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The Ghostmodern: Revisionist Haunting in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature (1887-1910)

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THE GHOSTMODERN:
REVISIONIST HAUNTING IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY
AMERICAN LITERATURE (1887-1910)

by

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The Ghostmodern: Revisionist Haunting in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature (1887-1910)

written by Math Trafton

has been approved for the Department of Comparative Literature

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
This project attempts to identify and explain numerous significant transformations in the genre of the literary ghost story in the period roughly contemporary with the earliest emergence of literary Modernism. Through a detailed examination of the literary encounters with invisibility in pivotal American ghost stories from the end of the twentieth century, the project considers the rich literary trope of ghostly haunting according to its capacity to provoke an engagement with marginalized, liminal spaces. In traditional ghost stories, however, as ghosts are ultimately overcome and order is restored, normative structures resume, and such engagements are trivialized. My analysis identifies a critical historical moment in which when certain authors explore changes to this practice. Particularly, this project performs a detailed reading of a select group of texts published between the years 1887-1910, namely, Guy de Maupassant’s “Le Horla” (1887), Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), Henry James’s “Sir Edmund Orme” (1891), and Edith Wharton’s “Afterward” (1910). Through exploring the ways these texts significantly innovate the genre of the literary ghost story, this project proposes the emergence of a distinct subgenre, which I ultimately term the Revisionist ghost story.

Through the trope of literary haunting, Revisionist ghost stories reflect on the nature of otherness and its essential incomprehensibility. In figuring haunting as a pervasive and ubiquitous force capable of disrupting order and stability, such texts challenge traditional
assumptions of subjective mastery and explore alternatives to prevailing normative structures. Revisionist ghost stories further suggest an essential incomprehensibility intrinsic to subjectivity as they present their characters’ ultimate powerlessness to exorcize their ghosts or escape their haunting. Not even the attempt to reflect on the inexplicable experience of haunting through the work of narrative can formulate an adequate coherence, for the characters’ frequent endeavors to recount their situation only intensify and propagate the impression of haunting. When a ghost appears in a Revisionist ghost story, it is not to signal the commencement of haunting, but to reveal the essential point that the experience of reality is itself always-already haunted by the profound limitations of human subjectivity and the incomprehensible vastness in the reality beyond.
This dissertation is dedicated to
Zoë Madison Trafton,
Whose vision is a source of infinite inspiration.
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INTRODUCTION

This project attempts to identify and explain numerous significant transformations in the genre of the literary ghost story in the period roughly contemporary with the earliest emergence of literary Modernism: 1887-1910. Through a detailed examination of the literary encounters with invisibility in pivotal American ghost stories from the end of the twentieth century, the project considers the rich literary trope of ghostly haunting and the ways it profoundly affects the way one perceives the world. When seeking an encounter with the invisibility of a ghost, one is always more attuned to what is not perceived than what is; haunting thus provokes an engagement with marginalized, liminal spaces. In traditional ghost stories, however, as ghosts are ultimately overcome and order is restored, normative structures resume. My analysis identifies a critical historical moment in which certain authors explore changes to this practice. Particularly, this project performs a detailed reading of a select group of texts published between the years 1887-1910, namely, Guy de Maupassant’s “Le Horla” (1887), Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), Henry James’s “Sir Edmund Orme” (1891), and Edith Wharton’s “Afterward” (1910). Through exploring the ways these texts significantly innovate the genre of the literary ghost story, this project proposes the emergence of a distinct subgenre, which I ultimately term the Revisionist ghost story.

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as they present their characters’ ultimate powerlessness to exorcize their ghosts or escape their haunting. Not even the attempt to reflect on the inexplicable experience of haunting through the work of narrative can formulate an adequate coherence, for the characters’ frequent endeavors to recount their situation only intensify and propagate the impression of haunting. When a ghost appears in a Revisionist ghost story, it is not to signal the commencement of haunting, but to reveal the essential point that the experience of reality is itself always already haunted by the profound limitations of human subjectivity and the incomprehensible vastness in the reality beyond.

The figure of the ghost has always possessed a complex theoretical foundation throughout its long history through Western culture, even in isolation from its diverse literary depictions. As popularly conceived, a ghost essentially amounts to an extension of human subjectivity beyond its traditional mortal limits; it is a subject’s a return from—or deferral of—the grave. However, given that the ghost’s return involves uniquely traversing death, that essential disruption of mortal integrity, ghostliness itself reflects the radical displacement of presence. More precisely, death’s disfiguration compromises the ghost’s intact human form and divests it of its completeness; as a result, in virtually all of its cultural expressions, it is generally disembodied from its original form in some way or another (sometimes as a soul, spirit, mind, will, and so on), and its presence is strikingly immaterial and imperceptible (or partially imperceptible).

The ghost’s unique semi-transparency and insubstantiality reveals the inescapable complexity of the corresponding “ghostly subject”—that is, its original mortal form, prior to its disfiguration. Paradoxically, insofar as its radical displacement has unhinged its subjectivity from its presentation, the ghostly subject, in its original form, is not properly present, nor is it
properly nonpresent. By virtue of the supernatural capacity to transcend or elude the event horizon of death, the essence of the ghost’s original presence is magically preserved, albeit in a substantially reduced form; it persists, that is, via a displacement into a reflection or image. The ghost is not identical to its prior state but a reference to it—it is always of something, the ghost of its original. Whereas a certain aspect of the original presence endures through death (and the return from it), there is a corresponding aspect that does not endure. Because death’s disfiguration necessarily results in an intrinsic reduction in form, the ghost will always be incomplete, lacking something of the original to which it refers. In the translation process, there is a remainder that is irretrievably lost to absolute invisibility. Ghostliness itself, in terms both of its radical displacement and its complex negotiation of the tension between presence and nonpresence, ultimately reflects what we can think of as the work of ghostly representation that, paradoxically, establishes a pretense of presence at the same time that it alludes to the very falsity of such a pretense.

The ghost ultimately presents a question of comprehensibility—that is, of what is graspable in a figurative sense (in terms of cognitive understanding through the formulation of conceptual coherence) and in a literal sense (in terms of a sensory perception, predominantly through sight and touch). As the ghost doubly captures both presence and nonpresence by its nature as the consequence of radical dislocation, it articulates the tension underlying the question of comprehensibility through its presentation of two layers of figuration: a comprehensible mode that reflects its original mortal subjectivity and an incomprehensible mode that reflects its absolute otherness beyond human the limits of human perception and cognition. Accordingly,

1 I prefer the term nonpresent over absent insofar as the latter indicates only an elsewhereness of the object, whereas the former also integrates the possibility of an object that is present that is paradoxically not presented as such (as though invisibly present, for example, which is not a component of absence).
2 For example, at the end of the first Gothic novel, The Castle of Otranto (1764), the ghost of Lord Alfonso the Good appears, though he is not depicted as Alfonso himself, but instead as “the form of Alfonso” (98), which demonstrates the disconnect of the ghost from his original mortal self.
the ghost becomes the point of mediation between two radically separated modes, and its presence thus imposes their contradictory coexistence. In terms of a human perspective, the presence of a ghost implies an encounter with the force of haunting, that is, with a completely invisible nonpresence whose trace is only discernible through its semi-present ghostly mediator. Prior to any literary figuration of the trope, the coexistence between the human and the absolutely incomprehensible remains principally neutral. Through its various narrative depictions, however, literary imaginings begin to appropriate the trope and layer it with a series of generic assumptions, the most prominent of which being a fundamental aversion to haunting.

The traditional ghost story, by its widest definition, is marked by its commitment to overcoming the disorder and chaos of its initial narrative conditions and confirming the integrity of experience (that is, appearing present, coherent, complete, direct, and familiar). More precisely, a readership thoroughly trained by generic conventions will expect, by the end of the narrative, an affirmation of not only comprehension (in terms of an elucidation of all the various mysteries in the specific plot), but an impression of comprehensibility as such that reinforces the assumption that all experience is essentially comprehensible—and what is not immediately comprehensible will, by means of deferred experience, become so eventually. As such, a traditional ghost story’s measure of success hinges on its capacity to completely dissipate the incomprehensible, and the impression of mastery becomes the singular focus of all of its narrative energies. The varying degrees of haunting forces responsible for corrupting comprehension (with nonpresence, incoherence, invisibility, and unfamiliarity) therefore singularly serve as temporary and ineffectual impediments, only deferring the progression toward inevitable resolution. The protagonist—customarily characterized by his or her courage, keen perceptions, interpretative and analytical reflective agency—must confront the forces of
haunting, conventionally through an engagement with its associated ghostly agent. In a climactic moment, as an epiphany, the protagonist overcomes the foreign element and truly makes sense of the situation; consequently, whatever missing information about the plot’s numerous mysteries has been hitherto concealed (deferred) are now belatedly restored. In short, the traditional formula is twofold: first the significance of certain details is concealed (rendered incomprehensible), then, in the end, that significance is revealed (restored as comprehensible), affirming an impression of comprehensibility.

The Revisionist ghost story, on the other hand, is defined not according to an opposition to the traditional treatment of the wider genre, but rather according to a specific reassessment of some of its integral assumptions. Rather than simply refine the efficacy of a particular literary expression of the conventional formula (which would result in yet another iteration within the genre’s tradition framework), the Revisionist project seeks to revise the conventional formulas themselves. Broadly speaking, this amounts to a foreclosure of the possibility of a stable resolution, which occurs through two joint endeavors, corresponding to the two principle operations of the conventional formula (ineffective concealing followed by effective revealing). In the first sense, the narrative of the Revisionist ghost story tends to depict its force of incomprehensibility (through haunting) as so powerful that the characters’ capacity to overcome it is not only formidable but impossible. In the second sense, it tends to depict a force of restoration (mostly through its characters, but also through circumstances of plot or setting, for example) as so powerless that its capacity to overcome its ghostly opposition is not only unlikely but impossible. In the simplest of terms, a narrative can achieve basic Revisionist success by establishing an initially incomprehensible condition without ever resolving it. Such a disruption to the conventional formula effectively exposes the naïve and illusory assumptions of the
tradition, which are consequently implied to be significantly inapplicable to the experience of reality. However, more forceful articulations of the Revisionist subgenre are furthermore driven to explore the implications and consequences underlying such assumptions, which include inquiries into the complexities of how and why these traditional assumptions lack practical relevance, as well as the possibility of alternative approaches beyond a hollow nihilism.

While some degree of the incomprehensible is invariably addressed within even the most conservative ghost stories, the generic conventions guiding such narrative engagements are characteristically restrictive according to the compulsion to exorcise its literary ghosts. As the historical analysis of the following chapter will propose, the traditional treatment of ghostliness assumes an essential association between a ghost and haunting. In literary terms, this correlates to the presumption that to exorcize the ghost is to eradicate the force of its haunting. The Revisionist ghost story, on the other hand, expands its engagement with the incomprehensible by theorizing the possibility of its prevalence and ubiquity independent of a ghost. In other words, the Revisionist ghost story theorizes on invisible forces that figuratively haunt the experience of reality, not through literary or supernatural means, but as an inevitable byproduct of human subjectivity.

Rejecting the traditional impulse to assert mastery over the incomprehensibility of ghostly haunting, Revisionist ghost stories reconsider the trope of ghost in terms of its haunting in an effort to return to its essential nonpresence, unpresentable to human experience. Such incomprehensibility figured by literary haunting extends beyond the mere unfamiliar into a radical unfamiliarity. It is the work of the Revisionist ghost story not only to consider the possibility of this irreducible term, but more significantly to maintain that irreducibility by enforcing inviolable limits on its characters’ experience, while also absolutely resisting its
characters’ (and often its readers’) various forceful attempts to resolve, exorcize, see, master, grasp, or comprehend it. In doing so, Revisionist ghost stories, seemingly in opposition to the all-pervasive modern human spirit of supreme epistemological optimism, significantly propose a profound and irremediable narrowness of subjectivity and its prerogatives. Arguably, this forceful criticism in addressing such traditional epistemological optimism might appear conversely pessimistic; however, as this project will demonstrate, such skepticism actually proposes a considerable amount of hope and meaning. More precisely, the epistemological agenda underlying the Revisionist refiguration of haunting is tied to an engagement with others and with the world defined by respect and humility. Insofar as this approach reflects an affirmation of subjective limits and a relinquishment of the compulsion to master otherness, the Revisionist ghost story ultimately articulates, in its various literary manifestations, an ethics of otherness.

Given that for the Revisionist ghost story, the question of haunting is almost always inevitably bound up with the question of ethics via an intensive exploration of radical otherness, the work of Emmanuel Levinas, arguably the philosopher of the ethics of otherness par excellence, becomes crucial. Critical of our social attachment to procedures of totalization (which accounts for all related attempts to master, to dominate, to grasp, to comprehend, and other attempts to know the other), Levinas shifts his theoretical focus toward infinity, linking otherness with the vastness of reality that cannot be adequately reduced to human conception. As an integral component of infinity as a concept, Levinas conceptualizes otherness as such (“radical alterity” and “the Other”) as a fundamental force that exceeds the mere presence of the other. In other words, Levinas theorizes an approach without knowable content—that is, an approach toward the other that keeps his or her otherness as such specifically in mind: “In this
sense [otherness] cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor
touched—for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object,
which becomes precisely a content” (TI 194). Such an ethical approach, which involves an
appreciation of the essential otherness that informs all relationships, strikingly resembles the
model of haunting depicted in the Revisionist ghost story. Just as those narratives’ literary
significance lies in an affirmation of the inescapable invisibility of haunting, so too does Levinas
suggest that subjective meaning is founded within the unknowability of otherness. Although
certainly not advising a submission to an other in particular, Levinas does propose a blind
submission to the force of otherness itself, whose various incarnations (invisibility, unfamiliarity,
and infinity) persist against all attempts to totalize them. While reading Revisionist ghost stories
through frequent references to Levinas’s theories might seem to distort the aims of the original
literature, I argue, to the contrary, that such a contemporary theoretical framework illuminates
the Revisionist subgenre’s departure from its traditional forbearers and its investigation of an
almost prophetic reconceptualization of experience. But to be clear, the project’s connection of
Levinas to this body of fiction establishes suggestive correlations rather than direct lineage,
exposing new opportunities in interpreting the Revisionist ghost story.

In addition to Levinas, this project also relies heavily on psychoanalysis, for arguably,
any reading of the supernatural—particularly of the ghostly—cannot fully ignore the
psychoanalytic implications of its material, and the Revisionist ghost story is no exception. The
very premise of psychoanalysis dating from its Freudian roots is thoroughly populated with
ghostly figures, particularly given its figuration of the mostly invisible unconscious that,
conceptualized in terms of its otherness, haunts the ego through occasionally inserting a
seemingly alien will or returning its repressions. The breadth of Freud’s theories in fact provide
a substantial foundation for reading the epistemological challenges posed by Revisionist ghost stories, namely those concerning the uncanny, *déjà vu*, mourning and melancholia, and afterwardsness. While there is reason to be weary of the sometimes reductive claims made in the name of Freudian psychology and its totalizing structures of psychological anatomy and development, this project aims to build on its anti-totalizing tendencies, including Freud’s important insight that the ego is not the master of its own house. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török provide a framework for this doubly “revisionist” approach. In the first sense, these revisionist psychoanalysts tellingly formalize the notion of an unconscious *internalized otherness* (houed in a conceptual “crypt”) through a complex theory of the phantom, a theory that strikingly reflects the innovative portrayals of haunting as depicted by Revisionist ghost stories. These psychoanalytic theorists extend the figuration of ghostliness to conceptions of subjectivity, interpersonal discourse (which takes even further significance in dialogue with Levinas), and language. Across its several applications, Abraham’s and Török’s phantom proves to be compatible with the Revisionist ghost, as the sign of an irremediable disruption both in human subjectivity and in the work of narrative reflection that attempts to articulate that subjectivity.

For Abraham and Török, language (sometimes conceptualized as *haunted language*) marks an attempt to negotiate the phantom’s presence, yet it reveals not a fluid consistency with the world itself, but rather an inevitable disconnect carried by uncertainty and indeterminacy. Ultimately, Abraham’s and Török’s concerns with methods of reading supply an alternative model of analysis, a *revisionist* model of analysis of sorts, whose approach is driven blindly—by, in other words, what cannot be seen, comprehended, grasped, or anticipated. As this project will demonstrate, this innovative approach to the work of analysis reflects similar proposals made by the Revisionist ghost story, and a thorough consideration of Abraham’s and Török’s theories not
only illuminates such early proposals, but also opens the opportunities of interpretation in these stories.

Equipped with the ethics of otherness and a revisionist psychoanalytic model of analysis, this project explores the Revisionist ghost story according to its radical dislocations. Generally speaking, its analytical scope remains attuned to the work of ghostly representation, which, firstly, explains the nature of the ghost’s presence as such and, secondly, negotiates the corresponding presence/nonpresence of its figurative “meaning”—that is, in a literal sense, the original presence of its former mortal subject. The understanding of the work of representation is in turn applied to the concept of experience, yet this application is double as it accounts for the reader’s experience of fiction as much as it does for the general subjective experience of reality.

In the first place, the association between a ghostly encounter and an experience of fiction, while arguably present through all figurations of the literary ghost, is especially present in the Revisionist subgenre. Merely by virtue of their shared imaginative roots, ghosts, as supernatural entities that are antithetical to rational order and empirical reality, operate more or less as manifested fictions; each exists in as a counterfactual and challenges the assumed limits of the possible. In addition, given the tendency of the Revisionist ghost story to intensify an impression of incomprehensibility in its characters, the fantastic nature of the ghostly presence is equally accentuated. In each narrative of this project, the characters find themselves incapable of establishing conceptual coherence from their increasingly complex haunted situations. In one sense, the characters’ experiences are more significantly displaced from what is understood to be “reality”; however, in another sense, because the characters’ cognitive faculties alone cannot comprehend the haunting, the characters all turn to writing (or imaginative reflection) in order to further reflect on the supernatural events. As it turns out, however, rather than naturalizing the
supernatural events through the attempt to capture them in narrative, the natural is conversely supernaturalized, and the experience of reality is seemingly fictionalized. Through direct references to the work of narrative, the authors of Revisionist ghost stories effectively use their fictional text as a field on which to reflect concerns over the otherness that haunts the writing process as well as subjective experiences.

Despite the fact that the characters in such tales may resist the ghostly haunting that pervades the text, the narratives themselves generally reinforce its associated incomprehensibility, often in terms of plot structure, resolution (or its absence), characterization, and linguistic ambiguity, among other ways. These texts tend to operate not according to imperialistic forces bent on naturalizing otherness (as do more conventional tales), but rather on extending its range and efficacy. As a result, as Revisionist characters confront the forces of haunting, they often become gradually aware of a sense of absolutely invisible otherness that remains intrinsic to their experience of reality. Revisionist ghost stories tend to regard the appearance of a ghost not so much as an inaugural moment in which a haunting disorder begins but rather as a revelation of always-already hauntedness, of the fact that the experience of being is itself innately haunted, incomprehensible. By this logic, the force of haunting is disentangled from its ghost, and its figurative power consequently opens up to express simultaneously a limitation in human subjectivity and an unknowable vastness in the reality beyond. Often, in the fictional world of the Revisionist ghost story, characters experience terrifying epiphanies wherein they realize that the true threat to their traditional assumptions about and experiences of reality are not—and have never been—the result of a supernatural force, but instead, are natural to human experience. For the astute reader, the application of this profound insight is not limited to literature’s fictional world.
As Revisionist haunting imposes the impression of incomprehensibility on both the characters’ experience of their fictional realities and the reader’s experience of the fiction itself, the association between these two respective experiences grows increasingly blurred and each one is increasingly drawn into itself. In the context of this tension, the reader begins to observe the impression of incomprehensibility in his or her own experience of reality. Revisionist ghost stories thus expose a profound distinction between reality as such (that is, the world itself) and the experience of reality (that is, the subjective interpretation of that reality based on human perception and cognition), whereby the former, fundamentally incomprehensible in its radical alterity (like the force of haunting), is understood only through the indirect and incomplete mediation of the latter (like the figure of the ghost). Revisionist ghost stories refuse to resolve the radical dislocation opened by ghostly haunting, and in so doing, present the extent of reality as such as ultimately unknowable and our experience of it as insurmountably fictive. The Revisionist ghost story thus uniquely presents haunting not as a force that threatens to annihilate the main characters, but rather as an affirmation of the vast invisibility lying just beyond the limits of one’s subjective experience of reality. While many of the characters experience levels of despair about their limited access to reality as such, they do so only in their stubborn inability to surrender their pretense to absolute mastery. In following the lessons implied by Revisionist ghost stories, especially as drawn out through Levinas and Abraham and Török, subjective experience is depicted as achieving greater access to ineffability, surprise, play, and freedom once such pretenses are abandoned.

The Revisionist ghost stories included in this project (those by Maupassant, Gilman, James, and Wharton) ultimately open the possibility and perhaps even set the terms of alternative figurative means to explore concerns about subjectivity and the limits of knowledge in literary,
filmic, cultural, and philosophical terms through the next hundred years and beyond. As they weave complexities and twists into their narratives, these stories seemingly anticipate what will become far more explicit popular literary and filmic depictions a century later. The lasting effects of this subgenre through the contemporary revival of the ghost (which I will consider further in the Conclusion) attest to its power to challenge the leading assumptions that shape its tradition and affirm an unfamiliar and underacknowledged aspiration to set aside a familiar and already-established order.

**Contemporary Dialog on Ghosts**

In the wake of what could be described as a substantial resurgence of cultural fascination with ghosts in the past three decades (particularly in its popular filmic and literary depictions), there has been a corresponding intrigue in academic circles. In addition to countless publications of new fiction, collections of old fiction, and “real life” encounters, scores of literary, theoretical, and historical texts have emerged, covering a wide breadth of perspectives on the topic. Some texts attempt to account for the recent revival in cultural or literary terms, and some merely use the revival as an impetus to newly return to various points in the genre’s literary history in the Romantic Gothic, the Victorian Gothic, or the twentieth century, and some return to the cultural history; some alternatively consider the genre’s filmic history. Others appropriate the

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4 See Glennis Byron’s and David Punter’s collection *Spectral Readings* (1999) and Christine Berthin’s *Gothic Haunting* (2010).
figure of the ghost and use it as a metaphor to explain or reconceptualize various subjects. Derrida’s immensely popular *Specters of Marx* (1993), for example, articulates theories on justice through haunting.\(^9\) Other texts employ the trope to explore such other subjects as Postmodernism,\(^10\) psychoanalysis,\(^11\) or contemporary sociology.\(^12\)

One particularly important text for understanding the complexities of the time period from which the Revisionist ghost story emerged is Julian Wolfrey’s *Victorian Hauntings* (2002), which addresses the significant ways in which the Victorian Gothic reworks our conception of textuality and exposes a mode of being that lies between the visible and invisible. Wolfrey’s argument hinges on the observation that “it is the very notion of ghosting, haunting, and of the spectral which disrupts any simple division between the spiritual and materiality” (23), and as readers of the Gothic, we are “witnesses to the blurring, the disturbance in the field of vision, caused by haunting, the merest trace incorporated into language” (24). *Victorian Hauntings* highlights the capacity of haunting to operate as a subtext and to expose complex issues of knowability and unknowability not only in the text itself, but within subjectivity itself, given that, as he argues, our understanding of subjectivity is often shaped and modeled by literary texts.

Wolfrey’s study, however, considers only English texts within the Victorian era; moreover, his claims could be made about many texts, regardless of period, insofar as his theories have more to do with the general operations of narrative than about the particular Gothic texts of his focus. Correspondingly, Wolfrey’s investigation into the theoretical conception of haunting has very little grounding in *actual* literary haunting, and thus contributes to what one critic calls “a

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\(^9\) See *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derida's Specters of Marx* (2008), a collection of theoretical articles inspired by Derrida’s text.


\(^12\) See Owen Davies’s *The Haunted* (2007) and Esther Peeren’s and María del Pilar Blanco’s collection *Popular Ghosts* (2010).
dizzying spin through postmodern theory and difficulty in pinning down one critical position” (Dougherty 273). My project builds on Wolfrey’s work on approaching the work of narrative as though it were haunted, while attempting to analyze a set of texts from a briefer historical interval in order to expose how these texts illuminate the disruptions provoked by haunting as well as the ways they incorporate those disruptions far more directly than any before them.

Helen Sword’s *Ghostwriting Modernism* (2002) provides particular insight for this project as it similarly explores literary, historical, and cultural implications as Modernism emerges out of the Victorian age (including literary Realism and cultural spiritualism). Specifically, Sword investigates the extent to which “popular spiritualism,” largely orchestrated by marginal figures, informed both the content and form of many celebrated Modernist (and, according to the epilogue, Postmodernist) writers of future generations. Like my project, *Ghostwriting Modernism* is interested in identifying ways in which the ghost, as popularly conceived, provides a special means to inquire about the avant-garde’s engagement with otherness. While *Ghostwriting Modernism* confines itself to the traces and vestiges of a previous culture left within Modernist works, however, my own project attends to the ghost texts themselves in order to explore the figurations of haunting (and their effects) through their direct articulation. It is my intention to move beyond how theorists and authors indirectly appropriate abstract cultural figurations of ghostly haunting toward examining how a particular subgenre of ghost literature has itself revolutionized them. By revolutionize, I mean the ways it has challenged traditions assumptions of mastery, transparency, and comprehensibility in literary figurations of haunting, in the work of narrative, and in the subjective experience of reality.

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13 Wolfreys’s literary readings consist primarily of Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* and *Little Dorrit*, Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, Eliot’s *The Lifted Veil*, and Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. While the argument illuminates the figurative haunting in these texts quite profoundly, the texts themselves offer little in the way of a premise of literal haunting.
Rabaté’s *The Ghosts of Modernity* (1996) aims at “combining psychoanalytic and philosophical concepts in order to reread the history of modernity” (ix). Given that the title invokes the ghostly process of a “return to,” the study evokes a resurrection, principally in terms of literary Modernism. The trope of the ghost—not only as a return, but also as mysterious, figurative, and multiple—provides Rabaté with various analytical approaches to his literary studies, namely in the proposition to *reread* the texts, especially in terms of their authors’ various biographical situations (which “haunt” the texts). While the text’s scope is confined crucial Modernist fiction and poetry (on Joyce, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Beckett, among many others), the theoretical approach to readership in general broadens its implications as applicable to wider literary studies. However, the figure of the ghost, appropriated as a trope through which to articulate a specific theory, is merely a means and not a focal point of direct study—the text certainly does not prioritize a consideration of the literature of haunting. Essentially, in stating his wish “to conjure up the image of a ghostly writer who imagines himself posthumous so as to mediate between his past and future and to judge the present” (3), Rabaté too marginalizes the actual study of ghostliness in favor of a study of the literary, and the ghost is purely for analytic treatment.

Terry Castle’s *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993) provides thorough readings of several ghostly texts (from Defoe to Postmodernism) in order to explore the nature of ghostliness. The text’s premise, that “to write the literary history of lesbianism is to confront, from the start, something ghostly” (28), situates it as an inquiry into a reading of literary haunting as an articulation of a marginal, *othered* discourse, and it again demonstrates the powerful capacity of ghostly figuration to articulate theoretical and social concerns. To express this sentiment, Castle uses the neologism “notherness.” Her project is primarily concerned with the way that, like a
ghost, a given narrative can exist in spite of an integral invisibility that has been imposed on it. While this apparition of the assumedly nonexistent is applicable to the discourse of liminal or even taboo subjects (such as expressions of lesbianism in Victorian England, for example), it also applies to the discourse of cultural expression, and thus the wider politics of social non-normativity. The attention to haunting manifests a celebration of both insubstantiality and being possessed insofar as both offer an embodiment of opening, of potentiality: “To become an appariation was also to become endlessly capable of ‘appearing’” (63). More than in the other texts listed, Castle’s interpretations of lesbianism inform the reader’s understanding of the ghost as a trope; however, they do so mostly through implication only. Particularly as she principally addresses “amor impossibilia—a kind of love that, by definition, cannot exist” (30-31), Castle’s explicit concern prioritizes an exploration of the ghostly nature of lesbianism over one of the lesbian nature of ghostliness—that is, the energies of her theorizations are oriented toward analyzing the lesbian situation, and the ghost is again merely the means. Accordingly, while the text’s many illuminations position it a crucial cornerstone in studies of marginalities, its relevance in theorizing about ghostliness as such is less powerful.

While this project is indebted to the critical spirit encompassing all of the academic inquiries into figurations of the literary ghost over the last two decades, it also aspires to contribute something unique to the established discourse. Presently, there are no published academic studies confined solely to American ghost stories of this period, situated in the transition between literary Modernism and Realism. There are also no comprehensive studies on ghostliness whose theoretical approaches combine ontology, psychoanalysis, and the ethics of otherness. More importantly, missing from the wealth of valuable publications is a thorough study of the ghost story’s radical transformations at the close of the nineteenth century, just
before it is generally abandoned as a serious literary endeavor. Through this project, I hope to offer valuable insight into an overlooked literary-historical development that, in its expressions of intrinsic otherness and limited subjectivity, anticipates varying twentieth-century philosophical developments that not only articulate similar concerns, but do so through the use of ghostly figuration. However, even more, I hope to offer a meaningful reflection on the ethics of otherness.

**Selection of Texts**

This project works to define the Revisionist ghost story that emerges in the late 1880s as a subgenre in distinction from its traditional generic conventions. I argue that the traditional figuration of the ghost, characterized principally by its assumed aversion to the incomprehensibility of literary haunting, has determined the genre as a whole throughout the entire history of the modern ghost story since Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) revived the ghostly spirit of *Hamlet*. While by no measure does the Revisionist ghost story replace the traditional ghost story, which persists in many forms today, it does form a generic subset that ask to reconsider and sometimes critique the wider genre. As the entire genre of the ghost story declines in popularity in the first decade of the twentieth century, so too does the Revisionist subset; comparably, when the entire genre rises again in America in the 1980s, again the Revisionist ghost story resumes as well. I explain its initial emergence at the end of the nineteenth century as a response to a number of historical factors. First, in literary terms, the Revisionist ghost story emerges out of the transition from Realism to Modernism, and this accounts for the subgenre’s distinct blend traditional assumptions of order and stability and

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14 Some prominent contemporary theorists who have relied on the figure of the ghost to communicate theoretical concepts include Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Paul de Man, and Slavoj Zizek, just to name a few.
experimental skepticism in form and content. Second, the close of the Victorian era provokes a certain literary and cultural ambivalence as it brings to light new discourses on the otherness of marginalized groups. Finally, the emergence of new theories of psychology, particularly in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis, revolutionizes popular theories of subjectivity, first and foremost by proposing the existence of an internalized agency working invisibly and independent of the ego.

The Revisionist model incorporates a relatively small subset of the genre as a whole, though its constituency represents a highly popular and academically respected group. In order to articulate the depth of the Revisionist model’s historical development, the project selects a group of ghost stories that are especially representative of the Revisionist trend, which adheres to one or more of five principle criteria: (1) their non-English nationality (mostly American), (2) their period from 1887-1910, (3) their relative success in popularity, (4) their literary concerns with marginalization, and (5) their literary concerns with the work of narrative in terms of writing and reading.

First, it is worth noting that the most outstanding Revisionist ghost stories are, unlike their traditional Romantic and Victorian Gothic counterparts, not English. In fact, except for Maupassant’s “Le Horla,” the fact that all of the tales selected by this project are American reflects this larger trend.15 Though the Spiritualist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century was as popular in England as it was in America, it is the former that has typically produced the most canonical ghost literature through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for

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15 “Le Horla” (1887) stands out as arguably the first text that exhibits substantial revisionist qualities according to my categorization. Despite the richness of this French revision of the traditionally English convention of the ghost, its potential miscarries in France and finds considerable momentum in the United States instead. Although “Le Horla” could be excluded from this study, it does hold a relative significance in demonstrating the shift away from more traditional models. Its inclusion as a point of origin, furthermore demonstrates the extent to which the American ghost story, characteristically revisionist, is not original, but instead predicated upon some former reference.
a variety of reasons.\footnote{16} Conversely, by virtue of its cultural and spatial dislocation from England, America presents a uniquely ambivalent perspective on that canon. Though not all Revisionist ghost stories are American, nor are all American ghost stories Revisionist, the degree of overlap suggests a distinct Americanization of the subgenre toward an awareness of insurmountable diversity fundamental to human subjectivity. Devoid of the English castles and estates of lineage that are so integral to the traditional ghost story conventions, the literary success of the American ghost story, from its very inception, has depended on its capacity to improvise its own contexts of haunting. Arguably, as variously interpreted by its authors, the American ghost story finds itself complexly haunted by its own national values (regarding conceptions of freedom, diversity and otherness, equality, independence, and so on) and its own haunted national past (regarding racism, imperialism, conquest, and so on), as well as by the success of its English counterpart.

Second, the texts I have selected for this project span the years 1887 to 1910. Because of the technological developments in serial and journal publishing during those decades, the genre remained widely popular through its extensive distribution throughout both England and America. By the time the first Revisionist ghost story is published, the Romantic and Victorian Gothic had long since firmly established the ghost story genre according to relatively rigid conventions, such as the promise of mysteries and secrets, the onset of a disruption to order proportionate to its formulaic resolution, and the general malignancy and efficacy of the unfamiliar. Generally speaking, through the rise of Spiritualism since its inception in roughly 1848 up until roughly the 1880s, the subject matter was taken relatively seriously by its writers and readers. However, starting in the 1880s, certain groups (such as the Society for Psychical Research, founded in England in 1882, and the American Society for Psychical Research, formed
in the United States in 1884) began to undertake aggressive campaigns against supposed psychics and mediums. As such respected groups exposed countless supernatural experiences as fraudulent, the popularity of Spiritualism began to experience significant decline. I argue that the Revisionist ghost story reflects the cultural ambivalence and spiritualist crisis that occurs in this critical historical moment.

Third, each of the four texts of this study is relatively popular—in most cases, the ghost story under analysis here is among the respective author’s most prominent works.17 This criterion, based on the stories’ widespread acclaim, works from the assumption that their popularity indicates their resonance with a larger cultural imagination. Consequently, not only do these texts demonstrate significant shifts in the treatment of their reconceptualizations of the figure of the ghost within their respective works, but their wide circulation suggests the degree to which their audience was receptive to their Revisionist concerns.

Fourth, in addition to the texts themselves, the authors selected for this study—Maupassant, Gilman, James, and Wharton—also possess some relatively similar sensibilities that contribute to the collective unity of this project’s texts. Situated within the literary transition from Realism to Modernism, the Revisionist ghost stories selected for this project may therefore be localized within a critical, liminal historical moment. As ghosts begin to recede from practical belief, I argue, they were sublimated from the actual to the imaginative and literary sphere, the literary implications of their expressions of otherness particularly relevant to increasing literary and cultural concerns of marginalities. In addition, each author of the selected Revisionist ghost stories, despite the class privilege enjoyed by most, represents some marginal aspect of society.

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17 An obvious exception to this is Henry James’s “Sir Edmund Orme,” which is often overlooked by critics. Though a consideration of James’s most popular ghost story, The Turn of the Screw, is ultimately omitted in favor of providing a thorough exploration of the context out of which that novella emerges, all of the significant claims made about “Sir Edmund Orme” apply to The Turn of the Screw.
For example, Gilman and Wharton were educated women, writing at a time before they had the right to vote. Most critics agree that James’s pronounced celibacy concealed his homosexuality. Wharton and James spent a great deal of their adult life abroad. Maupassant and Gilman suffered from madness, having been diagnosed with syphilis and “hysteria,” respectively. From their literary speculations made on the nature of haunting, each individual writer seemingly suggests a heightened ability to contemplate various notions of otherness, an ability presumably resulting from the authors’ acquaintance with the peripheries of social norms. One might even speculate that both literature and haunting—and presumably, their intersection—operate as the means to reflect upon such marginalization.

Fifth, apart from their status as sometimes marginalized members of society, the authors of the selected stories possess a pronounced preoccupation with the general work of narrative. Each author comes from a relatively educated social class, each highly versed in literature. Their characters correspondingly tend to be people of letters with a love of literature (and acts of reading and writing), and they are frequently writers themselves. In this sense, the characters represent authorial doubles in their haunted, fictional worlds. Maupassant’s “Le Horla” and Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” for example, are texts that are presented as diaries written by the protagonist through the narratives’ course of events; in James’s “Sir Edmund Orme,” the text is presented as a found manuscript, written by the protagonist years after the narrated events; and in Wharton’s “Afterward,” the text is presented as the protagonist’s narrative reconstructed through memory. The two former texts, “Le Horla” and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” frequently and self-consciously reference their own composition and thus emphasize the ways the work of narrative reflects models of subjective experience in Revisionist haunting. The latter two texts, “Sir Edmud Orme” and “Afterward,” furthermore, each rely on the narrative device of
embedding: the present moment not only incorporates a story from the past, but it also foregrounds the active interpretation of that story. In all cases, the tales seem to be as much about narrative and textuality as they are about ghosts. Furthermore, each of these major texts, I argue, is in some way haunted by a predecessor—in a sense, each story appears as a rewrite of a previous work by the same author. Examining each story in light of the revisions made from its previous version particularly highlights the story’s attempts to revise the traditional conventions of the genre as a whole. Though each text ultimately stands alone in its unique inquiry into the nature of haunting, the Revisionist subset of the ghost story genre emerges via its preoccupation with narrative strategies for representing the haunted nature of subjectivity.

**Chapter Layout**

In Chapter 1, I lay out a detailed historical lineage from the inception of the Gothic in 1765 to the emergence of the Revisionist ghost story in roughly 1890. I divide this span into the Romantic Gothic (1764-1820) and the Victorian Gothic (1820-1901), and I examine their respective treatments of the literary ghost as depicted in various critical texts. I argue that while the two periods of the literary Gothic differ in the specifics of the expressions of their ghosts, both remain united in their conventional assumptions, namely in their role as mediators between human subjectivity and absolute alterity and as indicators of an incomprehensible issue that must be addressed. I identify the genre’s traditional treatment of the ghost according to such assumptions, and as the chapter identifies through references to primary and secondary literature, the traditional model of the ghost story is determined by the eventual exorcism of its ghosts and,

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18 Arguably, countless traditional Romantic and Victorian Gothic texts are equally concerned with manuscripts in one way or another. However, the Revisionist ghost story uniquely positions its textuality in such a way that it furthers the effects of its narrative’s haunting rather than exorcizing it. See Chapter 1 for an extended investigation into differences in the treatment of textuality between traditional and Revisionist ghost stories.
by association, the work of disorder effected by the force of its haunting. It is out of this general
ccontext that I begin to explore an alternative treatment of the literary trope through an analysis of
the Revisionist Ghost Story.

Chapter 2 initiates the project’s study on the Revisionist ghost story as it steps outside of
England. The chapter performs a reading of the French short story “Le Horla” (1887) by Guy de
Maupassant, paying close attention to the way it presents an invisible force and how it is
discerned by the narrator. I begin by considering an earlier version of the story published half a
year prior by the same name, which uniquely speculates on the possibility of an entirely invisible
force—a haunting without a ghost. However, the original version is limited by its uninspired and
conventional narrative framework. By comparison, the revised version incorporates such
epistemological concerns of haunting and invisibility into its narrative apparatus through its new
arrangement as a diary. Through gaps in narrative, unreliable narration, emotional affect, and
impressions of interior isolation, “Le Horla” articulates its complex and innovative skepticism
about the assumed mastery of humans over the spectral. References to the philosophy of Levinas
help to articulate the literature’s depictions of haunting in terms of radical alterity, particularly
expressing its intrinsic incorporation into human experience as well as its immunity to
irreducibility. Whereas the narrator finds nothing but despair in his inability to grasp (figurative
or literally) the invisible force, considerations of Levinas help us look beyond the assumptions
held by the narrator into those held by the narrative itself. More precisely, with the support of
Levinas’s theory on parenthood in particular, I reveal the character’s turn to narrative reflection
to be not the means to comprehend the invisible being and resolve its haunting, as he intends it to
be, but instead the means to affirm its very incomprehensibility.
Chapter 3 shifts the focus of the project to American literature, beginning with “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This short story resembles “Le Horla” in several ways including its narrative structure, its speculations on an invisible force (again, dissociated from a discernible ghost), and its attention to writing and reading; however, its achievements as a Revisionist ghost story excel beyond those of “Le Horla” in its formative inquiries into a meaningful confrontation with the incomprehensible. The chapter begins with a reading of Gilman’s first ghost story, “The Giant Wistaria” (1890), which despite its traditional presentation of ghostly haunting, establishes Gilman’s principle concerns, namely the capacity of ghostly haunting to formulate an alternate text, that is, an alternative method of writing on an otherwise forbidden subject—female subjugation in this case. “The Yellow Wallpaper” extends this initial speculation by figuring its haunting as not merely an alternative method of writing, but an alternative method of reading. As the narrator spends her days between writing in her diary (which make up the text) and “reading” the haunted wallpaper, issues of haunting, narration, and subjectivity begin to blur. A brief reference to Freud’s concepts of uncanny and déjà vu, both of which define an experience of repetition that reflect a return to the old, contextualizes a point of contrast for a reading, supported by Levinas, that conversely identifies an experience of radical newness or an encounter with the unfamiliar as facilitated through the haunting of invisible forces. I term the experience of such newness jamais vu (“never seen”). Although the ending of the short story is ambiguous as the narrator’s subjectivity breaks down—as does the text she writes—Gilman’s narrative opens the opportunity for the possibility of producing meaning in the face of the incomprehensible.

Chapter 4 traces Henry James’s development as a Revisionist author through his first three ghost stories: “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” (1868), “The Ghostly Rental” (1876),
and “Sir Edmund Orme” (1891). The first two stories contextualize James’s interest in the experience of loss, particularly in the way haunting indefinitely extends the work of mourning. Reference Freud’s mourning and melancholia, I argue that the chapter’s primary text, “Sir Edmund Orme,” depicts two distinct forces tied to ghostliness: one that operates by the logic of mourning (tied to the perceptible ghost, which I read as traditional) and one that operates by the logic of melancholia (tied to invisible and incomprehensible haunting, which I read as Revisionist). This story, the first in this project to depict a ghost directly in narration, begins a complex exploration of the possible coexistence of these two forces without one being determined by the other. Through the literature, I explore “melancholic haunting,” distinct from the ghostly mourning that presents the illusion of a lost object’s recovery, as an invisible force of absolute alterity intrinsic to human experience that imposes a sense of profound privation. Finally, in reading the narrative itself as a found text, I propose, through references to Abraham and Török, an alternative mode of readership that, like the previous chapter, attempts to read the fiction not in terms of its direct and complete reflection of a real experience, but as an affirmation of the incomprehensibility presented through the experience of melancholia.

Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the project with a reading of Edith Wharton’s “Afterward” (1910). A quick look at Wharton’s first ghost story, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” (1902), demonstrates the author’s preoccupation with a model of experience in which an encounter (with a ghost, for example) is not recognized as such immediately, but only sometime later—I term this model deferred experience. Referencing Freud’s concept of afterwardsness (Nachträglichkeit), I then formalize a traditionalist interpretation of deferred experience as it is expressed in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” (that is, as a straightforward restoration of comprehensibility). By contrast, “Afterwards,” though its initial conditions are similar to those
of the earlier story, ultimately critiques the concept of afterwards and forecloses the return of comprehensibility. Instead, deferred experience is tied to a belatedness wherein the eventual recognition arrives too late to be relevant or meaningful. In light of this, “Afterward,” which presents itself as the protagonist’s narrative reflection, offers its text as the narrative’s culminating example of a belated recognition of earlier events. Through references to Abraham and Török, I propose a reading of the narrative as a literary exercise that, by virtue of being haunted by forces of melancholia and incomprehensibility, exists not as the reflection of an earlier event, but as a radically unique exploration of the present.
CHAPTER 1
THE HISTORY OF THE MODERN GHOST

The genealogy of the modern ghost—culminating in the ways in which it operates as a disruption to conceptions of normalcy and stability—truly begins as the Romantic Gothic consciously and emphatically reanimates the ghosts of Shakespeare into literary currents. Drawing on a long history of Western ghosts, the literary Romantic Gothic is responsible for formalizing the narrative conventions for the treatment of, understanding of, and engagement with the modern ghost. Though Romantic Gothic literature outwardly figures haunting as a disruptive force capable of revealing gaps within the presentation of narrated reality, the generic standards ultimately tend to limit the effects and significance of their haunting. Typically, the haunting fizzles at the same moment its simple message is decoded; in fact, in some more extreme instances, once the “truth” is revealed, the reader and character together come to realize that the ghostly haunting was, from the start, nothing more than a legerdemain. A detailed look at the Romantic Gothic literature will reveal that, in virtually all cases, the potential profundity of the ghost and all it represents for understanding the experience of reality and recognizing the limits of that experience is sacrificed by the essentially traditionalist narrative in order to restore the image of stability to the fictional world.

