghosts, the “late nineteenth-century attempts to subject ghosts to scientific evaluation tended to account for ghosts as randomly produced, meaningless entities that contrasted with the earlier notion of the morally instructive spectre”. He quotes Andrew Lang, an avid collector of tales of encounters with ghosts, who “claimed in 1894 that the ghost had become a ‘purposeless creature’ and ‘appears nobody knows why; he has no message to deliver, no secret crime to reveal, no appointment to keep, no treasure to disclose, no commissions to be executed, and, as an almost invariable rule, he does not speak, even if you speak to him’. The new ‘science’ had thus reduced the ghost to a meaningless, if baffling, aspect of the natural world” (qtd. in Davies 2007:8). If ghosts become scientifically verifiable “natural” phenomena, they are relegated to a kind of semantic emptiness: the symbolic surplus or excess of meaning that derives from their dubious ontological status rapidly evaporates.

On the other hand, there were obvious reasons intrinsic to the genre, too, for the fact that fin de siècle ghost stories seem less exciting today than other kinds of Gothic or sensation literature. Against the background

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Palliser’s *The Unburied* (1999) and Toby Litt’s *Ghost Story* (2004) to Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black* (2005), Nicola Barker’s *Darkmans* (2007) or Sarah Waters’s *The Little Stranger* (2009). The recent critical popularity of the topic is indicated by books like Julian Wolfreys’s *Writing London*, and by specialised volumes like those edited by Glennis Byron and David Punter (1999) and by Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham (2010) respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Detective fiction gradually came to occupy the slot retained for the mystery story; to see the similarities, it is enough to compare the plot structure of Charlotte Riddell’s ghost stories to that of detective stories. A sign (or symptom) of the transition is the hybrid, typically fin de siècle “genre” featuring psychic detectives, ghost-seers and ghost-hunters: Hodgson’s Carnacki, the Askews’ Aylmer Vance, or Algernon Blackwood’s John Silence.

<sup>7</sup> See also Luckhurst (2004:197).

of the massive Gothic turmoil of the period, ghost stories might be seen as a quaint cottage industry, a surviving enclave of obsolete fireside yarn-spinning. In a general sense, they seem to be less rich in those kinds of repressed contents and anxieties of (late) Victorian society the search for which motivates much recent critical enthusiasm for the Gothic (anxieties concerning the body, gender, sexuality, the empire, race, degeneration, the repercussions of Darwinian theory, etc.).

Although there have been several recent attempts to recover the genre for a reading that is searching for repressed cultural content, most of the re-readings inspired by such objectives have proved to be rather lame.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the case for a re-reading of the ghost story that focuses on the particularities of the genre might be made more convincingly if we did not insist on the usual fare of cultural criticism. One might even argue that it is precisely their relative semantic emptiness that might enable us to interrogate Victorian ghost stories in new ways. What makes them less amenable to content-based readings is the fact that those ghost stories are usually exhausted by their time-tested mechanism (and *mechanism* will be a key word in what follows). Ghost stories, then, like their spectral protagonists, compulsively replay or repeat the same narrative mechanism over and over again. In other words – words which suggest a slightly different strategy of reading – ghost stories are exhausted by their impulse

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<sup>8</sup> Taking their cue from Vanessa Dickerson's pioneering study of 1994, several critics have made attempts to recover ghost stories for the kind of reading that has been thriving on Victorian Gothic, and to read the genre as a dramatisation of Victorian cultural anxieties. Dickerson (1996:4-5, 133) claims that female ghost story writers used the genre to allegorise their own cultural plight (invisibility) and to challenge patriarchal discourses. Rather than images of female spectrality, Jarlath Killeen (2010:85-95) – in a truly insightful effort – sees in literary ghosts a disguised representation of the patriarchal forces subjugating them, and provides ingenious readings of stories by Dinah Mulock, Amelia B. Edwards and Charlotte Riddell. Nicholas Allen (2010:112, 115) reads Sheridan Le Fanu's ghost stories in the context of the changing geopolitical situation of Ireland, and Eve M. Lynch (2004:67-9) investigates ghost stories focussing on the figure of the domestic servant as an uncanny, ghostly presence. In his *The Ghost Story*, Andrew Smith argues that the ubiquity of ghosts indicates the crisis of property, inheritance and patriarchal genealogy, the demise of the aristocracy and of their construction of wealth (based on land and property rather than money). In general terms, Smith (2010:2) reads the ghost as a figure for "the fragile notion of the self" in the nineteenth century, and makes a claim for the genre as a site of subversive cultural energies: "During the nineteenth century the ghost story became *the* form in which conventional cultural assumptions about identity politics were challenged by a process of rational disembodiment" (Smith 2010:4).