The Romantic Gothic is generally understood to span the years 1764 (with the publication of Horatio Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto) to roughly 1820, and it includes work from such writers as Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory (“Monk”) Lewis, Clara Reeve, and Regina Maria Roche. Although the aesthetics and style of the literary Gothic are variously reflected in the German Sturm und Drang and Schauerliteratur, in the French Roman Noir, and
in the American Gothic movements, the origins of the Gothic genre (and term) are distinctly English, as are all of its earliest and most defining canonical authors. As such, the Gothic is a primarily an English phenomenon.

A number of factors may have contributed to England’s readiness for the advent of the Gothic literary style, though perhaps none is more significant than the country’s situation at the frontier of otherness. In part, the English national identity is geographically predicated upon a certain degree of alterity: though certainly a part of the European tradition, its geographic, insular separation from the continent prevents its complete inclusion. Furthermore, historically speaking, the English heritage is uniquely derived from a tension between a common Western European Roman ancestry and a foreign barbaric ancestry, a realization made by the very term *Gothic*. (The word itself refers to the various German tribes of the early Middle Ages infamous for sacking Rome, and the term holds particular resonance within England according to its association to the three tribes from which England is likely descended: the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes [Ellis 22]). According to Markman Ellis, certain English philosophers (Hume, Smith, and Burke) argued that the English constitution itself “preserved elements of the simple and barbarous gothic system of government, while at the same time revising and refining the laws for a modern and politer era” (25). As such, Ellis argues that “the gothic is not the destroyer of the civilised values of classical Rome, but rather is perceived as the source and respository of some of the unique, valuable and essential elements in English culture and politics” (24). Even prior to the advent of the literary Gothic (and the modern revival of the ghost), the English association

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19 For example, in their text *Gothic* (2004), David Punter and Glennis Byron claim of the literary Gothic in general (which enframes the figuration of the ghost) that it “always remains the symbolic site of a culture’s discursive struggle to define and claim possession of the civilized, and to abject, or throw off, what is seen as other to that civilized self” (5).
with the Gothic derives its cultural weight from the tension between otherness and selfhood, inherent to the term.  

In his article “Gothic and the Ghost of *Hamlet*,” Dale Townshend furthermore contends that the emergence of the Gothic onto the literary scene in the latter half of the eighteenth century is directly attributable to a realized need of England to come to terms with its own ambiguous historical identity. In order to reconcile its two competing features (that is, its civilized literacy and its barbaric superstition), the English first had to address and reclaim the term “Gothic” in its ambiguous and contradictory meanings. According to Townshend, the imperative to reinforce an English national identity essentially culminated in defending the worth of its national literary icon, Shakespeare, against certain eighteenth-century French Neoclassicist and Enlightenment thinkers who claimed that the appearance of the supernatural in the his work was nothing short of barbaric—that is, Gothic. As it turns out, this defense—which ultimately proved to be invaluable in the establishment of the not only the literary Gothic, but of a united English national identity as well—hinged precisely on the figuration of haunting, for particularly under critical attack were the ghostly elements of Shakespeare’s plays for which the dead king in *Hamlet* became emblematic. In order to address Shakespeare (and, symptomatically, an English intellectual and cultural legitimacy), one had to confront literary haunting; in other words, to claim an English identity was to defend Shakespeare, and “to defend Shakespeare, was to embrace his ghosts” (Townshend 71).

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20 David Punter and Glennis Byron also suggest, “‘Gothic’ became a highly mobile term, remaining constant only in the way it functioned to establish a set of polarities revolving primarily around the concepts of the primitive and the civilized” (3). Furthermore, Dale Townshend additionally localizes the term Gothic to England both as “traditional, familiar and native to enlightened, Whiggish England” and as “untamed barbarity” (66).

21 Townshend’ claim that “the Gothic revival and the renewal of interest in Shakespeare are two manifestations of the same cultural impulse” (72) is validated in the preface to *The Castle of Otranto* (the second edition) in which Walpole explicitly cites Voltaire’s claim that Shakespeare’s “mixture of buffoonery and solemnity is intolerable.” In response, Walpole suggests his own novel functions as an “appeal from Voltaire to himself” (11).
From the very beginning, the ghost as a literary trope served as a standard by which the Gothic in general would be identified. Though this is true in terms of its association with Shakespeare’s depiction of the so-called barbaric supernatural, it is also true in what it principally represents—that is, the liminality between life and death. Vijay Mishra suggests that Gothic literature as a whole is essentially framed by “the desire to present that which is unpresentable, that which is sublime” (19). Accordingly, the figure of the ghost reflects an indispensable component of the genre insofar as its cultural connotations are particularly suggestive of the tension between presence and nonpresence—between what can and cannot be presented. In fact, ghostliness effectively carries these concerns all the way into and through the experience of death itself, the unpresentable **par excellence**. By virtue both of its characteristic liminality and of its constitution as contradictorily both substantive and ethereal, the literary ghost typically represents an ambiguity capable of disrupting rational expectations and, consequently, capable of powerfully articulating the Gothic’s principle concerns with “a failure in representation through a massive disturbance as the texts, in trying to present the unpresentable, veer toward collapse” (20). Expressive of a sense of uncertainty according both to popular cultural imagination in general and to Gothic literature in specific, ghostly haunting tends to challenge common practices of representation. Taking into consideration such characteristics, indeed exclusive to the figure of the ghost, Mishra thus observes, “It is only in the ghost (in the supernatural) that the ‘unrepresentability’ of death in life (to experience death is to die) is made a possibility” (78). Through its modern revival in the Gothic novel, the literary ghost becomes a formalized trope signaling a semi-invisible disturbance that complexly demands and resists the presentation of the unpresentable: it presents the threat of death, in other words, without fully presenting that death itself. Because arguably no other figure so adeptly captures
the principle tenets of the literary Gothic, when speaking of the genre, one is just as well speaking of the ghostly, and *vice versa*.

Tracing Mishra’s estimation of the Gothic directly to the original literature itself not only affirms the validity of his extensive and qualifying claims, but it also illuminates the extent of the ghost’s efficacy as a trope. In the first truly Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Horatio Walpole explicitly addresses his intention to shape the emergent genre through a tangled amalgamation of the civilized and the uncivilized. More precisely, his fiction aims to explore the disorienting site where reality and fiction become confused. In the second preface to the novel, Walpole identifies his innovative blend of “the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern” (9)—that is, the blend between the ancient supernatural “imagination and improbability” (9) and the modern natural and rational perspective. As effectively a self-proclaimed reconciliation between reality and fiction, the novel features characters intentionally made “to think, speak, and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions” (10). In other words, the literary Gothic, according to Walpole’s formulation, places ordinary subjects into extraordinary situations of otherness; it is a literary encounter with an unfamiliarity that, at least initially, resists any process of familiarization. With this gesture, Walpole articulates what will become the foundation of the longstanding tradition of not only the literary Gothic, but of traditional ghost literature as well: the juxtaposition of objective order and subjective disorder.  

In addition to Walpole’s experimentation with the dialog between fiction and reality, *Otranto*’s preface furthermore underscores its novel’s inherently mimetic premise. Walpole openly identifies his stylistic imitation of Shakespeare’s work: “The great master of nature,

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22 H. P. Lovecraft suggests of *Otranto* that, “What it did above all else was to create a novel type of scene, puppet-characters, and incidents; which, handled to better advantage by writers more naturally adapted to weird creation, stimulated growth of an imitative Gothic school which in turn inspired the real weavers of cosmic terror” (25).
Shakespeare, was the model I copied” (10). In referencing Shakespeare (Hamlet, implicitly), Walpole presents another significant characteristic of the modern ghost story: its status as essentially a reworking. Not only is Walpole reproducing the motif of the ghost according to Shakespeare’s stylistic treatment, he is also attempting to modify it in order to augment its efficacy in meeting the Gothic aspirations of his novel (and of what, beginning from this formulation, will become the generic model). In essence, Otranto not only produces a dialogue between reality and fiction, but also between an original and its reflection. Walpole’s work thus explicitly extracts a significant and rather implicit corresponding characteristic of Shakespeare’s Hamlet (which, drawing from the supernatural communion between the ghost of the dead King and Prince Hamlet, itself produces a dialogue between the past and the [ideally corrective] present). In engaging the figurative “ghost of the past,” Walpole, like Prince Hamlet, is faced with the task of recreating the original in a reworked, enhanced, and corrected form. In terms of Otranto, the figure of the ghost conceptualizes a departed original authority in three qualitatively distinct situations: in the ghost of Alfonso the Good (diegetically, as a diegetic model for the characters’ morality), in the ghost of King Hamlet (extradiegetically, as a generic model for the treatment of haunting in particular), and in Shakespeare’s text Hamlet (extradigetically, as a metafictive model for the treatment of the novel in general as a literary text). In the case of all three haunted situations, seemingly due to a misunderstanding of the original, there emerges an imperative to reassess and consequently rework the situation in order to correct a discrepancy between what is (which has for some reason or another been corrupted) and what should be (particularly as formulated by some preexisting yet overlooked model or tradition). In other

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23 In a sense, the idea of a reworking is similar to that of a revision; however, I reserve the latter term (capitalized) to characterize the subgenre that emerges at the end of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, reworking involves altering the details within the structure of the genre, typically in the attempt to enhance the literary capacity to more perfectly draw out and express the generic conventions. On the other hand, revising (“re-vision”), as I use the term, conversely involves a radical transformation of the generic conventions themselves, effectively reorienting the literary perspectival vantage (that is, the reader’s and the writer’s point of reference).
words, just as Prince Hamlet must expose the injustice involving his father’s murder and in turn restore the legitimacy and potency of his lineage. Walpole must expose the injustice involving the unfound criticism of Shakespeare (by his French contemporaries in particular) and in turn restore the legitimacy and potency of the English cultural identity and lineage. Just the same, from within the construction of Walpole’s plot, the ghost of Alfonso the Good haunts the novel only in order to facilitate an exposure of the various injustices involving Manfred’s wrongful appropriation of the throne, which in turn leads to a restoration of the legitimacy and potency of young Theodore’s previously unknown lineage. Walpole’s careful and deliberate construction of *Otranto* as itself a standard for an emergent, inchoate generic form layers within its text three correlative situations of haunting which collectively formalize the generic foundation of the traditional ghost story. Whether literal or formal, each of these three situations of haunting results in a return to the past in order to reestablish a disrupted context of lineage with tradition. In other words, this primary Romantic Gothic novel therefore establishes the traditional ghost as a force both that reveals an incomplete and indirect experience of reality and that demands that that experience be reassessed and reworked according to its tradition.  

Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1778), an equally formative and innovative Romantic Gothic novel, similarly admits to reworking Walpole just as Walpole (and *Otranto*) reworks Shakespeare (and *Hamlet*). As the preface reveals, “This Story is the literary offspring of The Castle of Otranto, written upon the same plan, with a design to unite the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient Romance and modern Novel, at the same time it

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24 Within the Romantic Gothic framework, this guiding principle is generally a relatively simple task. For example, the need to reassess the situation in *Otranto* means little more than returning to the objective truth, which has been hidden. In contradistinction, a Revisionist ghost story such as “Le Horla,” involves not a return to tradition, but a peregrination into the absolutely unknown. As will be seen, the fundamental distinction between the traditional ghost story and the Revisionist ghost story lies in the tendency of the former to utilize the necessity of reassessment native to haunting in order to assert mastery of a situation (and ostensibly restore its missing completeness and directness) as opposed to the tendency of the latter is to explore the means of relinquishing mastery of a situation (and correspondingly affirming the inevitability of its completeness and directness).
assumes a character and manner of its own, that differs from both” (v). In the preface’s detailed criticism of Otranto, Reeve argues that Walpole has failed at “[keeping] within the utmost verge of probability” (ix, emphasis original); as a result, the over-exaggerated supernatural effects serve to “destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter” (x).

Inspired to illuminate more precisely the generic principles as she understands them, Reeve writes a novel intending to rework the “supernatural effects.” In this sense, Reeve reworks Walpole in order to perfect the literary expression of the genre in the same way that Walpole reworked Shakespeare. In light of this similarity, it can be argued that both Walpole and Reeve in their literary operations function analogously to their respective disinherited protagonists, Theodore and Edmund, who—like their model, Prince Hamlet—must reconcile the absent, haunting past with the present. Such early Romantic Gothic novels formalize the ghost as a mediator that opens the space between “the other” (that is, the dead, the supernatural, the barbaric, the past, the original) and the subject (that is, the living, the natural, the civilized, the present, the reworking).

While the ghostly haunting of early Gothic literature emphasizes the vast space between the subject and its other, it also facilitates an encounter with that other that aims to reduce or neutralize entirely its very quality of otherness. According to its general cultural understanding, a ghost, literary or otherwise, marks the supernatural return of the dead from beyond the otherwise radical limit of death, and as such, it presents the possibility of overcoming the otherness of death—at least partially. In these early Gothic tales so woven around the inheritance of power, ancestral lineage symbolically serves as the foundation for and legitimatization of one’s present identity; when our access to this past is lost (as it is in Hamlet, Otranto, Baron, and countless others), the truth of our being is othered—it is rendered absent or
unfamiliar. When this occurs, it is the responsibility of the literary ghost to restore and reanimate it (by refamiliarizing it). On this note, Dale Townshend argues that, “Hamlet serves the writers of Gothic romance and drama as a blueprint or set of dramatic instructions pertaining specifically to the appropriate treatment of the dead” (73). According to Townshend, there are two important consequences that arise from this observation. In the first place, what the Gothic tale inherits from Hamlet is the realization that “death, however resistant, must be drawn into an intimate and enduring relation with truth” (73). In the second place, the Gothic is necessarily predicated on an initial situation of mourning (that is, the subjective negotiation of a traumatic loss) insofar as Hamlet reminds us that “the dead in Gothic need to be adequately remembered, memorialized and mourned” (75). If this is correct, then at its very center, the ghost of Gothic literature is the signal of a disrupted mourning that must be resumed. In other words, when ghosts appear, their appearance should be read as an injunction to locate and restore the lost object—and, particularly, to reanimate one’s disrupted ancestral lineage.

In light of Townshend’s observations, we can begin to observe the possibility of a subtle distinction between a ghost and the force of its haunting. In the case of Romantic Gothic literature in general, haunting represents the impression of mourning that extends across the text. This mourning emerges out of not just any loss, but in particular out of the loss of one’s legitimate connection to an established historical tradition, often not perceived consciously by the characters or the reader. Haunting, therefore, manifests the deprivation tied to emptiness, to radical otherness, and to the invisibility of what ought to be, but instead is not. According to both its cultural and literary tradition, haunting, like the presentation of a nonpresence, signals the general impression and recognition of a particular loss. In the face of this profound sense of mournful loss, there surfaces a ghost. Unlike the haunting which is characteristically empty, the
ghost takes ambiguous physical shape as a partially materialized substance, and accordingly, it mediates the tentative connection between subjective reality and that lost object which has been effaced from it. In this respect, the ghost represents the conscious and semi-visible component of the invisible haunting, and it operates as a reminder of the loss, suspending the work of mourning. If the ghostly presence indicates the corresponding yet invisible presence of haunting, which itself evinces some deprivation, then so long as that ghostly presence persists, so too does its dreadful counterpart: the significant impression of loss. As it appears in Romantic Gothic literature, therefore, the figure of the ghost manifests a profound ambivalence—while its presence beneficently draws one’s awareness to a fundamental disturbance, its direct association with that disorder issues a malignity potentially capable of overshadowing the extent of its virtue.

The Romantic Gothic ultimately formalizes the traditional figuration of the literary ghost as an indication of loss. Ghostly haunting, in turn, in the way that it inserts an element of otherness into the experience of reality, is suggestive of a fundamental disruption in subjectivity that occurs at the intersection of reality and fiction. However, while the figure of the literary ghost does outwardly present the inevitable need to address such an otherness, the traditional literary treatment of the trope within the Romantic Gothic framework characteristically tends to reduce the efficacy of such an address in its effort to exorcize the haunting, which essentially amounts to its various attempts to master the uncertain, familiarize the unfamiliar, and overcome the otherness. More often than not, the traditional ghost story struggles to undermine and resolve the haunting, severely obstructing an authentic and meaningful engagement with otherness, particularly through the generic conventions of setting, characterization, and plot. Reflective of an effort to treat the symptom, not the cause, the traditional approach operates according to the
logic that an exorcism of the ghost will expose the incomplete and indirect nature of one’s experience of reality that will in turn remedy its incompleteness and indirectness. This highly reductive assumption is the result of an essential failure to distinguish a ghost from its haunting, and, significantly, it proves to underscore the traditional understanding of the ghost in which exorcizing the ghost amounts to neutralizing the effects of the haunting which has produced it.

In the first place, the conventional setting of Romantic Gothic literature—distant either in terms of space, time, or both—definitively separates its ghostly subject matter from the reader. Just as Hamlet’s medieval Denmark was too foreign a setting for his contemporary audience to properly identify with, so, too, for their respective readers, are the settings of the Romantic Gothic novels. Generally speaking, all of the most popular novels are set either in centuries prior to their publication (The Castle of Otranto [1764], The Old English Baron [1778], The Mysteries of Udolpho [1794]) or in distant countries (The Monk [1796], The Italian [1797], Clermont: A Tale [1798]). If the reader does not have a familiar foundation on which to stand, then the work becomes purely fantastic, and the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar is consequently very limited. When haunting is dislocated to vague or abstract foreign settings, the reader does not experience the same vulnerability to otherness as do the novels’ characters for whom the setting is quite familiar. Additionally, the already substantial estrangement resulting from discrepancies in the setting is further compounded by the characters’ conventional lives. The protagonists are typically disinherited members of the privileged aristocracy, and their actions and their class prerogatives are just as foreign to most readers as the setting. This separation often serves to obstruct the close identification of the reader with the subject matter, and the occurrence of the novels’ supernatural events remains identifiably fictive. The tension between
fiction and reality is thus strongly delimited according to the generic formalizations made by the
Romantic Gothic.

In addition to setting and characterization, the early Gothic novels of the Romantic period also tend to use the plot structure to minimize readers’ direct confrontations with invisible otherness. Very often, these tales rely on an inevitable revelation of truth, which is generally voiced by the ghost, in order to resolve the haunting’s temporary disruptions to the characters’—and readers’—experience of reality. For example, though the supernatural events in *Otranto* are frightful, the ghost’s singular and simplistic purpose is nothing more than to restore legitimacy to the rightful heir: in the final scene of the novel, the ghost finally appears to proclaim, “Behold in Theodore the true heir of Alfonso!” (98). Following this statement, the ghost—and his supernatural effects—departs forever. Similarly, in *Baron*, the ghosts of the slain Lord and Lady Lovel appear simply to reveal the rightful heir, their disinherited son Edmund, to the Lovel throne, a legitimacy which has been hitherto concealed by his deceitful cousin. Once the papers that confirm Edmund’s legitimacy have been gathered (which, “when together, furnish a striking lesson to posterity” [264]), the haunting recedes and subsequently, “the young Lord Lovel caused the haunted apartment to be repaired and furnished” (259-60). In both cases, as the objective truth is revealed, no impression of absolute invisibility remains. Though the characters of the Romantic Gothic have often, through some event or another, been estranged from the truth of their history, the ghosts that haunt these tales most often reforge disrupted relationships and lineages.

As a result of the minimization of the threat of otherness and the simplistic resolutions to the ghostly disruptions to normalcy, early Gothic tales often underplay the complex operations of haunting in favor of reinforcing the stability that otherwise is, by definition, problematized by the
ghostly effects. As their plots would suggest, the conventions of the Romantic Gothic narrative are determined by the desire to restore a state of normalcy to the experience of being, which, according to Townshend, “may only get under way once the corpse has been exposed in all its horrid yet necessary truth” (85). In effect, early Gothic tales tend to use the disruptive powers of ghostliness only with the underhanded moral convictions to restore a truer and more stable reality. As Markman Ellis observes, “the novelising strategies of gothic fiction, even when presented within the formal structure of the romance, propose a scepticism not only towards supernatural experience and superstitious belief but towards all naive forms of credulity” (14).

H. P. Lovecraft similarly notes of Otranto that it is “impaired by a brisk and prosaic style whose urbane sprightliness nowhere permits the creation of a truly weird atmosphere” (24).

In some cases, the climax of a Gothic tale—those of Radcliffe being most exemplary—reveals that the events which previously appeared supernatural were merely the products of “monkish superstition” (Udolpho 662), and thus never supernatural at all. Lovecraft contends that Radcliffe’s tendencies toward rationalism ultimately result in “destroying her own phantoms at the last through labored mechanical explanations” (27). For example, in a closing chapter of The Mysteries of Udolpho the ghostly figure haunting the novel turns out to be nothing more than a false ghost: “Had she dared to look again, her delusion and her fears would have vanished together, and she would have perceived, that the figure before her was not human, but formed of wax” (662). In cases such as these, the supernatural disruption of the real ghostly haunting is rendered completely ineffectual, as never having had legitimacy in the first place.

Consequently, the authors and texts of the Romantic Gothic tend to operate under the assumption that the literary text itself—much like the papers that serve to legitimate the proper
lineage of Edmund at the conclusion of *Baron*—is capable of resolving haunting through the logical and rational composition of its narrative. By the very premise of such early traditional ghost literature, the ghost is ultimately a benign entity whose supposed haunting disruption is more restorative than otherwise. Through its framing and plot structures, the ghost’s presentation of otherness is subdued, and the corresponding haunting tension between an objective reality and one’s dislocated subjective experience of that reality is, even if alluded to, not directly engaged. The conventions of the Romantic Gothic narrative apparatus to normalize the subject matter are thus at odds with the complexities of haunting that inversely disrupt normalcy. Dani Cavallaro similarly suggests that in traditional tales of haunting, “ghosts return not so much in order to unsettle the status quo as in order to mend a damaged fabric” (69). At the same time that Romantic Gothic texts appear to denounce the progressive principles of Enlightenment thinking through the presentation of ghosts and other supernatural entities, the formal techniques directing the Gothic narratives are often highly controlled and logical; the figure of the ghost is therefore ultimately deployed *against* the very threat of its associated absolutely invisible haunting. Operating as a double-negative, the ghosts of several foundational texts disrupt an already-disrupted situation. As instability is corrected, the ghostly qualities circumscribing the principles of the Romantic Gothic are tragically reduced as such early novels serve to secure—more than problematize—the ties between reality itself and its experience.

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25 In the final paragraph of the novel, the narrator legitimates the royal lineage of his newly adopted son through textual means: “Sir Philip Harclay caused the papers relating to his son’s history to be collected together; the first part of it was written under his own eye in Yorkshire, the subsequent parts by Father Oswald at the Castle of Lovel” (263-4).
The Ghost of the Victorian Gothic

The Romantic Gothic is generally understood to have come to an end in the early 1820s, arguably beginning with the transformations of literary conventions that began to take place at this time. For example, according to H. P. Lovecraft’s analysis, Charles Maturin’s novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1821) transcends the conventions of traditional Romantic Gothic fiction; he claims that in this novel “the Gothic tale climbed to altitudes of sheer spiritual fright which it had never known before” (32). Lovecraft suggests that through its particular emphasis on fear, which uniquely appears in this novel “out of the realm of the conventional and exalted into a hideous cloud over mankind's very destiny” (32), *Melmoth* stands out in contrast to the works of previous generations that were more overtly determined by rationalism and pragmatic logic (35). Regarding the intensified celebration of the grotesque as a force not so easily overcome, one could make similar claims of other texts of the same period, such as Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and de Quincy’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821). With such a transformation of convention away from a controlled and pragmatic pseudo-engagement with otherness, here begins a pronounced development in the complexity of the haunting that will become known as the Victorian Gothic era of the traditional ghost story.

With the rise in popularity of the Victorian Gothic novel and short story in the mid-nineteenth century, the ghost story as a distinct entity began to gain remarkable momentum. Particularly following two monumental events in 1848, the hidden, spiritual aspect of reality began to inspire remarkable fascination in the public mind. First, Catherine Crowe published *The Night Side of Nature*, an almanac of sorts for the spiritual world. The text provides definitions, examples, and propositions regarding a variety of supernatural occurrences all centered on the spirits that survive beyond death, and it achieved a widely popular success.
Crowe fundamentally invites her readers to open their minds to accommodate that which cannot be understood rationally and simply. Taking into consideration “our imperfect knowledge and limited vision” (21), Crowe claims of supernatural phenomena that “if we cannot explain them” then we must “admit that the difficulty arises solely from our own incapacity” (22). Crowe’s text serves as a counterpoint to the celebration and enthusiasm over scientific progress of the time. Though Crowe’s claims themselves are admittedly rational, they nevertheless acknowledge that the empirical pursuit of knowledge remains essentially incomplete and indirect when engaging reality as such.

The English publication of Crowe’s *The Night Side of Nature* presented the theoretical foundations for ghostliness and opened its discourse in public spheres. In the very same year, across the Atlantic in America, three sisters Kate, Margaret, and Leah Fox demonstrated a practical example of Crowe’s theorized communication with the other world. These young residents of Hydesville, New York famously used a system of rappings to fool the world into believing that they could directly engage invisible ghosts. In the way that the sisters seemingly sent and received messages that appeared to transcend the limits of death, they consequently proved to spectators not only that spirits exist, but that we can communicate with them. Public interest in spiritualism swept the country almost overnight, such that “in the early 1850s America, especially, seemed possessed. The spiritualist publications claimed that at least two million solid citizens could be counted as believers, perhaps half again that many in Europe. Many believed they had themselves talked to the dead” (Blum 20). Mediums appeared all across America and England, and séances were held on a regular basis with the promise to reach the dead. With such supposed proof to the public of a ghostly reality that enshrouds our own perceptions, Crowe’s skepticism toward the belief in a complete and direct experience of reality
claimed considerable authority at the time. Punter and Byron contend that the popularity of
spiritualism and the literature that frames it are responses to “the rise of positivistic science and
the decline of religion in the increasingly materialist and secular nineteenth century,” insofar as
“ghosts challenge or at least question the authority of science and reason” (27). They further
maintain that this “could be seen as an oddly reassuring, if nevertheless disturbing, proof of
something beyond” (27). In the latter half of the nineteenth century then, the subject of otherness
(particularly beyond the radical boundary of death) gained cultural currency, and its primary
manifestation was of course the figure of the ghost.

Literary production capitalized on this sudden mass appeal of the spiritual world—as well
as on a further intensified tension between the rational subject and an irrational otherness—with
a substantial increase in the output of Gothic tales, most dramatically centered upon
ghostliness.26 Writers of all backgrounds—Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Robert Louis
Stevenson, and Arthur Conan Doyle, to name just a few—differently took part in this excitingly
renewed genre. Though offshoots did appear within Continental Europe and in America
according to their own style, the most popular ghost stories of the Victorian period were either
British or they took place in the British landscape, following the tradition of the Romantic
Gothic. Such a profound proliferation of the ghost story was made possible by “the emergence
of many new periodicals and literary magazines in the wake of the mid-century expansion of the
publishing industry” (Punter and Byron 27). Throughout the Victorian period’s lengthy duration
from the 1830s to the early 1900s27, Gothic literature continued to express anxieties of otherness

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26 Punter and Byron similarly suggest that “Victorian ghost stories typically centre on the irruption of the
supernatural into the familiar, comfortable, and […] the mundane everyday world” (27).
27 The precise end of the Victorian Gothic—and the Victorian literary period as a whole—is heavily debated. As a
strictly historical era, the period ends at 1901 with the death of Queen Victoria; however, the literary style itself, as
profuse as it had become through the advent of technology in the reproduction of literature, hardly ended the day of
the queen’s death. Though many writers of the ghost story from the beginning of the century, such as Henry James
or Edith Wharton, might be called proto-Modernist as much as late-Victorians, the cultural shift, which lasts decades
and the irrationality lurking behind our rational world, though these expressions were all the more relevant and threatening to their reader, and the most explicit articulations certainly were voiced through the ghost story as it emerged as its own distinct genre.

Not only did the ghost become an icon for a specific popular belief surrounding the soul’s transcendence of bodily mortality, but it significantly began to further shape a number of rising preoccupations, including, for example the invisible worlds (of outer space, of the mind, and of the make-up of matter itself) exposed to us through science. According to Terry Castle, ghostliness—or, more precisely, the subjective and visually spectral qualities implicated in the related term *phantasmagoria*—is “fraught with symbolic potential” (43) in its particularly singular capacity to represent “the latent irrationalism haunting, so to speak, this rationalist conception of mind” (29). Ghostly figuration, in this sense, serves to expose “the spectral nature of our own thoughts” (29). Castle argues that in cultural terms, “the demystifying project” (52) of Enlightenment Western culture took to eradicating “the old theological world of apparitions” (52). Such an apparatus is especially visible in newly emergent Freudian psychoanalysis and its pragmatic approach to psychology, for example. From a scientific or philosophical viewpoint, any visions of ghosts were—contrary to popular belief—nothing more than mere figments of an overactive imagination, objects of a deceitful psyche. Despite that this pragmatic perspective gained considerable leverage as the nineteenth century came to a close, ghostliness nevertheless retained its power of haunting. Castle claims that:

> Ghosts were not exorcized—only internalized and reinterpreted as hallucinatory thoughts. Yet this internalization of apparitions introduced a latent irrationalism into the realm of mental experience. If ghosts were thoughts, then thoughts themselves took on—at least notionally—the haunting reality of ghosts. The mind became subject to spectral presences. […] By relocating the world of ghosts in the closed space of the imagination, one ended up supernaturalizing the mind until at least the start of World War I, provisionally begins in 1901, even though the “Revisionist ghost stories” explored in this project begin nearly a decade and a half before the turn of the century.
Engaging this paradox in which the self is haunted by the self, the ghost stories of the Victorian Gothic generally express a “frequently increasing ambiguity and a more sophisticated exploration of psychological processes” and, in turn, “the scientist who began to appear in twentieth-century Gothic fiction is frequently a psychologist” (Punter and Byron 24). As such, ghost literature at this point sought precisely to expose such tensions, bridging the gap inherent to the Gothic between the rational and irrational, a gap which, paradoxically, the literature simultaneously acknowledges and nourishes as itself a fictional reworking of objective reality. Born of the tensions between science and popular belief in the era of Victorian spiritualism, the nineteenth-century ghost story remained predicated on the complex discontinuity or disturbance between what is and what is not—or, between what is and what cannot be. Though most Victorian ghost stories tended to not fully address its complexity, the relationship between reality and fiction dramatically intensified as it became increasingly difficult to definitively distinguish a strict boundary between the two, particularly as the irrationality and invisible hauntings of fiction progressively corrupt the supposedly complete and direct experience of the world.

One of the more significant advances of the period lies involves the intensification of the threat of otherness. Though alterity has always been a concern within the literary Gothic, its pronounced invasiveness in the Victorian era tightened the relationship between subjectivity and otherness—namely between the characters and the ghosts, though also between the reader and the ghosts’ effects. According to Punter and Byron, the subject matter of earlier Romantic Gothic texts generally “was prior to, was opposed to, or resisted the establishment of civilized values and a well-regulated society” (8). There existed a strict boundary line between civilization and its other, and the terrifying perils of text and world were held at a safe distance.
Whereas the Romantic Gothic tended to displace the ordinary reader into a generally unfamiliar setting, the Victorian Gothic conversely kept its reader within a once-ordinary and recognizable reality, now infused with unfamiliarity. The figures of the Victorian Gothic consequently present an increasing threat of destabilization from within civilization. As the Industrial Revolution drew more and more people to the city centers, so too did it imaginatively draw in the villains and corruptive influences of the literary Gothic. Jarlath Killeen argues, “The growth of the metropolis was part of the reason why traditional Gothic fast became obsolete after the early 1820s—it was hard to be so frightened of the Catholic Continent when it seemed that much more terrible things were happening in the dark alleys and the lanes of the city in which you lived” (12). As early as 1820, the setting of the literature changed from foreign or remote spaces of another time into the familiar domestic and urban spaces of the present. Ghosts and other supernatural beings of the Victorian age inhabited not only the marginal and confined spaces of the city’s prisons and madhouses, but even the very “labyrinthine streets, sinister rookeries, opium dens, and the filth and stench of the squalid slums” of the nineteenth-century industrial urban landscape (Punter and Byron 21-2). As characters of the Victorian Gothic found themselves seemingly surrounded by the possibility of sinister otherness, the imposition into the normalcy of the subjects’ and the reader’s space was dramatically intensified. What Wolfreys identifies in the Victorian Gothic as “more potentially terrifying because of [the gothic’s] ability to manifest itself and variations of itself anywhere” (9) is similarly identified by Punter and Byron as “disturbingly familiar” (26): the otherness is given a greater depth of human, civilized figuration. Similarly, the Victorian subjects tended no longer to be members of the aristocratic gentry, but rather of the newly-emergent bourgeois population. The result of what Punter and Byron term a “domestication of Gothic figures” (26) is thus a further intensification of the
tensions between the modern and the traditional, between one’s experience of being and its radical otherness.

The intensification of haunting through the Victorian era is further evidenced by the ghost story’s corresponding empowerment of its ghosts. Jennifer Bann argues that ghosts of the Romantic Gothic period—and even those of the early Victorian Gothic period—are typically devoid of significant agency in and of themselves. These old ghosts were marked by the overtly constricting chains of death: for example “the ineffectually vengeful Old Hamlet,” “the mournful Achilles,” and the chained Jacob Marley (663). Bann claims that, “When these ghosts walked, it was not to deny death’s role as agency’s ultimate terminus, but to affirm it” (664), and these ghosts “functioned as narrative devices to restore order and justice rather than as individuals” (676). As the fashionable interest in spiritualism grew, however, literary ghostliness continued to challenge the limits of a tension with otherness as Victorian spiritualism further transformed into “something inherently powerful and transformative” with a “unique kind of power and psychological depth” (665). Authors in turn increasingly began to depict their ghosts “as characters, rather than as plot devices and moving scenery” (683). One of the more substantial developments in the Victorian Gothic therefore relates to the emergent capacity of the ghost narrative to resemble a reflective surface wherein the ghosts reflected, at least in part, the human characteristics of their protagonists and their readers.

Throughout the Victorian era, the changing conventions of the literary ghost established an increasingly powerful and complex figuration. Ghosts began to encroach upon the living more substantially, and exorcism sometimes became considerably more involved. The ghosts

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28 Similarly, Lovecraft argues of the early Romantic Gothic tales that their characters—and ghosts in particular—function more like “puppet-characters” than plausible humans. It is interesting to note a certain development within Lovecraft’s analysis: whereas he claims that Walpole’s characters are unmistakably puppets, he also argues that “Mrs. Radcliffe’s characters are puppets, but they are less markedly so than those of her forerunners” (28).
began to take on more of a human likeness; their haunting otherness reflects the characters’ and readers’ subjective experiences of reality. Consequently, within the literature, the normative and stable experience of reality suffers a proportionately terrifying corruption. Whereas the Victorian Gothic is indeed innovative in many of its transformations of the Romantic Gothic conventions, it is arguably less a radical renovation than it is an extension of the Gothic trend to articulate and overcome a disruption of normalcy in the engagement with otherness. Despite all of its developments, however, the treatment of the literary ghost and its haunting continued to be limited by its narrative apparatus insofar as the narration remained essentially antithetical to the otherness of its haunting. When Julian Wolfreys argues that “the spectral-gothic mode leaves its immaterial yet indelible mark in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the most conventional of narratives and the most unlikely discourses” (10), he reinforces the fact that just as Romantic Gothic literature was a reworking—more than a revising—of its Shakespearean and medieval predecessors, Victorian Gothic literature on the whole correspondingly finds itself merely reworking the Romantic Gothic. It is true that on some level, the Gothic genre, based on its fascination with otherness and liminality, is always to some extent the product of reworking, and the precise terms of the literary engagement with alterity remain in constant development. Nevertheless, the Victorian Gothic, despite its many elaborations on the genre’s inquiry into ghostly haunting, remains seated firmly within this traditional mindset both in its basic assumption that the absolutely invisible haunting can be simply resolved via its associated ghost as well as in the way that it tends to conceive of literary narrative as the means to exorcize the disorder of haunting. In other words, while the Victorian Gothic does extend and intensify the tension of the traditional conflict, it continues to fall back upon the same reductive results time and again.
Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s famous short story “The Haunted and the Haunters” (1859) supplies a particularly colorful example of the increased anxieties of otherness and the invisibility of truth at the same time that it demonstrates the inevitably reductive shortcomings typical of the literary Victorian Gothic’s attempt to master the effects of haunting through the narrative apparatus.29 The story features the haunting of a particular London mansion fraught with a variety of traditionally Gothic idiosyncrasies: furniture moves, doors open, close, and lock themselves, and the “pale blue misty outline of a human figure” appears (80). During the narrator’s stay in the haunted house, his perception of reality is increasingly infected by the fictions presented by the ghost. As the ghosts frighten off his servant and break his dog’s neck, the previously incredulous narrator begins to take the haunting seriously, and he begins to address it according to the seeming reality of its presentation.

In “The Haunted and the Haunters,” it is crucial to note that the ghosts’ increased effect upon reality is a direct consequence of the short story’s increased concerns with the work of narrative. The narrator truly begins to take the ghosts seriously once a dark force proceeds to dramatize a series of deaths in a seeming grotesque theater. In this ghastly presentation, a “phantom-male” appears to stab a ghostly woman in “a loose robe of cloudy white” (93) and “blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles, from the lace” (94). Other players include “a man long drowned—bloated, bleached, seaweed tangled in its dripping hair” and a squalid, cowering child, “famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes” (94-5). Such theatrics of death in this performed text speak of injustices, hidden crimes unsolved and unspoken, begging for a resolution and begging for an audience, as though the two were interrelated. Furthermore, the presentation of the haunting through a performative text underscores the falsity inevitably woven into the very

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29 According to M. R. James, this short story is perhaps the Victorian ghost tale par excellence; he claims “nobody is permitted to write about ghost stories without mentioning [it]” (170).
production of the supposed truth of the concealed crimes: the performance culminates in chaos as “bubbles of light” create a “disordered, irregular, turbulent maze” that literally consumes dramatically reenacted narrative into an unspeakable otherness. It is in the depths of these “shapes without symmetry” (95)—whose “movements were without order” (95) and yet seemingly manipulated by a personified Shadow—that the narrator must ultimately confront a radical otherness: “For there, though in nought else around me, I was aware that there was a will, and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own” (96, emphasis original).

A second detail in “The Haunted and the Haunters” demonstrates the increased complexity and tentative ties with the work of narrative held by the developing Victorian Gothic. At the climax of the short story, the narrator encounters a room that he believes to be the “receptacle for the influences which haunt the house” (104). In this room, the narrator discovers a tablet on which is written a curse on the house. The vellum on which the curse is inscribed—like the ghastly performance that dramatizes the crimes of the house’s past—metonymically contains and arguably produces the haunting. This is a substantial shift from ghost stories of previous eras wherein the tales’ textual components and use of writing could restore order and were implied to be a remedy to the curse of haunting30; instead, as it is now implied to be a source of the curse, the figuration of the text operates within a capacity of active menace.

“The Haunted and the Haunters” anticipates a significant shift in its treatment of ghostliness both in the way that it speculates on the profound presence of otherness and furthermore in the way that it tentatively couples haunting with the act of a disordering narrative presentation. However, this shift ultimately unravels as the story falls back on the common impulse of Romantic and Victorian Gothic literature to neatly resolve the haunting matter—

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30 Such as the papers that confirm Edmund’s lineage in The Old English Baron, for example.
particular through the traditional assumption that the haunting produced by a *corrupted text* can be overcome by the rational means of an *uncorrupted text* (and an exorcism of the associated ghost). By its conclusion, the short story will have undermined all of its powerfully disrupted effects. For Bulwer-Lytton’s story in particular, once the narrator discovers and properly interprets the source of the haunting, he recommends that the owner of the house simply remove the haunted room and the cursed vellum within. Following this suggestion, a construction crew “razed to the foundations the part of the building containing the secret room with the chamber over it” (112), and the owner, who previously would have nothing to do with the haunted house, now “had then the courage to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London” (112). All peace is aptly restored once the corrupted text is removed and overpowered by the uncorrupted text—that is, metafictionally speaking, the short story itself.

A ghost story such as this has a very straightforward narrative: ghosts appear in order to hint at the unseen haunting—here, there is an unhealed trauma, a concealed crime. Once that crime is revealed and its history properly acknowledged, the work of mourning is resumed, and stability is restored. Admittedly, there are several examples of more complex stories from the Victorian Gothic era that are not so easily resolved. Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), for example, presents a literary haunting whose thoughtful reflection on the ghost begins to open its capacity as a trope to newly explore the intersection of subjectivity, otherness, and the work of narrative. The depth of Brontë’s exploration of the trope does not entirely revise the genre’s tradition against itself in such a way that ultimately distinguishes the figure of the ghost from its

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31 Whereas the first version of the story is extended to include an encounter with a mysterious figure that has nothing to do with the original haunting and the house, a second (and more widely recognized) version excludes this ancillary plot, concluding the tale with the renovations of the house.
haunting; however, its thoroughness in the matter anticipates—perhaps even accommodates—the substantial revisions to come in the following several decades.

On the one hand, following the conventions of the genre, *Villette* situates itself firmly within its lineage. As Toni Wein observes, *Villette* frequently references elements from the various Gothic texts that precede it (as far back as *The Castle of Otranto* [1764], yet most notably and directly, Lewis’s *The Monk* [1796]), and as such, one could say that the novel is haunted by its literary history. On the other hand, however, rather than simply producing yet another iteration in the genre and purely reworking and refining the narrative’s articulations of generic conventions, Brontë readdresses these conventions according to a new perspective—namely a feminist one. Reorienting the frame of reference to a marginal position, the novel in turn demands a reconsideration in the treatment of its literary haunting in order to more precisely voice its concerns with the overlooked, unseen, and invisible margins of society that haunt from the periphery of the social majority. In light of *Villette*’s appropriation of the Gothic genre, Wein proposes that Brontë “possesses her literary heritage by creating a surrogate Gothic” (735). Drawing in particular from the way that the novel “rejects and rewrites the perverted representations of women” (737), Wein argues that the novel “is ‘new Gothic’ insofar as it makes women’s authorization of substitution, demonic in Lewis, heroic” (739). Furthermore, Christina Crosby identifies the inevitability of the novel’s extension beyond its generic tradition by virtue of its social concerns; she contends, “Written as it is by a woman and about a woman, it is bound to deviate—powerfully and productively—from a norm which by definition excludes its author from the traditional voice of coherent and non-contradictory authority” (715). Most contemporary critics seem to agree that *Villette* offers, through what essentially amounts to a
reconfiguration in its narrative perspective, a meaningful challenge to the limits of the Gothic tradition.

In its literal sense, the haunting in *Villette* is manifested in the repeated appearance of a ghostly nun. As related early in the novel, the nun was supposedly buried alive sometime in the Middle Ages “for some sin against her vow” (98), as though her death (and subsequent return) were the result of a disconnect between word and action, between reality and the language which attempts to capture it. The novel’s protagonist, Lucy Snowe, addresses the ghost’s legend in a conversation with the eventual love interest, M. Paul: “They say that hundreds of years ago a nun was buried here alive at the foot of this very tree, beneath the ground which now bears us” (346). After a moment’s pause, she questions the persistence of haunting and the contextual relevancy of the ancient past into the present, pondering, “Monsieur, what if it comes and goes here still?” (346). M. Paul, who has also encountered the ghostly nun, responds, questioning “whether this nun be flesh and blood, or something that remains when blood is dried and flesh wasted” (346). This contemplation reflects an earlier moment when, after her very first encounter with the ghost, Lucy wonders “whether that strange thing was of this world, or of a realm beyond the grave; or whether indeed it was only the child of malady, and I of the malady the prey” (237). The novel frequently returns to the question of the ghost’s nature, and the mystery of its ambiguous essence symptomatically haunts the narrative as a whole.