to attain or produce the desired effect (normally, a *frisson*) in the reader. If we define ghost stories as traditional narratives exhausted by their intention to produce the proper effect, the stories themselves begin to resemble the ghost they stage. A ghost is a phantasm that – as we know from Derrida – is not fully or properly present, yet it produces material effects in the real world (Gordon 1997:17).<sup>9</sup> One might think here of the Leporello-like roster of the Canterville Ghost's exploits, a list that amounts to an apocryphal, alternative family history of the Cantervilles; there seems to be no significant misfortune in the family annals that was not "caused" by one of Sir Simon's appearances or apparitions (sudden deaths, disinheritances, family feuds, broken marriage vows, instances of madness (Wilde 1996:200)).<sup>10</sup> The emblematic type of such material effects is provided by the fingerprints of ghostly hands, a cliché which also makes its obligatory appearance in "The Canterville Ghost" as "the mark of five fingers burnt upon [Lady Stutfield's] throat" (Wilde 1996:200).<sup>11</sup> Wilde's list, a mock repository of all the clichés connected to haunting, is a rewriting of the family chronicle as a series of all too tangible effects produced by the ghost.

We could say, then, that the "content" of ghost stories is eclipsed by or displaced into their mechanism and by their effect.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps one could risk the claim that, in the course of the nineteenth century, the stress in ghost stories shifted gradually from the reference of ghosts (the past events that they call attention to) to their meaning (the sheer presence of a ghost, of ghosting).<sup>13</sup> To illustrate some aspects of this shift, I shall briefly look

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<sup>9</sup> According to Wolfreys (2002:xiii), all texts are phantasmatic "while having an undeniably real or material effect, if not presence".

<sup>10</sup> See also Wilde (1996:195, 202, 207, 208).

<sup>11</sup> Another well-known example is the imprint of the ghostly hand in Le Fanu's (1996:126) "Narrative of a Ghost of a Hand".

<sup>12</sup> In other words, this means that ghost stories, as Henry James recognised in the frame of *The Turn of the Screw*, are transferential narratives, in which the point is the iteration and the interaction, the transmission of the story, as in the ultimate ghost text, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, as well as in the excellent fin de siècle ghost story, Perceval Landon's "Thurnley Abbey". In these texts, the story seems to replay itself, using its tellers as mediums.

<sup>13</sup> This process recalls the hermeneutical turn carried out by Marx and Freud and described by Slavoj Žižek: both in Freudian dream analysis and in Marx's interpretation of the commodity, "the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the 'content' supposedly hidden behind the form: the 'secret' to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, the 'secret' of this form itself" (Žižek 1997b:11).

at two fin de siècle ghost stories: Oscar Wilde's "The Canterville Ghost" (1887) and a little-known 1890 tale by Richard Marsh, "A Set of Chessmen".

Marsh's story, set in a small town in Bretagne, opens with the narrator buying a set of exquisite chessmen in an antiques shop. The set used to belong to the late Monsieur Funichon, always known by the town-dwellers to be a little odd. Funichon, a notorious "chess-maniac" (Marsh 1995:258), was found dead "seated at the table, the chessmen on the board, his hand on the white rook" (Marsh 1995:259). Taking the set home, the narrator immediately starts a game against his flatmate, an ardent legitimist Frenchman called Philippe Henri de St Servan. Both players find straight away that they are impeded in their moves. It seems that there are only certain specific moves allowed by the set: as soon as the players reach out towards the pieces, an invisible, ghostly hand grabs their wrist (Marsh 1995:267) compelling them to make moves they do not want to make. Apparently, the set is playing its own game, using the players as mediums: "They appeared to be automatic chessmen, automatic in a sense entirely their own" (Marsh 1995:262). Haunting, then, announces itself as an interruption of the present, spoiling or thwarting the game of (the) living.