Throughout the novel, Lucy encounters the ghost four times. The first and perhaps most memorable scene of haunting occurs precisely at the moment that Lucy steals away to a garret to read a letter written by Dr. John, the initial love interest.32 This brief chapter is narrowly and

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32 The reception of this love letter reflects an earlier scene wherein Lucy happens upon a *billet-doux*. Kept awake by a thunderstorm, she decides to take a stroll through the garden in which the ghostly nun is said to be buried. Charmed by the “delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, pealing out such an ode as language never delivered to man” (101), Lucy admits to a longing “for something to fetch me out of my present
solely concerned with this letter, which seemingly confirms its author’s affection for Lucy.
Unlike many of the other epistles presented in the story, however, the actual content of this particularly meaningful letter is significantly omitted from the narrative entirely. The narrative focuses instead on Lucy’s response, as a happiness that is “genuine and exquisite: a bubble—but a sweet bubble—of real honeydew” (230) overcomes here with the literary validation of her romantic fantasy. Imagining that “a passing seraph seemed to have rested beside me, leaned towards my heart, and reposed on its throb a softening, cooling, healing, hallowing wing” (230), Lucy interprets the euphoria as an unseen force from beyond the limits of her subjective agency, responsible for influencing her experience—and it is figured specifically in terms of a visiting supernatural presence.

This brief elation is almost immediately interrupted, however, through a subtle yet profound narrative trick. The narrative register switches almost imperceptibly from the present into some time of reflection, long in advance—conceivably at the time of narration. While Lucy, in the moment, is naively delighted, the narrative voice conversely expresses a skepticism, confessing to the inevitable brevity of this bliss, retrospectively acknowledging, “Dr. John, you pained me afterward” (230). The narrative anachronistically inserts onto the scene the reference to a future event of which Lucy, at the time of narration, cannot possibly be aware. As though it were an invisible haunting infused into the narrated moment, this disembodied voice accounts for some presence that, just like the seraph alluded to just one sentence prior, exists just beyond existence” (101). It is in this state of mind that “some object” drops at her feet. On inspection, she discovers the object to be a love letter, and while she seems to confess to an inner dream of “some lover” or a “future husband” (102) after her own heart, she convinces herself that what she has found is indeed not a love letter—at least not one intended for her. A quick perusal of the letter confirms its misaddress—while it is a love letter, it is meant for somebody else. The references in the coded letter are meaningless to Lucy, as the love expressed in word is nothing but a mystery in the hands of an unintended audience. Though subtle, this early scene establishes an associative link between a narrative mishap (that is, a disconnect in literary communication) with the ghost that will later haunt the narrative and, in the scene referenced above, interrupt the reception of a corresponding letter that, this time, is actually intended to be Lucy.
Lucy’s conscious human awareness. It is precisely at this instant, just moments in advance of the ghostly nun’s first literal apparition, that Lucy begins to contemplate the possibility of haunting:

“Are there wicked things, not human, which envy human bliss? Are there evil influences haunting the air, and poisoning it for man? What was near me? …” (230). Then, too uncanny to be a meaningless coincidence, a ghost suddenly appears: “in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black or white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white” (231). In short, Lucy sees “an image like—a NUN” (231), as though it were the direct result of abstractly envisioning an invisible haunting.

While Lucy tentatively supposes that the dreadful vision of the nun (that is, its “image”) could have been merely the consequence of nerves or madness, she moreover proposes that her encounter with haunting (or more precisely, the ghost it produces) results from and perhaps corresponds to her engagement with a literary text—that is, from the fact that she “was unsettled by the excitement of that letter” (231). In any case, the frightful shock of the apparition startles Lucy out of her various reflections on Dr. John and his affections, and as she flies the room, she thoughtlessly abandons the letter. In this most basic sense, the ghost’s presence results in an interruption of Lucy’s engagement with her cherished text. Later, when she realizes that she left it behind, she panics and cries, “Cruel, cruel doom!” (231). Then, as though assigning a malicious and deliberate agency onto the ghostly force, she laments, “To have my bit of comfort preternaturally snatched from me, ere I had well tasted its virtue!” (231). As Dr. John unexpectedly appears on the scene, promising “twenty letters for the lost one” (232), she confesses that truly, she longs only for the recovery of the original, for an opportunity to reread it, explaining “I read it, but only once. I want to read it again. I am sorry it is lost” (233). The

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33 Given the narrative context, it is unclear whether this reflection is the product of Lucy’s imagination at the narrated time (in the present) or at the time of narration (far in the future).
haunting in this case results in a profound disruption of the subject’s capacity to draw meaning from a literary text, a capacity apparently not realized within its initial reading. In light of this, Jessica Brent eloquently points out:

Effectively creating a hole in the text through which the letter is dropped, the nun serves as a visual disturbance that undoes narrative stability and coherence. And thanks to that disturbance, we never do get to savor Graham’s linguistic plenitude, and in fact, we never will, since that dropped letter is just the first in a series of other missing letters, the ones that Graham will never write. Signaling another breakdown in Lucy’s narrative, then, those unwritten letters produce a painful silence in the text that eludes her understanding as well as her control.

Accordingly, the novel depicts haunting as a force that introduces a term of disruption and uncertainty into the work of narrative, producing in turn what we might conceptualize as a cognitive dysfunction. While this treatment is more of an intensification of the longstanding generic tradition than a revision of it, it does nevertheless challenge the limits of such a cognitive dysfunction through its dramatically more extensive insertion and application into the work of narrative of the novel itself. Through confiscating a literary text that is essentially treated as the key to properly comprehending the situation, the ghostly presence pushes the profound possibility that regardless of its intent, a narrative as such remains fundamentally incapable of directly and completely presenting its meaning.

The ghostly nun conspicuously interrupts the potency of a particular work of narrative, though it does so not only in the first encounter, but in each subsequent one as well. Lucy’s second sighting similarly occurs in the context of a narrative disruption—that is, in a suspension in the accessibility of narrative meaning that in this case more resembles a concealment of narrative material. In this scene, following a temporary disappearance of her collected love

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34 Graham Bretton (that is, John Graham Bretton), to whom Brent refers, is the full name of the character Dr. John. It is eventually revealed that Dr. John, whom Lucy adores through the first half of the novel, turns out to be none other than her childhood friend (and sweetheart, by some measure), Graham.
letters from Dr. John, Lucy decides to hide these letters away—not only to ensure that nobody else may see them, but seemingly also to symbolically bury (that is, *repress*) her feelings for the man who has, since writing the letters, retracted his affection. Having put the papers within a newly acquired “bottle which might be stoppered and sealed hermetically” (277), Lucy ventures out to bury it at, significantly, the site of the ghostly nun’s grave—that is, at the foot of a “Methuselah of a pear tree, dead, all but a few boughs” (98). Once the bottle is concealed within a hollow of the tree and then cemented over, Lucy, “lingering, like any other mourner, beside a newly sodded grave” (278), gradually becomes aware of a shadow beginning to take shape before her. Although in this scene, it is Lucy—not the ghost—who is responsible for making the letters disappear, the novel’s haunting nevertheless occurs once again in the context of the concealment of narrative information. Like this instance, the third appearance of the ghost also follows the pattern of cognitive dysfunction. This time in the presence of M. Paul, the ghost appears in the context of the gentleman’s stated design “to follow up the mystery” (346) of the ghost. Immediately after this declaration, M. Paul begins to qualify his words, as though apparently the meaning of his intention were not properly realized within his initial articulation. However, as he begins to clarify and readdress his statement, he is able to speak nothing more than, “I mean—” (346) before the ghost appears literally mid-sentence, directly interrupting the articulation of his thought.

In *Villette*, Brontë establishes a haunting that in many ways more extensive than standard generic treatment, narrowly operates by the logic of concealment than of revelation. The literal haunting, which is always accompanied by the at least marginally perceptible presence of its ghost, serves to disrupt the novel’s literary texts, boring holes in their linguistic and narrative fluency. As a result of the ghost’s occasional appearances in the text, meaning is often deferred
or displaced. Concerned with the disruption of meaning, the novel ponders the inevitable presence of something intrinsic to reality that will, in spite of our best efforts, forever remain absolutely invisible and ungraspable to our imperfect human senses. In this sense, Brontë begins to open the trope of haunting to new avenues of thinking through one’s approach first to the experience of reality (modeled by Lucy’s perspective) and second to the work of narrative (modeled in part by the letters and to some degree by the novel itself in a metafictive sense as it plays with the transmission of narrative information to its reader). However, this innovation to the conventional treatment of literary haunting, while remarkably impressive, does ultimately fall short of achieving what this project will eventually identify as the truly Revisionist subset of the genre—and it does so namely in its final refusal to abandon its intrinsic attempt to master both the supernatural elements as well as the peculiar insight into subjectivity of which it is symptomatic. In other words, more than simply pondering the nature of the ghost, according to the generic convention of the Gothic novel, Villette (and its characters as well), meets the challenge of the seemingly intrinsic uncertainty of the haunted situation and in turn asserts its attempt to overcome it. M. Paul confides to Lucy his intention to resolve the question of the nun, declaring, “It has baffled me so far, but I mean to follow up the mystery” (346). This profession expressly voices the generic disposition of the Gothic approach to haunting, a disposition which Villette, despite frequent signs of resistance and hesitation, ultimately falls back upon.

Following standard Gothic tradition, Villette’s various narrative disruptions that result from ghostly haunting tend to find themselves inevitably resumed. Although the ghost’s first appearance does separate Lucy from her letter, the resulting separation is merely temporary. As

35 A moment prior, prompting their conversation on the supernatural in the first place, M. Paul explains, “I have seen, Miss Lucy, things to me unaccountable, that have made me watch all night for a solution, and I have not yet found it” (345).
Lucy weeps, profoundly mourning the letter as a lost object, Dr. John appears to be moved by her display of emotional desperation. He thus reveals that she is mistaken in presuming that the ghost stole away with her letter—in reality, it was he who had seized it when he saw it on the floor where she had dropped it. Indeed, the letter disappeared only under rational pretenses, and there was never anything supernatural about situation to begin with. With some hesitation, Dr. John returns the letter. Much to her relief, Lucy’s mournful state is ostensibly resolved (even reversed) entirely.

By the end of the novel, in a fashion similar to the narrative’s facile restoration of the lost object, the foundation of haunting as a disruptive and ultimately unknowable force is all but completely undermined. As Lucy develops as a character, the fortitude of her constitution becomes progressively more defined by her courage, particularly evident in the face of the haunting. Although her first encounter with the ghost is marked by a sense of terrifying fright, Lucy’s subsequent encounters exhibit her increasingly bold resolve. In fact, even in the first encounter, the moment she realizes her letter is lost, her fear is overshadowed by her desire to re-attain the lost letter and recover its symbolic “taste of fruition” (230) in the context of her relationship with Dr. John. In spite of the terror, she proclaims, “This precious letter! Flesh or spirit must be defied for its sake” (231), and she swiftly returns to the haunted scene. Though she is prepared to boldly confront the dreadful haunting, the encounter does not take place because the ghost has since disappeared in her own absence from the scene.

In the following encounters, Lucy grows all the more confident in her measured advance upon the ghost and the essence of its mysterious haunting. In her second encounter, after concealing her love letters, the ghost reappears, though this time she does not find herself so dramatically shocked. She addresses the ghost directly, calling out, “Who are you? and why do
you come to me?” (279). There is of course no answer, and the ghostly nun does not account for her own haunting presence; rather, “she stood mute. She had no face—no features: all below her brow was masked with a white cloth” (279). Her curiosity intensified, Lucy then approaches the ghost: “I stretched out my hand, for I meant to touch her” (279). However, every motion toward the ghost is met with a corresponding movement as the ghost steps away and recedes further and further back to the shadows until Lucy eventually “looked and saw nothing” and “nothing spoke or reappeared” (279). Despite that the literary haunting is fundamentally predicated on the mystery’s resistance to explaining itself, Lucy’s increasingly potent confidence and subjective agency begin to approach the enigma all the more aggressively.

This courage eventually culminates in Lucy’s fourth and final encounter with the ghost. Entering her dormitory in the middle of the night, she looks over her bed and observes, “nothing ought to have lain: I had left it void, and void should have found it” (440); however, to her surprise, she finds “the old phantom—the NUN” (440). By Lucy’s immediate assessment, the ghost is an intrusive presence where there should be a non-presence—that is, a something where there should be nothing. Provided that she is, by her own account, “tempered by late incidents, my nerves disdained hysteria” (440), she gathers her courage in resolved deliberation:

“Approach I must. Courage! One step!—” (440). Thus unafraid, she “defied spectra” (440) with unprecedented boldness. At this climactic moment, she asserts her subjective agency in the effort to overcome the supernatural figure: she relates, “I had rushed on the haunted couch; nothing leaped out, or sprung, or stirred; all the movement was mine, so was all the life, the reality, the substance, the force” (440). As a result of this violently forceful confrontation, she

36 Not insignificantly, Lucy is moreover struck in the moment by the fact that, unlike her first encounter with the ghost which, after its sighting, she related to her adored Dr. John, she presently has no one with whom to share the experience—that is, no one to witness her act of witnessing. She laments, “this time there was no Dr. John to whom to have recourse: there was no one to whom I dared whisper the words, ‘I have again seen the nun’” (279). In this case, the ghost (and its haunting) is not only itself silent, but it draws attention to how isolated and solitary Lucy is—how at this moment, her world, without companionship, is made essentially silent as well.
overpowers ghostly nun: “I tore her up—the incubus! I held her on high—the goblin! I shook her loose—the mystery! And down she fell—down all round me—down in shreds and fragments—and I trod upon her” (440). Insofar as Christina Crosby suggests that “to come into her own, Lucy must learn to uncover hidden and discomforting truths” (701), it seems unavoidable that this unveiling necessarily occurs as an act of revelation. In contemplating the ordinary robes left on her bed, Lucy thus discovers that her ghostly nun turns out to have never been ghostly at all, but a perfectly human agent in disguise. Lucy’s courage and indomitable assertion of subjective agency may well be a marvelous boon to feminism, but they actually extend into the context of haunting (too far, by our measure) so as to allow the narrative to reaffirm the traditional formula that the novel has, for so long, successfully avoided. By the end, Villette situates its work of narrative against its figurations of haunting in such a way that ultimately diminishes the efficacy of the latter, reducing it to its presumed association with its ghostly manifestations. In this outward sense, Lucy appears to the reader to have mastered the mystery: she sees the supposedly invisible; she grasps the supposedly ungraspable; she comprehends the supposedly incomprehensible. In reality, the haunting turns out to be, as Lucy initially intuits of the legend of the ghostly nun in general, mere “romantic rubbish” (99).

While the haunting in Villette eventually recedes back to its conventional tendencies, the extent to which Brontë approaches and even skirts the outermost edge of the traditional treatment

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37 This point is hinted at here, though it is explicit confirmed a few pages later in a letter in which the peripheral character Ginevra thoroughly explains the rouse in all of its detail: as it turns out, the ghost was only ever the costume of one, the Count De Hamal, who would use the disguise in order to sneak into the boarding school for an occasional tryst with Ginevra.

38 Crosby, in analyzing the scene in great detail, similarly argues that “[Lucy’s] process of self-discovery is most vividly dramatized when, at the climax of the novel, she victoriously rends the veil of the spectral nun which has haunted her throughout the story, exorcising the ghost which has embodied her mental instability and fragmentation. This unveiling is the most literal and climactic of her discoveries, demonstrating how, as she says, ‘I always, through my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth; I like seeking the goddess in her temple, and handling the veil, and daring the dread glance. O Titaness among deities! The covered outline of thine aspect sickens often through uncertainty’” (701-2).
of the trope is indeed very worthy of our attention. In fact, despite the way the narrative’s ghostliness retreats from its innovative trajectory, the extensive challenges made to its generic boundaries attest to its symbolic capacity to at least tenuously explore a form of traceable invisibility that lies just beyond the grasp of our experience of reality. When awakened by a thunderstorm one night, Lucy reflects that “certain accidents of the weather, for instance, were almost dreaded by me, because they woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy” (101). She thus articulates the impression of a certain impoverishment of her subjectivity—behind the veil of consciousness, there inevitably lies a hollowness, an irremediable uncertainty intrinsic to the experience of reality. In this abstract sense, Lucy is seemingly {	extit{haunted}} by a vague impression of limited subjectivity, and significantly, in this scene at least, this figurative haunting appears in a context completely devoid of a ghost.

Later in the novel, Lucy further ruminates on the nature of this perceived invisible component to the experience of reality in a brief conversation with Dr. John. In this instance, however, this impression is linked to the appearance of the ghost. Dr. John supposes that the “case of spectral illusion”—which more or less alludes to Lucy’s tendency to sense what is beyond the limits of human perception—is actually the result of a “long-continued mental conflict” (235). Lucy in turn ponders the possibility that the haunting is a product of an internal (not external) mystery, inevitably intrinsic to human subjectivity: “[the nun] came out of my brain, and is now gone in there, and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her” (235). Lucy is filled with dread in imagining her vulnerability to such a force that, by virtue of its absolute invisibility, threatens to unremittingly elude comprehension; she explains, “I shudder at the thought of being liable to such an illusion! It seemed so real. Is there no cure?—no preventative?” (235). Dr. John responds, proposing merely that she redirect her concerns
away from such anxieties over the ineffable and toward the cultivation of her own happiness. Instead, however, Lucy eventually chooses redirect her libidinal energies away from the doctor and his inane philosophies in general and toward her dedicated pursuit of the truth underlying the mystery of the haunting. Clearly, Lucy (and, to some extent, the novel itself) rejects Dr. John’s advice. In her mind, happiness, like the profundity of meaning in the experience of reality, is a far more complex and ambiguous concept which invisibly haunts us from just beyond the limits of our comprehension. In a way that foreshadows the more extensive work of later authors of Revisionist ghost literature, *Villette* presents the possibility that, concealed behind the literary ghost whose force as a supernatural agent is eventually neutralized, there is nevertheless a conceptual haunting that, independent of its ghost, retains its principle capacity to undermine the naïve assumptions of unequivocal meaning central not only to the work of narrative, but to the experience of reality as well.\(^\text{39}\)

As demonstrated expressly in “The Haunted and the Haunters”—and eventually in *Villette* as well—the Victorian Gothic, like its preceding Romantic counterpart, commands a controlled narrative structure in order to contain and overpower its ghosts. As a testament to the essentially traditionalist character of the majority of ghost stories from this period, the formulaic resolution most frequently dispenses with the haunted text, or, more precisely, through the work of exorcism of the ghosts, it restores the text to its proper state, divested of its haunting as such. In this manner, the profound effects of haunting as a rich literary trope are reduced if not entirely nullified. Even as certain ghost stories may superficially depict haunting as a disruptive force, the power of their ghosts is most often extinguished, and, on a broader level, the authors of these tales continue to mobilize their own literary texts against the threat of haunting. The linear

\(^\text{39}\) On this note, Brent concludes that in *Villette* ultimately demonstrates that, “distinguished from the psychoanalytic concept of the ‘talking cure,’ narrative here is neither purgative nor productive” (108).
movement from unknown to known in a quest of investigative discovery downplays the ultimate efficacy of the ghostly haunting in order to facilitate the optimism underscoring the protagonist’s capacity to prevail. Generally speaking, both the narrator and the reader of a traditional ghost story realize on some level that the haunting is more or less artificial and thus trivial. As a result, the fiction and the otherness it presents inevitably remain as unthreatening to the reader as they do to the protagonists. Even those few stories that do not feature an explicit or ostensibly tidy resolution generally do, at minimum, allude to an impending possibility of such. As treated in traditional ghost literature—in both Romantic and Victorian Gothic—haunting is sharply determined by the capacity to which it may be exorcized and by the capacity to which the subjective experience of reality may achieve unalienable degrees of stability and consistency.

The Revisionist Ghost Story

From its very inception, the modern ghost story has expressed a narrow interest in exploring the nature of tradition as such. In fact, innovation has always been an integral component of the genre insofar as presenting a situation of the unexpected and shocking is among its principle features; however, in the introduction of *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Ghost Stories* (1996), Michael Cox suggests that with regard to the standard conventions, “innovation has come more through ingenious reinterpretation than radical reinvention” (xi). In light of the basic assumptions made by the traditional ghost story, in spite of what may be understood as the Gothic’s intrinsic aspiration to critically rework itself, the expectations for resolution and affirmation of the prevalence of comprehensibility are typically consistent over this interval, especially within the English tradition. According to such traditional assumptions,

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40 For example, although the narrator of “The Haunted and the Haunters” becomes alarmed, his cool pragmatism never fully leaves him, nor do the precision or the sterile calmness of the narrative voice ever waver in the slightest.
ghosts appear as a disruption to a character’s stable experience of reality insofar as they present the possibility of otherness in variously abstract or tangible terms. Once engaged on more or less superficial terms, however, this otherness is dispensed with; it is overcome or mastered by the textual apparatus that contains it, as though the narrator’s work of figuring the horror of haunting into the narrative itself could somehow magically nullify its effects by conquering the otherness of its ghosts. Though various stories throughout the period offer differing degrees of engagement with their ghosts, the will to resolve haunting is inevitably manifested through narrative techniques (such as plot structures that allow for the ghosts’ inevitable exorcisms, relatively weak characterization of the ghosts, an overly-controlled voice, or remote settings and characterizations, for example). In short, the narratives of these traditional ghost stories invariably serve as the rational means to compensate for the otherwise indeterminable effects of haunting, and, whereas such early tales of the modern ghost provide a “powerful sense of psychological disturbance” and “penetrating social critique” (Punter and Byron 30), this experience is brief and secondary to the demand for firmly reestablished sense of order within the narrative apparatus as a whole. Beginning in the late 1880s and early 1890s (particularly in America), however, the modern ghost story began to undergo a profound revision that, beyond the limited reworkings of the Romantic and Victorian treatments of ghostliness, ultimately produced a qualitative difference in the treatment of ghostly haunting.

At this critical moment in the history of the ghost story, in contradistinction to the conventions of the traditional Romantic and Victorian English ghost stories, a new approach to ghostly haunting emerges that is distinctly revisionist. The Revisionist ghost story gains its true momentum in America, outside of the traditionalist sphere of England. One might even say that the American ghost story, from its very beginnings, is guided by an inquiry into the ways in
which the American identity itself is haunted by its European roots. Beyond the conventional English concern with restoring the legitimacy of one’s lineage with the past, early American ghost narratives tended to explore the possibility of breaking with the tradition of the past. In *The Literature of Terror*, for example Punter suggests that such American tales often express the possibility that “evil has in one sense or another to do with the European […] as a weighty impediment in the path of progress” (184). The haunting of America by its European ancestry is visible in perhaps one of America’s most celebrated early ghost stories, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1819), in which the antagonistic ghost, the Headless Horseman, is literally the remnant of America’s heritage from across the Atlantic, once in league with the British forefathers: he was “the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannon ball, in some nameless battle during the Revolutionary War” (330). One could also look to the countless Poe’s stories that seem to take place in a nondescript European setting—and his arguably most ghostly stories “Berenice” (1835) and “Ligeia” (1838) utilize distinctly European or ancient names, suggestively emphasizing the association of malicious ghostly haunting with its European roots. One of Hawthorne’s most explicit ghost stories, “Old Esther Dudley” (1839), likewise features the title character, in awaiting the return of the British Governor at the end of the American Revolutionary War, hosting immense midnight parties with the dead, either the fallen British or the Loyalist sympathizers.

Such early American ghost stories arguably show some interest not merely in reworking the literature in order to better address the concerns of the genre, but furthermore in revising the genre itself to accommodate a more complex exploration of haunting in all of the complexities of its capacity as a literary trope. However, while such a disposition may latently exist throughout the relatively shorter history of the American ghost story, the artful inquiry into the depth of the
matter remains subdued for some time. As time passes and America experiences its own immense and intense wave of cultural fascination with ghostly spiritualism, however, America’s unique perspective as simultaneously included in and excluded from the tradition begins to accommodate a more mature articulation of its assumptions regarding haunting. With the approach of the turn of the century in America, literary haunting begins to transcend its traditional reduction to a mere secondary byproduct of the ghost, representative of a returned past. Indeed, it begins to take shape as a trope capable of addressing the complex and irresolvable issues of diversity and otherness, of ethics, and of an experience of reality conceived of as inevitably and eternally on the frontier of the unknown.

The earliest definitive traces of the Revisionist ghost story appear in America in the late-Victorian period, and the Revisionist form continues today, over 125 years later. While the traditional conventions of the Romantic and Victorian Gothic have variously continued to manifest themselves to greater or lesser degrees in the vast array of popular ghost stories throughout the twentieth century, the derivative Revisionism has recently gained considerable momentum and has become increasingly accepted, particularly at the turn of the millennium. Certainly, all ghost stories produced after 1900 are not necessarily, by virtue of their date of publication, Revisionist: many contemporary ghost stories continue to cling to the conventions of previous eras, attempting to rework the literary depictions of ghostliness without revising traditional standards. Some twentieth-century ghost stories exhibit virtually no Revisionist qualities, some exhibit limited Revisionist qualities, while others alternatively exhibit quite significant and innovative Revisionist qualities. Those in this third group, especially those belonging to the initial wave of innovation, are the driving subjects of this project. Though it is unrealistic to perform a detailed analysis of every relevant ghost story, it is nevertheless possible
to address certain identifiable Revisionist texts that emphasize particularly revolutionary traits and illuminate the depth of historical development—at least enough to offer an adequate illumination of both the variety and categorical cohesion of the emergent subgenre as a whole.

Categorically, the Revisionist ghost story produces, by its nature, a substantial revision of the fundamental generic assumptions on haunting, principally through reevaluating their ghosts’ relationship with and effect on their encompassing narratives. The Revisionist subgenre offers an alternative outlook on the subject matter wherein, beneath any outwardly traditional presentation of ghosts, there lies an essence of haunting, that, as an absolutely invisible force, eludes all attempts to control, master, or comprehend it. In its literary figuration, Revisionist haunting radically defies narration, and by extension, it represents a force intrinsic to reality that, in turn, radically defies subjective experience. The result, as will be seen, is a profound meditation on the nature of narrative presentation—and, correspondingly, on the subjective experience of reality—as essentially privative and fictive. The remainder of this project is thus dedicated to a close reading of four Revisionist ghost stories\(^{41}\) that have radically changed the way that we literarily and culturally understand the trope of ghostly haunting, opening and lending the vast complexity of its figurations to alternative ways of working through the ethics of otherness.

Generally speaking, the Revisionist subgenre ventures beyond the conventional English paradigm with the hopes of approaching the subject matter in a way that does not simply reduce the efficacy of haunting to a temporary setback. As a result, Revisionist ghost stories tend to investigate the possibility of an absolutely invisible haunting that, being intrinsic to the subjective experience of reality, exists independently of any ghost. In refusing to submit to the

\(^{41}\) Additionally, each text will be considered from within the context of an earlier, often prototypical text, by the same author. In each case, the revisions made from an earlier work into its later form reflect corresponding renovations made to the overall generic assumptions regarding haunting.
traditional disposition to reveal (or reduce to the point of insignificance) its invisible essence, such narratives inevitably result in profound uncertainty within the narrator precisely because an encounter with such a haunting exceeds not only sensory perception, but human comprehension as such. Consequently, as is also the case with some traditional ghost stories as well, where the characters fail to overcome their haunting in their direct experiences, they often turn to the production of a literary text as an extended reflection of those experiences, and this text therefore manifests one final attempt to capture, refigure, and master the haunting. However, in distinction from the traditional model, the text produced by the Revisionist ghost story tends to fail to overcome its haunting just the same. In fact, underlying the essential revision to traditional assumptions lies the profound lesson that the attempt to master the haunting through the conceptual figuration of narrative intriguingly exacerbates—rather than mitigates—the haunted situation, and with grave consequences.

The chapter that follows begins an inquiry into a radical revision to the traditionally English literary ghost story, and it does so through positing a haunting utterly divorced from a perceptible ghost. Strikingly, however, the chapter considers not an American text, but a French one—that is, Guy de Maupassant’s “Le Horla.” In a certain sense, its emergence from any culture outside of England, whether American or not, is itself expressive of the physical and conceptual distance necessary to accommodate a corresponding shift in perspective in the reassessment of the genre. While Maupassant brilliantly captures an innovative re-theorization of haunting through his outside perspective, however, it is crucial to observe the limits of his exploration. Particularly next to the American Revisionist ghost tales addressed in subsequent chapters, “Le Horla” offers a relatively underdeveloped consideration of the radical otherness it presents, which is manifested perhaps most distinctly in the story’s conclusion in which the
character, overcome by profound despair, resolves to kill himself. In a certain sense, this shortcoming is symptomatic of the ways in which the French cultural and literary scene in general is, not as properly equipped to capture such generic revisions as the multitude of American authors, who in turn ride the momentum to carry the Revisionism through. Due to both its complex filial relationship with England (and, by association, the established tradition of literary haunting) and the intimacy of its own cultural history with spiritual haunting, America proves to be particularly accommodating for the Revisionist ghost literature that emerges near the end of the nineteenth century.
CHAPTER 2
“LE HORLA” AND OTHERNESS

Near the end of Guy de Maupassant’s “Le Horla” (1887), the narrator hatches a plan to free himself from the overwhelming grasp of the invisible being haunting him. After quietly slipping out of his home, he locks the door and quickly sets the house ablaze, believing the being to still be within. Though he can find no reasonable possibility that the being would have escaped, upon reflecting on the event in his diary, he begins to sense the persistence of haunting. With a shudder, the narrator reaches a profound realization, a thought that concludes his diary narrative: “No… no… without any doubt, without any doubt… it is not dead… Then… then… I will have to kill myself, me!…”42 The ellipses that terminate the short story—and that, significantly, do not resolve its significance, but rather defer it—suggest the possibility that ultimately, there exist no means to exorcise, master, or even comprehend the text’s haunting.

Maupassant’s refusal to resolve the haunting woven through the text presents a substantial revision of the two most significant traditions of ghost stories: the Romantic and Victorian Gothics. Traditionally speaking, the ghost is an uncanny figure: it serves to reveal that which been concealed, such as a hidden crime. Prior to “Le Horla,” haunting typically functioned as a persistent reminder of some forgotten or repressed component of the past, and the ghost appeared as the catalyst which impelled the characters and reader to resolve the incomplete past. By the end of “Le Horla,” conversely, nothing is revealed, and nothing is resolved: the narrator, who expects to see the invisible, finds nothing and is overcome by desperation. While Maupassant certainly plays with the conventional figuration of haunting as revealing, his story

42 « Non… non… sans aucun doute, sans aucun doute… il n’est pas mort… Alors… alors… il va donc falloir que je me tue, moi !… » (57).
ultimately presents a radical departure from tradition: if haunting reveals anything at all in “Le Horla,” it is simply the truth that something exists that fundamentally cannot be revealed. In other words, haunting is not a revelatory force in the conventional sense; it is merely the revelation of a concealment, the presentation of nonpresence. As it foregrounds the inevitable limitations of the subjective experience of reality, “Le Horla” stands out in stark contradistinction to the traditional ghost story of the Romantic or Victorian Gothic period, and it marks the beginning of a certain subset of Revisionist ghost stories that are predicated on “unknowing” through an encounter with radical alterity.

Revision: Into a Diary

“Le Horla” is a rather straightforward story about haunting. Through a series of nearly forty diary entries over four months, the unnamed narrator reflects upon the increasingly acute impression that an invisible being has taken up cohabitation with him. This being, eventually named the Horla, a portmanteau of hors and là (literally: “out there”), is not a ghost in the traditional sense, insofar as it does not directly appear as a dead human, returned from the grave. The operations of its haunting, however, more or less resemble traditional ghostly logic: it is depicted as inaccessible, conscious, and beyond the natural and rational; at the very least, we can call it a phantom. As far as the narrator interprets the situation, the Horla haunts with

43 On the note of ghostliness in “Le Horla,” Jacques Bienvenu argues that the short story is more a meditation on what cannot be seen rather than a traditional tale of the supernatural. He contends: “To be certain, the Horla is not a ghost in the narrative, though it nevertheless operates as an invisible menacing being that is a part of this formidable series of the dead who return to haunt the living. This point must be taken into consideration if we want to understand the true obsession that is hidden within the story.” (« Certes, le Horla n’est pas un fantôme dans le récit, mais il s’agit tout de même d’un être invisible menaçant qui s’inscrit dans cette impressionnante série des morts qui reviennent hanter les vivants. Ce point doit être pris en considération si nous voulons comprendre la réelle obsession qui est cachée dans cette histoire » [29]).

44 We might note that in French, there is no single word that captures the precise image of the English ghost as a liminal figure returned from the grave. Though they differ by varying degrees, the most commonly used words to figure ghostliness are fantôme, spectre, esprit, and revenant, all of which are heavily associated with haunting and the dislocation of presence. Furthermore, it might be argued that the English cognates for each of these terms fall
devoted persistence, leaving only the minutest trace, just enough to allow the narrator to vaguely acknowledge its presence (that is, to discern its nonpresence). Superficially, the invisible being appears to be relatively innocuous: it merely drinks milk and water on occasion, flips the page of a book, and plucks a rose from its stem. The depth of its malice is not contained within these nonchalant gestures, however; the true threat of the haunting instead lies within the narrator’s suspicion that the being’s invisible presence corrupts the will driving his thoughts and actions, rendering them not his own. The underlying conflict in this haunted situation is thus between a seemingly autonomous subject against the threat of an otherness intent on penetrating and altering that subjectivity by diminishing its perceptive and cognitive limits.

Before opening Maupassant’s depiction of an encounter with otherness to theoretical analysis, it is necessary to consider the narrative format of the text, which significantly contributes to the ultimately Revisionist quality of the text. It is very important for us to note that the version of “Le Horla” that we read today is, in fact, a reworking of—and nearly complete rewriting of—an earlier Maupassant tale of the same name, published half a year prior. The transformation undertaken from this original version highlights a number of features that characterize the short story’s revision of the genre as a whole.

The early version of “Le Horla” still features an unnamed protagonist who, through a first-person narration, recounts his encounter with an invisible being. The narrative appears as a case study embedded within a larger frame wherein a psychiatrist, Dr. Marrande, allows his patient to present his situation to three colleagues. The protagonist traces the transition of his ailment from a mere “nervous anxiety”\(^45\) to the lucid and visionary perception of an

\(^{45}\) « Ce fut d’abord une sorte d’inquiétude nerveuse qui me tenait en éveil des nuits entières, une telle surexcitation que le moindre bruit me faisait tressaillir » (235).
“unknowable neighbor.” The Revisionist qualities of the later 1887 version can be traced to the original 1886 version particularly in its last few lines as Dr. Marrande, playing the role of a reader of the case, concludes his analysis with the uncertain ponderance, “I do not know if this man is crazy or if we both are… or if… if our successor [the Horla] has truly come.” The ambiguous ending maintains the possibility for some nebulous encounter with alterity, as the 1887 version will foreground. While the original plot presents such a possibility, however, its threat is essentially nullified by the text’s structure: insofar as the tale is recounted over a year after the events of the story take place, the material is qualified and contained by an objective and clinical frame, and the depths of its investigation into radical alterity remain relatively limited and distanced. In fact, the premise of the story generally adheres to the sterile narrative formula that Sartre attributes to Maupassant’s oeuvre, in which “the structure of his short stories is almost invariable; we are first presented with the audience, a brilliant and worldly society which has assembled in a drawing-room after dinner. It is night-time, which dispels fatigue and passion” (139). This narrative procedure, as Sartre argues, removes the subjectivity of experience from the narrative and replaces it with the image of stable objectivity:

The adventure was a brief disturbance which is over with. It is told from the viewpoint of experience and wisdom; it is listened to from the viewpoint of order. Order triumphs; order is everywhere; it contemplates an old disorder as if the still waters of a summer day have preserved the memory of the ripples which have run through it. (140)

Generally speaking, the original 1886 version of “Le Horla” coincides with such observations. As such, the initial narrative condition (characterized by the disorder that emerges from an incomprehensible situation) conflicts with the explicitly ordered structure that frames it and ultimately produces coherence from it. Though this original tale offers some keen insight into an

46 « Insaisissable voisin » (243).
47 « Je ne sais si cet homme est fou ou si nous le sommes tous les deux..., ou si... si notre successeur est réellement arrivé » (249).
encounter with the unfamiliar, the strength of its vision nevertheless falters in the way that its haunting fails to expose a fundamental and irresolvable disorder beneath the veneer of a seemingly stable narrative structure.

It is the 1887 version of “Le Horla” that weaves a conscious textual self-reflection into the narrative by reconstructing the short story into a diary, changing the perspective away from that of a situated vista of order presided over by professionals. The action is now immediate, and, as the reflective distance is diminished, the experience is no longer deferred to a later point at which it can be professionally interpreted into a state of comprehensibility. As the tale is divested of a clinical frame; if anybody in the story is responsible for analyzing the narrated material, it is the narrator alone, and that analysis occurs less in the reading of the situation than in the writing of it. In facilitating the intersection of subjectivity and narration, the new version meditates on the inherent gaps in presentation within an incomplete and indirect experience of reality. Although not all Revisionist ghost stories are necessarily diary narratives, the appropriation of the diary format in “Le Horla” draws an implicit and powerful association between the ghost story and textuality that will, in future Revisionist ghost stories, command a substantial presence. In any case, we will find that future Revisionist ghost stories are informed by this conscious textual self-reflection (that is, in the performative work of narration), however much they present such acts explicitly within their narratives. Within “Le Horla” in particular, the decisive reconfiguration of the story into a diary narrative substantially changes the dynamics of the story, insofar as the new format serves to emphasize two points that will be explored: first, its highly subjective and limited narrative scope, and second, its inquiries into the procedures of narrative presentation.
First, diary narratives in general tend to stress the limits of subjectivity. Next to its original version, which was both omniscient (at least in terms of its embedding narrative) and posterior, the diaristic revision of “Le Horla” is divested of a certain objective narrative agency. In the original, the protagonist’s psychiatrist Dr. Marrande, like the text itself, serves as a qualifying intermediary between the reader and the narrated material. Admittedly, the doctor, also like a textual apparatus, remains relatively transparent: he says to his colleagues: “Anyhow, I have nothing to say to you about my client. He will speak for himself”48; nevertheless, the narrative’s frame, from within the safety of the maison de santé, establishes considerable distance from the narrated events and implies a certain sterile objectivity. Furthermore, given that the original tale is recounted of a year after its fictional events took place, its posteriority is foregrounded. The interval between the action and its narration accommodates a certain reflection, and through this deferral, logic and structure can be given to that which, as it was experienced originally, appeared without order. This pragmatic reflection contributes to the apparent objectivity of the story and neutralizes the threat of haunting. When the story is reworked into a diary narrative, the haunting becomes immediate as the narration occurs practically concurrent to the events it narrates. As David Gillespie notes in his study of the literary diary in general, “the diary […] is not based on recollection or the reconstruction of experience; rather, its dual dynamic is observation and reflection, it is contemporaneous, without the autobiography’s strict demarcation of past and present. The diary exists in the present, it is written about the present and it serves as a personal record of the experience” (621). In a diary narrative, the pretense of an underlying system of order and structure is withheld; from its premise, the reader of a diary narrative is very narrowly constricted to the narrator’s perspective. This literary technique stresses the confinement of subjectivity and exacerbates anxieties over the

48 « D’ailleurs, je n’ai rien à vous dire de mon client. Il parlera lui-même. » (233).
incompleteness of one’s experience of reality. For the reader, just like for the narrator of “Le Horla,” all that is suggested to exist beyond that limited scope is rendered essentially inaccessible in its purest sense. The objective field, in other words, is substantially restricted, and the character’s experience of his fictional reality is presented as essentially incomplete.

In addition to the limitation of experience, the diary format also foregrounds the processes of narrative composition. Whereas the traditional practice of posterior narration is commonly composed abstractly and outside of the diegetic frame of the story, within the diary form, the reader practically witnesses the composition as it takes place through the series of events narrated—the act of putting the pen to the page and writing the letters and words of the manuscript are all but presented within the text itself. As such, the reader is persistently reminded that the narrative is merely a text, and the fictional reality supposedly presented appears filtered. Pretenses of transparency are thus lifted as the text presents itself as an obstruction to the narrated material. Martin Calder suggests that the structure of “Le Horla” as a diary narrative orients the text’s preoccupation away from the “undisclosed enigma” of the tale’s supernatural events, and instead “towards the question of writing itself” (42). Through the metafictive foregrounding of the process of narrative composition, “Le Horla” is seemingly as much about the haunting of narrative as it is about the narrative of haunting. As such, the short story’s fictional reality is obscured by the attempt to present it, and it thus becomes difficult or impossible to untangle the haunting events of the story from the depiction of those events redundantly presented again (that is, re-presented) by the work of narration. Due to the manner in which the diary narrative in “Le Horla” foregrounds the work of narrative composition, the character’s experience of his reality is essentially indirect.
Principally, both versions of “Le Horla” present the haunting possibility that there exists some component of being that is fundamentally incomprehensible. Whereas the original 1886 version delimits this supposition through its textual frame, the 1887 version allows its text to be corrupted by such a radical alterity in order to emphasize the pervasiveness and ubiquity of the invisible. Accordingly, “Le Horla” appears as a substantial revision to the ghost story genre in its reconfiguration of textual procedures. Through its innovations, Maupassant uses the trope of haunting to emphasize the narrator’s crisis when he encounters what appear to be gaps within the experience of his fictional reality. In foregrounding the diary as a narrative device, “Le Horla” furthermore layers this crisis into the work of narration: according to convention, the narrator perceives the diary as a field to explore his corrupted experience of reality. Whereas the narrator structures and organizes his experience into a text, the diary serves as a double or mirror of its author’s reality, like a ghost, proposing to reveal what is concealed. In the end, however, the short story is tragic because it fails to reveal anything, and the narrator in turn fails to adapt his own perspective to the demands of the radically unfamiliar situation: he refuses to accept the inability to perceive the unperceivable, and he thus refuses to accept the limits of his subjective experience of being. Through the depiction of this tragedy, “Le Horla” demands a new in a thinking of and through the haunting void as a component of reality that intrinsically exceeds the periphery of our incomplete and indirect experience of reality.

The Incomprehensible

The diary in “Le Horla” begins with a peaceful reflection: “What a lovely day!” The narrator, living luxuriously without care or worry, has no particular purpose in his narrative endeavors other than to describe a brief—and abstract—history of himself followed by the

49 « Quelle journée admirable ! » (3).
recording of a few uninteresting events. The meandering narrative, unfocused and undirected, establishes the general sense of stability, complacency, and lack of tension enjoyed by the narrator, which will serve as a counterpoint to the crisis that will soon set in. The imagery focuses on the narrator’s attachment to the land, the land of his ancestors. He states: “I have my roots here, these profound and delicate roots which attach a man to the ground where his ancestors were born and died.”

The narrator’s familiar association with the land and with his ancestors determines his conservative comfort and grounds his uneventful experience of reality—everything is seemingly comprehensible. He observes the town Rouen from a distance, noting the sight of its towers and the sound of invisible clangs from the town’s bells, carried by the wind. He observes a Brazilian three-masted ship pass by; he writes that he waves at it. Following these inconsequential perceptions, he reasserts, “How nice the morning was!”

This first passage establishes a stable reality whose ostensibly transparent presentation of the fictional reality will soon undergo substantial transformation.

After this initial passage of seeming little importance, the narrative energy begins to gather with a sudden change in the narrator’s disposition. In his second entry a few days later, he notes, “I’ve had a little bit of a fever for the last few days; I feel unwell, or rather I feel sad.” It is as if the narrator is struck by the mourning that accompanies the loss of something substantial; yet, he cannot identify what it is that was lost. The narrator begins an extensive rumination on the various features and effects of what he calls “mysterious influences.” Accordingly, he writes that “one might say that the air, the invisible air, is full of unknowable Powers whose

50 « […] j’y ai mes racines, ces profondes et délicates racines, qui attachent un homme à la terre où sont nés et morts ses aïeux » (3).
51 « Comme il faisait bon ce matin ! » (4).
52 « J’ai un peu de fièvre depuis quelques jours : je me sens souffrant, ou plutôt je me sens triste » (4).
53 « influences mystérieuses » (4).
mysterious regions we must endure.”54 Unable to discern the “mysterious influence” responsible for his mourning, he ponders the possibility that some component of being could conceivably exist without being presented, and he thus begins to speculate on the “profound […] mystery of the Invisible.”55 Despite having no trace of “alarming symptoms,” the narrator continues to suffer incessantly from “that dreadful sensation of a menacing danger, that apprehension of a coming tragedy, or of an approaching death,”56 and consequently, as he links this sentiment to a still undiagnosed illness, his condition worsens. Something unidentifiable has occurred in the narrator’s life, affecting his perception of reality.

Despite the narrator’s best attempts to locate his troubles, the question nevertheless remains: what is he mourning? He wonders, “Is it the form of the clouds, or the color of the day, the color of things, so variable, that, passing before my eyes, has troubled my thoughts?”57 Following this inquiry, the narrator begins to wonder about the unlimited number of possible sources of his ailment—it could be anything. The entirety of the real world appears to him as potentially invisible and untraceable: “All that surrounds us, what we see without looking at it, what we brush past without knowing it, what we touch without feeling it, what we encounter without distinguishing it, all of this has rapid, surprising, and inexplicable effects on us—on our senses and, through them, on our ideas, on our heart itself.”58 As he contemplates it, the world around the narrator begins to appear filtered and somewhat incomprehensible by nature. What seems to trouble the narrator more than anything else is, paradoxically, the fact that he cannot
identify precisely what it is that troubles him. Considering the theoretical investigation of the limits of the subjective experience of reality, it seems that what the narrator has lost—and is mourning—is a complete and direct relationship with reality.

After directly acknowledging the depth of being that eludes human perception, the second diary passage of “Le Horla” concludes with the narrator’s lamentation: “Ah, if we only had other organs that would grant other miracles in our favor, what other things we could discover around us!” The narrator expresses a profound longing to transcend the confines of his subjectivity, and it is this desire which implicitly drives and complicates the remaining narrative. Whereas the narrator is literally haunted by an invisible being sapping his autonomous will, he is figuratively haunted by the supposition that his access to reality as such is both indirect and incomplete. Inspired by the attempt to access the inaccessible—and to perceive the unperceivable, to comprehend the incomprehensible—the narrator seemingly embarks on a ghost hunt and, not surprisingly, soon after, he becomes acquainted with an invisible being. Unlike a conventional ghost story whose force of haunting is dependent on the presence of its ghost, the presence of the ghost in “Le Horla” is conversely dependent on a preexisting state of hauntedness.

In the first several passages, the limitation of the narrator’s experience of reality is abstract, and he has no means of comprehending it. In the fifth diary entry, however, this formless otherness of the “mystery of the Invisible” is localized in a dream. The narrator recounts a nightmare from the previous night: “I feel that I am lying down and that I am sleeping… I sense it and I see it… and I also sense that someone is approaching me, is looking at me, is touching me, is getting on my bed, is kneeling on my chest, is taking my neck in its hands.

59 “Ah ! si nous avions d’autres organes qui accompliraient en notre faveur d’autres miracles, que de choses nous pourrions découvrir encore autour de nous !” (44).
and clenching... clenching... with all its might to strangle me."\textsuperscript{60} At this moment, the abstract *something* that embodies the “mysterious regions” of our reality suddenly becomes a *someone*; it is now a defined being that appears to consciously manifest the properties and supposed malice of the invisible force corrupting the narrator’s thoughts. According to Ernest Atikin, this being is “nothing less than the imaginative concrete personification of his [Maupassant’s] abstract Unknown, of his ‘ce qu’on ne comprend pas’ in its widest signification” (207). Once the void concealed beyond his experience of reality takes on a personified reflection of its human “observer,” the narrator begins to consider himself properly haunted. With his haunting forcibly localized within an embodied albeit invisible figure, it is now *as if* he can engage the gaps in the presentation of reality, *as if* the haunting had a subjective agency that, because of its invisibility, cannot be reduced to an object. Consequently, the narrator enters into a relationship with radical alterity.

At its center, “Le Horla” is a tale about one man’s haunting by that which is absolutely foreign and *incomprehensible*, figuratively and literally—that is, it is a narrative of his encounter with radical alterity. Such a degree of otherness localized in the gap in the presentation of reality poses a critical assault on the traditional models of subjectivity that are predicated on assumptions of a complete and direct experience of reality. The otherness embodied by the Horla disrupts the possibility for a transparent experience of reality—that is, an experience of reality that is perfectly congruent to reality itself. The narrator, who deeply values the “profound and delicate roots which attach a man to the ground where his ancestors were born and died,” represents a traditional figure who must confront the necessity to reconsider his conservative

\textsuperscript{60} « Je sens bien que je suis couché et que je dors... Je le sens et je le vois... et je sens aussi que quelqu’un s’approche de moi, me regarde, me palpe, monte sur mon lit, s’agenouille sur ma poitrine, me prend le cou entre mains et serre... serre... de toute sa force pour m’étrangler » (8).
perspective as the text figuratively uproots such foundations as the question of inheritance becomes problematized, which we will examine in further detail shortly. The short story is a tragedy in its most direct sense, insofar as the narrator ultimately refuses to adapt to a changing situation and thus fails to meet the text’s demand for a fundamental reconsideration of expectations regarding the experience of reality such that they are no longer bound by assumptions of transparency. Despite the many anxieties that may accompany such a paradigm shift, the text, like a cautionary tale, underscores for the reader both the need to account for the falsity (non-transparency) embodying our experience of reality as well as the possibility to confront absolute otherness in a meaningful way.

While the short story itself offers a thoughtful reflection on the subject of otherness, its engagement with alterity—and particularly the difference in perspective between the text and its protagonist—can be opened substantially through a reading of select portions of Emmanuel Levinas’s early inquiry into the possibility of radical alterity in “Time and the Other” (1947). This essay, which explores the intersection between subjectivity and its “Wholely other [Tout Autre]” (31), provides a model through which we can better analyze the haunting in “Le Horla.” Levinas exposes our investigation into the gap in the presentation of reality that I suggest is figured by the presence/nonpresence of the Horla. According to Levinas, otherness cannot be reduced to the idea of an other person (whose alterity is merely a matter of degree because of the other’s relative correspondence to one’s own subjective existence and thus because of his or her general ability to capacity to be assimilated into knowledge and network of sameness). Otherness itself is absolutely unknowable; its difference is a matter of kind. This unpresentable which cannot be figured is “the very dimension of alterity” (88): it supposes “the absence of the

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61 In discussing the power of the invisible wind, a minor character, the monk at Mont Saint-Michel, speaks of its capacity to “déracine les arbres [uproot trees]” (16).
other” (90) because by definition, it supposes the nonpresence of everything knowable. It is “ungraspable” (72), “absolutely surprising” (76), and “not unknown but unknowable, refractory to all light” (75). In “Le Horla,” this radical alterity is not so much present in the narrator’s seemingly transparent relations with other people as it is in his encounter with the invisibility of the Horla, which appears as a gap in presentation. Levinas’s text and its nod toward the ghostliness of alterity thus add definition to the inquiry into the encounter with a being whose invisibility presents nothing but nonpresence: “this absence of the other is precisely its presence as other” (Levinas 94). Figurations of nonpresence haunt the experience of reality, and their unpresentability (that is, their invisibility) is particularly relevant to our investigation of “Le Horla” and its narrator’s unsuccessful task of engaging the otherness of being.

In the final paragraph of “Time and the Other,” Levinas tellingly depicts the engagement with otherness as essentially ghostly. In the essay’s final paragraph, Levinas chooses to depict the intersection of the same and the other as it occurs within a haunted space: within “the world of the spirit [l’esprit]” (94). Since an encounter with the other cannot be reduced to the knowledge that accompanies the pretense of vision, it must take place within the context of the in-visible. Haunting embodies the otherness of which Levinas speaks, and the ghost is the other which is dislodged from the order of sameness. Levinas, like Maupassant, orients a subjective experience of reality—one which is perpetually engaged with the concept of radical alterity in a tentative yet meaningful relation—not through the matter that populates reality, but through the ghostly otherness that haunts it.  

62 Whereas the narrator of “Le Horla” sinks to despair, feeling

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62 One might briefly turn to the philosophy of Alain Badiou for a similar use of ghostly figuration in order to articulate an engagement with otherness. Though Badiou rejects a number of Levinas’s philosophical procedures as theologically-grounded, his inquiry into radical alterity (labeled “the void [le vide]”) is greatly indebted to Levinas. Badiou’s void, which itself is the embodiment of radical alterity, is marked by its ghostly population. Just as the limits of the experience of reality are ultimately exposed to the narrator of “Le Horla” through the eponymous invisible being, to Badiou, one figuratively perceives gaps in the presentation of being through “phantom remainders” which are remainders “of the multiple not originally being in the form of the one” (53)—that is,
what Levinas terms the “profound unhappiness [malheur]” of solitude (58), “Time and the Other” conversely explores the possibility of affirming the haunting of otherness. From within “the world of the spirit,” Levinas dislodges the experience of reality from reality itself and provides a key to discovering the “path of redemption” (66). In the case of Maupassant’s short story, this equates to an opening of the possibility for a meaningful interpretation of an irresolvable haunting. Through such a reading, we will explore the tension in “Le Horla” between the narrator who desires resolution and the text that denies it.

**Seeing Invisibility**

When the narrator of “Le Horla” is faced with the crisis of otherness, he becomes desperate for a remedy. At first, he attempts to forget what he has seen—or, more precisely, what he has yet failed to see. He vacation to Mont Saint-Michel and Paris and finds considerable relief, though in each case, the haunting resumes within a day or two of his return home. His physician is unable to diagnose his condition—the gap in the presentation cannot be accounted for by empirical science. Furthermore, the narrator is socially alienated as a result of his condition, as all those to whom he explains his haunting laugh derisively. The plot is primarily driven by the narrator’s attempt to mitigate the solitude he experiences in an encounter with what we identify as “something that is absolutely other, something bearing alterity not as a provisional determination we can assimilate through enjoyment, but as something whose very components of being itself that do not directly appear in its presentation. In other words, a phantom is the figuration of what is left out, what is not presented (though nevertheless presumed to be) in an act of presentation: a phantom is the very incongruity that differentiates an original and its representation. As such, the phantom “cannot in any manner be presented itself, because the regime of presentation is consistent multiplicity, the result of the count,” meaning that it defies the laws of the structure that would present it (53). In the way that the phantom remainder recalls the incongruity between an original and its representation, it is a reminder that there exists more than what is presented—and what can be perceived. For Badiou, too, it is haunting which discredits the legitimacy of presentation as such by revealing that the transparency of presentation is essentially illusory and consequently that presentation itself is intrinsically incomplete and indirect.
existence is made of alterity” (Levinas 74), an encounter which is terrifying in the way that it radically nullifies the narrator’s assumptions and knowledge of reality.

One of the more dedicated attempts to overcome his haunted situation appears in the narrator’s struggle to master the Horla through appropriating it into the sameness of his experience of reality. The force driving his desire to see the invisible being is laid out most explicitly in the original 1886 version: “The impossibility of seeing it exasperated me, and I lit all the lights in my apartment, as if I could, in this light, discern it.”63 More complexly in the 1887 version, the narrator reflects on the constriction imposed by the limitations of his own senses, and then he observes: “the wise say that the beast’s eye, different from ours, doesn’t discern what ours does… And my eye cannot discern the newcomer that oppresses me.”64 With this, he declares, “Me too, I want… I will be able to… I must know it, touch it, see it!”65 Once the narrator localizes the haunting into a personified albeit invisible being, he begins to conceive of this unpresentable otherness as essentially presentable, something that can be seen, touched, and known.

There are a number of incidents where the narrator believes that he has directly encountered his invisible stalker. For example, when strolling among his bed of roses, he witnesses “the stalk of one of the roses bent, as if an invisible hand had bent it, then broke it off, as if this hand had picked it! Then, the flower rose, following a curve that a hand would have described en bringing it toward a mouth, and it remained suspended in the transparent air, all

63 « L'impossibilité de le voir m'exaspérait et j'allumais toutes les lumières de mon appartement, comme si j'eusse pu, dans cette clarté, le découvrir » (243).
64 « Les savants disent que l’œil de la bête, différent du nôtre, ne distingue point comme le nôtre… Et mon œil à moi ne peut distinguer le nouveau venu qui m’opprime » (47).
65 « moi aussi je veux... je pourrai... mais il faut le connaître, le toucher, le voir ! » (47).
alone, immobile, a frightening red stain, three paces from my eyes." From this sight alone, he claims that, “I've seen... I've seen!... I've seen!... I am still chilled to the nail... I am still frightened to the spine... I've seen it!” But what precisely has been seen? Nancy Traill analyzes the narrator’s phrase “I've seen...,” observing that “the absence of a grammatical object suggests that the narrator cannot yet identify what he has seen” (130). There is a particular confusion here wherein the narrator confuses seeing it (that is, the nonpresent figure) with merely seeing its trace (that is, nonpresence itself). Despite his hopeful supposition that he has seen the Horla, he has in fact only further experienced its haunting by not seeing it.

In another scene, on a walk through the forest, the narrator feels as though he is being closely pursued by the being. So long as he does not look behind him to verify the pursuit, the impression intensifies. When the tension is too much, however, the narrator turns around and finds nothingness: “I was alone. I saw nothing behind me but the straight and wide path, empty, high, redoubtably empty.” Again, it is not merely nothing that is there, but an emptiness pregnant with absented elements. Again, when the narrator peers into the void in the attempt to find something, he finds only its trace, an indication of its nonpresence. The narrator gradually begins to experience haunting as an exposure of nonpresence—that is, as the presentation of a...
hollow emptiness which reveals that something is concealed, while at the same time refusing to reveal the concealed element itself. Haunted, the narrator perceives the absence of stimuli: he encounters the emptiness of the woods; he listens for what is not spoken and looks for what is not visible. In the midst of such an inquiry, haunting exposes a fundamental failure in communication—a failure of reality to present itself. The Horla thus manifests that which cannot be understood in our subjective perception of the world and what cannot be accurately conveyed in language or narration—it draws attention to the unpresentability lying under every act of presentation.

In the end, the narrator’s compulsive quest is too narrow, and he fails to affirm the invisibleness that inevitably surrounds him. In his encounters with alterity, he never dismantles his firm belief in the redemptive possibilities offered by knowledge and he remains naively focused on filling the gaps in knowledge exposed by the indiscernible. His search for knowledge as a means to truth is therefore a null search that will always lead him further away from his goal. In the end, in not coming to come to terms with the failure of structured representation, the narrator fails to exorcise his phantom. The more he attempts to uncover, the less he can grasp, and it is this very frustration—the acknowledgment of something which is not presented—before which a ghost stakes its ground. As the familiarity and stability of his world literally slacken, the narrator becomes disoriented and he begins to stumble. In this scene in the woods, for example, after witnessing the nothingness, he relates, “I nearly fell; I opened my eyes; the trees were dancing and the ground was floating; I had to sit down. Then, ah! I no longer knew how I’d gotten here! How strange! Strange! How strange! I had no idea at all.”

As the narrator attempts the impossible task of penetrating this impenetrable veil sheltering his experience of

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70 « Je faillis tomber ; je rouvris les yeux ; les arbres dansaient ; la terre flottait ; je dus m’asseoir. Puis, ah ! je ne savais plus par où j’étais venu ! Bizarre idée ! Bizarre ! Bizarre idée ! Je ne savais plus du tout » (10-11).
reality, he grows dizzy and loses consciousness. As he encounters the very limit of human experience, objective space appears to be divested of its reason and normalcy, and he slips further and further into madness, unable to accept \textit{missingness} as a substitute for the missing element itself.

If the Horla is, as Ernest Atkin suggests, “symbolic not of a particular mystery like hallucination but of the mysteriousness of universal, ultimate reality—the reality that lies beyond the reach of our perception” (206), then the narrator’s ghost-hunt is certainly symptomatic of his desire to transcend (or at least correct) the limits of his indirect and incomplete experience of reality. Fundamentally, “Le Horla” is deeply concerned with the crisis that occurs when one encounters a gap in presentation within the experience of reality. The transparency of being is violated when one discovers that the subjective experience of reality is too incomplete and too direct to ever reveal the depth of reality in its full truth. This incongruity—wherein the original, objective reality is inevitably more profound than its reduced, subjective presentation—is experienced according to a lack of perception and a presentation of the haunting nonpresence of some radical alterity. When the narrator of “Le Horla” witnesses the \textit{invisibleness} of a foreign being—and not the invisible being itself—he becomes aware both of the existence of some component of reality that inevitably exceeds his perception and thus of the limits of his own subjective experience of reality. As presented within this short story, haunting is the crisis one experiences upon \textit{seeing an invisibleness without seeing the invisible}.

Because, according to Levinas, “invisibility results not from some incapacity of human knowledge, but from the inaptitude of knowledge as such—from its in-adequation—to the Infinity of the absolutely other” (32), the haunting in “Le Horla” simply cannot be overcome. Through the very end of the short story, however, the narrator remains utterly incapable of
surrendering the will to overcome the alterity presented by the Horla. As though he irremediably belongs within the tradition of récit protagonists identified by Sartre, the narrator remains tragically devoted to principles of order; he cannot accept that “one is no longer master of anything—that is, one is in the absurd” (Levinas 50). In refusing to affirm the otherness inherent to his indirect and incomplete experience of reality, he refuses to adapt his perspective of being according to the demands made by the text. This failure, by negative example, however, offers the reader the opportunity to succeed in engaging invisibleness where the narrator failed. Levinas reveals the stakes underscoring the text in affirming the invisibleness of alterity. For Levinas, an encounter with alterity is not necessarily violent in that it does not so much break what was once whole as it reveals that the wholeness one had once believed in was nothing but illusion. Accordingly, an encounter with alterity fundamentally accommodates a liberation figured as “essentially a new birth” (Levinas 81).

Haunting fundamentally operates according to what Levinas defines as the “failure of communication” which “is neither a struggle, nor a fusion, nor a knowledge,” but instead is “a relationship with alterity, with mystery—that is to say, with the future, with what (in a world where there is everything) is never there, with what cannot be there when everything is there—not with a being that is not there, but with the very dimension of alterity” (88). This dimension is a liberation that unhinges all knowability from the principal assumptions and expectations within the experience of reality. Haunting—that is, the encounter with alterity—retains an opening for the occurrence of the impossible; it is redemptive insofar as it endows the experience of reality with a perpetual newness which “stops [life’s] everyday transcendence from falling back upon a point that is always the same” (66). As such, the lesson of the ghost, which the narrator of “Le Horla” overlooks, is this:
This ‘not knowing,’ this fundamental disorder, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come [à venir]. (89)

The haunting encounter with radical alterity must not incorporate seeing, communicating with, or appropriating the other. Haunting is merely an encounter with the otherness of the other, and nothing more. It does not provide understanding, but it reveals a lack in understanding. It humbles its subject, and, as a rebirth, it perpetually remains “an aspiration and an awaiting” (32), open to new avenues of thinking. Haunting is an opening of analysis without conclusion.

What Maupassant’s narrator overlooks is precisely what Levinas terms the “redemption” of being (66) and even the “victory over death” (90), possible only through the confrontation with otherness. Alterity, insofar as it is “absolutely unknowable” is thus “foreign to all light, rendering every assumption of possibility impossible, rendering every assumption of possibility impossible” (Levinas 71). Alterity is thus felt in the wake of an event—that is, the appearance of something “absolutely unknowable.” Such a “transcendent event” (Levinas 90) violates the wealth of knowledge accrued by the experience of being, and accommodates the reconstitution of experience which is not predetermined. Whereas one is always subject to the radical alterity of reality,71 the profound awareness of this fact (that is, haunting) is invoked through this transcendent event, through the presentation of unpresentability. In order for such a transcendent event to hold the meaning Levinas attributes to it, however, the subject must be willing to affirm

71 In “Le Horla,” Maupassant provides frequent allusions to various mysterious forces of the earth, such as the lengthy reflection on the wind made by the monk at Mon Saint-Michel. The monk asks the narrator, “Do we see the hundred-millionth part of what exists? Look, there is the wind, which is the strongest force in nature, which knocks down men, blows down buildings, uproots trees, lifts the sea into mountains of water, […]—have you seen it, and can you see it? And yet it exists.” (« Est-ce que nous voyons la cent-millième partie de ce qui existe ? Tenez, voici le vent, qui est la plus grande force de la nature, qui renverse les hommes, abat les édifices, déracine les arbres, soulève la mer en montagnes d’eau, détruit les falaises, et jette aux brisants les grands navires, le vent qui tue, qui siffle, qui gémit, qui mugit,—l’avez-vous vu, et pouvez-vous le voir? Il existe, pourtant » (14-6).)
the alterity in the experience of reality. In “Le Horla,” this failure of affirmation is most apparent in the narrator’s misreading of the origin of his haunting.

The Origin of Haunting

Near the end of “Le Horla,” the narrator seems to have encountered a possible explanation for the source of the haunting, and, exhausted in his tireless search for such an account, he is all too willing to accept it without question. While reading the Revue du Monde Scientifique, he discovers an “epidemic of madness” that has recently broken out in Rio de Janeiro: “[the locals] claim that they are pursued, possessed, governed like human cattle by invisible, yet tangible, beings.”

According to the article, the haunting appears to be some remnant of the primitive world. The narrator then recalls from the first day of the narrative when, doing nothing in particular, he waved at the Brazilian ship: he fancies he must have then invited in the phantom-like figure. He recalls, “I found it so pretty, so white, so gay! The Being was on board, arriving from over there, where its race was born. And it saw me. It saw my white house also; and it leapt from its ship to the shore. Oh, my God!”

With this reading, the narrator believes to have established the precise moment wherein the haunting originated—he seems to have located the origin of haunting.

The narrator presumes that the haunting originates from the appearance of the Brazilian ship. This collision of the old, primitive world and the modern world, made possible by mercantile commerce, is symptomatic of a traditional model of haunting which functions as the

72 “Les habitants éperdus quittent leurs maisons, désertent leurs villages, abandonnent leurs cultures, se disant poursuivis, possédés, gouvernés comme un bétail humain par de êtres invisible bien que tangibles” (44).
73 “Je le trouvai si joli, si blanc, si gai ! L’Être était dessus, venant de là-bas, où sa race est née ! Et il m’a vu ! Il a vu ma demeure blanche aussi ; et il a sauté du navire sur la rive. Oh ! mon Dieu ! » (44).
remainder (and often a return) of a lost past that has since been redrawn. While this explanation suffices for the narrator, the text subtly exposes to its reader a far more complex origination of its haunting that has nothing to do with Brazil. We must recall that the text’s haunting is defined by its paralyzing appropriation of the narrator’s will, or more precisely, by an otherness embedded within his subjectivity. A return to the first passage of the short story, however, reveals that such a haunting actually precedes the narrator’s supposed invitation. The supposed originary act (the narrator’s wave, prompting the appearance of the “absolutely unknowable”) is marked by its own lacking agency: in that original passage, the narrator writes, “I saluted it, though I don’t know why, except that seeing this ship gave me pleasure” (emphasis added). Even before the event that invokes his haunting, the narrator’s will is already seemingly compromised—before the apparition of the phantom, he is already haunted.

There are two particular philosophical suppositions that the narrator encounters throughout the short story that help to support the claim that haunting is tied not to an external invasion, but rather is an a priori component intrinsic to being. During his sojourn in Paris, the narrator makes the acquaintance of the hypnotist Dr. Parent, a friend of his cousin. Dr. Parent, who specializes in remedying nervous diseases, suggests that, “ever since humans have thought, ever since they have known to express and write out their thoughts, they have felt themselves

74 Freud’s “The Uncanny,” examines the unsettling feeling (that is, the uncanniness) associated with ghostliness. First, an encounter with a ghost is uncanny because the ghost functions as the return of what was thought to have been lost; it is, traditionally speaking, a secret that has been unearthed. On a deeper level, however, a belief in ghosts is uncanny as well because the possibility of haunting functions as the return of a set of “primitive beliefs which have been surmounted [which] seem once more to be confirmed” (226).
75 “Je le saluai, je ne sais pourquoi, tan ce navire me fit plaisir à voir » (4, my emphasis).
76 The name Parent seems too deliberate to be coincidental. The pragmatic doctor who attempts to apply a cool sense of rationality to the supernatural functions as father-like figure. Not only does he propose something of a law (and, in the tradition of the “nom du père,” a prohibition) of order to a chaotic system, but he also operates as a progenitor—that is, an originator—of haunting. See below.
bordering a mystery, impenetrable to their crude and imperfect senses.” Dr. Parent continues his claim with the resulting theory that, “so long as this intelligence remained still at its rudimentary stages, the haunting of invisible manifestations took on conventionally frightful forms”; the doctor then proceeds to list countless instances of “popular belief in the supernatural.” Ultimately, the doctor constructs a theory of haunting which assumes no particular commencement, but rather is inherent to reality, legible only within the limitations of the subjective experience of it. Therefore, the general source of haunting is more precisely understood as the advent of an awareness of this fundamental condition, a “fear of the Invisible,” which, unlike traditional conceptions of haunting, is not particular to our own situation or to crimes that we commit, but is universal to conscious beings: it is something that “has always haunted our fathers.” A particular irony reveals itself when we consider Dr. Parent’s lecture of sorts on the nature of haunting (which we inherit from our parents) as itself a renewed source of further anxiety and haunting for the narrator. From Dr. Parent’s presentation, we can affirm the possibility that haunting is not the result of an external force yearning to communicate with us, as we had traditionally thought, but conversely the result of our feeble internal forces yearning to communicate with the reality beyond our perceived horizons: the ability to conceive of an other

77 “Depuis que l’homme pense, depuis qu’il sait dire et écrire sa pensée, il se sent frôlé par un mystère impénétrable pour ses sens grossiers et imparfaits, et il tâche de suppléer, par l’effort de son intelligence, à l’impuissance de ses organes” (23).
78 “Comme il est profond, ce mystère de l’Invisible ! Nous ne le pouvons sonder avec nos sens misérables, avec nos yeux qui ne savent apercevoir ni le trop petit, ni le trop grand, ni le trop près, ni le trop loin » (5).
79 “Quand cette intelligence demeurait encore à l’état rudimentaire, cette hantise des phénomènes invisible a pris des formes banalement effrayantes » (23).
80 From a passage in the original 1886 version of the short story: « La peur de l’Invisible a toujours hanté nos pères. » (247)
produces in tandem the conception of otherness as such. As a result, the unknowability that haunts humanity originates in the seemingly futile attempt to “express and write out [our] thoughts,” to address the Invisible. It is not simply the limitation of subjectivity itself that produces haunting, but rather the failed attempt to communicate the subjective experience of reality.

Dr. Parent’s observation is echoed by a similar rumination that the narrator later discovers in a historical account of “all of the invisible beings haunting man.” The narrator acquires a manuscript written by the fictional doctor of philosophy and theogony, Herestauss, which proposes that “man, ever since he began to think, has sensed and dreaded a new being, stronger than him, his successor in this world, and, feeling it nearby and not being able to see the nature of this master, he created, in his terror, an entire race of occult beings, vague phantoms born of fear.” Once again, haunting is tied to the impression of confinement of subjectivity due to “not being able to see” (Herestauss), to “crude and imperfect senses” (Parent), and to “my eye [which] cannot discern” (the narrator). Suffering under the weight of human limitations, the subject invokes a symbolic haunting which is experienced as a disruption to the experience of reality. Like Parent’s, Herestauss’s treatise infers that haunting—that is, the awareness of such suffering—derives from thinking about and articulating the human experience of being. The very presentative act of narration (as in a diary, for example) provokes an investigation into a void that exceeds our perception, and such a profound engagement results in the phenomenon we conceive of as haunting. In the short story, there is truly one single event that precedes the passing of the Brazilian ship—preceding as well the ruminations on the country life and its

81 “… tous les êtres invisibles rôdant autour de l’homme » (40).
82 Unlike “Parent,” “Herestauss” has no direct literal translation or obvious implication from the German other than the obvious “Her-” as Herr [Master], an implication of mastery and authority.
83 “L’homme, depuis qu’il pense, a pressenti et redouté un être nouveau, plus fort que lui, son successeur en ce monde, et que, le sentant proche et ne pouvant prévoir la nature de ce maître, il a créé, dans sa terreur, tout le peuple fantastique des êtres occultes, fantômes vagues nés de la peur » (40-1).
“attachments” to the past—that could possibly account for the invocation of the phantom. That event is, of course: the commencement of the narrative.

According to the deliberate framing of these two philosophical ruminations on haunting—and its origination in human [written] expression—Maupassant suggests that the narrator’s haunted condition derives not from the arrival of the Brazilian three-masted ship, as the short story would naïvely have its reader believe, but more fundamentally, from its very foundation as a literary text. In other words, the diary narrative invokes—rather than explaining or exorcising—its haunting. The narrator’s controlled attempt to present his situation on the page fails to offer any singular meaning or explanation for the haunting—the diary can present the Horla no more than the experience of reality can. All that remains in the wake of either presentation is simply a trace of the phantoms of being: unknowability itself.

Foreshadowing the ultimate inability of the narrative to contain and master its situation, there is a scene early in the short story that depicts an aphasiatic crisis as the narrator attempts to read. Seized by “an incomprehensible inquietude”84 which suggests to him that “the night concealed for me a terrible threat,”85 the narrator picks up a book and begins to read, as if taking part in a narrative could offer solace; however, he confesses, “I try to read, but I don’t understand the words; I can hardly distinguish the letters.”86 Rather than revealing meaning, the literature further conceals it; like the haunting Horla, the process of reading obviates its capacity to properly inform. The narrator attempts to counteract the breakdown in his experience of reality, though rather than compensating for the disorientation, his engagement with the literature ultimately results in further crisis—that is, in a corresponding breakdown of narrative presentation. The narrator begins to realize that the written text cannot combat the threat of

84 « Une inquiétude incompréhensible » (6).
85 « La nuit cachait pour moi une menace terrible » (7).
86 « J’essaye de lire ; mais je ne comprends pas les mots ; je distingue à peine les lettres » (7).
unknowability; instead, it is somehow complicit in it. In our human understanding, as the truth of reality as such undergoes the process of presentation (that is, as it is presented), it is reduced to a text that is haunted by its supposed original purity. The reduction of presentation implies the concealing of certain original elements, rendering the experience of reality both indirect and incomplete. The failure of communication proposes that the text, like the narrator’s experience of reality, appears to properly communicate little more than its fundamental inability to properly communicate. To Blanchot, Orpheus’s gaze, which is inextricably bound to one’s engagement with haunting, is highly significant because it produces and affirms a concealment as it approaches the inevitable failure to attain objective meaning (that is, to be properly communicated to). Such an approach supposes that “what we call the insignificant, the inessential, error, could, to one who accepts the risk and surrenders to it without restraint, reveal itself as the source of all authenticity” (174). The authentic, to Blanchot, is the uncertainty of an unfamiliar experience, an uncertainty that emerges to the level of consciousness in the face of haunting. “Le Horla” is ultimately concerned with the horror in witnessing the occurrence of the impossible, when the haunting leads one to dispense with the inessential question, What is real?, and instead turns to the essential question, What is reality?

It is impossible to argue against such an obvious observation as “before he [the narrator] senses the Horla’s presence, his life is peaceful and he has no cause for anxiety” (Traill 127). Less obvious, albeit more importantly, before the narrator begins journaling, his life is peaceful and he has no cause for anxiety. The narrator begins to suffer a fever almost immediately after

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87 Blanchot implies that the motivation for Orpheus’s turn to see the invisible originates within his approach of the ghostly world: “It is inevitable that Orpheus transgress the law which forbids him to ‘turn back,’ for he already violated it with his first steps toward the shades” (172).

88 Further exploring the act of disappearance within Blanchot’s reading of the myth of Orpheus, Huffer contends that the loss of Eurydice (and, in the context of our interpretation of “Le Horla,” we might add the loss of certainty in the attempt to perceive the Horla—or even reality as such) indicates “not only that literature cannot tell the truth (i.e., fiction as the opposite of veracity), but, most crucially, that literature is literature because it lays bare its self-recognition as untruth” (187).
he begins to narrate his experience of reality in diary format. When he goes on holiday to Mont Saint-Michel—and, not coincidentally, puts down his pen and paper for an entire month—he returns cured! When the narrator returns to his journaling routine, however, the haunting returns. As the haunting becomes more severe and as the narrator’s madness intensifies, the narrative passages grow in length and equally become more frequent, as though they could offer some remedy—or, conversely: as the narrative passages grow in length and equally become more frequent, the haunting becomes more severe and the narrator’s madness intensifies. Whereas at the beginning of the short story, the average span between entries is roughly four to five days, at the climax, not one day goes by without narrative reflection for a period of over two weeks, and sometimes there are two passages in a single day. The association between the intensity of haunting and the processes of thinking and writing suggests the inherent invocation of the phantom inherent to the act of presentation.

The Horla, as a haunting gap in the presentation of reality, functions as a reminder of inevitability of an incomplete and indirect experience of reality. Whereas in many other preceding ghost stories, a supernatural event forces a significance upon the world that demands a narrative account to make sense of it and exorcize it, here, the opposite is true. Indeed, the naïve supposition that the haunting produces the narration conceals the more menacing possibility that, conversely, it is the narration, as an inaugural event, that produces the haunting. One might therefore invert Traill’s claim that, “It is only when his life is pervaded by a strange presence that he looks for an explanation” (127) into, more appropriately: *it is only when the narrator looks for an explanation that his life is pervaded by a strange presence.*
Paternity

For Levinas, the essential point of subjectivity (that is, the “victory over death” [90]) is embodied in one’s readiness to affirm the radical alterity inherent to his or her indirect and incomplete experience of reality: one must be driven by an Eros that, as a “failure of communication,” is not characterized by fusion, grasping, or knowledge (88). While this eventually results in an acceptance of the otherness lurking invisibly behind every aspect of reality, it begins with an affirmation of the radical alterity within one’s self: the process of transcending the constricting sameness of everyday life “is not just the disappearance of the self, but self-forgetfulness, as a first abnegation” (67). The answer to Levinas’s essential question, “how can the ego become other to itself?” (91), lies in and only in the procedure of paternity.

The model for paternity, as it is described at the end of “Time and the Other,” is depicted as the complex relationship between a parent and his or her child: “Paternity is the relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me” (91). When we think of such a disorienting collision of subjectivities, we might recall the lengthy scene in “Le Horla” in which Dr. Parent demonstrates the power of hypnotism—which of course, like paternity, is nothing short of the insertion of a primary subjectivity into a secondary one. This mode of transference further reflects the narrator’s superficial explanation for his ailment—that is, an epidemic of “contagious

89 The fécondité that Levinas depicts as the source for reproducing the self into the world implies a sense of fertility that might be more commonly or traditionally associated with the feminine. Yet, Levinas selects the term paternité to capture the subject who experiences the procedure, neither the feminine maternité nor the gender-neutral parentalité (or even some version of être parent). The gendering of this concept becomes more obvious when Levinas depicts the father [père] and the [fils] as the sole players in this theater. Observing the gendering of Levinas’s text, Donna Brody questions, “Is ethical responsibility confined to the otherness of a male other? Whereas it was possible to wonder whether the term of the feminine was reserved to the female sex, there seems no such equivocality haunting the unambiguous notions of paternity and the son” (62).

90 Hypnotism is precisely the “unexpected route [voie inattendue]” made in the advance toward the “haunting of invisible manifestations [hantise des phénomènes invisible]” (23).
madness” (my emphasis). For Levinas, paternity is thus a positioning of the self on the frontier of the other in which orders of sameness and otherness more or less exchange varying properties: “Paternity is not simply the renewal of the father in the son and the father’s merger with him, it is also the father’s exteriority in relation to the son, a pluralist existing” (92). The resulting effect from the procedure of “fecundity,” as Levinas develops it, is a doubling of the subject into itself and, simultaneously, an object of alterity. 

While the reader may conceivably interpret this theoretical model literally, its meaning is far more significant when understood figuratively. There is a corresponding model for the pursuit of Love (“Eros,” as Levinas presents it) in Socrates’s dialog with Diotima in Plato’s *The Symposium*. According to the wisdom, Love—and its “divine beauty” (49, 211e)—is the result of reproduction (that is, *paternity*), insofar as “every mortal thing is maintained in existence, not by being completely the same, as divine things are, but because everything that grows old and goes away leaves behind another new thing of the same type” (45, 208a). On the one hand, this relates to men and women who literally reproduce—which are “pregnant in body” secure “happiness forever by producing children” (46, 208e). On the other hand, there are those who are “pregnant in mind” (46, 209a), and because the effects of their reproduction are more intellectual and capable of “[producing] beautiful discourses” (48, 210a), one “should regard the beauty of minds as more valuable than that of the body” (48, 210b). This reading of *The Symposium* of those whose paternity has resulted in lasting and meaningful reproductions are the great poets Homer and Hesiod.

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91 “Une épidémie de folie » (44).
92 The seemingly dizzying leap back to Plato is mitigated when one realizes the extent to which Levinas implicitly and explicitly draws from Plato (particularly *The Symposium*) as an inspirational source of his conceptions of alterity. Additionally, one should note that even in Plato’s *The Symposium*, the field of reproduction and addressing otherness is figured according to ghostly haunting insofar as Love, the force which connects a subject to its other, is defined as a “spirit” which functions to “interpret and carry messages from humans to gods and from gods to humans.” According to Plato, spirits act as a medium: “They convey prayers and sacrifices from humans, and commands and gifts in return for sacrifices from gods. Being intermediate between the other two, they fill the gap between them, and enable the universe to form an interconnected whole” (39, 202e).
93 Some examples in *The Symposium* of those whose paternity has resulted in lasting and meaningful reproductions are the great poets Homer and Hesiod.
*Symposium* thus invites us to consider the implications of Levinas’s paternity according to the production of “beautiful discourses,” that is, through composing narratives.

While the narrator of “Le Horla” seems believe that the production of a diary narrative will reflect his haunted experience of reality (and ideally reveal what his experience conceals), the actual result is quite different. As it turns out, rather than offering a reflective surface upon which reality is completely and directly reflected, the diary operates as a non-reflective mirror, an asymmetrical doubling of the narrator and his situation. The otherness which haunts the narrator appears as a direct result of his attempt to secure the stability of his perceived order of sameness. The diary, as the offspring of the narrator, unexpectedly presents “a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me” (Levinas 91)—that is, a sense of otherness that intensifies the haunting and localizes it as not only an exterior force, but an interior one. In engaging his own narrative text, the narrator faces another encounter with the radical alterity woven into his experience of reality.

In his analysis of “Le Horla,” Martin Calder argues, “the diarist holds up his journal as a mirror to himself” (42), which echoes Brewster Fitz’s earlier claim that, “a journal is, figuratively speaking, a mirror which the author holds at an oblique angle in order for the reader to see him, and direction in front of himself, in order to see his own image” (956). However, as both critics propose, Maupassant’s complex treatment of reflective apparatuses—that is, of mirrors and, equally, of narrative—demonstrates the inevitable failure of such an attempt at transparent presentation. The presentative processes of dreaming, self-narrating, and even thinking, all produce a similar effect of mirroring or doubling. Fitz offers the naïve supposition, which is held by the narrator of “Le Horla,” that “man must double himself, in order to think himself, in order to think” (959). Contrary to expectations, however, this doubling act actually
deconstructs more than it constructs insofar as it obstructs rather than facilitates the capacity for the subject to understand his or her own situation. Fitz ultimately concludes that, “a journal, however, reflects not the author’s presence, but instead the very opposite, the author’s absence” (962). As such, the journal functions as a non-reflective mirror.

In “Le Horla,” there is a moment near the climax of the story when the narrator sees his own reflection effaced, demonstrating the idea of a blank mirror, a mirror that does not reflect. While pretending to write “in order to deceive [the Horla], because he too was observing me closely,” the narrator glances at the mirror and fails to see his own reflection—he then writes:

One could see as clearly as in broad daylight, yet I did not see myself in my mirror. It was empty, clear, profound, full of light! My image was not there inside it…and I, I was facing it! I didn’t dare to advance, I didn’t dare to make a movement, feeling that he was certainly there, but that he would escape me, he whose imperceptible body had devoured my reflection.

The narrator looks into the mirror, expecting to find an accurate representation of himself communicated back through a reflection; instead, the haunting corrupts the presentation. The image, a haunted text of sorts, withholds—not presents—its referent, the narrator must face the terrifying loss of orientation when he perceives the trace of an otherness lodged within his own experience. The narrator correspondingly exclaims, “I had seen it! The terror remained with me and makes tremble still.”

On a related note, Benj. Woodbridge explores the etymology of the word *horla* in French. In referencing Maupassant’s close association with the doctor and poet, Henri Cazalis, who wrote under the pen-name “Lahor,” Woodbridge supposes that Maupassant found a “sonorous combination of syllables” (52) of the pseudonym’s inversion. Underlying this reference, however, is a certain “duplication of personality” (52) which suggests the mirroring of an identity through the use of pseudonym. Just as the pseudonym Jean Lahor the author doubles Henri Cazalis the physician, now “the Horla is conceived as a sort of reduplication of its victim” (52). Though subtly, this theory underscores the short story’s most prominent ontological thread, that of a subjective doubling—or reflection—that renders a subject fundamentally estranged from his or her being.

Just as when he spies the floating rose, the narrator discerns a gap

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95 “Je faisais semblant d'écrire, pour le tromper, car il m'épiait lui aussi » (51).

96 “On y voyait comme en plein jour, et je ne me vis pas dans ma glace !... Elle était vide, claire, profonde, pleine de lumière ! Mon image n'était pas dedans... et j'étais en face, moi ! [...] Je n'osais plus avancer, je n'osais plus faire un mouvement, sentant bien pourtant qu'il était là, mais qu'il m'échapperait encore, lui dont le corps imperceptible avait dévoré mon reflet » (51).

97 « Je l'avais vu ! L'épouvante m'en est restée, qui me fait encore frissonner » (52).
within the presentation of reality; however, this time, he uniquely witnesses the nonpresence as it is associated with himself. The mirror, like the narrative text, provide a sense of Levinasian paternity, a collision between self and otherness. Another instance of an inaugural event (of conscious self-reflection in the face of a mirror that fails to properly reflect), this moment reifies the concerns voiced in an earlier passage in which the narrator ponders the possibility of his own double-being. He thinks, “I was living, without knowing it, this mysterious double life which makes us doubt if there are two beings in us, or if a strange, unknowable and invisible being animates, at times, when our soul has drifted to sleep, our captive body which obeys this other, just as it obeys ourselves, even more than it obeys ourselves.”

Standing before the mirror and witnessing his own insubstantiality, the narrator perceives the manifestation of this conceptual double-life.

As this moment indicates, it is the illusory space reflected and opened up by the mirror—or literary text—that is most vulnerable to haunting, precisely in the ways that it reflects an otherness onto the subject and consequently draws attention to an unfamiliar foreignness housed within the subject. The non-reflective “opaque transparency” of the mirror and of the journal symptomatically point to a more fundamental concern presented by the text: the non-reflective nature of the experience of reality. Reality, “Le Horla” supposes, cannot directly or completely present itself—the most it can do is present some trace of itself in its nonpresence: it can accurately present only its own failure to accurately present. The “paternal” creation of a text thus recapitulates this primary failure within the experience of reality.