Having excluded the possibility of a hoax, the narrator identifies the dead M. Funichon as the agent of the haunting, and challenges him provocatively, threatening to smash the pieces (Marsh 1995:268-9); as a result, he is nearly strangled to death by the unseen hand, or by M. Funichon, who – like most revenants – seems to be stronger and more consequential now than he was in his life. Conducting a thorough search among M. Funichon's things, the narrator finds a crazy, multi-volume chess book, a book that was apparently intended to contain all possible games (like a chess version of Borges's library); it is these games that must be played out on the board in a fixed order.

The premise of the story is fairly traditional: a strong will asserts itself from beyond the grave. What is interesting, however, is that the will is, as it were, empty: all it wants is to be asserted; it has no message to deliver, no unpunished crime to report or missed funeral to demand. The story can be read as an allegory of the displacement of haunting from its content to its form, but also, if we want to transform the form-as-content aspect into a content of the second degree, an allegory of the mechanical, automatic nature of haunting (the source of the "the humour of the thing" (Marsh 1995:265), the comic potential recognised by the narrator, who even speculates about "possessing" a ghost "which might be induced to perform at will – almost on the principle of 'drop a coin into the slot and the figures move'" (Marsh 1995:272)). The ghost is activated only when a game gets

under way, and is entirely indifferent to the identity of the players,<sup>14</sup> just as it is indifferent to any aspect of life that is unrelated to the game being played. The moves, which are his “messages”, have no reference, only a semiotic meaning (their place in the system of moves).<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the two players become a pair of automata themselves, caught up in a series of unalterable moves. Invoking the popular image of the chess-playing automaton, Marsh’s story uses the metaphor to connect the ghost and the haunted, suggesting that we are (being) haunted inasmuch as we are (being) mechanical, performing acts that are not our own – just like the hysterical patient and the factory worker, two emblematic figures of modernity. It is precisely the semantic emptiness of the haunting that foregrounds its repetitiveness, its empty form, suggesting the possibility of allegorical extension. One could argue that Marsh’s story offers both “hauntedness” and “spectrality” as metaphors for what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*: “The unconscious is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second nature of *habitus*” (Bourdieu 1977:78-9).<sup>16</sup>

The allegorical potential of Marsh’s story resides mostly in the flauntingly mechanical nature of ghost and haunted players alike. By merging the figure of the ghost and the haunted subject, the text also reinforces a process that was increasingly prominent in nineteenth-century ghost stories: from a mysterious other, the ghost was changing more and more into a double of the haunted subject, reinforcing T. J. Lustig’s

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<sup>14</sup> There is one thing which makes the narrator susceptible to haunting: like most of the haunted victims in M. R. James’s stories, he is fond of the past, poking about in the antiques shop among objects that had been removed from their context and entered another realm, that of commodities (antiques can be defined as relics with a price tag). Basically, however, what makes these two characters susceptible is the symbolic position beside the chessboard that they come to occupy: they are haunted inasmuch as they occupy these positions.

<sup>15</sup> The actual game the narrator and his flatmate are compelled to play is a joke: a series of possible but pointless moves in which black simply repeats the moves of white, providing an internal *mise-en-abyme*, yet another repetition of the haunting itself.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that Bourdieu’s *habitus* is much less “negative” in terms of its implications for agency than, for instance, Foucault’s idea of the internalised microstructures of power (see Cooper 2010:16-8). The mechanical game of chess also invokes the iterability of signs which reactivate meanings that are not our own; echoing Derrida, Richard Terdiman argues that “context is the memory of language” (Terdiman 1993:192), and calls the content invoked or conjured by our use of the sign “spectral” (Terdiman 1993:192).