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98 « Je vivais, sans le savoir, de cette double vie mystérieuse qui fait douter s’il y a deux êtres en nous, ou si un être étranger, inconnaisssable et invisible, anime, par moments, quand notre âme est engourdie, notre corps captif qui obéit à cet autre, comme à nous-même, plus qu’à nous-mêmes. » (19).
99 « transparence opaque » (52).
If the process of writing implies, as Calder argues, “a reflective distance which dislocates the Self from itself” (53) and as Levinas argues, the event wherein “the ego become[s] other to itself” (91), then, as Maupassant depicts the situation in “Le Horla,” haunting is the manifestation of that reflective distance which demands that one affirm the presence of otherness within the subjective experience of reality. Latent within Maupassant’s Revisionist depiction of haunting is what Levinas calls “self-forgetfulness” (67), which is defined by a defamiliarization of one’s experience of reality through the release of assumption and expectation. It is precisely this self-forgetfulness—which opens one’s subjectivity to the freedom in the perpetual re-opening of possibility offered by the presence of radical alterity—that will become so crucial to later Revisionist ghost stories.

Ultimately, “Le Horla” is an inquiry into the possibility of what the narrator describes as “a world where one is sure of nothing, since light is an illusion, since sound is an illusion.” As Traill suggests, “Le Horla” presents its reader with an experience in which “positivistic confidence gives way to philosophical uncertainty and anxiety” (134). Though such a disturbance to an ordered experience of being is arguably central to countless narratives throughout history, what is unique in “Le Horla” is the way that it, in advance of Modernist and Postmodernist experimentations with indeterminacy, formally constructs its textual apparatus as a metaphorical non-reflective text in a way that dispenses with the pretense of resolution.

100 For more on the solubility of the narrating self in the short story, see Jutta Fortin, who argues, “The ‘failure’ of the diary in the tale […] questions the emphasis on the self which lies at the basis of any form of autobiography” (47).

101 « Ceux qui le dirigent sont aussi sots ; mais au lieu d’obéir à des hommes, ils obéissent à des principes, lesquels ne peuvent être que niais, stériles et faux, par cela même qu’ils sont des principes, c’est-à-dire des idées réputées certaines et immuables, en ce monde où l’on n’est sûr de rien, puisque la lumière est une illusion, puisque le bruit est une illusion. » (22).

102 In a sense, one might even argue that such a play with models of indeterminacy (as informed by figurations of haunting) anticipates Modernism and Postmodernism. Helen Sword, for example, argues that popular interest in ghosts “stirred up a host of attendant cultural anxieties regarding literary authority, authenticity, inspiration, and the reliability of new communication technologies” (8). The concerns, she contends, largely informs the literary transition from Realism to Modernism: “modernist writers were intrigued and attracted by spiritualism’s ontological
Unlike many of its more conservative predecessors, “Le Horla” demonstrates an ethics of otherness that will not be reduced to an other. Even the narrator’s final foolproof plan to subject the Horla to human mortality fails. After successfully locking the Horla within the confines of his home, the narrator sets the house ablaze with the malicious attempt to exterminate the being. He thus begins his final diary entry, initially believing in his triumph over the Horla. “It’s done,” he proclaims. Because the Horla’s escape would be impossible, the narrator generally assumes a successful eradication of the being. He claims, “Through all the windows, opened to the furnace, I watched the base of the fire, and I thought that he was there, in the oven, dead…” As he continues to narrate the event, however, he begins to doubt his success. In writing and expressing his thoughts, he is brought back to the center of haunting. His diary, like a non-reflective mirror, is invariably endowed with a haunted characteristic. His ruminations lead him to the inevitable conclusion: “No… no… without any doubt, without any doubt… it is not dead… Then… then… I will have to kill myself!…” The narrative ends with these words, expressly unresolved as the narrator clumsily realizes that his haunting is not external, but internal—within his capacity to think about, write about, and experience reality. This instance of narration reflects—as does the entire body of the short story—the unfortunate truth that there exists no means to exorcise, master, or even comprehend the unpresentable. Not only is the gap in the presentation of reality inevitable, the attempt to account for it necessitates only another shiftiness; its location of authorial power in physical abjection; its subversive celebrations of alternate, often explicitly feminine, modes of writing; its transgressions of the traditional divide between high and low culture; and its self-serving tendency to privilege form over content, medium over message” (8-9). While cultural and literary figurations of ghostliness in general may prompt such theoretical inquiries, “Le Horla” in particular begins a wave of revisionism in the treatment of ghost stories that acutely affirms the capacity of haunting to articulate such concerns of not otherness itself, but of the its irreducibility into sameness.

103 « C’est fait » (52).
104 « Par toutes les fenêtres ouvertes sur la fournaise, je voyais la cuve de feu, et je pensais qu’il était là, dans ce four, mort… » (57).
105 « Non… non… sans aucun doute, sans aucun doute… il n’est pas mort… Alors… alors… il va donc falloir que je me tue, moi !… » (57).
presentation that will only perpetuate the effects of the haunting. Unwilling to release his predominantly epistemological preoccupations with being, the narrator cannot accept that “my eyesight is so poor, so imperfect,” and he thus remains enslaved by his insatiable desire to master his experience of reality. As he is unable to meet the Revisionist demands of the text (that is, to affirm the figurative power of haunting and the figurative death of the illusion of transparency in the process of presentation), he finds no other recourse than the literalization of death. It is up to the reader to return this death to its figurative meaning and to engage the continual reopening of possibility underlying the haunting radical alterity that the text exposes.

It is possible to read “Le Horla” as the narrative reconstruction of its author’s own descent into madness through a variety of psychological disorders (likely resulting from his neurosyphilis and drug and alcohol abuse). Luis-Carlos Álvaro, for example, suggests that, “by reflecting on his own experiences [in his drug use and in his hypersensitive personality], Maupassant provided a rich source for his stories” (114). If we reduce this story to the effects of an individual psychology, we lose the richness of its allegorical content. In fact, if we look to the text, we will find a number of sources whose experiences in some way reflect similar phenomena as the narrator’s—such as Dr. Parent, Herestauss, the “frenzied inhabitants” of Rio de Janeiro who suffer from a strikingly similar ailment, and the narrator’s servant Jean who suffers corresponding symptoms when the narrator leaves town. As an awareness of an ungraspable otherness spreads from person to person, it seems unlikely that this story is purely the product of a psychotic author’s attempt to represent himself and his miserable condition. A detailed reading suggests that, distinct from the standard Victorian ghost story conventions, there is no original

106 “mon œil est si faible, si imparfait” (« Le Horla » 47).
107 According to Levinas, even this final attempt to attain mastery over his situation is futile: given a “notion of being without nothingness, which leaves no hole and permits no escape,” Levinas claims that there is an “impossibility of nothingness” that therefore “deprives suicide, which is the final mastery one can have over being, of its function of mastery” (50).
108 “Les habitants éperdus” (44).
crime that produces the system of haunting—unless of course that “crime” is self-reflection. This ghostly tale figures its haunting not as a singular depiction of exteriority to be overcome, but rather as a condition that, because it is universal to the human experience of reality, cannot be exorcised. As the story is situated apart from the mainstay of the Victorian Gothic, it is afforded both conceptual and literal space to reflect upon the genre.

Literally expressive of the distance from the traditional English Victorian Gothic is the inarguably “French” characteristic of the short story. The imagery of particular landmarks (such as the River Seine, the “rooted” Norman countryside, the salons of Paris, and Mont Saint-Michel) defines the setting of the short story as distinctly French. Additionally, there are significant political reflections articulated on French Independence Day—however, these reflections are considerably unpatriotic: the narrator criticizes his countrymen, the republic’s leaders, and the national principles (the narrator claims that “the population is an imbecilic flock, either stupidly patient or in ferocious revolt”\textsuperscript{109} and that “Those who follow [the Republic] are also idiots, but instead of obeying men, they obey principles which can be nothing but simplistic, unproductive, and false”\textsuperscript{110}). Given such biting criticism, one wonders if this text is not so much attempting to define its Frenchness, but rather its non-Englishness—that is, if it is asserting its independence from a genre dominated by English influence. As a reworking of the Victorian Gothic ghost story, “Le Horla” seems to actively emphasize its Frenchness in order to distance itself from tradition.

Working out of a well-established convention, “Le Horla” is undeniably haunted by the traditions that define its genre (just as the final 1887 version is haunted by the original draft of the story). By foregrounding its continental influence, however, the story can express itself as

\textsuperscript{109} « Le peuple est un troupeau imbécile, tantôt stupidement patient et tantôt féroce révolté » (46).
\textsuperscript{110} « Ceux qui le dirigent sont aussi sots ; mais au lieu d’obéir à des hommes, ils obéissent à des principes, lesquels ne peuvent être que niais, stériles et faux » (48).
not simply another iteration of the genre’s totalizing conventions, but as a revision—as an offspring whose filial relation to its parent is one of transition, as a challenge to the definition of its borders, as something “outside there” [hors-là]. According to Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*, the relationship of a subject to his or her parent is a complex one: while on the one hand, “the son *is*, without being ‘on his own account’” (*TI* 278) and is thus not completely independent. At the same time, however, the child is not merely an extension of sameness from the parent: “The son resumes the unicity of the father and yet remains exterior to the father: the son is a unique son” (*TI* 279). Whereas the “fathers” of the literary genre (like Dr. Parent) theorize about the existence of an otherness according to conventional means, it is “Le Horla” (like its narrator) which actively and innovatively experiences this otherness and its complex implications.

By deliberately denying an Englishness of the genre, Maupassant is able to provide the framework for what I term the Revisionist ghost story. However, while the relationship of England with the Continent is certainly one colored by separation, the complexity of the French-English dynamic is not nearly as rich as the one between America and England, which much more closely resembles the “parent-child” model that, particularly according to Levinas’s model of *paternité*, generally defines a system of revisionism. It is conceivably for this reason that while the French identity can conceptualize a reworking of the genre, such a dramatic shift becomes considerably more prevalent in America. Beginning with the next chapter, I will inquire into a series of ghost stories that, following the initial framework established by “Le Horla,” continue to examine the genre from an outsider’s marginalized position. From Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ghost stories and onward, we can begin to see a more radical renovation to the traditional generic conventions that will define the tenets of Revisionist ghost literature not only by the pretense of an inextinguishable presence of invisibility (which appears as a result of self-
reflection), but furthermore by a laborious and inexhaustible commitment to an exploration of that invisible through critical and creative interpretation.
In virtually all of its cultural and literary incarnations, whether traditional or Revisionist, haunting effectively indicates that there exists something beyond the knowable, literal surfaces of one’s subjective experience of reality. The extent to which haunting facilitates an encounter with otherness in traditional stories of haunting, however, is relatively minimal as the unknown is incorporated into the network of knowledge. Generally speaking, the conventional ghost story begins by presenting to its fictive reality an unfamiliar element, which, as the narrative explores its haunting, is eventually familiarized. In this case, the capacity of haunting to open new avenues of thinking about a situation is neutralized as ghosts are exorcized and their histories are revealed. The Revisionist text I explored in chapter 2, Maupassant’s “Le Horla” (1887), powerfully reshapes the operations of haunting away from traditional figurations. Haunting within this short story still implies the presence of a concealed component of reality; however, the narrative fails to uncover its depths, and the unfamiliar is never properly familiarized. Instead, the haunting corrupts the narrative and its protagonist, infecting them with an unknowable quality: the familiar is indeed defamiliarized. The narrative withholds any conclusive resolution, and in the story’s perhaps most infamous scene, the narrator looks into a mirror only to witness the evanescence of his reflection. By operating according to a logic of concealment, Maupassant’s haunting tale opens a rift in the subjective experience of reality that its narrative is ultimately unable to suture shut.

The magnificence of Maupassant’s Revisionist insight in “Le Horla” lies within the tale’s imperative that its protagonist must reconsider his approach to his experience of a reality
characterized by radical alterity. Whereas conventional ghost stories tend to reduce otherness itself into the mere presentation of *an other*, “Le Horla” retains the sanctity of otherness as such. Accordingly, its refusal to resolve its encounter with otherness suggests that there exist certain invisible components of reality forever beyond the reach of our perception, and that, because our subjective experience is inherently limited in its capacity to directly and completely access reality, all attempts to perceive the unperceivable are ultimately futile. Despite this radical innovation in the narrative treatment of haunting, however, the protagonist ultimately fails to explore any such alternatives to one’s inexhaustible need to understand and master the unfamiliar, and as a result, the narrator falls into maddening despair without any substantially revised perspective.

As the French “Le Horla” exhibits a number of Revisionist traits, it shapes the foundation for several subsequent Revisionist ghost stories in America. Though it cannot be confirmed, it seems possible that Charlotte Perkin Gilmans, when writing “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), was familiar with and influenced by Maupassant’s “Le Horla,” published five short years prior.\(^\text{111}\) Whether connected or not, “The Yellow Wallpaper” reflects many of the same preoccupations as its French predecessor, suggesting the readiness of the genre to undergo a significant revision outside of England. Gilman’s tale, like Maupassant’s, is a diary narrative of confinement that relates an encounter with a haunting being whose existence exceeds the knowable terms of the narrator’s experience of reality.\(^\text{112}\) Not only does the short story explore the depths of the unknown, it furthermore explores the possibility of unknowability itself. In this tale, however, such an encounter is directly tied to acts of writing and reading insofar as an

\(^{111}\) Horowitz, for example, mentions the possibility of this link (239, n7).

\(^{112}\) “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a story of the abstract confinement of the narrator’s subjectivity within her limited experience of reality; however, it is also a story of the concrete confinement of a young wife whose every action is more or less commanded by her husband.
engagement with *narrative* reflects for Gilman an engagement with *haunting*. In the way that it positions critical and creative readership as a model for interpreting a haunted situation, “The Yellow Wallpaper” produces substantial innovations to the genre of the ghost story, further opening the capacity of haunting as a powerful theoretical figure for thinking through an experience with otherness as such. More than simply presenting the demand that one reread the situation (according to a Revisionist model), Gilman’s story offers a glimpse of what that alternative model of reading may look like.

The two greatest achievements made by “The Yellow Wallpaper” in the field of Revisionist ghost stories lie first in the way that it figures the experience of reality as fundamentally *haunted*, and second in the way that it provides critical and creative readership as a model for confronting haunting (and, by association, for confronting the experience of reality as well). These accomplishments are clear enough in the short story when read in isolation; however, their transformative power becomes especially palpable when one considers Gilman’s one earlier ghost story, “The Giant Wistaria” (1890). Gilman’s first attempt at the ghost story genre, a prototype of sorts to “The Yellow Wallpaper,” reveals in its amateur form many of the central ghostly operations more complexly and subtly woven into the later story. “The Giant Wistaria” reveals a less subtle correspondence between critical readership and haunting in the way that it figures its haunting as a concealed text—that is, as the story of a woman whose history has not been permitted a legitimate place within the greater cultural narrative. While this short story does reveal a number of innovative and Revisionist characteristics so integral to “The Yellow Wallpaper” in a prototypical albeit cruder fashion, it nevertheless remains anchored to the conventions of the standard literary Gothic; it is only later when this allegiance is broken in
“The Yellow Wallpaper” that Gilman demonstrates the full power in her capacity to revise the ghost story genre.

**“The Giant Wistaria”**

Aside from sharing similar protagonists and atmospheres, both “The Giant Wistaria” (1890) and “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) share a number of thematic concerns. In addition to investigating feminine confinement, motherhood, and oppressive masculine patriarchy, both narratives fundamentally interweave haunting and textuality, exploring the possibility of reading concealed material and listening for the voice of the voiceless. It is precisely in positioning the short story’s narrator—and, by extension, its reader—as an active reader of its haunting that Gilman begins to unfold a substantial revision to the traditional ghost story that will eventually provide a model of alternative readership.

Initially, “The Giant Wistaria” appears to be a tale of repression, though in the end, it is just as much one of expression. The narrative traces the attempt to find a voice for the voiceless, which in turn means discovering the key to decoding the coded text which appears in the form of haunting. As the short story is structured, the details of this repressed story are directly presented in the text’s prelude. The text begins with a prelude that draws from the very foundation of America’s history, in Colonial New England. The prelude introduces an unnamed young mother who has recently delivered a child out of wedlock. The young woman’s oppressive father, Samuel Dwining, demands that she abandon the child and its itinerant father, and he banishes her to the confinement of her room: “Get to thy chamber and be not seen again to-

113 Also, it is noted within the prelude that the seed for the wistaria, the haunting plant that eventually comes to overtake the house, has been brought from England as a seed to be planted in America. Gilman seems to deliberately trace a lineage through America back to England, perhaps a history of persecution, of gender inequality—and, given that the wistaria is primarily characterized in the story according to its Gothic nature, of ghostly haunting as well.
night” (39). The young woman can do nothing but comply, and not only does she become invisible according to her father’s will, she is also literally silenced by “her father’s hand upon her mouth” (39). Unseen and unheard, she is stripped of agency and is unable to voice any resistance to her father’s cruel sentence. Her story is thus effaced. Gilman presents a merciless father whose malevolence can be glossed by a reading of Emmanuel Levinas’s depiction of totality. In *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas depicts such a “trial by force” as a violence to other persons which consists in “interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action” (21). Such authoritative control, is “fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy” (21). Totally is problematic for Levinas for the same reason it is for Gilman: it reduces individuals to a common discourse and thus annihilates individualism (it becomes “invisible outside of this totality” [Levinas 22]). Provided that “the meaning of individuals […] is derived from the totality” (Levinas 22), those who act in opposition to the objective vision of totalizing morality—such as the young mother—are oppressed and silenced. In establishing a sympathy for the young mother, “The Giant Wistaria” testifies to the destructive nature for such a concept of knowledge and encounters with other individuals, a concept seemingly woven into American foundations.

Excluded from the narrative, the young unnamed mother—and her story—occupies an observable diegetic gap. Though *something* happens, the invisible action is left exterior to the totality of what is acceptable to Sir Dwining, who is ever-so-anxious to “to hide the blot forever” (39). In her article on “The Giant Wistaria,” Gloria Biamonte observes that just as the young mother “refuses to participate in a tale not of her own making,” she likewise refuses to
participate in “a world that will not allow her to create her own story” (36, original emphasis). Since her story is unacceptable to the totalizing forces, she instead “creates a different sort of ‘text’ for her story” (36). This alternative text, the invisible text, in turn emerges in the story proper through haunting, through the young woman’s inevitable ghost. Although the young mother is not allotted a legitimate space within the master story, her tale nevertheless persists concealed within the house. The house—and the short story—both realize “the astonishing feat of containing more than it is possible to contain” (TI 27), as the silencing of an illegitimate narrative produces a haunted subtext whose hidden existence transcends the limits of the primary text’s totality. The remaining portion of “The Giant Wistaria” in turn attempts to read beyond the surface of what is presented in order to discover the hidden truth.

Following the prelude of “The Giant Wistaria,” the story proper begins a century later with a dramatic shift of tone as a newly married woman, Mrs. Jenny, enthusiastically demands that her husband rent for her—and their respective sisters and brothers-in-law—a summer house. With the presentation of the “huge wistaria vine” that “covered the whole front of the house” and the “rickety cradle” in the garret (41), the reader immediately recognizes this house as the one from the prelude. In establishing such a continuity, the short story proposes a revisitation to the story’s incomplete prelude.

Jenny immediately intuIts that the house is haunted, claiming, “What a house! what a lovely house! I am sure it’s haunted!” (40). The haunting is in turn characterized according to its capacity to tell a story: Jenny asserts, “I am convinced there is a story, if we could only find it” (42). Biamonte suggests that while the prelude functions as “a painful tale of destroyed motherhood,” the story proper conversely functions as “a narrative of discovery and interpretation” (33). If the prelude figuratively embodies the act of writing a text, then the main
story figurative embodies the act of *reading* that text. Haunting draws awareness to a gap in presentation that must be reread; the short story’s ghostliness reveals to Jenny the invisibleness of some repressed history, a subtext beneath the text’s surface. Whereas the father in the prelude will make “a new life to cover the old” (39), the ghost exposes the remnants of the old life which has been covered like a palimpsest. The narrative action embodies the core of Levinas’s productive ethics, which are principally founded upon a “movement going forth from a world that is familiar to us […] toward an alien outside-of-one self [hors-de-soi], toward a yonder” (33). Accordingly, Jenny’s ghost hunt is an investigation into unfamiliar space, literally and figuratively culminating in an investigation into the “unknown blackness below” (41) at the bottom of the well situated in the cellar of the haunted house.

For Jenny, her sister Kate, and sister-in-law Susy, the method of engaging this haunting thus lies in the process of critical readership of the story’s various haunted texts (that is, of the various surfaces upon which the haunted—or concealed—subtext is abstrusely inscribed). Everything the characters observe possesses the capacity to signify more than what its surface suggests. The wistaria vines that circle the mansion appear as a haunted text as the characters read into them the ghostly figuration of a suffering body: Susy cries, “Just look at this great wistaria trunk crawling up by the steps here! It looks for all the world like a writhing body—cringing—beseeching!” (41). The haunting inspires the women to look past what is present, and they consequently “began to see bloodstains and crouching figures so plentifully that the most delightful shivers multiplied” (43). The ghost-hunt ostensibly resembles an attempt to breach the totality of what is familiar and obvious into what is completely new and invisible beyond such horizons.
As the characters actively engage the strangeness provoked by the house’s haunting, the hidden alternative text gradually materializes and the unreadable text ultimately becomes readable. On the first night, the “dreams” of three of the vacationers—Jenny, her husband George, and her brother-in-law Jack—function as a further haunted text upon which a history is encoded. The dreams separately depict a ghost, “a woman hunched up under a shawl” (45). In the attempt to establish a loosely objective and empirical account, an account that embodies what Levinas would describe as a totalizing production of history, the characters adopt a rational and diagnostic reading of the situation. Through their communal reading, they discover a correlation in their separate experiences. The ghastly performance operates as a semi-invisible text through which the characters may read a concealed event as they reenact some unspeakable event surrounding the deaths of the prelude’s young mother and her newborn: when initially perceived, the ghostly woman, “all wrapped up in a shawl,” carries “a big bundle under her arm” (44), presumably the baby; upon a subsequent sighting, the same woman, “hunched up under a shawl” (45), stands holding the chain to the well, the bundle gone. The young woman, perhaps out of sheer desperation, has seemingly discarded her child into the bucket, into the well. As the characters continue their investigation, they descend to the cellar and collectively pull a bucket from the well, and George declares, “Truth lies hid in a well, and we must get her out” (46). Sifting through the “gloomy contents” of the bucket, the group discovers the remains of an infant. Following this startling discovery, as construction workers happen open some floor panels above, light literally fills the room and exposes, “in the strangling grasp of the roots of the

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114 Levinas says of the production of history, “Totalization is accomplished only in history—in the history of the historiographers, that is, among the survivors. It rests on the affirmation and the conviction that the chronological order of the history of the historians outlines the plot of being in itself, analogous to nature” (55). This function of history, directed toward a singular ending or meaning, is problematic for Levinas. He advocates instead a beyonddness to such ordering principles that opens rather than closes possibility.
great wisteria,” “the bones of a woman” who bears the same “tiny scarlet cross” as the young woman of the prelude (47).

At the climax of the short story, there is a profound sense of an unexpected repetition. The conclusion unquestionably refers back to the events of the prelude, and one might furthermore argue that the main character herself functions in part as an iteration of the colonial young woman who precedes her.115 The short story’s haunted texts (the wistaria vines, the ghostly woman, and so on) present a lucid retelling of what the reader may have already guessed. Through listening to the ghost and interpreting its message, the mystery (housed beneath the surface, in the cellar) is literally and figuratively brought to light, and the “truth” of the original situation is effortlessly recovered from the well. Despite that the characters seem determined to encounter the unfamiliar, that which is discovered turns out to be a mere iteration of what is already familiar—particularly for the reader who is privy to the prelude. The narrative’s engagement with otherness is ultimately neutralized by the writer’s commitment to resolving the tale neatly and symmetrically in that it is reduced to an order of sameness. While neither I nor Levinas would propose that there is no possibility of historical recovery in such a situation, the necessity to recover the lost history of the ghost’s story in “The Giant Wistaria” overpowers the narrative’s and the characters’ original commitment to possibility. Ultimately, the short story fails to accomplish what it ostensibly sets out to do: it does not achieve a meaningful encounter with the unfamiliar, and, as such, it lacks a truly Revisionist capacity in the treatment of its literary haunting. Indeed, the haunting remains fundamentally traditional due to its attachment to...

115 J. Samaine Lockwood suggests that superficially, “Jenny and the colonial-era woman seem quite different” (97); on a closer look, however, as reflected by the house and ghost, Jenny, too, is a character in the “story of female subjugation” (101), and she still belongs to a class of women kept “from recognizing and experiencing intimacies with past American women and simultaneously forcing them to repress memories of their own sexual history” (98) at the hand of the masculine forces. Namely, Jenny is subjugated by her husband George (a doctor who “does not participate in or understand her excited state” [98]), Jim (the “stodgy realist” [99]), and Jack (the sensationalist reporter with “a vested interested in denying the contiguity of the past and present” [99]). See Lockwood (98-101) for more.
certain literary procedures which, in assuring that a given unfamiliar situation has been “already seen,” operate similarly to a commonplace experience of *déjà vu*.

*Déjà vu*, the logic of the traditional ghost *par excellence*, is a mental procedure that triggers upon certain encounters with unfamiliarity. By proposing that a given situation is nothing more than a repetition, *déjà vu* actively ascribes a sense of familiarity (though typically objectively inappropriate) to a situation otherwise objectively evaluated as unfamiliar. At the center of “The Giant Wistaria,” the narrative emulates such a repetition: through haunting, the subtext that has been concealed *returns*, and its voice is restored. In the tradition of a typical *déjà vu* experience, the reader is meant to think, “I somehow feel like I have seen this before,” or, in the reader’s case of *déjà lu*, “I somehow feel like I have *read* this before.” The principles governing the experience—that is, the brain’s higher cortical regions for an actual experience of *déjà vu*, or the narrator’s production of the story for its literary counterpart—present the haunted text as essentially readable, and the unfamiliar is presumably subjected to the characters’ and reader’s mastery. In Levinasian terms, this movement toward the unfamiliar is motivated by the attempt to grasp it and incorporate it into the network of stable knowledge; the desire for that which has been exterior to one’s sense of the familiar is presumed to be satisfied. The premise of Jenny’s desire, therefore, embodies merely a traditional need, located at the “basis of desire” which “would coincide with the consciousness of what has been lost; it would be essentially a nostalgia, a longing for return” (33). That such a desire is presented as though it were satisfiable, the movement toward an encounter with the unfamiliar is ultimately neither creative nor innovative; conversely, it is necessarily assumed to be pre-determined, as are all experiences of *déjà vu*. The narrative structure, rather than opening up the text to the possibility of countless
interpretations, follows a delineated and narrow path toward its predictable end, and its supposed meaning is anchored to the totality of its content.

“The Giant Wistaria” presents an alternative text, then, but it makes no demand for an alternative model of readership through which to engage that alternative text, and the characters and the reader thus approach the unknown as though it were principally knowable—or already known, déjà su. The haunted subtext operates as would any traditional, readable text. Granted, the act of reabsorbing the lacking elements into the outer discourse may illuminate particular drawbacks to such totalizing forces (for example, revealing the tyrannical practices of Sir Samuel Dwining—and perhaps even of the contemporary male figures); however, at the same time, it also maintains the pretense that a text can only be known if it exists within the totality. This assumption reinforces the dogmatic principles governing such totalizing procedures as a whole as it reinserts those tyrannical practices back into the narrative structure itself. As a result, the relationship between the rational logic of the subject and the irrational logic of haunting is essentially one of mastery, unfortunately “reducible to knowledge of the other by the same” (TI 28). Were the story to embrace the irrational logic of haunting, it would conceivably run the risk of jeopardizing the feminist stakes woven through the narrative by preventing the exposure of any readable text. However, there is a way that Revisionist haunting retains the innate power to produce a readable story, particularly one from a marginalized frame of reference, without also presenting the assumption of its completeness and directness, its immunity from alternative readership. In short, as a ghost story, “The Giant Wistaria” is characteristically traditional because it restores the pretense of a singular meaning and encodes within its text the [supposedly] proper single way to read it. Whereas the characters in “The Giant Wistaria” pull the contents of the dark well toward them, toward the light that figures the order of sameness, the characters of a
more Revisionist tale might instead descend into the depths of the well themselves, encountering the otherness from within a framework of otherness. While “The Giant Wistaria” cleverly articulates female subjugation in America’s past and present, because of its ultimate commitment to privileging the objective totality, it remains fundamentally traditional in its use of haunting and, by extension, in its engagement with otherness.

**The Wallpaper: The Haunted Text**

It is not until a few years later, with the publication of “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), that Gilman truly demonstrates the powerful capacity of haunting to refigure an encounter with otherness that is not predicated upon knowledge and mastery. In fact, in the way that its literary procedures abandon the logic of *déjà vu* so vital to most traditional tales of haunting, the narrative conclusion of the short story (unlike that in “The Giant Wistaria”) seems to utterly invert the suspicion, “I somehow feel like I have seen this before.” In its refusal to present a conclusion that affirms a system of totality, the transformation from “The Giant Wistaria” to “The Yellow Wallpaper” formalizes a revision to the ghost story genre into a study on what Levinas terms the *infinity* that necessarily and radically exceeds the domain of a conceived system of totality. As Gilman reshapes haunting—not as a force that reveals the concealed, but conversely, as a force that conceals the revealed—she creates a tale whose immense success extends across a wide spectrum of social and cultural issues concerned with aspects of otherness.

Like “Le Horla,” “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a first-person diary narrative that recounts its narrator’s chilling and increasingly acute experience with haunting. On its surface, it appears to be an exploration into the means to express what has been repressed, whereas it actually functions as an inquiry into the means of such an expression. The unnamed narrator—along with
her husband—takes up summer residence in a “colonial mansion, a hereditary estate” (41) that she expects to be haunted. Though less explicit than in “The Giant Wistaria,” this story too has its roots in Colonial America, in the infancy of the American nation. The narrator’s vacation ends up being drastically restricted, however, due to her need to recover from what seems to be post-partum depression following the birth of her first child. Condemned to bed-rest at the instruction of her husband John, a physician, she is left little with which to pass the time, and she in turn takes to writing, despite being forbidden to do so. Rather than overtly address what she feels is an unjust diagnosis and prescription, her literary ruminations instead follow a stream-of-consciousness ramble, although her focus inevitably returns to the room’s “horrid wall-paper.” The more she dwells on the paper and its awful nonsensical and asymmetrical patterns, however, the more she begins to discern a ghostly figured concealed behind it, and the more her abhorrence transforms to obsessive fascination. Furthermore, as the narrator begins to view the outer pattern as bars confining the ghostly woman (resembling the bars on her window), she gradually becomes obsessed with releasing the inner figure from behind the paper. In the story’s famously ambiguous last scene, the narrator, in pulling off a good deal of the paper from the wall, seems to release the haunting figure—however, the details are almost completely obscured as the narrative unhangs and the point of view and subjectivity shift into utter unreliability. Without a definitive, authorial explanation inscribed within the story itself, it is impossible to determine a single interpretation, and one questions whether Gilman believes any longer that it is possible to properly express what has been repressed. As a result, “The Yellow Wallpaper” ultimately proposes a possible way of reading one’s experience of reality, a way capable of

116 In analyzing the “colonial” aspects of the short story, J. Samaine Lockwood suggests that “The Yellow Wallpaper,” as a testament to the mistreatment and “colonization” of women, also speaks to “other ongoing histories of imperialist tyranny at home and abroad in Gilman’s day, from the destruction of Native Americans and their culture by means of military action in the West and by the Dawes Act of 1887 to US colonization of places like Hawaii and the Philippines that, in 1890, lay just over the horizon” (107). The “renovation” to the colonial estate, Lockwood argues, is symptomatic of a need to reconsider an American history of colonization and imperialism.
partially circumventing the problematics of a so-called “masculine” totalizing system without necessarily recreating it.\(^{117}\)

Initially, the haunting in “The Yellow Wallpaper” appears as a conventional force that reveals the presence of something invisible, something which exceeds the character’s subjective perception. Gilman uses this model to accentuate the capacity of haunting to fracture experience. It is precisely because of the haunting that the narrator, reflecting upon the wallpaper, sees double: not only is she able to discern the terrible outer pattern, but also the trace of a creeping woman behind it. The force of haunting exposes the existence of another layer beyond the surface—that is, a sub-surface of sorts—and consequently describes an essential duality within an experience. When a character (or the reader, for that matter) suspects the influence of haunting, she becomes aware not only of what is present, but also of that which is not presented yet nevertheless exists proximately, somehow. The situation is thus perceived—or colloquially, read—as though it were a text whose outer layer concealed an inner depth. Gilman begins this figuration in “The Giant Wistaria” where the haunting, characterized by an intuition of excess, a “dreadful feeling as if something were going to happen” (43), reveals that the vines, the well, and the house itself are not merely what they seem; they have another hidden side. The ghost, too, who glides across the room in the middle of the night (44) withholds a terrible secret, and her appearance presents a duplicity. On the one hand, she literally appears present in the room as a “muffled figure” (44), performing actions. On the other hand, however, she is dissociated from the reality of the characters: she does not hear their attempts at communication, and Jenny’s husband observes of his encounter with the ghost, “Only she wasn’t there!” (46). The ghost’s

\(^{117}\)While many feminist critics rightly attribute the detrimental totalizing practices to the systems of order traditionally put in place and maintained by masculine figures—both in Gilman’s works and in countless others throughout many cultures, throughout history—I would argue that to reduce such a practice to a strict gender-determinism in fact furthers the effects and claims to legitimacy of the very totalizing forces such criticism opposes. As an inquiry into the ethics of an encounter with otherness as such, I am interested in how this engagement is not only results from gender politics, but also precedes it.
existence seems to span at least two planes—a here ness and a there ness—and her actions (withdrawing items from a bureau, depositing a shawl in the well) are likewise to be read as reflections of the shrouded mystery confined to the other place—the subtext that reveals what really happened.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Gilman explicitly explores the duality of what I will call the haunted text, and she does so to a much greater depth through the narrator’s intense study of the wallpaper. As the narrator intensifies her gaze into the surface of the wallpaper, she gradually discerns its latent sub-surface. At first glance, the presence of another layer behind the surface of the figurative text she reads is subtle: “This wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then” (47). After more study, however, the haunted text reveals the proximity of a mostly-invisible other: “I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design” (47). Because of Gilman’s attachment to haunting as a literary trope, she is able effectively to depict a text not as simple and self-revealing, but instead as inherently complicated and obscuring.

Recall that in Gilman’s first ghost story, the textual duality presented through haunting is able to resolve itself quite neatly. The conclusion of “The Giant Wistaria” is marked by what is essentially a deus ex machina wherein the renovations to the house literally break apart its haunted surface as the workers “removed the floor and the side walls of the old porch” (47). This action, which ushers a flood of sunshine into the dark cellar and reveals the bones of a woman, illuminates the otherwise darkened situation and restores continuity to the divided text. Initially, the reader may expect a similarly restorative resolution in “The Yellow Wallpaper”

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118 This is of course strikingly similar to the desperate attempts of the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” to tear the haunted wallpaper from the wall in the short story’s final scene.
wherein the marginalized figure, even if she tragically does not completely overcome her oppression, at least discovers the means to properly communicate her situation to a sympathetic reader. One may be tempted to applaud the narrator’s attempts to write a diary in order to express what she is led to believe is not permissible to express (as the ghost of “The Giant Wistaria” was seemingly able to do). The extent to which must keep her manuscript secret from John, who “hates to have me write a word” (44) evinces the subversive capacity of writing to transcend the confines of her oppression. The diary is subversive not only because the narrator defiantly writes “in spite of them” (42),119 but also because it offers her the liberty to freely express herself and her situation outside of the totalizing discourse. In practicing her “imaginative power and habit of story-making” (46), her fancies exceed the limitations imposed by external forces. According to Diane Herndl’s analysis, the narrator’s authorship creates an alternative to “acceding to the demands of a patriarchal society,” insofar as a woman who “produced herself, wrote herself, would become well” (69). The narrator’s diary manuscript therefore provisionally functions as a concealed subtext hidden within—and excluded from—a totality, potentially capable of directly conveying the details of her situation.120

In a sense, the concealed narrative holds the capacity to empower the woman it [re-produces; however, this capacity is nullified if such a written manuscript is never read. As Herndl points out, “In writing only for ‘dead paper,’ writing only to death, [the narrator’s] language use becomes less governed by existence in the world outside the self and more an internal, dyadic construction. She writes to no one. She begins to cease functioning as a

119 According to her husband and her brother, both physicians, the narrator is “absolutely forbidden to ‘work’” (42), which includes writing. When the narrator’s sister-in-law Jennie arrives to help keep up the house, she too forbids writing.
120 King and Morris similarly note that as a result of the narrator’s oppression, she suffers a split within the self, as if between a private and a public self. The first-person narrative approach then affords her the means to articulate this split insofar as “there is a gap between the ‘I’ who narrates and the ‘I’ who is the subject of that enonce: between the heroine writing and the heroine as written” (28). While the manuscript is ostensibly the resolution of this split, where two aspects conjoin, it is moreover “the site of a radical contradiction” (28).
‘speaking-subject’ in the world” (Herndl 71). Generally speaking, the narrator faces the peril of writing a text that will remain concealed forever, absolutely unacknowledged and unaffirmed.\textsuperscript{121} In “The Giant Wistaria,” if not for the mangled vines and the ghastly theatrics of haunting, the marginalized woman of that narrative (and her story) would so have remained absolutely unread. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” on the other hand, Gilman experiments with a diary that, at least within the tale’s fictional reality, remains absolutely unread by anyone except the narrator.\textsuperscript{122} It appears that the narrator here would similarly require a \textit{haunting} in order to render her manuscript somehow accessible to an audience; however, unlike the more patient and playful men of “The Giant Wistaria,” John refuses to legitimate any premise of haunting (which, for the narrator, “spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid” [42]). The story’s haunting, which does not reveal precisely what has been concealed, operates according to a non-conventional logic, and the diary—and its diarist—loses its potential to communicate, to integrate its concealed subtext into a master text.\textsuperscript{123}

As a text, the diary remains unable to communicate to any reader within the world of the short story, and this failure is profoundly reflected within the narrative’s other—and more central—text: the yellow wallpaper. Not a traditional text, the wallpaper offers no overt traditional meaning; in fact, it is nothing short of repulsive at first glance. From its very first impressions, the wallpaper is exceedingly grotesque and offensive, and it seemingly discourages

\textsuperscript{121} Even as the narrator actively—though presumably unconsciously—practices self-censorship, it is furthermore quite possible that her own text will not even be recognized by its author. For example, Catherine Golden observes that the narrator writes in what is essentially a code, hiding what she truly means, though this censorship inevitably “shows the muted text diverging from the dominant text” (196).

\textsuperscript{122} Should one argue that the narrator’s transformation into the skulking figure in the last few pages of the story (as she seemingly exhibits the haunting formerly restricted to \textit{within} the paper) represent a physical release of her inner “sub-text,” even this goes unread as its only witness, John, faints rather than engage what might be termed the literary production of his wife’s interiority. Diegetically speaking, there is no explicit attempt of any character to engage—or read—the narrator’s private subjectivity, through her diary or otherwise.

\textsuperscript{123} For an extended discussion on writing “to no one” (as writing becomes significant in its capacity to communicate to the writing self rather than to the reading other), see the following chapter on James.
any form of readership: “The color is repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow” (43), and it is a “dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others” (43). The paper is depicted as an “optic horror” (48), and its disturbing odor lingers constantly (54). Its most offensive trait, however, is in its irritating and confusing structure, which offers no organizing principles to the pattern: “when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions” (43). The narrator observes, “I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of” (48). By obscuring any sense of pragmatic organization, the “sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin” (43) fail to produce any coherent image and thus totally obscure the paper’s subpattern.

The surface of the paper—and all of its abstruse markings—remains impenetrable by the governing rules of totality, and its awful nonsensical and asymmetrical patterns frustrate every attempt to read them by conventional means. Whereas the narrator initially presumes a degree of harmony between the wallpaper’s surface and its subtext, in the hours she spends “trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately” (51), she ultimately discerns a fundamental disconnect between the two planes. As a text, the wallpaper’s obstructive outer pattern interferes with its capacity to directly and completely present its meaning, effectively maintaining that such meaning remain other to its reader except for through the efforts of subjective labor. The narrator thus begins to discern the constricting outer pattern as a text that is haunted by a subjugated victim who, from her invisible confinement, “takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard […] all the time trying to climb through” (55). In this short story, Gilman does not characterize haunting as a force that reveals
concealed information; rather than resolving problems of unknowability—as did the haunting in “The Giant Wistaria,” for example—the haunting of this tale conversely serves to intensify those problems and, in turn, inspire an inexhaustible labor in the reader. The complex layers of abstrusity, both in the yellow wallpaper and in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” ultimately render all proper and traditional forms of communication impossible such that it is no longer a question of teleological discovery, but one of infinite exploration.

Characterizing its innovative revision to the ghost story genre, “The Yellow Wallpaper” deviates substantially from the premise of familiarization which resembles the cognitive procedure *déjà vu* as it is found in “The Giant Wistaria” and other relatively traditional tales). For a point of contrast, Gilman presents the narrator’s husband-physician John as the embodiment of such systematic rationalism guilty of attempting to reduce and domesticate all encounters with otherness. His model for readership is predicated on the familiarity of presence, and he “scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures” (41). In this sense, John’s approach to reality reflects the logic of *déjà vu*: when confronting an unfamiliar situation, his only recourse is to reduce any degree of alterity to an order of sameness, within the network of what is already known. To him, nothing is strange and new—all is ordinary commonplace and knowable. When the narrator takes an interest in the possibility that the house is haunted, her husband merely laughs condescendingly at her fancies. She confesses that “there is something strange about the house” (41), and he refuses to recognize the *strangeness* of the unfamiliar; he instead shuts the window, claiming that the strange feeling is nothing more than a draught. John remains similarly detached from his wife’s ailing condition. She supposes that “John never was nervous in his life” (44) and therefore, he “does not know how much I really suffer” (44) and “he does not believe I am sick!” (41). Rather than engage the
situation on its own terms, John is satisfied to simply deduce that “there is no *reason* to suffer” (44), and he reductively diagnoses her condition as a “slight hysterical tendency” (42). When confronted with a situation or a text whose meaning is not outwardly apparent, rather than engaging the unfamiliar on its own terms, he attempts to incorporate it into a matter of familiarity in what might be termed a “reversion of the alterity of the world to self-identification” (*TI* 38). Within “the possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, and other relative to me” (*TI* 38), the procedures of such totalizers neutralize all sense of unfamiliarity and thus reflect the logic of *déjà vu* as if to say, “I somehow feel like I have seen this before.” In forcibly anchoring the unknown to the known, John eliminates all possibility of encountering otherness and retains the presumption of mastery over his situation, reflecting Peter Krapp’s definition of *déjà vu*: “a sense of the overly familiar, the tediously repetitive, the already known, the always present” (*x*). Such a dependence on conceptual acts of grasping and mastering serves as the counterpoint against which an alternative, Revisionist model for engaging the world must emerge.

Although the principal charge of the *déjà vu* procedure lies within the attempt to familiarize the unfamiliar, there nevertheless remains an integral inconsistency that the subject militantly committed to the procedure is likely to overlook or dismiss. If we turn to cognitive reports, we will find that the *déjà vu* impulse, as it forces a recognition of qualitatively unfamiliar material, fundamentally provokes a “clash between two simultaneous and opposing mental evaluations: an objective assessment of unfamiliarity juxtaposed with a subjective evaluation of familiarity” (Brown 2). In following the experience through, it is quite possible to dismiss this

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124 Diane Price Herndl claims that the narrator’s hysteria is the result of “a woman who allowed herself to be produced” (69); it is a woman’s illegitimate response to “a system in which she is expected to remain silent” (53). Dianne Hunter, in her analysis of the history of so-called “hysteria” and its diagnoses, separately suggests that “hysteria is feminism lacking a social network in the outer world” insofar as “neither hysterics nor feminists cooperate dutifully with patriarchal conventions” (485). It is no wonder that John, in an attempt to retain his totalizing control over the situation, diagnoses his wife with hysteria.
contradiction by simply privileging the sense of familiarity. For example, Freudian psychoanalysis tends to reduce the objective unfamiliarity in a *déjà vu* experience into a relatively familiar—albeit unconscious—framework, insofar as *déjà vu*, to Freud, always indicates repressed material surfacing to consciousness. According to this model, the situation which triggers the feeling of *déjà vu* is never original or completely unfamiliar—it always reflects an earlier, concealed situation, and it always retains the capacity to bring that original to light. In fact, the work of psychoanalysis is seemingly entirely directed toward the patient’s eventual claim, “Now I feel as though I had known it all the time” (“Fausse Reconnaissance” 207). In “The Giant Wistaria,” Gilman produces a similar effect for the reader when she neutralizes the contradiction between the familiar realism and the unfamiliarity of the haunting by directly linking the latter to an earlier, real event—the reader exclaims that he or she has “known it all the time” and all impressions of strangeness and unfamiliarity are dismissed.

Unlike the traditional methods which redirect the inherent contradiction of a *déjà vu* experience in favor of domesticating an encounter with otherness, “The Yellow Wallpaper” obsesses greatly on the irresolvability of such a clash. The “something queer” about the house which the narrator intuits on the first page is never quite resolved—in fact, it only intensifies as the story proceeds. Peter Krapp’s cultural analysis of *déjà vu* integrally links the phenomenon with “a sense of being slightly out of place” (146). Additionally, Alan Brown’s scientific inquiry identifies a sense of anguish that occasionally accompanies the experience due to an internal “struggle to match the present familiarity with the missing past memory” (55). This disquieting

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125 Freud first mentions *déjà vu* in *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) where he explains it as “that strange feeling we perceive in certain moments and situations when it seems as if we had already had the same experience, or had previously found ourselves in the same situation […] yet we are never successful in our efforts to recall clearly those former experiences and situations” (320). Citing Ferenczi, Freud suggests that “the feeling of *Déjà vu* corresponds to the memory of an unconscious fantasy” (321). In “Fausse Reconnaissance (‘Déjà Raconté’) in Psycho-analytic Treatment” (1914), Freud is more explicit: here, he contends that *déjà vu* is the “activation of an unconscious impression” which “makes its way into consciousness under the influence of a new and similar impression” (203).
and disorienting sensation is precisely that feeling which we call *uncanny*. Freud famously defines the uncanny as the discomfort which coincides with the occurrence of “something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it” (“The Uncanny” 222). More explicitly, the uncanny is not simply the sense of familiarity within unfamiliar material (this is, of course, *déjà vu*); rather, it is the dreadful sense of disorientation which arises at the moment one questions the order and stability of his or her experience of reality; it is the moment of hesitation one experiences when facing a yet-undetermined situation. For example, the unfamiliarity of darkness is not particularly uncanny in itself—it is uncanny, however, when, blindly feeling through the objects of the room, one “collide[s] time after time with the same piece of furniture” (“The Uncanny” 213). Underlying Freud’s analysis, one might discern the implication that the uncanny moment is principally characterized by a confusion of experience, by the contraction between what one expects and what one experiences—it is a revelation of the falsity upon which one has been standing. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the haunting figure of the creeping woman embodies the very character of the uncanny as she functions as what Levinas terms “the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself” (*TI* 39). Referencing Jentsch, Freud adds that a sense of disturbance establishes the basis of our

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¹²⁶ One might turn to Todorov for an extended study of such hesitation that occurs within the fantastic. According to his depiction, a fantastic hesitation occurs when, “in a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses [...] or else the event has indeed taken place” (25). To Todorov, the fantastic is the moment of hesitation which is “experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (25). Tales of haunting produce such a hesitation, though whereas traditional tales generally attempt to resolve it as thoroughly as possible, Revisionist tales generally attempt to extend it as thoroughly as possible.

¹²⁷ Freud provides various examples of the “uncanny effect” produced by moments of confusion regarding reality, such as, “when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in full reality” (221), when an “unintended recurrence of the same situation” (213), or when “we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs” after having supposedly surmounted prior, primitive ones (224). All of these arguably derive from a sense of what Freud, citing Jentsch, calls “intellectual uncertainty” (194). One should note that Freud believes there is “a solution” to this disruptive confusion (224), which fundamentally involves recognizing that what we presume to forget, overcome, or surmount remains—figuratively speaking, if we properly remember our dead, their continued presence (haunting) will not be a shock of disorientation for us.
understanding of the uncanny: “The better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it” (195). The disturbance, therefore—that is, the ghost—provokes the possibility of the uncertainty so integral to the uncanny. Beyond the traditional Freudian framework, however, Gilman ultimately proposes in this story that one not assume that the strange and unfamiliar source of disturbance is not something previously experienced and repressed, but rather that it is radically new.

Gilman extends the sense of uncanniness in “The Yellow Wallpaper” by refusing to allow the encounter of déjà vu to resolve (that is, domesticate) the unfamiliar encountered. Rather than revealing what has been concealed, this story is more overtly concerned with concealing what ought to be revealed. Just as the narrator thinks she has reached a logical conclusion in the interpretation of the wallpaper, she finds herself back where she has started: “You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream” (51). As for the narrative as a whole, the source of haunting is completely unexplained (as it was in “The Giant Wistaria”). Helen Horowitz observes:

Gilman left it ambiguous whether this nursery “playroom and gymnasium” with its barred windows had been inhabited by other suffering women in the past. Gilman worked within the horror genre of Romantic fiction and followed its ghostly template, but by domesticating her tale and grounding it in realistic details, she enhanced its uncanny effect and opened up a world of suggestion and potential interpretation. (176)

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128 Of course it appears that according to its ambiguous ending, Gilman intended that the short story as a whole can—and should—be read similarly. Janice Haney-Peritz observes that the narrator, in the construction of her narrative, appears “to produce just some such uncanny effect, for not only does her writing expose the ‘unheard of contradictions’ in a man’s prescriptive logic but in dealing with those contradictory impasses by jumping from one thing to another, it also makes the reader aware of gaps in that discursive structure” (117).
Gilman seems to deliberately present a situation that provokes a crisis where the “present familiarity” finds no stable foundation within a “missing past memory” (Brown 55). Through her Revisionist figurations of haunting, Gilman produces an unfamiliar, alternative text that cannot be read according to traditional methods of reading. Because of this, reading becomes a labor by improvised means, an exercise—it seems appropriate that the narrator’s room was once a gymnasium: “It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls” (43). Quite tellingly, the narrator relates the inexhaustible and laborious reading of the wallpaper’s “interminable grotesques” (49) as essentially exercises in gymnastics: “I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I will follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion” (48). The procedure of interpretation is indeed a deliberate effort, particularly as it resists the revelation of any master conclusion, and the unfamiliar resists familiarization. In fact, quite distinct from the logic of a déjá vu experience, the short story innovatively and against tradition defamiliarizes the familiar. As a result, the reader, by the labor of working through the story, is certain to exclaim, “I somehow feel like I have never seen this before!”

**The Yellow Wallpaper: Jamais Vu**

In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Gilman’s Revisionist haunting operates according to a logic that is radically distinct from its traditional counterparts. Whereas conventional figurations of haunting tend to appeal to the reader’s need to attain narrative closure, the haunting in this short
story inevitably denies the possibility for such satisfaction. Rather than adhering strictly to the logic of a déjà vu experience, this text additionally incorporates what I newly term the logic of a jamais vu [“never seen”] experience. Whereas déjà vu explains an objectively unfamiliar situation in subjectively familiar terms, jamais vu conversely dislodges an objectively familiar situation into an impression of subjective unfamiliarity: it is the experience of “inappropriate unfamiliarity” (Brown 103). In consulting cognitive theories on the matter, we find that the phenomenon of jamais vu is a dissociation of misrecognition (106) wherein there is a delay as a perception passes through the higher cortical regions of cognition—as a result, the perception is disjointed from any knowable meaning and, unrecognizable to the brain, it exists in absolute uniqueness, subjectively unfamiliar. Even in the thousandth perception of the same object, there is a moment suspended by the logic of jamais vu in which the object appears in radical alterity.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” it is the haunted wallpaper, in its inherent unreadability, that principally provokes the experience of jamais vu. Because the text is deliberately opaque, seemingly admitting to its inability to completely present its subtext (and thus releasing its reader of any assumptions of transparency), it provides a screen on which the narrator can explore alternative, unfamiliar methods of reading without being obliged to adhere to traditional methods. The extent of Gilman’s inquiry into innovative and Revisionist methods of engaging the unfamiliar—as well as what may otherwise appear to be familiar—as radically other is brilliantly reflected in the way the narrator’s attentive study of the wallpaper produces, in Haney-Peritz’s words, “an uncanny place in which no-body is or can be at home” (118). Whereas Gilman presents a disharmony between a traditional model of readership and an unreadable text through John, she conversely opens the possibility to explore alternative models through the narrator. With Levinas as a guide, I will interpret the narrator’s various jamais vu strategies in
engaging the haunting and the radical alterity it proposes, and while the narrator’s laborious exploration (through an alternative model of readership) remains susceptible to falling back upon the same naïve attempts at mastery, it serves as a starting point for future Revisionist ghost stories.

The most direct alternative model of readership in “The Yellow Wallpaper” emerges from within the narrator’s attempt to read the haunted wallpaper. As observed above, the narrator conceptually divides the wallpaper as a system into two layers: the outer pattern (which, as it exists on the plane of sameness, is present, knowable, and experienced) and the sub-pattern (which, as it exists on the plane of otherness, is absent, unknown [or unknowable], ostensibly inaccessible). This duality presents an obvious inconsistency given that the wallpaper is “pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study” while also being “dull enough to confuse the eye in following” (43). As such, the haunted text inspires its reader’s desire at the same time that it defers that desire’s satisfaction. Gilman accordingly anticipates the particular form of desire that Levinas later terms as “a desire without satisfaction which, precisely, understands [entend] the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other” (34). Because of the way that Gilman attributes the wallpaper’s textuality to a logic of haunting, she is able to create a relationship characterized by desire that exists between the text and its reader, which reflects “a relationship whose positivity comes from remoteness, from separation, for it nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger” (TI 34). As long as Gilman’s narrator labors to sustain simultaneously a proximity and a remoteness to the ghostly other behind the text, she is able to maintain a correspondingly dual approach of the reader to the text. The narrator proceeds to read the haunted text guided by two conflicting impulses that will ultimately collide in the short story’s catastrophic conclusion.
In the first half of the short story, the narrator’s relationship with the haunted wallpaper text is principally oriented toward an exploration through its unreadability. This mode of readership tends to respect the alterity of that which is desired, and it is energized by the narrator’s innate self-identified “imaginative power and habit of story-making” (46). In thinking about the wallpaper, she reflects upon her life-long propensity for fancying: “I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store” (46). The energy to explore, the will to labor, derives from the narrator’s capacity to open the strict confines of what is (or what appears to be) into what could be. This form of exploration proceeds according to its commitment to the invisible, to reconciling what is seen to what is unseen (jamais vu). To Levinas, vision is problematic insofar as it assumes an absolute “adequation of the idea with the thing, a comprehension that encompasses” (TI 34). It is conversely the invisible that exposes an insurmountable separation between the idea and the thing, and consequently, it, like the tale’s haunted text, seems to resist absolute totalization. The invisible represents the “vertiginous depth of what is not yet, which is not” (TI 259), and it “does not denote an absence of relation; it implies relations with what is not given, of which there is no idea” (TI 34). Accordingly, the narrator dispenses with what the pattern literally suggests—which is of course nonsense to her—and instead considers and reconsiders the blankness of the wall and what it might invisibly, figuratively suggest. The turn from all that is familiar and legible within the presentation of the haunted wallpaper into a conceptualized space of thereness appears as “a movement going forth from a world that is

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129 The narrator also subtly references how her seemingly wide experience with romantic Victorian literature influences her readership of her environment: Upon arriving at the house, the narrator remarks, “It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people” (42). This quote also establishes a subtle link to the traditional literature which she ultimately revises.

130 In Time and the Other, Levinas further explains that subjectivity (being in time) is essentially “a relationship with the In-visible, where invisibility results not from some incapacity of human knowledge, but from the inaptitude of knowledge as such—from its in-adequation—to the Infinity of the absolute other” (32).
familiar to us, whatever be the yet unknown lands that bound it or that it hides from view, from an ‘at home’ ['chez soi’] which we inhabit, toward an alien outside-of-oneself [hors-de-soi], toward a yonder” (TI 33). Rather than figuring the unfamiliar as familiar, the narrator conversely figures the familiar as unfamiliar through an engagement with the narrative’s haunting. Essentially, the narrator’s first task in developing a method of alternative readership when confronting the yellow wallpaper lies in a displacement from the familiar.

Motivated by an intention of respect for the alterity of the unfamiliar, the narrator exhibits a humble curiosity throughout the first portion of the narrative. In this initial phase, she is not interested in objectifying the desired—her exploration is not explicitly guided by a will to know, to grasp, and to conquer the strangeness; conversely, her inquiry into the haunted paper intends moreover to sustain the “something queer” about the house (41). In order to retain the integrity of strangeness, the narrator adopts a form of subjectification, which, unlike its counterpart objectification, imbues the otherness with a sense of unmitigatable agency. This conceptual process is effected most generally through the literary device of personification. In the story’s second passage, the narrator writes, “this paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had” (46 original emphasis). As she focuses on particular breaking points where the pattern recedes, she intuits “recurrent spot where the pattern lolls” in which “two bulbous eyes stare at you” (46). Where the pattern subsides, the narrator perceives a humanlike figure. In fact, the narrator admits that she “never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before” (46). Through her critical and creative interpretation, the narrator exercises her capacity to produce an impression of active subjectivity within the desired, and this subjectivity endows the desired with the capacity to slip away unexpectedly. Furthermore, it is curious to note that the haunting is principally manifested through the apparition of a face, particularly through the
eyes. The “expression” that the narrator observes in the “inanimate thing” embodies precisely the expression of the face that, according to Levinas, produces an “epiphany” wherein what is perceived (and is “still graspable”) turns into “total resistance to the grasp” (TI 197). For Levinas, the face in particular operates as a gateway to the infinite otherness, and insofar as the narrator can imaginatively produce a face—albeit vaguely so—she can conceptualize an experience with otherness as such, predicated upon the indeterminacy of not seeing (jamais vu).

The narrator’s imaginative personification results in an opening of the encounter with the unfamiliar within which it becomes possible for her and the animated figure to enter into a relationship together. More than mere projection, which attempts to figure the otherness of an object according to a subjective order of sameness, imaginative personification admits to a fundamental and ultimately irreducible uncertainty inherent to the unfamiliar. In personifying otherness, however, one always runs the risk of reducing otherness into an other in a way that abandons the idea of its alterity—the narrator’s personification of a haunted text renders her reading vulnerable to a search determined by the expectation of acquiring knowledge.

On the one hand, through the process of what Levinas calls “the passage of the invisible to the status of the visible” (TI 243), a character such as John may conceptually substantiate otherness in a way that seemingly renders it knowable. Levinas reminds us that “to know amounts to grasping being out of nothing or reducing it to nothing, removing from it its alterity” (TI 44). Gilman, on the other hand, presents a Revisionist approach by interrupting any complete vision of the figure behind the haunted wallpaper—that is, by refusing to allow the meaning of the wallpaper (if there is one) to appear to present itself, by presenting the text as challenging. At best, the

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131 Levinas observes that meaning derives precisely from an acknowledgment of otherness within our experience of reality: “The relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence, and leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist” (TI 193).
narrator can discern only a trace of the other who exists there, and the alterity of the other is “strange, provoking, formless” (47). That the face’s eyes are framed by a broken neck and that they invertedly “stare at you upside down” (46), the presentation of a human face as such is disrupted—it resembles a human face, but it is not a human face; it is not an image already known which may be reduced to an object. It may be a natural tendency for one to reduce all otherness to a graspable object; however, as Gilman explores in this text, through considerable labor, it may be possible to conceive of an other whose otherness remains intact. Conceptually speaking, the narrator’s imaginative efforts tend to produce not an other (in full materiality), but rather the idea of an other. Instead of redrawing the invisible as invisible, she alternatively manifests the invisibility as such. The presence of the other is thus acknowledged through its personification; however, in maintaining its essential invisibility, its status as other is not compromised, and its presence retains an inherent falsity. The other persists as a subject (whose actions, by definition, are independent and cannot be properly anticipated) and not as an object. As the narrator addresses the void of alterity latent within the wallpaper, that void addresses her in return in unforeseeable terms (“those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere” [46]), for so long as the other is acknowledged as a subject, rather than an object, its precise meaning remains deferred. The narrator, in turn, makes no overt attempt to order the disorder—at least not initially.

Herself a victim of the forces of totalizing authority, the narrator seems compassionate toward another who appear similarly confined. Consequently, for some time, the narrator’s course of exploration regarding the wallpaper is motivated primarily out of a respect for the otherness within the paper. If she understands, as Levinas does, that “the neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object” is something that necessarily “take[s] place in the
light” (*TI* 43), then she also realizes that it is light which both figuratively and literally facilitates the attempt to totalize alterity. Since light is precisely what allows that “vision moves into grasp [and] opens upon a perspective, upon a horizon, and describes a traversable distance, invites the hand to movement and to contact, and ensures them” (*TI* 191), the narrator’s peregrination through the void of knowledge (in engaging a relationship with otherness as such) is predicated upon a conceptualized network of darkness and invisibility. The narrator observes, “there is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes” (51). The narrator’s reading of the wallpaper text is affected by the time of day the text is read—that is, according to the level of light. Against conventional conceptions of darkness as the embodiment of the frightful, confusing, and paralyzing unknown, Gilman’s short story inverts this scheme as the nighttime darkness liberates her readership.

Traditional vision supported by light provides little explanation to the pattern: “by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind” (51). When relying on clarity of vision and when expecting a certain degree of transparency in the presentation of the text, one is met with intolerable frustration as the anticipated revelation of rational meaning, order, and logic in the meaning fail to materialize.

The possibilities of readership change when the sun sets, however, and by moonlight, the narrator admits that “I wouldn’t know it was the same paper” (52). With the environmental change, which necessitates that the reader proceed through darkness and disorientating unfamiliarity, the text reveals something entirely different. Whatever light there is—“twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and […] moonlight” (52)—is subdued and muted.\(^{132}\) Under such darkened circumstances, the narrator is able to most clearly discern that there is “the woman

\(^{132}\) In some cases, unlike the ambient sunlight, the light is subjectively localized, held by the narrator and emanating from her position alone. In other cases, its softness obscures details and interferes with a thorough readership.
behind [the outer pattern] as plain as can be” (52). The darkness dispenses with the conceit that all reality is containable within a totality, that it all can be grasped, mastered, known. Without lights, reality becomes invisible: all that is already seen suddenly becomes never seen, conceptually speaking. This defamiliarization cannot be mistaken for a procedure of homogenization that reduces all difference to an order of sameness (such as Hegel’s “night in which all cows are black”); rather, it is crucially the invitation—if not imperative—to descend into the blackness of the well to discover for oneself (rather than pull the contents up into the light). When the narrator operates in the darkness, either literally or figuratively, she is able to engage the unfamiliar while leaving its alterity intact. In doing so, she establishes a sense of remoteness which has the capacity of encountering radical alterity “if desire is not the possibility of anticipating the desirable, if it does not think it beforehand, if it goes toward it aimlessly, that is, as toward an absolute, unanticipatable alterity, as one goes forth unto death” (TI 34).

The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” adheres to her commitment to aimlessness and non-anticipation. We have already seen the various ways that the narrator draws the essential supposition of what could be (or, for Levinas, “what is not yet” [256-273]) out of what seemingly is. Conceptually, the writing itself further emphasizes the practice of a Revisionist approach to a haunted text through the use of modality. Modality, the grammatical operation of haunting par excellence, is the practice of framing a declarative statement through a subjective lens, thus admitting to the possibility of inaccuracy. The statements “I think he is the king,” “It looks like he is the king to me,” “I heard he is the king,” and “It is possible that he is the king” are all various modalizations of the declarative “He is the king.”

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133 For example, the narrator concentrates her imaginative “story-making” in opening the field of interpretation; she assumes that there exists more than what can be seen; she visualizes the concealed material as a subject with agency, completely unpredictable; and she engages the text most productively at night.

134 Whereas other grammatical operations—such as the use of the subjunctive mood—present the non-real or the counter-factual, modality distinctly presents the supposed reality at the same time that it implies the incompleteness of that reality by emphasizing such a presentation as a mere supposition.
unfolds an otherwise totalizing claim and presents it as incomplete and indirect. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the bulk of text is written in the grammatical realis, as most stories are: most events large and small are written as relatively unquestionable factual presentations of what is: for example, “there is a delicious garden” (42, original emphasis), “It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed” (43), and “There’s sister on the stairs!” (47). The narrator’s analyses of the haunted wallpaper text, however, frequently appear instead in the grammatical irrealis, generally expressed through the use of modality. When lying awake as a child, imagining furniture coming to life, the narrator claims that “there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend” (46, my emphasis). The verb was implies the real and actual presence of the chair in the room; however, the verb seemed denotes that the chair did not truly exist as a friend in reality (only in a counterfactual unreality). Uses of modality constantly surround the critical and creative interpretations of the narrator’s alternative methods of reading from the “strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to skulk about” (47, my emphasis) to the “faint figure” who “seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out” (50, my emphasis). The pattern itself, though not really a bad dream, is certainly “like a bad dream” (51, my emphasis) to anyone seeking to master it.

As Gilman, via her narrator, weaves modality into the language of the story, she not only intensifies the ambiguity of haunting, but she furthermore enforces the alternative mode of readership proposed by the story. Modal language serves to undermine the pretenses of singularity and knowledge generally associated with the everyday practice of language. Both imprecise and ambiguous, modality presents the refusal to reduce possibility to fact. The reader who states her interpretations in a language of modality admits and acknowledges the limitations of her subjective perception and in turn maintains the sanctity of the unknowable status of the
interpreted material. The encounter with otherness therefore remains open to subjective interpretation—the other is engaged consciously as an *idea of the other*.

For most of the narrator’s observations, the otherness is little more than a “formless figure” (47); in fact, at various points, the barely discernible woman is characterized by an impression of plurality. The narrator acknowledges the impossibility of transcending the impassible limits of the outer layer of presentation; she intuits that “nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads” (55). In essence, any attempt to interpret a singular meaning is not only impossible, but it also inevitably yields to a multiplicity of results. She correspondingly confides that “sometimes I think there are a great many women behind” (55), and she notices that “those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere” (46). Always moving, always eluding a traditional and rational subjugation, the woman/women remain(s), in such modal depiction, essentially unknowable. The narrator admits that despite the wish to “see her out of all the windows at once,” her experience of reality is relatively limited, and she can “only see out of one at a time” (56). Accordingly, the narrator fancies that the woman/women behind the paper “may be able to creep faster than I can turn!” (56, original emphasis). In rejecting the absolute sovereignty of seeing what *is*, “The Yellow Wallpaper” initiates an inquiry into a mode of reading that is not determined by *seeing* (that is, readership is interested in the in-visible of a *jamais vu* experience). Through the alternative model of readership presented by the short story in all of its various manifestations, the ungraspable other—whose relationship with the subject is defined here by haunting—constantly slips away in a state of perpetual indeterminacy.

For a period, the narrator finds substantial gratification in this state of indeterminable readership. “Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be,” she claims; “you see I
have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch” (53). That her interpretation is not limited by the light and by the totalizing impulse to reduce every encounter to a knowable term (on the order of sameness), the narrator is liberated to conversely experience anything familiar as though it were unfamiliar. As her alternative methods of reading have emerged to common practice, she finds herself in the delightful state of perpetual expectancy of unknown terms which accompanies an innovative and *ad hoc* mode of interpretation. She directly attributes her new gratifying subjectivity to the text whose haunting opacity forbids a rational interpretation: “it was *because* of the wall-paper” (54). In refusing to provide a conclusive explanation, the reader is forced to abandon the expectation of conclusiveness and in turn is apt to find something new with each reading. After stating her acquired fondness for the paper and its effects, she observes that in the paper seems to sprout new possibilities as though it were an uncontrollable plant: there are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously” (54). This frame of mind constitutes what Levinas will characterize as “an order where everything is *pending*, where what is no longer possible historically remains always possible” (*TI* 55). As in an experience of *jamais vu*, every approach to the text is as though it were the first, and thus every reading is experienced as an encounter with the absolute unknowability of radical alterity—every reading is alive to the freedom of its interpretative capacity.

**The Yellow Wallpaper: Catastrophe**

At this point, it should be clear that despite the spirited receptibility to otherness generally celebrated in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator’s commitment to invisibility is nevertheless not wholly without attachment to the visible. It is crucial to note that the narrative
does not suggest the utter collapse of presentation wherein all order and meaning would be essentially unattainable and thus unworthy of serious pursuit. As the narrator’s interpretation of the haunted paper’s subpattern follows the logic of a *jamais vu* experience in which every familiar detail is regarded as though it were absolutely unfamiliar, her analysis (that is, the means of her interpretation) nevertheless closely follows the outer pattern in its objective presence. If the narrator’s reading were purely untethered to what is visibly presented (beyond any relationship with or consideration of the haunting other), then interpretation would be entirely personal, unfounded, and meaningless—to entirely abandon the aspiration “to distinguish the order” (48) would be to invite the hollowness of anarchy. After all, subjectivity—that is, the production of the identity “I”—is always necessarily founded upon principles of sameness, on an *at-homeness*; a subject that is absolutely invisible (utterly devoid of order, familiarity, and knowledge) is indeed no subject at all. The narrator’s will to establish consistency on a level of knowledge through her various attempts to “follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion” (48) is therefore not only justifiable but necessary. The short story draws upon the sensibilities of what I term the *jamais vu* experience not to annihilate any sense of the familiar, but rather to evince the ultimate inexhaustibility of the unfamiliar within the familiar, to open a space for the unexpected to emerge from within the expected, from within what one has assumed to be the complete and direct totality.

As the first half of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is constructed, Gilman does not seem interested in the annihilation of the idea of totality. However, she does refuse to assume a primacy and an absolute privilege of this framework of sameness, which would amount to an

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135 Levinas argues against the anarchy that necessarily arises in the deligitimazation of a system of totality: “There is an anarchy essential to multiplicity. In the absence of a plane common to the totality (which one persists in seeking, so as to relate the multiplicity to it) one will never know which will, in the free play of the wills, pulls the strings of the game; one will not know who is playing with whom” (*TI* 294). However, “when the face presents itself” (294), this sense of anarchy is confronted and challenged and connection between appearance (present within the totality) and truth (beyond the horizon of any totality) is reestablished.
assumption of an immunity of the familiar (the “I,” the outer pattern, the idea of the visible totality) and an inferiority of the unfamiliar (the you/he/she, the sub-pattern, the idea of the invisible infinity). Gilman instead presents an inadequation between one subject’s produced network of sameness and the objective (reality as such), and in turn, the objective, which is essentially unfamiliar to the subject, remains unremittingly invulnerable to any attempt to reduce it to the familiar. Gilman’s haunting thus produces an irresolvable opposition between the subjective and the objective. The narrator must, as she generally does, sustain a connection between what [seemingly] is and what could be, between the presented outer pattern of a haunted text and the mystery that lies beyond its horizon; even though she must acknowledge the ultimate unsatisfiability of a conclusive discovery of knowledge, she must nevertheless remain committed to the pending possibility of such a discovery through the persistence of labor. The haunted text is the site where the same (subjectively familiar) collides with the other (subjectively unfamiliar), though unlike most traditional formulations of a similar premise, “The Yellow Wallpaper” interrupts the possibility for one to overcome the other. Gilman seems to suggest that just as the haunted text itself remains essentially splintered between two opposed states (familiar and unfamiliar), so too must be its reader’s approach.

Despite the story’s underlying imperative for the approach to an unfamiliar situation presented through a haunted text, the narrator, as her engagement with the wallpaper slowly becomes dominated by the will to master it, ultimately demonstrates that though a haunted text may resist totalization, it can never be completely immune from it. As Gilman and Levinas seem to separately propose, the subject must retain a tentative—and always skeptical—awareness of the totality, not as a singular indicator of truth, but as the presentation of horizons just beyond

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136 Levinas similarly localizes such an irresolvable collision between the familiar and the unfamiliar in the face, which is a presentation of the other (by the other) that “exceed[s] the idea of the other in me” (TI 50, emphasis original) and is thus “independent of my initiative and my power” (TI 51).
which truth begins. Throughout most of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator maintains a sense of relative balance between resourceful exploration and impoverished depletion, oscillating between the labors of close analysis and creative interpretation. Near the end of the text, however, the narrative begins to waver as the balance is disrupted by narrator’s increasing frustration with the wallpaper’s incurable opacity. As a result, the desire to engage the unfamiliar in a peaceful relationship transforms into a need to conquer it. For Levinas, the distinction between a desire and a need underscores the entire ethics of otherness. First, a desire resembles jamais vu, the pretense that some given material, however objectively familiar, is not subjectively recognized at first. Levinas correspondingly details desire as the longing for “a land not of our birth, for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves” (TI 33-4). As such, desire, driven by the unfamiliarity of otherness, “does not rest upon any prior kinship” and it “can not be satisfied” (TI 34). A need, on the other hand, operates according to a logic that resembles the cognitive procedures of déjà vu—it strives to familiarize. In Levinas’s words, need “would coincide with the consciousness of what has been lost; it would be essentially a nostalgia, a longing for return” (TI 33). A desire is an outward movement of exploration toward the unfamiliar while a need is an inward grasp of discovery toward the familiar. Whereas the narrator initially demonstrates the capacity to engage otherness according to a balance between resource and poverty (as a desire), her approach is gradually overtaken by the need for the familiar to master the unfamiliar.

The narrator admits from the tale’s start that it takes considerable effort to follow the “lame uncertain curves,” and she confides that “I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness” (46). Such frustration (amplified by the derision she senses in the wallpaper’s affect, such as when “that awful pattern began to laugh at me” [57]) inevitably leads
to a gradual increase in aggression. This obsession, motivated less by searching than by finding, forsakes the “desire without satisfaction” (TI 35). As the end of summer draws near, the narrator grows anxious that her desire (read: need) will not find its satisfaction; she contends that “I don’t want to leave now until I have found it out” (54). This militant search for an objectively stationed truth (by which she occasionally proceeds “just as a scientific hypothesis” [52] \[137\]) surfaces in the narrator’s need to grasp and contain the woman behind the paper, to reduce the multitude of possible figurative meanings into a single revealed, literal meaning. The developing hunger for satisfaction culminates at the short story’s climax when the narrator, armed with rope—in case “that woman does get out, and tries to get away” (57)—begins to claw at the yellow wallpaper’s outer surface, desperate to tear it down and expose what it conceals. This zealous and all-consuming struggle to make the impossible possible describes what the reader is likely to interpret as the narrator’s descent into madness. \[138\]

In a passage near the end of the short story, there is a subtle yet decisive moment which marks the narrator’s final turn away from the innovation of jamais vu exploration, of critical and creative readership. The narrator begins the passage with the claim, “I really have discovered something at last” (55). There is a shift from exploring to discovering, and the interminable possibilities become terminable. Within this frenetic passage, the narrator contends that “the front pattern does move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!” (55, original emphasis). This revelation reflects the narrator’s growing need to entrap the other, though it also suggests that the other might be reduced beyond its limits into the plane of sameness. A shift in grammar accompanies this turn as well: whereas previous depictions of the woman in the

137 Janice Haney-Peritz also observes the disturbing “resemblance between the narrator’s writing and John’s discourse” (116-7).
138 For more readings of what appears to be the narrator’s experience of madness or psychosis, see: Horowitz (182-7), Hume (480-2), Johnson (522-3), Kennard (76-80), Kolodny (457-63), and Treichler (67-72).
wallpaper are generally framed through the subjective lens of modality, the narrative now begins to depict the skulking woman behind the paper through the indicative mood—Gilman herself accentuates this shift in her narrator’s writing by italicizing the word *does*. From this point onward, the attempt to open the *realis* into the *irrealis* is reversed, and all of the creative possibilities that have been opened unwind as the *irrealis* is narrowly forced into the *realis*.

“I’ve seen her!” (55), the narrator exclaims; she believes that the ghostly figure has become a component of her reality, visible and knowable. She may just as well say, “I’ve *already* seen her!” The narrator’s relationship with the other transforms from one conceptually founded upon ideas of otherness and invisibility (*jamais vu*) to one conceptually founded upon ideas of sameness and visibility (*déjà vu*). This shift in grammatical mood anticipates—even accommodates—the narrator’s emerging belief that the “top pattern could be gotten off from the under one” (56), that the unreal might be imperialized by the real.

In the final passage of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator’s totalizing project emerges to such an extent that it would make her husband quite proud; however, her intention to grasp the ungraspable yields profoundly catastrophic results. The final passage commences with the narrator describing her success in securing solitude for the last night in the mansion. Once alone, the narrator rushes to the moonlit wallpaper to help “that poor thing [who] began to crawl and shake the pattern” (56). The narrator (as subject) and the woman in the paper (for the narrator, the desired object) form an improvised community where precise subjectivities begin to blur: “I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled” (56). The chiastic structure here reflects a symmetry between the traditional reader and the truth of the haunted text, both working in

139 Unlike the narrator of “Le Horla,” who mistakenly claims, “I’ve seen it!” when he has merely seen the being’s invisibleness, here the narrator presumes to have actually seen the other that, for so long, has completely eluded her. 140 Judith Fetterley suggests that in weaving a text of mastery and domination, the narrator “becomes a version of John himself” (164).
harmony from their respective sides. The narrator describes how she works tirelessly to peel the paper from the wall, though after a brief contemplation of suicide (“I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try” [57]), there is a radical shift in the narrative. Without any pretense of context, the narrator writes, “I wonder if they [the women who creep outside] all come out of that wall-paper as I did?” (58). Curiously, Gilman detaches the first person pronoun from the stable position of the narrator, as it quite clearly here corresponds to a woman who has escaped from the paper (though the action of the escape itself goes suspiciously undisclosed). The shifting subjectivity then appears to oscillate back to the narrator in the following line: “But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don’t get me out in the road there!” (58). Without having narrated it, the protagonist has been overtaken (by the very object she has sought to overtake, as it were). As the text loses all its authorial integrity, a sense of haunting is released into the narrator’s fictional world. Either the subjectivity that embodies the “I” no longer refers to a stable and familiar point of reference (which would mean the ghostly woman has utterly unhinged the at-homeness of the narrator) or the narrating voice can no longer properly distinguish the familiar from the unfamiliar (which would mean the narrator has fallen to madness)—however, it is impossible to tell which is the case. This is precisely the moment of uncanny doubling which Freud mentions, which occurs when “the subject identifies [herself] with someone else, so that [she] is in doubt as to which [her] self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for [her] own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self.”

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141 A number of critics analyze this symmetry in the way that the wallpaper reflects the narrator (or is the narrator’s projection); for example, see Kolodny (458-9), Suess (84-95), Fetterley (162-3), Owens (76-7), and Golden (195-7). Whether or not these analyses bear any weight, however, what is most important to note is that the aspect of the other woman can only be presented (indirectly and incompletely) through the figuration of haunting.

142 Similarly, when the narrative voice says to John that she/it has “got out at last […] in spite of you and Jane” (58), it appears as though this reference to “Jane” is a reference to the story’s narrator who has hitherto eluded naming. Assuming this is the case, the original subject who has been narrating all along has now been displaced from her narrating subjectivity; she has become an object.
(210). Contrary to the assumptions of Freudian psychoanalysis, however, this disorientation and proliferation of uncertainty is not something to be resolved through the procedure of analysis—in fact, it is the extensive creative and critical reading of the paper which prompted this crisis to begin with. It would appear as though the narrator’s effort to reduce the unfamiliar to familiarity has resulted in the inverse: the familiar (the narrator’s own subjectivity and the text itself) has been radically defamiliarized.143

This puzzling ending offers no overt resolution: it is unclear of John is still alive, if the narrator returns to her original status, if she has broken free from the confines (of her human subjectivity, of her victimized femininity), or if she has sunk further into the depths of that confinement. Given the narrator’s final total appropriation of the narrative, her condescension to John as she calls him “young man” on the final page, his “feminine” faint, and her literally crawling over him, it is possible to interpret this conclusion as a victory for the narrator.

However, from all that is presented (which is relatively slim), the conclusion seems to be more of a defeat. King and Morris are skeptical of the narrator’s suggestion as they observe that “the breaking free, even if only in the hallucination of madness, ought surely to indicate a more positive movement than the chilling conclusion of the tale suggests” (25). E. Suzanne Owens similarly questions if the reader is not meant to “lament the limitations of the combined force of female worldly and other worldly power, which can only be expressed by creeping” (78).

Furthermore, despite that Gilman deliberately omits any objective outcome of this final crisis, Judith Fetterley forecasts that “when John recovers from his faint, he will put her in a prison

143 Diance Herndl observes that “as the woman’s position of subject becomes increasingly tenuous, it becomes impossible to sort out who or what is writing. Tenses shift back and forth between present and past […], the persona shifts from the woman in the room to the woman in the wallpaper” (73). Consequently, the reader is unable to ascertain “whether we are reading a madwoman’s text, a sane woman’s post-facto description of madness, or an entirely impossible text, one that could never have been written” (73).
from which there will be no escape” (164). What most critics seem to interpret in the tone of the story’s conclusion is a deliberately constructed atmosphere of defeat. If the force behind the narrator’s eventual project to familiarize the unfamiliar (by releasing it from behind the paper into her reality) is driven by the need to discover the means to express herself and overcome the limitations that preserve her otherness in the eyes of characters like John, then the conclusion of the story is indeed a failure: he never affirms her position. However, in spite of this defeat (in enforcing the breadth of the totalizing network by reducing all instances of the unfamiliar to a plane of familiarity), and perhaps because of this defeat, there can be read a subtle victory for the narrative, if not the narrator.

The lesson of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” which can seemingly only be articulated through haunting, is one of failure. If a traditional ghost story such as “The Giant Wistaria” is characterized according to its attempts to ward off the possibility of failure and restore the atmosphere of security, then “The Yellow Wallpaper” is conversely characterized by its attachment to the necessary breakdown of such a pretext. When pushed to its limits, the haunted text exposes an inevitable failure within its capacity to produce its own objective meaning, to exist entirely within the familiar realm of a totalizing system: the entire premise of its presentation is not to reveal its concealed components but rather to reveal the fact of concealment and nothing more. The consequence of this failure exceeds the mere wallpaper, however. There is a critical shift that occurs within the narrative crisis in the last passage when the narrator desperately rips the paper from the wall: whereas the narrator’s active readership has

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144 Treichler similarly supposes, “As the ending of the narrative, her madness will no doubt commit her to more intense medical treatment, perhaps to the dreaded Weir Mitchell of whom her husband has spoken. The surrender of patriarchy is only temporary: her husband has merely fainted, after all, not died, and will no doubt move swiftly and severely to deal with her. Her individual escape is temporary and compromised” (67).

145 For example, shortly after the republication of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Gilbert and Gubart interpret the story as “a striking story of female confinement and escape, a paradigmatic tale which (like Jane Eyre) seems to tell the story that all literary women would tell if they could speak their ‘speechless woe’” (89, emphasis original).
hitherto been applied exclusively to the wallpaper, it is now redirected toward the narrator’s experience of reality as a whole. As a haunted text, the wallpaper provokes a model of readership (predicated on an unresolvable engagement with the unfamiliar) that pertains not merely to itself, but to being as such. When the haunting figure leaks into the narrating subjectivity, the haunted text is no longer the wallpaper, but the narrator’s experience of reality. The narrator’s readership of the haunted wallpaper therefore serves as a literary exercise for a greater project: a revised mode of readership (of her own text, her diary, her experience of reality) that is not founded upon assumptions of completeness or directness.

On a general reading of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the narrator’s struggle with marginalization is inevitably apparent. Barbara Suess explores the narrator’s alienation from the Lacanian Symbolic Order (which prompts her attempt “to create her own, alternative Order” [92]), and ultimately claims that this estrangement results in the way that the narrator “often feels influenced or pressed by external forces” (91). Given what is traditionally read to be Gilman’s feminist slant, these external forces are easily interpreted as masculine by their nature. In fact, as it is presented, it is quite tempting to interpret the short story as the narrative of masculine oppression and, consequently, feminine subjugation. One might correspondingly suppose that the reason that the narrator cannot read her own text is that, as a woman, she is denied access to it. It is dangerous, however, to reduce the situation to a mere matter of gendering—that is, to reduce oppressed to a strictly feminine gender and to reduce the oppressor to a strictly masculine gender. After all, John’s sister Jennie is, in spite of her femininity, just as oppressive as John (even if she is relatively directed by him) and, particularly at the end of the story, John, in spite of his masculinity, seems to be no more in control of his own situation—and, correspondingly, of his wife—than the narrator. Rather than gendering the totalizing principles of supposed

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146 For more on this interpretation, see Golden (194-200), Herndl (53, 68-74), and Treichler (64-73).
normalcy (which the literary haunting will effectively disrupt), it is important to understand the extent to which such totalities are not by necessity as complete and direct as they present themselves.\textsuperscript{147} That is to say while historically men have undeniably been more aggressive in implementing and maintaining totalizing structures in what is often termed the “patriarchy” (and resultingly, women, as others outside of the system, more often subjugated), such an association is the product of deceptive assumptions made by the totality rather than of necessary and natural essence. The uncertainty provoked by Gilman’s Revisionist literary haunting opens the possibility for a subject, in advance of any gendering, to elude the colonizing effects of determinacy.

Conclusion

As the desperate attempt to read a seemingly unreadable haunted text is irreversibly thwarted in the climax, the narrator is forced in her maddening crisis to admit to inevitable failure to reduce the “something queer” to something natural.\textsuperscript{148} Within this admission, the split in subjectivity between the “I” who narrates and the “I” who is narrated is never more explicit. If the narrated “I” is unsuccessful in her project to domesticate the text she attempts to read, the narrating “I” arguably finds at least marginal success in her ultimate abandonment of such a

\textsuperscript{147} Even Levinas falls victim to the tendency to determine subjective roles according to gender. In what is arguably a totalizing structure (against which he otherwise tirelessly battles), Levinas reduces fecundity [fécondité] to a relationship of paternity (between father and son) only. Donna Brody suggests that where Levinas does use the concept of maternity, he often uses it in such a way that, unlike paternity, it reproduces sameness in such a way that “the female capacity for child-bearing is poached, colonized, and substituted from her to him where it figures as a kind of agamic or parthenogenic reproduction of the other-in-the-same” (74). As a result, she identifies that “the principle of identity and difference—necessary as opening onto the subject’s relation with infinity—is reserved to the male sex” (62). Equally, Levinas demonstrates a gender determination when he characterizes eros, the will to labor an inexhaustible search for the ungraspable infinite, as fundamentally feminine: “alterity is accomplished,” he claims, “in the feminine” insofar as it is comprised purely of “modesty” and “mystery” (T&O 88). While the weight of the stakes in Levinas’s argument is easily upheld when one respectively substitutes paternity [paterñité] for parenthood [parentalité] and desire for the feminine for desire for an other who always slips away, it is significant to note how easily (though not inevitably) one slips into the totalizing mindset he or she seeks to escape.

\textsuperscript{148} If the narrator has truly accessed the truth of the wallpaper, anchoring it to a plane of sameness, this is not revealed within the text, and it does not occur to traditional rational logic.
project. After all, it is the narrating “I” (not the narrated “I”) who retains the narrative’s last word, and it is precisely because of her relinquishment of the familiarizing principles of *déjà vu* that the story has no identifiable conclusive. As this narrating “I” orchestrates the text, she applies on its surface the same illegibility etched onto the outer pattern of the wallpaper, and by doing so, she produces a haunting within her own text, which has by now become her experience of reality as such, and she is able to understand her experience of reality as though it were a [haunted] text.¹⁴⁹ King and Morris, who examine the strategies of readership presented in the short story, observe that “ways of reading texts reflect the ways of reading the world” (23)—the haunting within the wallpaper would thus seemingly correspond to a haunting within the world. The narrative victory thus comes when the narrating “I” releases her pretention of totalizing mastery and demonstrates the capacity (and seeming sustainability) of a readership guided by the principles of *jamais vu*. Ultimately, the narrator’s authorship of the diary text (and, in the final scene, her readership of it) does not resolve the haunting but produces it. In approaching her diary as she would the yellow wallpaper, she is able to see the way that the her access to reality is fundamentally privative in the way that it is mediated by a text that is inherently haunted: being does not occur in reality, but rather in what is innovatively produced in the readership of reality—that is, in the *idea* of reality, in the experience of reality. Gilman ultimately seems to propose that subjectivity is a haunted text, indirect and incomplete, whose reality exists suspended, forever pending, just beyond the horizon of our limited experience.

In her analysis of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Janice Haney-Peritz casually notes that “to John, the narrator’s haunted house is nothing” (115), and unfortunately, too many contemporary scholars are of the same disposition, concerned for example with only the gender politics or the

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¹⁴⁹ Annette Kolodny similarly observes that “We are presented at the outset with a protagonist who, ostensibly for her own good, is denied […] activities and who, in the course of accommodating herself to that deprivation, comes more and more to experience her self as a text which can neither get read nor recorded” (457).
I contend, conversely, that it is precisely the haunting, as Gilman revises it, which produces the tale’s controversy and demand for multifarious interpretation; it is quite conceivable that without its foundational Revisionist haunting, the short story would have passed away virtually unnoticed, never to return. It is through her revision to traditional figurations of haunting that Gilman is able to explore the depths of failures in communication—and, likewise, the redemptive qualities of admitting to an inevitable sense of unfamiliarity within an experience of reality one has been conditioned to believe as totalizingly familiar. What this tale of Revisionist haunting attempts to demonstrate is that when a text, because of its haunting, admits to its inevitable inability to fully disclose its meaning, the reader is put in the position to read according to an active fancy, a creative and critical readership informed by the procedures of jamais vu. The narrative’s final victory is thus found within the defeat of the narrator, of the narrator’s husband, and of the narrative itself. Gilman’s use of haunting to present the failure of communication anachronistically reflects Levinas’s later premise that, “from failure alone would come the necessity of curbing violence and introducing order into human relations” (TI 83).

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150 On a similar note, Treichler’s claim that “it is the voice of male logic and male judgment which dismisses superstition and refuses to see the house as haunted” (65) reflects the attempt to reduce the eponymous wallpaper and its infamous haunting to a mere vehicle through which to interpret—or diagnose—the text and its meaning. For additional explorations of haunting and its relevance to the story, see King and Morris (24), Dock (59–60), Owens (70), and Weatherford (69–70).

151 Following its 1973 republication, “The Yellow Wallpaper” has earned significant reputation as a rediscovered text. Perhaps the most significant early reading of the story comes from the brief yet significant analysis in Gilbert and Gubar’s seminal text The Madwoman in the Attic (1979). Gilbert and Gubar claim that, “as the narrator sinks more deeply into what the world calls madness, the terrifying implications of both the paper and the figure imprisoned behind the paper begin to permeate—that is, to haunt—the rented ancestral mansion in which she and her husband are immured” (90, emphasis original). It is the haunting which figures the madness, the alternative vision of reality, and its complete permeation and refusal to be bound to convention directly account for the interesting success of the character, according to the authors’ reading.

152 One might also consider the concluding remarks of Time and the Other: “What one presents as the failure of communication in love precisely constitutes the positivity of the relationship; this absence of the other is precisely its presence as other” (94).
“The Yellow Wallpaper” significantly works from a frame of Revisionism that becomes distinctly American in its figuration. The attention to American colonialism illustrates the depths to which an American national identity is so wrapped up in a particular new form of haunting. Lockwood observes that, “Gilman’s yellow wallpaper seems to be a primary historical document requiring analysis, for it tells a story of the Anglo-American past” (102); however, what the wallpaper reveals is anything but the pretense of a complete and direct recovered history. The haunting in the story produces what Lockwood describes as “hard-to-read traces of a brutal, gendered history that renders impossible a nostalgic view of the national past” (86). One might argue that American nostalgia itself is impossible in many ways because of the complexities involved in the national lineage as essentially borrowed—from Europe, from Native Americans.

In this Revisionist ghost story, the point of reference that would tell the story of what really happened is fundamentally lacking—and not even the narrator’s immense labor can force it to reveal itself. What the labor produces instead is a perceivable gap that is haunting itself—allegorically, it produces an awareness of the integral uncertainty of the unfamiliar which embodies not only a national identity to a certain extent, but even more so, one’s subjective experience of reality. As the narrator of this story labors voraciously only to confront the inevitable inability to grasp the unfamiliar, she comes to distinguish the difference between the infinity of reality as such and her subjective experience of that reality. The way that Gilman balances her character’s awareness of an inevitable failure in communication with a refusal to let the experience of reality—both incomplete and indirect—be reduced to an anarchy of meaninglessness demonstrates the Revisionist capacity of her story to present an innovative

\[\text{Footnote: For example, Lockwood further contends that, “Gilman’s notion that late-nineteenth-century Anglo-American women remained imprisoned in a colonial (pre-national) condition, behind modernity as it were” (Lockwood 88). The contemporary conditions of oppression are not distinctly American, but are rather inherited from somebody else’s history—they, like the wistaria seeds in “The Giant Wistaria,” have been imported from England, from Europe. Within the framework of sameness of the American national identity, there exists an otherness.}\]
model for thinking through one’s experience with being. Ultimately, Gilman labors to produce a concept of subjectivity that is figured by its status as always incomplete and indirect, as always developing—both in spite of and because of ghostly haunting. In this way, “The Yellow Wallpaper” anticipates future iterations of haunting which collectively embody an early expression of emerging Modernist indeterminacy in America.
Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), following “Le Horla,” successfully demonstrates the capacity of literary haunting to depict, ambiguously, an otherwise ungraspable component of reality whose absolute invisibility cannot be reduced and effectively reproduced within the limitations of our normative human subjective experience. As the turn of the century approached, a number of writers of ghost stories, particularly American, began to concern themselves with the possibility of a literary figuration of “ghosts” whose haunting invariably exceeds our grasp, both literally and figuratively speaking. Not semi-transparent and ethereal, and not precisely the return of the dead, Gilman’s “ghost” is certainly Revisionist—to such an extent that the reader may hesitate to even call it a ghost. The story’s departure from traditional figurations of ghostliness is evident in ways that James reproduces a similarly ambiguous haunting, though this time in a dialog with its traditional counterpart. In the same decade that Gilman and Maupassant are innovating within the genre, Henry James, too, picks up his pen and begins his own literary exploration of haunting, which ultimately strives to revise the genre, effectively continuing the Revisionist trajectory of the inquiry into the absolutely invisible, while still referencing its convention. In other words, he inserts a Revisionist haunting, an inextinguishable force that invariably defies presentation and comprehensibility, into a narrative plot that overtly appears traditional in its treatment of ghostliness.

Whereas Maupassant and Gilman wrote relatively few ghost stories, James’s extensive oeuvre contains over a dozen. Unlike the authors from the previous chapters, the path of his Revisionist inquiry emerges more out of an evolution over the course of a number of
considerably different tales than out of a direct rewriting of a single earlier tale—and this evolution actually begins as early as 1868 with the publication of his first ghost tale (nearly twenty years prior to the original versions of Maupassant’s and Gilman’s tales). Though many consider *The Turn of the Screw* James’s finest ghost story, and for good reason, it is crucial to analyze the tales which lead into this popular novella—namely, James’s first three ghost stories: “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” (1868), “The Ghostly Rental” (1876), and “Sir Edmund Orme” (1891). Through a close look at these three tales, it becomes clear how James can explore the same philosophical questions of haunting as do Maupassant and Gilman, though without abandoning altogether the traditional figuration of ghostliness. In other words, James is able to deepen the Revisionist ghost story through near parody which, beneath the smooth veneer of a traditional model (that is, the haunting of *an other*), introduces a Revisionist haunting (that is, the haunting of *otherness as such*). An inquiry into James’s first three ghost stories reveals the way that James is able to weave such a profound reflection on haunting into the popular and accessible generic form, which is precisely what makes his ghost stories not only so entertaining, but also so literarily and philosophically rich.

James’s ghost stories in particular are concerned with the natural human experience of loss. In fact, Arthur Brown suggests that in the way that James figures his ghosts as inevitably ungraspable essences, the stake of his narrative of haunting lies in the question of “whether the privilege of an artistic consciousness—of access to an immortal adventure—does not require the loss of that which makes us human” (60). Generally speaking, our conscious mind understands the experience of loss (like the traditional figuration of haunting) as a malady to be avoided and overcome at all costs. However, James mobilizes his ghost literature to seriously explore the experience of loss and open its various complexities. While on the one hand he depicts the
traditional response to loss (which is captured by what we commonly understand to be the work of mourning), he illuminates the extent to which this established perspective is misguided and fails to address the depth of our human experience. He thus presents an alternative response, one which reflects what psychoanalysis in particular presents as the work of melancholia. Unlike Freudian psychoanalysis, which depicts melancholia as a pathological disorder, James, long in advance of revisionist psychoanalysis, conversely questions whether an experience like melancholia might in fact be a more natural and integral manifestation of our indirect and incomplete subjective experience of reality. In James’s first two ghost stories, “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” and “The Ghostly Rental,” haunting manifests a force of incomprehensibility that silences and interrupts the attempt to grasp, to reduce otherness to a state of sameness, and to master an incoherent mystery. Whereas these significant earlier works depict haunting as a suspension in the gradual work of accepting loss (that is, in the work of mourning), they begin to propose another form of haunting, an absolutely invisible form, reflective of the kind explored earlier in this project. With “Sir Edmund Orme,” James formalizes this difference in presenting a form of haunting that I argue is correlative to Freud’s depiction of melancholia in the way that it articulates a profound privation in the subject’s experience of reality and voices an internalized and insurmountable otherness from within. I suggest that James’s first three ghost stories formalize James’s Revisionist haunting and establish the context out of which emerges his most celebrated ghost story, *The Turn of the Screw*.

“*The Romance of Certain Old Clothes*”

Henry James’s first ghost story, written quite early in his literary career, was “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” (1868), written thirty years in advance of *The Turn of the Screw*. ...
Screw. “The Romance,” in spite of its few interesting moments, is generally dismissed not only by critics, but it was dismissed by James himself in his later years. Nevertheless, the tale remains an integral component of James’s oeuvre of ghost literature, indicative of the transition away from the generic traditions into a more complex framework, highly Revisionist in nature. Just as the substantial, particular renovations Gilman made between “The Giant Wistaria” and “The Yellow Wallpaper” (and, though to a lesser extent, the renovations Maupassant made between the two versions of “Le Horla”) demonstrate the author’s capacity to reshape the genre as a whole, the changes made between James’s earliest forays into the literary ghostly and his later ones reveal a similar shift in focus from mourning to melancholia. On a closer look, “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” haunts James’s subsequent ghost stories as a point of reference set within the traditionalist model he ultimately is determined to reshape.

“The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” features a relatively simple plot: after the death of the seeming protagonist Perdita, the sister Viola marries her widower brother-in-law and greedily attempts to pilfer the dead sister’s chest of elegant clothes; subsequently, Viola is attacked and killed by what is presumably Perdita’s ghost who protects the trousseau (which the husband, Arthur, once vowed to keep locked away). The tale of jealousy between the sisters has certain Gothic undertones, though the narrative in general plays out more like a tragic drama than a ghost story as such. In fact, one might hesitate in characterizing the tale as a ghost story at all were it not for the final sentence, wherein “the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful

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154 Raymond D. Havens references James’s response to a publisher seeking his permission to publish the short story; in the letter, James claims the tale “is not a thing that I have the least wish to see disinterred, and nothing could possibly please me less than to see it figure, as a representative tale of mine, at the end of a long period during which I have written so many other and better ones” (qtd. in Havens 132). Havens thus remarks, “To the author of The Ambassadors and ‘The Turn of the Screw’ his early ‘Romance’ must have seemed, what it is, amateurish. It has too little drama, too much summarizing, a beginning too slow and too remote from the main action, a patronizing, satirical attitude towards the characters that develops a mood at odds with the final horror, and, in the second wife, a character too crudely and obviously selfish” (133).
“ghostly hands” (37) imply the aftermath of a ghostly visit. While James clearly resorts to ghostliness as the means to terminate the tension between sisters, haunting appears here more as an afterthought and a means than as a subject itself worthy of reflection. Through the excessive force of violence, the ghost of Perdita operates by a logic of ending, rather than one of beginning.

Attesting to the story’s commitment to generic conventions, its haunting is the result of an unkept promise and a corresponding disruption in lineage, just as in such Romantic Gothic cornerstones as *The Castle of Otranto* or *The Old English Baron*. Before her death, Perdita fears that her sister will intervene into her relationship with her daughter; while reflecting on Viola’s greed, “the thought of her sister’s rapacity seemed to cast a dark shadow between her and the helpless figure of her little girl” (31). On her deathbed, anticipating that her sister will attempt to usurp her most beloved belongings—that is, the “poor little wife’s old gowns” (32)—Perdita commands that her faithful husband lock them away in a chest and “never give [the key] to anyone but your child” (32). She first has him promise, then has him swear, and finally says and repeats, “I trust you.” This pledge is founded not only upon the explicit maintenance of authentic lineage, but furthermore upon the faith of trust, loyalty, and fidelity—it is intended to ward off the intrusion of another lover into the unicity of their marriage whose limits will shortly be tested through death. It is the breach of this spoken contract that invokes the ghost, who wreaks violence directly (through death) on she who actively violates the chest’s seal and

155 Granted, there are subtle ghostly considerations given to “the late Mrs. Lloyd,” such as her possible resentment at Viola’s and Arthur’s courtship, or the “great privacy—almost with secrecy” (34) in which the new couple is married (in order to avoid catching the attention of the former Mrs. Lloyd). Such respects, however, are presented more as “waggish” (34) superstitions of the time, and hardly present a particularly haunted atmosphere in any generic sense.

156 Lustig likewise argues that, “The final scene of ‘The Romance of Certain Old Clothes’ is the most intensely centrifugal ghostly encounter in James, yet the ghost also intervenes authoritatively in order to defeat Viola’s desires, prosecuting the competitive principle from beyond the grave and bringing the tale to a bewildering and dreadful close” (65).
indirectly (through a second widowering) on he who is passively complicit. Presumably, through the brief instance of haunting and its grotesque results, the young daughter will now inherit what is rightfully hers when she reaches the proper age. The ghost in Henry James’s first tale of haunting is thus a force of reconciliation, a hand of justice that restores what ought to have been, wherein James uses the ghostly to represent the return of the lost (*perdita*), albeit through an almost laughably trite and underdeveloped use of ghostly violence.

Many critics agree that “The Romance,” published when James was just twenty-five, is among his work that most overtly demonstrates the influence of his literary predecessors. The story is unoriginal in many ways, and generally speaking, in this story, James neither innovatively utilizes the figure of the ghost as the means to reflect upon the genre nor reshapes the work of genre or the subjective experience of reality. Instead “The Romance” ultimately succumbs to an overtly traditionalist model; however, within its general adherence to convention, it nevertheless contains the trace of the Revisionist sensibilities that will be advanced in the ghost stories of Gilman and Maupassant in the decades following. The two most visible explorations of such sensibilities lie in James’s attention to the complex incorporation of the dead into the living character’s subjectivity and the encounter with radical alterity.

First, James demonstrates an interest in the instability of subjective identity, as it seems as though each of the two main characters, Perdita and Viola, are variously haunted throughout the story. In the first sense, each sister is haunted by the literary figures suggested by their

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157 For example, in addressing the various developments of the supernatural in America through the nineteenth century, Arthur Quinn has noted, “Certain stories of Mr. Henry James in his earliest period, like *A Romance of Certain Old Clothes*, have a flavor of Hawthorne, but his later and most powerful story of the supernatural, *The Turn of the Screw*, is not like Hawthorne’s work in the least” (132-3). Furthermore, T. J. Lustig contends that while certain elements reflect Melville’s various preoccupations (as in *The House of Seven Gables*, for example), “*The Romance of Certain Old Clothes*” is as well a deliberate reworking of some of James’s predecessors: he calls the story “an attempt to counter Trollope by evoking ghosts in the midst of the mundane and simultaneously to overcome Hawthorne by rewriting the colonial history of Massachusetts with Mérimée’s detached worldliness and rhetorical restraint” (52).
names (given to them by their father, “a great reader of Shakespeare” [21]): while “Viola” carries weight in its reference to a literary heroine of *The Twelfth Night* known for her success in the arts of deception, “Perdita” references the disinherited daughter in *The Winter’s Tale*. Beyond mere literary allusion, which, by virtue of a reference to the long passed, formulates a rudimentary, abstract haunting, the reader also discovers that Perdita’s name (which means “the lost one”) is furthermore a memorial to “a little girl born between [Viola and Perdita], who had lived but a few weeks” (21). Figuratively, then, Perdita is directly haunted by the dead, as though, through the clothing of her name, her very existence could somehow channel the lost sibling. In this sense, Perdita invokes an experience of mourning, which, generally speaking, encompasses an expression of grief over a lost object. In this short story, the name “Perdita” references not only the story’s protagonist, therefore, but also the older [unnamed] sister who died as a baby before Perdita’s birth, thematically conflating the identity of the living sister with that of her deceased sister. Perdita’s existence in this sense is secondary, a conceptual restoration of a lost original. Although the lost baby sister is never again mentioned beyond page one, her presence (absolutely invisible to Perdita, who was born after the death of the older sister) haunts Perdita through her name.

Adding to the complexity, not only is the character Perdita subtly haunted by a dead baby sister, but she also dies two-thirds through the narrative, and subsequently, she literally haunts her surviving sister. In this sense, Perdita truly becomes *the lost one*. When Viola marries her

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158 Viola (the name James used for the character in the original 1868 publication) references the prominent heroine from *The Twelfth Night*. In “The Romance,” however, James’s appropriation of the name undermines the character of Shakespeare’s Viola, who is principally identified by her ability to take on a disguise (as a man) to relatively noble ends. In James’s slight revision to the story for republication in 1885, he renamed the character to Rosalind (this time the heroine from *As You Like It*) only to further the extent of this subversion.

159 James also complicates this conflation, however, in characterizing Perdita in opposition to her name. He suggests that she “might very well have exchanged the sweet melancholy of her name against something more in consonance with her aspect and disposition,” full of “smiles and gaiety” (22). In this sense, Perdita has apparently not incorporated the haunting lost other (her dead baby sister) into her own identity—at least not outwardly.
brother-in-law, furthermore, she appropriates her dead sister’s name when she becomes “Mrs. Lloyd.” The identities of this second pair of sisters are likewise conflated, and, underlying the subtle network of haunting their separate subjectivities are destabilized. Though its development is relatively rudimentary here, those characters who are literally or figuratively haunted by the dead that precede them experience a disruption of subjectivity by incorporating the dead, particularly through naming. The dead do not stay dead, in other words—rather, through the work of haunting, the dead return as ghosts and become something like clothes that can be discarded. Though underplayed here, the process of *ghostification*—that is, the subject’s transformation into a ghost—reveals itself to be present at James’s earliest conceptualizations of haunting.

Second, James begins in the story to address the possibility of encountering an absolute alterity. At the center of the short story lies a tension manifested in the rivalry between two sisters: one who has been “bestowed the romantic name of Viola” and one who has received “the more serious one of Perdita” (21). The integration of the “romantic” and the “serious” has been a central concern of Gothic literature since its inception; however, James is interested in the way that these two forms do not peacefully coexist by their nature and are perhaps utterly unreconcilable. Though the story ultimately does much to order a disrupted system, it at the same time refrains from completely naturalizing its supernatural component. By the last line of the story, the rivalry between sisters does not resolve, at least not visibly; rather, their conflict is carried to an arena of complete unknowability: into death. As early as this story, then, James

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160 Recall the second preface to *The Castle of Otranto* in which Walpole claims to have achieved a reconciliation between fiction and realism: the innovative blend of “the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern” (9), which essentially correspond to the supernatural and the natural, respectively.

161 On this note, Lustig similarly contends that through writing this story, James “discovers that in practice there is a contradiction, or at least an incompatibility, between realism and the ghost story” (53).
shows interest in confronting this paradox of knowing as not knowing, which is essentially inseparable from an exploration of the means of engaging the unfamiliar.

It is significant that the ghost of James’s first tale of haunting not materialize—at least not for the surviving main character, Lloyd, nor, more importantly, for the reader. T. J. Lustig observes that “James’s wish for a virtually spectral power” is most active when, “as he crosses the threshold in the final scene of the tale, Lloyd comes upon an explosion of absolute alterity” (53). There is a sense of the truly unfamiliar addressed here, a ghost whose otherness is so absolute that it seemingly cannot be witnessed except by those whom it radically and irreversibly overtakes. This brief encounter with haunting—or, more precisely, an encounter with its trace—illustrates how James, interested in exploring a haunting more profound than its traditional figuration, hesitates to reduce the ghostly uncertainty to a palpable realism. The haunting of this story, which manifests itself in vengeful wrath, occurs explicitly as a force to correct Viola’s crime; however, by the same turn, it also disrupts the attempt—deliberate or otherwise—to appropriate another. Insofar as Viola reproduces the role, image, and even name (“Mrs. Lloyd”) of her deceased sister, there is running through the story a current of déjá vu (in which an objectively unfamiliar otherness is subjectively assumed to be familiar). This déjá vu, effected through Viola’s character, can be described as the return home to a home that is not properly one’s own—it is a possessive claim made over the other.

Levinas provides additional depth to such a movement by figuring this possessive claim over the other as a grasp which intends to draw the unfamiliar into the light which illuminates—and effectively familiarize it. The grasp, to Levinas, is essentially an act of violence in its attempt to appropriate rather than to respect. Viola’s claim to Perdita’s sacred clothing marks her movement toward the other with the intent to possess, to claim it as her own—like her
married surname. Levinas warns us of the will of “reduction to the same,” which is explained as “the neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object” (43). Viola, who is never treated sympathetically by the narrative, is certainly guilty of such an attempt to lay claim to her sister’s identity. However, James ultimately demonstrates—albeit somewhat awkwardly here—that the otherness of the dead cannot be properly domesticated. The force of haunting interrupts the current of déjà vu by violently refusing appropriation, and it reflects what Levinas speaks of in general as the “total resistance to the grasp,” a resistance which results in “the opening of a new dimension” (197). In the case of Viola and Perdita, the attempt to grasp is met with such ruthless force that its resistance manifests—perhaps irresponsibly so—in a grasp of a whole other order, a literal grasp of the neck which silences the living subject and radically annihilates its capacity to grasp: a ghostly grasp that forecloses all other attempts to grasp. Although the precise response to various attempts to grasp the unfamiliar will develop throughout James’s production of ghost stories, the premise for such a relation is clear here: the will to master is met with overwhelming opposition. While on the one hand, the ghost appears in order to disrupt Viola’s appropriation of her envied sister’s character, it furthermore disrupts the reader’s capacity to appropriate the climactic action of the story itself. Though the source and motivation of the haunting are quite clear, its actual appearance remains absolutely uncertain, for the ghost is never directly or completely depicted in narration. Even if there is so far no model for a meaningful engagement with that otherness, James’s treatment demonstrates that even as early as his first attempt at ghost literature, he is considering ghosts whose presence defies representation. In fact, the absolute invisibility—that is, of a ghost whose missed appearance entirely eludes the work narration—which James presents in mere passing in this story becomes the principle concern of the overly curious hero of his next ghost story, “The Ghostly Rental” (1876).
“The Ghostly Rental”

“The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” has found little acclaim by critics throughout the years, as its innovation, though retrospectively anticipating of James’s later Revisionist ghost stories, is relatively limited. The story therefore operates as little more than an exercise for James to begin to explore the nature of haunting and its possible association with textuality—an association strikingly lacking in “The Romance.” James’s next ghost story, “The Ghostly Rental” (1876), also set in the American Northeast, further scrutinizes the complexities which arise in the relationship between the familiar and the unfamiliar in such a way that draws out certain Revisionist claims about the nature of subjectivity and of haunting. Among the many changes made between James’s first ghost story and this one is the transition from an objective third-person point of view into a subjective first-person one—mirroring the similar transitions made in the renovations of Gilman’s and Maupassant’s Revisionist ghost stories, and perhaps suggestive of the limitations of subjectivity as reflected in narrative position. The unnamed narrator, a former theology student at the Divinity School of Harvard, admits to being a very curious person with “a very sharp pair of eyes”; he openly admits that “it is, indeed, owing to [my eyes’] inquisitive habits that I came into possession of this remarkable story” (39). Especially with its overt attention placed on the narrator’s favorite text, Pascal’s *Pensées*, the short story serves as a detailed account of one’s attempt to engage (and domesticate) the unknown through rational sensory experience, and as such, the narrative perspective is

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162 Next to Maupassant and Gilman, the shift from objective third-person to subjective first-person (from “The Romance” to “The Ghostly Rental”) occurs chronologically prior in James’s work; “The Ghostly Rental” was published in 1876, whereas “Le Horla” and “The Yellow Wallpaper” did not appear until 1887 and 1892, respectively.
substantially grounded within the attempt to reduce the unfamiliarity of a supernatural experience into a realist framework.\textsuperscript{163}

In “The Ghostly Rental,” James initiates a meaningful inquiry into the nature of haunting, and for the most part, he is able to successfully draw from its richness as a trope not only in a literary sense as an investigation into the limits of vision, but also in a philosophical one wherein the story also explores subjectivity as determined by loss. The short story begins its extensive exploration into the nature of haunting from within a relatively traditional framework—on its outermost surface, the tale is fundamentally concerned with issues of loss, and the mourning associated with that loss finds literary expression through the figuration of haunting. The short story follows the narrator’s interest in the subject of haunting after accidentally stumbling upon a New England mansion that on first sight he immediately intuits must be haunted. After spending considerable time and effort investigating the sealed, dark house, he crosses paths with Captain Diamond, an elderly man who comes to visit the house. Most of the story then features the highly curious narrator’s engrossment with the old man’s bitter tale of loss. Like the reader of the short story, the narrator generally plays the role of a passive observer, collecting as much information about the situation as he can. He eventually learns from the town gossip Miss Deborah and later from Captain Diamond himself that some twenty years ago, the old man was responsible for killing his daughter. Miss Deborah explains, “Oh, not with a pistol, or a dagger, or a dose of arsenic! With his tongue. Talk of women’s tongues! He cursed her—with some horrible oath—and she died!” (49). So the story goes, that because the young woman had betrayed a marriage arranged by her father by inviting in the company of “a young man with

\textsuperscript{163} Martha Banta suggests that “The Ghostly Rental” indicates a shift in James’s style: “the young James had changed from a romantic indulgence in the ghostly tradition that marked and marred ‘The Romance of Certain Old Clothes’ and ‘DeGrey: A Romance.’ It shows him in a mood […] more critical more playful, and ultimately more fruitful for his later work in the genre” (107).
whiskers from Boston” (50), the father fell into a violent fury and disowned her. As a result of his brutal words, the daughter fell into a state of suicidal despair. Shortly after the young woman’s death, she returned as a ghost to haunt the Captain, which in turn “made the old man very uncomfortable” (51). Miss Deborah adds, “little by little his passion had passed away, and he was given up to grief” (51). The narrator learns that the ghostly haunting—resulting from words, spoken as a curse—has persisted these two decades.

Through the persistence of haunting, the Captain’s grief takes the form of what we may now recognize as an extended work of mourning. Given Freud’s study on the subject, conducted nearly four decades after this short story and culminating in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), we find additional insight into the old man’s condition—and its relationship with haunting. Freud’s essay famously establishes mourning as a normative procedure that frequently occurs following the loss of a valued object, even in the most well adjusted of people. In its most explicit articulation, mourning is “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (243). At its foundation, mourning is the process of labor in which one negotiates the nonpresence of an other.

Mourning is a common response to loss, according to Freud, and in the clinical sense, it generally does not require special treatment. In most cases, after experiencing a traumatic loss, the subject suffers a “painful frame of mind” in which the subject experiences a contradiction—while an active interest in the lost object remains, the lost object itself no longer exists and thus cannot receive the effects of that interest. That is to say, the libidinal force underlying such an interest finds itself confused, and the patient consequently withdraws and suffers a temporary apathetic disposition; the experience of the loss of a valued object results in a “loss of interest in
the outside world” (244). Whereas the work of mourning is predominantly comprised of a series of resistances to the loss of the object through the means of psychically prolonging its presence, with due time and repeated reality-testing, it will confer the truth that the object is gone, and, upon this acknowledgment, the libidinal investment that was once directed toward that object will be redirected. In short, mourning is experienced as a conflict wherein one’s natural inclination to remain interested in the lost object is negotiated against the “demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object” (244). The lost object, by the psychic procedures within the work of mourning, appears to retain a presence beyond its loss (or death), and as such, it is richly captured in the traditional figure of the ghost, which itself is an extension of a human beyond its mortal limits. Freud observes that the tension of mourning can in extreme cases result in “a turning away from reality” marked by “a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis” (244). In a figurative or literary sense, such a psychosis can be articulated through the supernatural presence of a ghostly visitor who allows, from the subject’s perspective, the persistence of a lost object beyond the moment of its loss. As such, the force of literary haunting, in its traditional conception, is little more than a figurative extension of mourning in which “the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged” (245).

In “The Ghostly Rental,” the haunting that Captain Diamond experiences is very much an extension of what we identify as a psychic work of mourning. As Freud observes, the subject who continues to cling to the lost object (which essentially relates to a refusal—or inability—to redirect libidinal attention from that lost object) consequently withdraws from a stable

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164 This sense of a lost figure whose prolonged presence exceeds its loss (or death) is characteristic of traditional ghost literature in general, and one can make the strong case that generally speaking, literary haunting is always tied up in some way with a suspension in the work of mourning. For example, Dale Townshend makes the compelling argument that fundamentally the literary Gothic explores “what transpires when truth does not superimpose itself upon death, and through this, when the process of mourning the dead has been halted, blocked or even entirely neglected” (77).
experience of reality. Because the ghost of his daughter operates as a hallucinatory psychosis in which the existence of the lost object is seemingly prolonged, the Captain’s grief remains an open wound, and he is forced to cling to her spirit. As a result, his capacity to live what Freud might envision as a normal life is diminished. His only means of subsistence are the “good American gold and silver” (51) left by the ghost (as rent paid for the right to remain in the haunted house), collected by the old man every quarter-year. Due to the details of the contractual arrangements made with the ghost, the Captain’s existence is all but completely dependent on this figure, who represents for him a persistence of his lost daughter. In this case, haunting is a retributive force\textsuperscript{165} that, perhaps out of nothing more than a vindictive spirit, indefinitely suspends the subject’s work of mourning. While the old man confides that his ghostly daughter “has forgiven me as the angels forgive,” that forgiveness is corrupted by the persistence of her haunting presence: he adds, “that’s what I can’t stand—the soft, quiet way she looks at me. I’d rather she twisted a knife about in my heart” (54). Under the gentleness of her countenance lies a relentless reminder of the brutality of his own actions (or words, as it were), a wound reopened with each ghostly reappearance. The image of purity in his daughter’s haunting fragility and innocence prevents Captain Diamond from completely forgiving himself for his own crime, and because of the haunting, he is unable to resolve his work of mourning and the ego cannot become, as Freud suggests in the completion of such a work, “free and uninhibited again” (245). So long as the ghost continues to haunt, the guilt of his crime remains essentially unforgiven.

From this précis alone, “The Ghostly Rental” shows little sign of any unique or revolutionary characteristics. After all, the modern ghost story since Hamlet more often than not

\textsuperscript{165} Attesting to the vengeful severity of the ghost, Miss Deborah explains, “the ghost had no mercy, as he had had none” (41).
employs the trope of haunting to express a disruption in the work of mourning and the need to revisit some unresolved crime of the past. Though the foundation of the short story is relatively unoriginal, what is initially striking here is the way in which James seems to present no means to exorcize the ghost or the force of haunting she carries. More specifically, Captain Diamond appears not only to have fully accepted the permanence and inevitability of his haunted situation, but also to have drawn meaning out of it. Unlike more traditional stories in which haunting is treated by its characters as a malignant affliction to be overcome, the haunting of this story—and the resulting suspended state of mourning—has become an intrinsic component of the character’s reality. The haunting is not so terrible, the old man explains to the narrator: “I am an old soldier—I am not afraid!” (47). In confronting the ghostly haunting, the Captain confronts the depths of his crime to no end. He explains to the narrator, “I once committed, unintentionally, a great crime. Now I pay the penalty. I give up my life to it. I don’t shirk it; I face it squarely, knowing perfectly what it is” (53). In his twenty years of living with haunting, the Captain has adopted a way of thinking through haunting that is not predicated on the attempt to overcome or master it. Mourning the loss of his daughter has become a life commitment; he claims, “it’s my business; it’s my avocation” (53). The excess of contemplation has led him into an extended practice of self-reflection. “He had had troubles,” Miss Deborah explains, “and they had detached him from the world, and driven him back upon himself” (46). Through this brooding, the suspended work of mourning ultimately results in an alternative approach to reality: “the penalty is terrible, but I have accepted it. I have been a philosopher” (53). The Captain’s extended engagement with haunting has produced an approach to thinking about the experience of reality—it has produced a philosophy of haunting.
The Captain’s encounter with haunting transcends the theoretical framework of rational experience to which the narrator is accustomed, and it presents a challenge to the narrator’s youthful curiosity. A student of advanced theology, the narrator is of an extremely inquisitive nature—he characterizes this period of his life as “youthful years of perplexed and excited, but also of agreeable and fruitful experiment” (38). He explains, “I have always had an eye to the back scene in the human drama” (38), identifying an inherent character trait to which he owes his intrigue for the mysteries of life which exceed common presentation and understanding. Given his natural disposition, the narrator is ripe to explore what knowledge could be contained within such a philosophy of haunting. In an early conversation, at the mere hint of “departed spirits,” the narrator becomes “irresistibly impressed” and “touched with credulity” (47). When Captain Diamond finally alludes to his mysterious philosophy, the narrator’s interest is markedly piqued: “you fill me with curiosity and with compassion” (53), he exclaims. Through the old man, the narrator seeks to obtain some form of enlightenment in his experience of reality.

It is seemingly crucial for James’s plot that the details of such a philosophy are not revealed, but merely alluded to indirectly; to disclose those details would compromise the narrator’s assumptions privileging direct experience. After the Captain mentions his foray into the supernatural, the narrator begins to pry, seeking more information. However, the old man offers no satisfactory explanation. Following a lengthy silence in which the narrator “anxiously awaited [the Captain’s] revelation” (53), the latter merely insinuates that the meaning of such a philosophy cannot be conveyed through words. In response to the narrator’s claim that his area of study is theology (that is, “a thing one can’t learn in six months” [53]), the Captain says, “I should think not, so long as you have nothing but your books” (53). Seemingly language can neither capture nor convey the experience of haunting. In an earlier conversation with the
narrator, the old man directly explains his visions of the departed spirits: “It’s not a matter of cold theory,” he contends. “I have not had to pry into old books to learn what to believe. I know! With these eyes I have beheld the departed spirit standing before me as near as you are!” (47). Behind this pointed remark is the implication that the systems of principles and knowledge, even if reinforced by the volumes of all the world’s encyclopedias, cannot compete with the type of experience to which Captain Diamond refers. Instead, the truth of this philosophy of haunting can only be experienced firsthand—notably, through vision. To further the point, he offers the narrator a proverb: “a grain of experience is worth a pound of precept” (53). With this, the Captain suggests the possibility of an experience beyond the laws of nature and beyond the limits of language.

Henceforth, the narrator conceptualizes this “diminutive old man” as the keeper of a profound and romantic secret of the sublime. However, the Captain refuses to betray any meaningful details of the mystery. Other than indicating the possible existence of an alternative vision of reality, there appears to be nothing that the old man has to offer. Having seemingly exhausted his old companion’s usefulness in the matter, the narrator instead turns his attention to the house. He impatiently awaits the next time in which the Captain will visit the haunted house to collect his ghostly rent—it is his intention to enter the house. We recall that from his earlier visits to the house, the narrator had immediately intuited something invisible and unfamiliar lodged behind the “familiar meaning” of the house’s surface—with little empirical material to support it, the narrator after a relatively quick glimpse asserts with “profound conviction” that, “The house is simply haunted!” (50). The narrator approaches the house as though its “striking look of solidity and stoutness of timber” (40) were, like the “closely drawn” rusted shutters, concealing something. The longer he studies the house, “the intenser seemed the secret that it
held” (40). On his second visit, the narrator is struck with the frustrating realization that he “could not see everything” (44). In turn, he observes, “my curiosity grew intense, but I was quite at a loss how to satisfy it” (43). In this sense, the house and the Captain both suggestively harbor meaningful secrets, yet both appear rigidly sealed and opaque in their outer surface (the house, like the old man, is “admirably solid” [41]). In the narrator’s lust for knowledge, the approach to Captain Diamond’s “philosophy” and the approach to the haunting of the house are essentially one and the same, directed along the intention to access a transcended experience of reality through an encounter with haunting; the only difference between the two is that the house, because its haunting occupies a tangible space in reality, is presumably accessible in its physical presence beyond words. The narrator observes, “the dwelling before me gave a vivid meaning to the empty words ['haunted house']” (40). Now, he hopes, on his third visit to the haunted house, he will be able to earn the old man’s permission to enter the house and experience its haunting firsthand.

When the narrator encounters Captain Diamond in his quarterly visit of the haunted house, he startles the old man with his unannounced presence. By ambushing the old man here, the narrator hopes to gain admittance to the house, to extend his field of vision and see beyond his sight. With little explanation, the narrator practically accosts the Captain with his intentions: “I am a great observer, and I had noticed this house in passing. It seemed to me to have a mystery. When you kindly confided to me that you saw spirits, I was sure that it could only be here that you saw them” (55, my emphasis). The narrator places quite an emphasis on the faculties of vision: he first expresses a debt to his own superior senses, then he announces his desire to expand them further. The narrator ultimately reveals to the old man, “I should like to
see what you see” (56, my emphasis), which merely rearticulates his desire “for a chance to see the inside” of the house (56).

The narrator’s desire to encounter haunting is voiced most expressly in the way that he privileges his sense of sight—not only in this moment in which he openly states his wish to see what the Captain sees, but throughout the story. In the chance encounter with Captain Diamond at a local cemetery early in the story, the narrator tellingly emphasizes the striking presence of the old man’s brilliant eyes. The “duskily glowing eyes” possess a certain “fixed glitter” (46) that seems to capture their capacity to penetrate the darkness of the haunted house. The Captain explains, “with these eyes I have beheld the departed spirit standing before me as near as you are!” (47), and the narrator likewise observes how they “certainly looked as if they had rested upon strange things” (47). On the subject of “the immortality of the soul” (53), the old man relates, “I have seen it with these eyes; I have touched it with these hands!” (54). James associates the eye with the hand in order to emphasize the extent to which Captain Diamond represents—to the narrator—the possibility of figuratively grasping the truth of haunting.

Early in the story, the narrator of “The Ghostly Rental” relates, “my eyes and I were on excellent terms; they were indefatigable observers of all wayside incidents, and so long as they were amused I was contented” (39). If nothing else, this short story is an inquiry into the nature of optics and our reliance on vision in order to assure ourselves of our possession of knowledge of the world. To see is to behold, and for a haunted subject, to behold the ghost is to grasp its meaning and fix its otherwise ambiguous presence. Similarly, according to Freudian psychoanalysis, the capacity to see a lost object speaks to the capacity to cling to it or grasp it in the defiant refusal to accept its loss. A mourner, especially in an extreme case, may experience a psychotic hallucination in which the lost object returns before him or her, presumably in visual
form. In specific terms, Freud turns to the term *amentia* to describe this hallucinatory wishful psychosis in the essay “The Metapsychology of Dreams” (1917). Through the mourner’s experience of amentia, the “reaction to a loss which reality affirms, but which the ego has to deny, since it finds it unsupportable” (233), the subject’s command of reality-testing is rendered inoperable, and the images presented through the hallucinatory psychosis are favored as constituents of “a better reality” (233). In this sense, the amentiatic visions are inspired by the haunting images of the lost object, and the subject’s uninhibited perception of them facilitates an illusory perceived sense of possession over that lost object. Though on the one hand, Captain Diamond’s experience of reality as such is ostensibly crippled by the ghost that for twenty years has oppressed his every thought, at the same time, because of his insight into the haunting, he possesses what the narrator presumes to be a more enlightened experience of the secrets that exceed reality. This “chance to see inside,” the narrator believes, will suspend his command of reality-testing, allow for a glimpse of the lost object, and, in turn, grant him the same sense of enlightenment in the “immortality of the soul” (53).

Levinas further illuminates James’s inquiry into the assumptions made on seeing—and touching or “grasping”—particularly in terms of possession and mastery. Levinas ultimately contends that “objectification operates in the gaze in a privileged way” (188). This has to do with the way that vision, unlike the other senses, functions in relation to light. “The eye does not see the light,” Levinas reminds us, “but the object in the light” (189). Because of this, “the light makes the thing appear by driving out the shadows; it empties space. It makes space arise specifically as a void” (189). In the way that light overcomes darkness, it assumes the power of presenting—in relative perfection—an object to the subject. Vision thus claims “the privilege of maintaining the object in this void and receiving it always from this nothingness as from an
origin” (189). Unlike our other faculties, sight thus presents not only an object, but an assurance of the stability of an object’s existence in relation to us. To focus on the image of an object is to ignore the void out of which the image originates; as Levinas argues, “vision in the light is precisely the possibility of forgetting the horror of this interminable return, this aperion [sic.], maintaining oneself before this semblance of nothingness which is the void” (190-1). In other words, human subjectivity privileges vision in the way that it presumes the stable existence of an object, which, in turn, opens and presents the possibility for grasping that object out of the void. Levinas’s interpretation illuminates our common—and unethical—employment of vision as an essential forgetting of the infinite.

In “The Ghostly Rental,” James’s narrator prescribes to this common interpretation of vision—after all, he suggests that he “came into possession of this remarkable story” only because of the “inquisitive habits” of his “very sharp pair of eyes” (39, my emphasis). As Freud and Levinas separately suggest, the character’s reliance on vision attests to his assumptions about the world—that to him, sight operates like the totalizing attempt to grasp an other out of a state of alterity in order to claim possession of, domesticate, and overcome the sense of its otherness. The narrator’s eyes, insofar as they assure him of mastery of his environment and his experience of that environment, chiefly work to satisfy his self-proclaimed “great desire for knowledge” (47). While in most veins of his life the narrator presumably finds great satisfaction to such a consuming thirst, his encounter with haunting unsettles this practice by interrupting the immediate possibility for such gratification. It is through his renovation in the treatment of haunting that James ultimately undermines the overt assumptions of the narrative and interrupts traditional expectations of vision and knowledge.
After much anticipation, the narrator is finally granted access into the haunted house; however, his first experience of haunting is a considerable letdown in that the ghost he sees appears too “familiar” for his taste. Upon entering the house, before seeing the ghost, the narrator settles into an *a priori* assumption that the ghost exists: “I had made up my mind that there was in fact a ghost” (56). This supposition is the result of the narrator’s expressed attempt to avert an encounter with anything entirely unexpected; he relates, “I had assured myself that once the mind was prepared, and the thing was not a surprise, it was possible to keep cool” (56). In a certain sense, the narrator constructs a vision of the ghostly image *before* the image itself is presented to him. When he finally does see the ghost, the narrator is struck by its relative opacity, as though there were something mortal about it; he is, in other words, struck by its familiarity. He says to himself, “I had always thought ghosts were white and transparent; this is a thing of thick shadows, densely opaque” (57). In his unexpected encounter with the familiar, the narrator finds considerable discomfort: a sense of immeasurable “Dread, with a capital latter” (57) literally paralyzes him with horror wherein “the soles of [his] shoes seemed suddenly to have been transformed into leaden weights” (58). Perhaps the narrator is struck with fright at the general presence of the ghost, though more likely, he is burdened by the ghost’s uncanny likeness to human figuration. He claims that “familiarity on the part of the haunting Presence had not entered into my calculations, and did not strike me pleasantly” (58). Because of his thorough reliance on vision as the means to reduce otherness to an order of sameness, he is disappointingly unable to encounter any degree of alterity, and no mystery is resolved. In this initial encounter, James thus dramatizes the tension between one’s attempt to grasp the otherness of haunting and the haunting’s essential ungraspability.
To extend his investigation into the ungraspable, James weaves a series of two plot twists into the conclusion of “The Ghostly Rental” that ultimately interrupt the narrator’s—and perhaps the reader’s—expectations of the nature of knowledge within the subjective experience of reality. On the narrator’s second visit to the house, this time alone, he again comes across the ghost. This time, however, as he speaks to the ghost, sharing the news that the Captain is dying, the ghostly figure “slowly unveiled its face” in order to reveal the “perfectly human face” of the old man’s daughter (63). Upon this revelation, the dread previously experienced by the narrator dissipates—his “agitation had completely vanished” (63). Whereas the first vision of the ghost was dreadful because it juxtaposed the ungraspable with the attempt to grasp it, this encounter by contrast reframes the ungraspable as never mysterious or supernatural to begin with—merely misinterpreted. In an instant, the concept of an ungraspable component of reality disappears; light is seemingly shed on the mystery, and the philosophy of haunting, now revealed to have been founded upon a misreading of the Captain’s experience of reality, is invalidated.166

Through this gesture of unveiling the ghost as an imposter, the romantic element of the story is diminished, and the short story reinforces the supremacy of world view driven by pragmatic realism. T. J. Lustig dramatizes the unveiling scene as he summarizes: the narrator “exposes and violently masters the fake apparition, ruptures the veils, contests and defeats the supernatural force which had previously been invested in old clothes” (72). In this figuration, Lustig draws attention to the ways in which James effectively demystifies the romantic elements

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166 This scene references, among other things, the final encounter with the spectral nun in *Villette* in which Lucy figuratively unveils what she perceives to be the ghost, but turns out to be nothing more than empty garments: “I tore her up—the incubus! I held her on high—the goblin! I shook her loose—the mystery! And down she fell—down all round me—down in shreds and fragments—and I trod upon her. […] The long nun proved a long bolster dressed in a long black stole, and artfully invested with a white veil. The garments in very truth, strange as it may seem, were genuine nun’s garments, and by some hand they had been disposed with a view to illusion” (440). James’s narrative, however, extends beyond this mere homage to the Gothic tradition in the way that, as will be seen momentarily, the story follows up with a second plot twist that substantially complicates such an otherwise conventional formula.
of his first (“genuine”) ghost story, “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes.” As the result of this exaggerated unveiling, the narrator “does not encounter the ethereal, ephemeral presence of a disembodied spirit but something far more fleshly and mundane” (73). Lustig—who links Diamond to Hawthorne as a seasoned veteran of the old world—finds this revelation suggests that “both Diamond and Hawthorne have been the victims of a delusion, a confidence trick; that behind the fluttering rhetorical tissue of romance and superstitious faith there is, or should be, something real and palpable, something solidly if somewhat anticlimactically substantial” (73). The romance of the ghost hunt has been diminished, and the haunting, now exposed as nothing more than a legerdemain, is essentially overcome. As the daughter discloses the intricate details of her “extraordinary game” (64), a sense of realism is firmly restored, and the narrator relaxes. The house is shown not to have been properly haunted to begin with, and there are no longer any circumstances or details which prove to be impenetrable to the narrator. The narrator again finds himself safely contained within the cold comfort of a sense of familiarity granted by his assumptions of vision. It would appear as though realism has triumphed over romanticism, and that the fantasy of haunting has been laid to rest—at least for now.

Although the tale has seemingly explained away and thus resolved all issues of the ungraspable, however, James follows up with a second plot twist that reinserts a new mystery. Moments after Captain Diamond’s daughter confesses her charade, she leaves the room, only to encounter a real ghost—that of her newly deceased father. As Lustig suggests, the narrator “has exorcised one apparition only to raise another” (73). In a flash, she becomes the victim of a profound force of haunting wherein she unexpectedly beholds the impossible: She claims that she saw him standing at the foot of the stairs, yet claims simultaneously that “it’s not he!” (64). The ghost inserts an element of the ungraspable into her experience of reality, and the result is a
crisis: she is overwhelmed. The contradiction underlying the Captain’s haunting reintroduces a
crux of questions into the narrative, questions that betray a framework of realism and in turn
demand further exploration. The Captain’s daughter and the narrator in turn agree to split up in
order to investigate the mystery separately. They plan to rejoin the following day in order to
share their respective findings. However, typical of most of James’s ghost stories, this new
mystery—unlike that of the false haunting of the daughter—inevitably remains unsolved. As
agreed upon, the narrator writes a letter to be delivered to the Captain’s daughter, revealing his
findings—namely, that the Captain indeed passed on sometime in his absence and that, in the
words of the servant Belinda, “he’s as big a ghost as any of them now” (65). The
communication of this message, however, “was not destined to be executed” (65): that night, the
house burns to the ground and, in the panic of the neighbor’s attempt to put out the fire, the
well’s lava stones, which mark the designated space to leave the message, are overturned. The
narrator’s message—much like the manuscript of the story as a whole—serves as a dead letter
insofar as its capacity to explain and make sense of its incoherent subject matter is nullified.

If not for the dramatic redirection at the end of this short story, “The Ghostly Rental”
would resemble countless other traditional tales whose narratives haughtily presume to have
overcome their hauntings, either by settling unpaid debts, righting forgotten wrongs, or exposing
that the supernatural events were in fact never supernatural to begin with. It is the opening of a
new and absolutely invisible haunting which cannot be neatly resolved or mastered that marks
James’s commitment to a significant shift away from the naïve conventional tendencies to
ultimately lay to rest—and, in turn, overcome—the ghosts of the past. In her analysis of “The
Ghostly Rental,” Martha Banta argues that while the bulk of the short story is successful in its
presentation of ghostly effects, it ultimately fails in the end “because an arbitrary demand is
made upon the reader suddenly to switch attitudes about the narrated events without previous
preparation, because the ghost is added for no good reason other than to shock” (110). For
Lustig, on the other hand, it is precisely this unexpected reinsertion of the romantic that prevents
the “unveiling” from being a simplistic “Oedipal assault on Hawthorne” (73)—that is, a charge
against the tradition of American literary Romanticism (and its treatment of ghostly subject
matter). Lustig contends, “James is seeking to clear imaginative ground for himself, to exorcise
the ghosts of his predecessors, but his tale has a properly problematized awareness of the
implications of such acts. By revising Hawthorne, James finds himself repeating him” (73).
Within this awareness lies the beginnings of James’s contributions to the Revisionism of
haunting. Most significantly, Lustig observes that from within this short story, “James discovers
that in breaking with the past he has implicated himself in that past and its patterns; in laying
ghosts he has become haunted” (74). The element of “shock” that Banta identifies marks the
unexpectedness in encountering the uncontainable prevalence of haunting, of the unfamiliar.
Initially, the return of the departed Captain (now in ghostly form), like any instance of returning,
runs the risk of resorting to the logic of déjà vu, wherein a new and yet unidentified experience is
by default presumed to preexist within the network of sameness. The essence of the shock,
however, lies in its capacity to disrupt such presumptions and to maintain an insurmountable
degree of otherness within the experience. Even if Banta’s reservations are partially justified in
James’s somewhat bulky treatment of such an unanticipated narrative disturbance, the effects of
this shock begin to shape a literary experience given definition by its jamais vu characteristics.

In “The Ghostly Rental,” as in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” haunting is the
manifestation of a force of incomprehensibility that silences and interrupts the attempt to
familiarize the unfamiliar, to reduce otherness to a state of sameness, and to grasp and master an
incoherent mystery. In both short stories, like in “Le Horla” and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the actual ghosts remain deliberately unseen by the surviving characters (Arthur Lloyd and the narrator in the two respective tales)—and, more importantly, by the reader as well. In this sense, the narrative in both cases is ultimately kept powerless in its will to reduce the unfamiliar to a comfortable level of familiarity in language, and the figurative grasp of vision is nullified. It is quite telling that the Captain’s daughter responds to seeing her father’s ghost by dropping the candle in fright. In the first sense, the narrator later remembers that it is precisely this event which is responsible for igniting the flame that will later consume the house, as though to suggest that the “demon-kindled blaze” (66) which voids the haunted house from existence is a direct result of a frightening encounter with the unfamiliar. Furthermore, as she drops the candlestick, she effectively releases her grip on the supposed mastery offered by the light. Her vision, without the candlestick, is cast to darkness—enlightenment in all accounts is rendered inoperative. The blackness into which the chamber is thrust (and the narrative’s refusal to reveal the ghost to the reader), the inability to communicate via letter, and the erasure of the house itself together impede all means to process the haunting.

Through James’s Revisionist figuration of haunting, this short story presents at its very core the inevitability of a failure to see the invisible. James’s haunting emerges as a force whose presence can ultimately be guessed at, but cannot be verified—particularly not through seeing, not through literal or figurative grasping. To return to Levinas’s terminology, the haunting which emerges at the end of “The Ghostly Rental” is precisely that which reminds the reader of the “horror of this interminable return, this aperion [sic.]” (190-1) that vision presumes to diminish. As Levinas claims, the common yet fallacious assumption made by the pretense of vision lies in its presentation of “the possibility of […] approaching objects as though at their
origin, out of nothingness” (190-1), and thus, vision suggests a “deliverance from the horror of the there is” (191) by concealing all the there is not (which lies beneath the there is). James’s Revisionist haunting, however, interrupts such a deliverance and, by the same means, reinforces the horror of the infinite. It recalls to the subject the persistence of the void from which the image of an objectification procedure originates and removes the semblance of completeness and directness from the image as it is perceived. In maintaining the invisibility of the invisible—through dead letters, gaps in narration, un-depicted ghosts, and the burning of the house—James alludes to the same essential point that Levinas articulates much later: “vision is not a transcendence” insofar as “it opens nothing that, beyond the same, would be absolutely other, that is, in itself” (191). In revealing this much, James’s tale of Revisionist haunting is fundamentally a narrative of failure. The narrator’s failure to deliver his letter to Captain Diamond’s daughter is ultimately symptomatic of the narrative’s failure to explain, resolve, or exorcise its haunting.

If it is true that “The Ghostly Rental” is essentially a narrative of failures, among them should be counted the failure of the narrator’s attempt to grasp the Captain’s experience of haunting. For most of the short story, the narrator, in the pursuit of what his old companion alludes to as the philosophy of haunting, seeks a meaningful experience in the Captain’s work of prolonged mourning. According to the operations of such a work, the lost object (the daughter) is mysteriously preserved as an external object (as a ghost) whose haunting presumes some tentative basis for her continued presence. For the Captain, who originally had direct ties to the lost object, the loss experienced is of a primary order, and as such, through the indefinitely suspended work of mourning, he attributes a great deal of meaning to the unhealing wound of that loss. However, insofar as the foundation of this work of mourning is revealed to be a
profound misinterpretation (as the haunting itself is shown to be a hoax), James discredits the depth of meaning attributed to this process; the Captain dies in solitude, and he appears to proffer no enlightenment in terms of his experience of haunting. If there is any meaning in this text, it seems to lie in the experience of another kind of haunting beneath the obvious (traditional) one, particularly as reflected in the narrator’s subjectivity. Precisely, this amounts to the narrator’s acknowledgment of pervasive invisible gap in his experience of reality.

The narrator, having never lost an object as such, is ultimately unable to experience the work of mourning as the Captain does—what he experiences instead is a general sense of privation that is not directly predicated on the loss of a particular object. While the narrator of “The Ghostly Rental” does not experience the work of mourning, it might be accurate to posit that he does experience what in some way resembles what Freud identifies as the work of melancholia. For Freud, although the experience of mourning is a “grave departure from the normal attitude of life,” it nevertheless accounts for a common response to loss (243). In fact, because generally speaking, the work of mourning will run its due course over time, “it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and to refer it to medical treatment” (243-4). What is far more troubling in psychoanalytic terms is the pathological counterpart (or extension of sorts) of mourning: the depressive malaise of melancholia. If mourning is the response to a particular loss, then melancholia might be conversely considered a general attributive characteristic. That is to say, for the psychoanalyst, the trouble with melancholia is

167 Freud suggests that the work of mourning requires only time in order to resolve itself: “in mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and that when this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object” (252). Furthermore, Freud explains that it is the narcissistic drive to live that provokes the ego to reassign its libidinal energies insofar as “each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido’s attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished” (255). Of course in the case of haunting, in which the procedure of reality-testing is interrupted, the work of mourning will be suspended and the severance in turn cannot take place.
that the manifestations of grief do not result from a discernible loss. For a subject in mourning, like Captain Diamond, there is always a clear sense of the lost object, and “there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious” (245). A melancholic conversely “cannot consciously perceive what he [or she] has lost” because the loss itself “is withdrawn from consciousness” (245)—or arguably, there was no singular, precise loss that took place to begin with. Melancholia, a loss without a lost object, is disorienting and puzzling in its expression.

In interpreting the narrator as melancholic, we can draw out the depth and nature of his narrative struggle, namely in the realization of the deficiency of his experience of reality. Provided that melancholia is the confused impression of loss without an actual loss having taken place, the fundamental difference in assumptions between the work of mourning and the work of melancholia is that the former, because it retains a conscious memory of the object it has lost, retains also the longing for that object’s return and a reversal of the loss itself. Since the work of mourning involves a natural resistance to the release of that lost object, mourning intrinsically comprises a longing to return to an original situation that has been shattered through a primary loss; like the experience of déjà vu, the lost object whose presence is psychically prolonged is the extension of what has already been seen.

The melancholic on the other hand—particularly in the case that James builds here—has no external object to associate with the impression of loss, and the inhibition which results from the subject’s malaise appears generally undirected. Freud explains that it “seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing [the patient] so entirely” (246). In order to explain the impression of loss, Freud suggests in turn that integral to the procedure of melancholia is the subject’s cannibalistic consumption of the lost object and its subsequent incorporation into the ego. The procedure of melancholia therefore functions “to establish an
identification of the ego with the abandoned object” (249, original emphasis). Initially, this inference may seem unfounded; however, the claim gains significant leverage if we consider that in the case where the abandoned object is said to have never existed (or at least never been abandoned in the first place), it might be more accurate to rephrase Freud’s conjecture into: the melancholic identifies the ego itself as though it were an abandoned object. Recasting the identification as such explains the pronounced sense of “impoverishment of [the] ego on a grand scale” (246) that Freud associates with the complex. For the melancholic, there is no sense of a return of the lost object (as there is for the mourner) because there is no originary or definite lost object to return to. Try as it may, the ego suffering from melancholia finds itself completely unable to locate the source of its malaise and impression of loss. The failure to discern the particular source of an impression of loss in turn results in a profound frustration, and the inability to grasp the lost object becomes symptomatic of a generalized inability to grasp reality as such. Freud supposes that the melancholic “has a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic,” namely in the recognition that he or she is fundamentally “petty, egoistic, dishonest, lacking in independence, [and his or her] sole aim has been to hide the weakness of his own nature” (246). Unable to grasp a mastery of his or her situation, the melancholic is dreadfully aware of the limitations of the experience of reality, and the ego is identified as an abandoned object in the sense that it is itself lost, existing in acute and irremediable isolation from the reality that surrounds it. Freud further suggests that “in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (246); in the inability to grasp reality as such through its experience, the depth of that experience in reality feels diminished. The type of melancholia that James begins to formulate in this ghost story correspondingly represents a turn outward in the recognition of a radical alterity intrinsic to
the subjective experience of reality which reveals that experience to be essentially privative and unhinged from reality as such.

Unlike the ghost of mourning, who once appeared to the narrator in disturbing familiarity, the ghost of melancholia leaves no trace but an impression of impoverishment. Freud explains that in the procedure of melancholia, “the shadow of the object [falls] upon the ego” (249), much like an absolutely invisible ghost whose haunting presence produces not a shadowy other, but a shadowy otherness as such. In other words, whereas mourning identifies a haunting by *an other* (such as a ghost), melancholia conversely identifies a haunting by *otherness as such*. In “The Ghostly Rental,” Captain Diamond—and later his daughter—experiences a generically traditional kind of haunting, the haunting produced by the nonpresence of an other in the work of mourning; the narrator, however, in his inevitable failure to grasp the Captain’s philosophy, experiences an altogether different kind of haunting, the haunting produced by radical nonpresence and otherness as such in the procedure of melancholia. If we interpret the narrator’s ultimate engagement with haunting through a Freudian depiction of melancholia (and not mourning, as is the case in more traditional tales), then the haunting in the short story is less about one’s so-called possession or grasp of a lost object than it is about one’s realization that the object was *never truly possessed or grasped to begin with*.

“The Ghostly Rental” serves as an inquiry into a new kind of haunting, one given considerable dimension when illustrated through a Freudian depiction of melancholia. It would appear that the narrator, in following Captain Diamond, inherits a susceptibility to some aspect of haunting from the old man; however, the haunting that he experiences in turn is of a radically different order. In forcing an identification with a mourning subject (that is, in identifying with the narrative of loss which belongs to another), the narrator seemingly opens his experience of
reality to the procedure of melancholia. In a certain sense, as it occurs in “The Ghostly Rental,” melancholia is born out of a subject’s identification with another’s primary loss, for when that subject reflects on that experience of loss and fails to locate its source, his or her ego begins to suffer a diminution, a profound sense of privation in the subjective experience of reality. Given the underlying melancholic character of the narrator, it is of no surprise that he ultimately remains nameless.

Underneath it all, “The Ghostly Rental” ultimately portrays a subtle character shift in the narrator as he begins to draw an awareness of his experience of melancholia, and this shift in perspective more or less amounts to a shift in approach to the work of narration—that is, to textuality. The initial approach is depicted in a relatively direct fashion, and it might be likened to the approach taken by one in mourning. In this case, one envisions the text as a form of monument—one which memorializes a lost object, figuratively recalling its presence and thus effectively mitigating its loss—or a lost series of events. Under this assumption, the text, like the psychotic production of the mourner, resists the loss through the desperate attempt to reproduce the lost object. Initially, “The Ghostly Rental” seems to be predominantly accommodating to this mode of readership, for the short story commences with the narrator’s express favoritism toward the period of his life captured within the narrative’s scope: he declares, “I have never regretted those two youthful years of perplexed and excited, but also of agreeable and fruitful experiment” (38). Through the first few paragraphs, the narrative continues to carry forth a considerably nostalgic tone, namely in its fond depiction of the “charming mixture” of the “mingled pastoral and scholastic quietude” (38) surrounding Cambridge. The narrator, narrating from a time thirty years after the narrated events, somberly notes that the area has “changed for
the worse since those days” (38). This nostalgia acknowledges that as the times have changed, the cherished landscape is no longer what it used to be; it is in a sense lost, and it becomes something to mourn. Presumably, through the presentation of the narrative text, the reader is capable of grasping the narrated reality through mastering a renewed experience of it. Just as the narrator discovers through Captain Diamond’s story that violence wrought by “foul and damnable words” (154) is capable of sending one to the grave, his narrative exercise seems to inquire whether language might also have the power to reconstruct what has been shattered. This is precisely the mode of readership adopted by the narrator for much of the short story insofar as he approaches the Captain’s narrative with the express attempt to master the old man’s mysterious philosophy of haunting—that is, to see what the old man sees. An approach to narrative under this pretense ultimately entails the attempt to prolong the existence of the lost object.

Beyond this first approach to textuality, James portrays a second one, one which can be likened to an approach taken by the melancholic. In this case, the reader envisions the text as a radical dislocation of the lost object. Whereas Freud sees melancholia as a troubling pathological disorder, our interpretation of it via James’s ghost story configures it more appropriately as a fundamental component of the human subjective experience of being. The reader, who inherits the work of mourning from the text in a process almost identical to Freud’s

168 Furthermore, it is worth noting a certain degree of nostalgia in the treatment of Captain Diamond, who reminds the narrator “of the portraits of Andrew Jackson” (42-3). Martin and Ober argue that the passing resemblance of the old man who speaks with ghosts and Andrew Jackson is not insignificant. To them, the haunting corresponds to a “‘bitter-sweet’ tone [which] corresponds to the somewhat ambivalent relations with America that the story reflects” (9), and the image of Andrew Jackson, a “martial bearing, rugged features, an appearance of stoicism and endurance” of the old America (2). To the authors, the ultimate death of the Captain and the destruction of the haunted house together point to “James’s ambivalent feeling toward America” (8), as though the Captain were to invoke a profound sense of mourning. Lustig separately identifies within this short story a nostalgia for the old literary Americanism symbolized by Hawthorne. From the association made in the short story between Diamond and a Hoffman character, Lustig in turn observes, “it is only a short step—phonetically and generically—from Hoffmann to Hawthorne and there is an important sense in which ‘The Ghostly Rental’ sets out to assess the nature of Hawthorne’s captaincy, his ownership of the house of romance, the status of his ghosts and the validity of his fears” (71).
notion of secondary identification, undergoes a narrative experience which is markedly unhinged from the narrated reality. At the climax of the tale, the narrator reaches an epiphany where he realizes the folly of his pursuit for knowledge, which would suggest an awareness of the essentially privative nature of his haunted situation. Following the appearance of Captain Diamond’s ghost, the daughter exclaims that the ghost is “the punishment of my long folly!” (64); conversely, the narrator, who has henceforth been a mere voyeur in the haunted intercourse between father and daughter, adds in turn, “it’s the punishment of my indiscretion—of my violence!” (64). Here, James forms an association between the narrator’s indiscretion and violence, as though the two were naturally synonymous. Pericles Lewis suggests that the fire that consumes the house is the ultimate violent consequence of the narrator’s attempts at grasping: he claims “the narrator’s attempts to throw light on what should have remained hidden generate a destructive heat” (45). The lesson learned in the moment of epiphany suggests a revised approach to textuality that regards the narrative, like the melancholic’s ego, as divested of its capacity to adequately present its own reality.169

The short story’s commitment to an approach to textuality that corresponds to the procedure of melancholia becomes clearest in the closing paragraphs which fail to effect a sense of closure. In the final scene, the narrator arrives at “the familiar crossroad,” folded letter in hand, only to find that “the haunted house was a mass of charred beams and smouldering ashes” (66). In the chaos of the fire, the lava stone, designated as the place under which to leave a written letter, has been “completely displaced” (66). The means for communication and for discovering any meaning of the event is completely foreclosed. From all that the reader can tell,

169 One wonders the extent to which the narrator’s epiphany has impacted his general approach to his experience of reality. From the opening lines of the short story, we learn that the narrator, at the time of the tale’s narration, has freshly chosen a career in theology. A line later, however, we learn that he “afterward renounced it, in truth, with equal ardor” (38), presumably following the events of the tale. Within this small detail, the reader may discern a causal link between narrative events (namely in the narrator’s encounter with haunting) and the abrupt redirection of career.
the narrator never encounters the Captain’s daughter again, and their failure to communicate remains absolute. In addition, the narrator (at the time of narration) decides to omit any qualifying remarks at the end of the story, so typical of James’s technique, which perhaps testifies to the lessons he has learned through either his engagement with haunting or his reflection on this engagement (through the work of narration)—that is, that the work of narrative cannot produce an unquestionable coherence out of incoherence. Subtle as it may be, the short story alludes not only to the incompleteness of narrative presentation, but furthermore to the destructive nature at the heart of the obsessive pursuit to of knowledge. The mode of readership ultimately suggested by the short story presumes a certain level of distance and unknowability with regard to the narrated reality, as though that narrated reality were to be understood not as a direct and complete reflection of an original (lost) reality, but rather as an enunciation of its very lostness. In any case, the depth of such exercises is given only preliminary substance in this short story, though it is substantially developed in James’s next ghost story, “Sir Edmund Orme.”

“Sir Edmund Orme”

“The Ghostly Rental” did much to establish the framework of James’s contribution to the Revisionist ghost story. The tale emphasizes the inadequacies of vision and knowledge (by exposing one’s experience of reality as indirect and incomplete) next to the infinitely invisible. This foundation seemed to serve as an adequate metaphor to capture James’s concerns with otherness, for following the publication of the story in 1876, James took an extended break from

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170 Of James’s ghost stories in general, Pericles Lewis observes, “The most successful protagonists are those who do their best to live on good terms with their ghosts and avoid inquiring too deeply into their worldly or supernatural origins” (35).
writing ghost stories. It was not until fifteen years later that he returned to the genre with “Sir Edmund Orme” (1891). Arthur Brown suggests that this ghost story in particular “seems to mark the beginning of James’ command of the form; it seems strikingly sure of its tone” (60). The dynamics of haunting in this ghost story shift considerably from James’s previous attempts at the genre, and while some changes appear on the surface to conform with its conventions, others continue to extend the reach of James’s developing Revisionism. Whereas the traditional ghost story exposes certain cultural concerns in terms of the impulse to comprehend reality, James presents haunting as a force of incomprehensibility that cannot be exorcized, reduced, or overcome. In its inevitable presence, however, he also explores a strategy of coming to terms with this force and looking beyond the visible.

The short story begins with a developing friendship between a young, unnamed male narrator and the matronly widow Mrs. Marden. The narrator first finds himself irresistibly drawn toward Mrs. Marden (intellectually), and then toward her attractive daughter, Charlotte (romantically). However, as his feelings for the younger woman begin to intensify, he gradually becomes aware that she is unknowingly haunted by a ghostly figure. It soon becomes clear that only the narrator and Mrs. Marden can see the ghost, and this shared vision then forms the basis for their “strange communion” (83). One evening, Mrs. Marden confesses to the narrator that even though the ghost hovers about Charlotte, it is she, the mother, who is responsible for the haunting. Once long ago, Mrs. Marden explains, she led on a suitor named Edmund Orme, despite having no genuine feelings for him—according to callous whim, she discarded Orme in favor of another, Major Marden (the man she eventually married, though for only five short

Lustig observes that, despite not writing physical manifestations of the supernatural into his tales for nearly a decade and a half, James nevertheless “continued to rely on the ghostly as a root metaphor whether he was extending or restricting the experience of his protagonists, collaborating with or competing against them. If literal ghosts vanished, they almost immediately began to reappear as figures of speech, states and stages of subjective experience” (74).
years until his untimely death left her a widow). The young Mrs. Marden deceived Orme and nonchalantly “threw him over” (85) just before their planned wedding; the deception and the rejection were together too much for the jilted young man, and he swallowed some poison and died an agonizing death—only to return to haunt the woman who wronged him. The ghost of Orme is motivated, Mrs. Marden surmises, by the singular intention “to make me suffer [...] for what I did to him” (84-5), and he is thus what Martha Banta calls “a ‘revenge ghost’ in the high old style” (112). Mrs. Marden, who once committed a “breach of faith” in a “heartless act” (87), is generally guilty of disingenuousness, of a false love, of a failure to respect and nurture another. Once this context of haunting is established, the remainder of the narrative is directed by the various attempts to lay the ghost to rest; Mrs. Marden’s suffering finds eventual relief from her punishment, and Charlotte does not repeat her mother’s mistake and become haunted herself.

On the surface, the literary haunting in “Sir Edmund Orme” is very traditional in the way that it follows the conventional formula: the ghost’s presence fundamentally recalls a particular unresolved and forgotten crime of the past. By the end of the story, it would appear as though the characters successfully exorcise the ghost, as the last line of the story simply states: “that was mercifully the last of Sir Edmund Orme” (91). While the overt theater of haunting is seemingly very direct and complete, what is most intriguing about this short story, however, is the way that this one primary instance of haunting cleverly conceals beneath it a far more profound secondary instance. Whereas the ghost’s direct relationship with Mrs. Marden is certainly the most explicit case of haunting in the story, it will be seen that alternatively, the ghost’s complex and ambiguous relationship with Charlotte produces a qualitatively different model for haunting, a model whose characteristics are highly expressive of the newly emergent Revionist ghost
literature. In this tale, as in “The Ghostly Rental,” James’s contribution to Revisionist ghost literature initially works from of a traditional foundation wherein a particular character is haunted by a force that reflects an extended work of mourning. As that character is effectively displaced, however, the narrative makes space for and establishes a radically different experience of haunting—one characterized by the psychological procedure of melancholia. When rereading “Sir Edmund Orme” attuned to this alternative model for haunting, the supposed success achieved by the narrator’s and Mrs. Marden’s traditional approach to haunting becomes questionable. As James places these two vastly distinct instances of haunting in dialogue with one another, he not only addresses the various shortcomings in applying the traditional figuration of literary haunting to one’s theoretical approach to the experience of reality, but he furthermore begins to posit the merit of an altogether alternative model for such a theoretical approach, a model in which affirms the depth of an absolutely invisible force intrinsic to human experience. It is precisely in this way that “Sir Edmund Orme” attests to James’s capacity to reconceptualize the genre beyond its traditional treatment and use the work of narrative to expose a trace of the incomprehensible.

Once again, we can essentially conceptualize the distinction between the traditional and Revisionist models of haunting in the short story through the corresponding distinction between the experiences of mourning and of melancholia, though the distinction is deepened here and its implications more thoroughly explored. If the significance of this project hinges on this critical differentiation, then it is worth the time to extend our understanding of these two psychoanalytic procedures, especially as they relate to figurations of haunting. In particular, the distinction is given sharper definition through a consideration of the theoretical lens provided by revisionist psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török. At times individually and at times
collaboratively, Abraham and Török devote a great deal of attention to the works of mourning and melancholia, and their contributions ultimately extend the complexity and significance of melancholia, particularly as it is expressed in “Sir Edmund Orme,” as well as reinforcing and complementing the model of an ethical engagement of radical alterity proposed by Levinas. Throughout their collective work, Abraham and Török persistently rely on the figuration of haunting in order to properly express their psychoanalytic models, and an application of some of their theories to the short story will provide the basis for teasing out and subsequently interpreting James’s alternative model of haunting (as predicated on the experience of melancholia). Such a study first will reveal to us the shortcomings of the traditional approach to haunting and therein explain its inevitable failure. Even more significantly, however, their contribution will reveal a meaningful approach to haunted subjectivity that involves a shift in assumption from transparency to opacity, particular with regard the capacity of language and narrative to present reality.

In order to comprehend to its full depth the distinction between the processes of mourning and melancholia, we must explore the correlative distinction made by Abraham and Török, following Ferenczi, between introjection and incorporation. Insofar as these procedures function as unconscious psychological responses to an impression of loss, they extend the analysis of our subjective processing mechanisms. In their most extensive essay on the subject, “Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation” (1972), Abraham and Török begin the work of defining the terms against one another. At its start, the essay establishes a foundation for the subject’s response to an experience of loss. The experience of loss (or

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172 For Abraham, psychoanalysis is less a clinical practice than a theoretical model for the approach to one’s experience of reality, particularly regarding one’s approach to otherness. In the introduction to the collection The Shell and the Kernel, Volume 1, Nicholas Rand, Abraham’s nephew and translator of most of his works, argues that Abraham is noted for his attempts to “transform Freudian psychoanalysis into an investigative and interpretive theory of being” (5).
privation in general) is a fundamental and inevitable component human life, and as subjects, our most primal response to loss is driven by the procedure of introjection. Introjection is the component of the work of mourning which is responsible for diminishing the experience of loss (and compensating for the abruptness of that loss) by psychically reconstructing a substitution of sorts for the lost object, producing the impression that the lost object is indeed restored.

Abraham and Török suggest that introjection, in the way that it effectively fills a perceived emptiness, figuratively reconstructing the lost object in some creative fashion, is broadly defined as “the process of broadening the ego” (127). Furthermore, introjection effectively suspends the work of mourning insofar as its sole purpose is to prolong the subject’s attachment to the lost object and forestall the redirection of libidinal energy away from that object. Through this procedure, the impression of a loss is diminished, and while the other’s presence is artificially maintained, it is reduced to familiar terms on an order of sameness and otherness as such is essentially disregarded.

If we recall, Freud suggests that through the typical work of mourning, the lost object is “psychically prolonged” (245) only because the subject, unwilling to acknowledge the loss for some length of time, undergoes “a clinging to the object” (244). In the case of literary haunting, it often occurs that the psychically-produced lost object appears to cling to the subject more than the reverse, but the underlying premise is unchanged: by virtue of its supernatural properties, the lost object persists through its loss. Properly speaking, however, in the case of both psychology and ghost literature, the lost object does not exactly “persist”—rather, it is reconstructed. In both cases, there occurs an introjective process of doubling which produces a psychic or supernatural object as the subjective copy of the original lost object, abstracted from its existence in reality. Accordingly, introjection is a process of metaphorization—that is, it produces a metaphor to take
the place of an original object. Generally speaking, the traditional figuration of literary haunting mimics the internal psychic procedure of introjection. As the psychoanalytic terms are then translated into supernatural terms, the internal cognitive operations are projected onto the broader field of the fictional characters’ lived experience—in a traditional model, the process of introjection takes the form of haunting, and the metaphor it produces (the figurative reconstruction of a lost object) takes the form of a ghost.

In “Sir Edmund Orme,” the ghost of Orme, who appears dressed “in complete mourning” (78), is the most explicit illustration of a reconstruction of a lost object, produced through a haunting which resembles the procedure of introjection. Through haunting, the work of mourning is extended insofar as Orme’s loss (that is, his death) is mitigated through the presentation of his ghost: through the force of haunting, the deceased human persists through his death. The ghost of Orme functions as a haunting monument that archives historical events and prevents the erasure of their memory in the present: his frequent visitations interrupt Mrs. Marden’s capacity to forget. In these terms, this form of ghostly haunting, guided by an extension of the work of mourning, contributes to the tale’s general preoccupation with the possibility of reconstructing the past that manifests throughout the text in various ways. In fact, this principle narrative concern is established as early as the short story’s prelude through the conspicuous presentation of not only the various “letters, memoranda, accounts, faded photographs, [and] cards of invitation” (67), but also with what is arguably the text’s most significant memorial, the found manuscript itself. The prominent display of such artifacts reflects a thematic compulsion to reconstruct the past. In addition to the prelude, the narrative proper also presents historical monuments, particularly in association with Mrs. Marden. It is no surprise that Mrs. Marden—for whom, by virtue of being so persistently haunted, the past is so
present—decorates her home with a range of nostalgic trinkets. The widow finds an attachment to the past through the “pious memories” retained in the multitude of “portraits and tokens and trophies” (68) kept throughout the house. These objects serve as metaphors of the past that extend the work of mourning as they facilitate the psychic reconstruction of the past they metaphorize. In the context of describing these objects, the narrator observes in Mrs. Marden a “a dim wistfulness, a longing for security” (68), as though to suggest that she is figuratively haunted by the past before revealing that she is literally haunted by a ghost. Like memory, like an invisible stain or residue left on the unconscious mind, traditional haunting figuratively reconstructs a lost object through supernatural means, and with that reconstruction is the deceptive supposition that that lost object may be once again grasped and possessed. Such haunting therein responds to a primal nostalgia which wishes to reattain what has been lost.

In general terms, the work of mourning is painful in the way that it reminds the subject of a devastating loss, and similarly, the force of haunting is markedly disruptive, destabilizing, and terrifying—Mrs. Marden refers to her experience with haunting as a curse (74). Despite the negative implications of such processes of figurative reconstruction overall, there nevertheless remains within them the essential capacity to broaden the ego. In presenting a metaphor of the lost object, these correlative processes extend the subject’s opportunity to reflect upon the loss and perhaps make some sense out of it—within the figurative reconstruction of a lost past there lies a second chance of sorts. In “Sir Edmund Orme,” the ghost’s return marks the return of Mrs.

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173 It is immediately evident that Mrs. Marden is indeed pursued by the past—initially, it appears as though it is the memory of her husband that haunts her, as she confides to the narrator that with all of the memorials to him, her home is “a place in which she felt herself still under the protection of his goodness” (68). As the narrative carries on, however, it becomes clear that the unfortunate widow is surprisingly rarely preoccupied with memories of her deceased husband, but rather with those of that one former suitor whose tragic rejection resulted in suicide. Precisely, when Mrs. Marden claims that she carries a punishment through life (69), she is alluding to Orme’s haunting, whose figurative reconstruction reflects a forcefully intrusive memory.

174 At one point, the narrator observes that in Mrs. Marden’s years of exposure to the ghost, she “had broken down under it. Her nerve was gone […]. She had got used to breaking down” (80-1).
Marden’s youth, and therefore the haunting within the story serves as a metaphor for a shameful and forgotten past event, newly projected onto the unfolding drama between Charlotte and the narrator. This reconstructed situation metaphorizes an original event that by virtue of the extensive trauma and shame associated with it, has been conceptually “lost” insofar as it cannot be properly understood and perhaps has no meaning. Through this figurative reconstruction, Mrs. Marden finds the opportunity to readdress and potentially resolve the past that haunts her so.

If the situation is to be resolved then the injustice that underlies the haunting must be readdressed—and if the original crime is rooted in a deplorable instance of infidelity, then one method of correction might be achieved through an allegiance to truthfulness and the purity of love. As Charlotte blossoms into womanhood, her flirtatious disposition presents the possibility that she will repeat her mother’s transgressions. As reason would have it, the only way to terminate the ghost’s lasting effects—and, in the same gesture, rescue Charlotte from a lifetime of intolerable suffering—is to redirect Charlotte away from developing patterns of coquetry. In this figurative reconstruction, Mrs. Marden must therefore prevent her daughter from making the same fatal mistake of amorous infidelity of which she herself was guilty, and in this sense, not only will Charlotte be saved, but by the same token, so will Mrs. Marden. In other words, if Mrs. Marden succeeds in reforming Charlotte’s wayward dispositions, she will exorcize the ghost and resolve the haunting—and the possibility for such an outcome thus lies within the extent to which Charlotte’s love for the narrator is pure. “I believe it will all pass.”

175 After all, in Mrs. Marden’s case, it would appear that her own loyal attachment to her eventual husband, Major Marden—the gentleman for whom she left Orme and for whom she confides her love was genuine—had sufficed to keep the ghost from surfacing her unspeakable crimes: during her marriage, though it lasted only five years, she was “happy, perfectly happy,” and “time obliterate[d]” her secret (85).
Mrs. Marden confides to the narrator, “if she only loves you” (84). Insofar as the haunting in the short story figuratively produces a narrative of sorts that metaphorizes the past and thereby reconstructs certain circumstances from the unspeakable past, it offers the mourning Mrs. Marden the illusory presence of a lost past.

At this point, it is crucial to note that the loving relationship Mrs. Marden envisions between the narrator and her daughter is absolutely tied to haunting—tied, that is, to the fact that he can see the ghost where no other suitors can. The narrator’s remarkable vision seemingly attests to his privilege and enlightenment. On the subject of his ability to see the ghost, he claims, “There’s no doubt that I was much uplifted. I couldn’t get over the distinction conferred on me, the exception—in the way of mystic enlargement of vision—made in my favour” (80).

Mrs. Marden similarly interprets the “mystic enlargement of vision” as inevitably linked to his capacity to love insofar as it proves his virtue and testifies to the purity of his desire. She exclaims to him, “I knew you would [see the ghost], from the moment you should be really in love with her! I knew it would be the test—what do I mean?—the proof” (76). From this, because all of her daughter’s other suitors cannot see the ghost, they are therefore, as she tells the narrator, “not in love with her as you are” (84). Martha Banta, in her reading of the story, further suggests that the narrator is able to take part in the ghost hunt only so that he may resolve it; Orme appears to the narrator “because he loves with a love that seeks to give, not merely to possess. His ability to see is the proof of the quality of his love” (112). Banta, like Mrs. Marden, assumes that merely because the narrator can see the ghost, his love reflects purity of desire, which Levinas characterizes as “a desire without satisfaction which, precisely,
understands the remoteness, the alterity, and the exteriority of the other” (TI 34, original emphasis). Banta and Mrs. Marden alike associate the narrator’s approach to haunting (guided by the efficacy of the grasp of vision) with the authenticity of his love. According to their reasoning, if he can take part in the metaphorization which produces the haunting, if his sense are adept enough to make invisible visible, then his character is of a virtuous nature, and his love will exorcise the haunting which plagues Mrs. Marden: he reflects early in the narrative, “It appeared in the event that I had some healing power” (69). The narrator in turn thinks himself capable of fully understanding the object of his desire, which ostensibly attests to his capacity to correct the situation.

On a closer examination, the “mystic enlargement of vision,” which principally establishes the narrator’s supposed virtue, is thoroughly guided by the principles of introjection, and its totalizing grasp exposes its unethical foundations. Though the narrator’s first impression of the ghost of Orme is marked by a relative formidability (the ghost’s “presence acted as a strong appeal, almost as an oppression” [77]), as the story progresses, the narrator grows increasingly intrigued and confident. Initially, the narrator’s interest appears to stem from a relatively innocent exploration of otherness as such. Expressing his curiosity in the matter, he confesses to Mrs. Marden, “I’m very glad to be in anything so extraordinary” (79)—he is quite thrilled to be included in a mystery as profound as ghostly haunting; the ghost is “a splendid presence,” he cries (79). In one encounter with the ghost, as the narrator meditates on the ghost’s ambiguous and mysterious “splendid presence,” he confesses to its unfamiliarity: “of what odd essence he was made I know not; I’ve no theory about him” (86). The ghost’s otherness presents a gap—the “essence” implies an impoverishment of presence that amounts to a figurative loss in the defined presence of another. The narrator’s desire, which originates within this perceived
loss, immediately takes the form of a search: he excitedly proclaims, “I opened myself wide to
the impression,” and “I was on the lookout for it as a pilot for the flash of a revolving light” (80).
In terms of haunting, this desire is perhaps best expressed in the narrator’s remark “I should in all
likelihood see it familiarly” (80). The narrator’s desire therefore emerges not out of respect for
the remoteness and unfamiliarity of the ghost, but instead out of an intention to domesticate and
familiarize its haunting—that is, to grasp it. In response to this impression of loss, the narrator
aspires to literally grasp the ghost: in one encounter with Orme, he considers “practicing an
experiment, with him, of touching him, for instance” (86). Firstly, such a literal grasp would
affirm the ghost’s materiality and essentially reconstruct his presence. This approach,
determined to produce a definite presence from an indefinite presence, strikingly reflects the
procedure of introjection. Secondly, this literal grasp would also assert mastery over the ghost in
the very attempt to claim possession over it. The desire to touch the ghost is complemented by a
corresponding desire to speak to it—that is, to take the liberty “of addressing him, since he set
the example of silence” (86). Again, the narrator identifies a lack: in this case, the silence
presents a lack of sound and language, a gap which only words could fill.

In one sense, the narrator aspires to literally grasp the ghost and reconstruct a presence
from its ambiguous “essence.” However, this desire generally reflects another sense in which the
narrator aspires to figuratively grasp the ghost—that is, to understand its mysterious haunting.
The narrator claims, “I want to understand what I see” and “I want to know more about it” (79).
Establishing coherency amounts to knowing, which in turn ultimately amounts to producing a
“theory about him” where there otherwise is none. Levinas provides depth to such an impression
of knowledge in the way that he associates it with a grasp. Provided that knowledge operates in
the reduction of reality to a concept, “to know amounts to grasping being out of nothing or
reducing it to nothing, removing from it its alterity” (TI 44). In the effort to give figural shape to presence, this grasp essentially identifies a principle of organization that is concerned first and foremost with an impression of what Levinas terms “the coherence of concepts” (TI 72-3).

Standing on the lookout for the ghost, the narrator reflects on his purpose. He is eager to reduce the ghostly incoherency into coherent concept, essentially defining the presence of the ghost’s essence in order to demystify the mystery of haunting. Quite tellingly, the narrator asserts that he is “ready to generalise on the sinister subject” (80). This introjective figural reconstruction is essentially conceptual, though it manifests in linguistic terms as well. There is a point in the story when, truly reflecting on the ghostly presence for the first time, the narrator exclaims aloud, “The place is haunted, haunted!” (79, original emphasis). The italics emphasize that the word anticipates the narrator’s subsequent reflection: “I exulted in the word as if it stood for all I had ever dreamt of” (79). The word takes the form of a conceptual container capable of totalizing (or generalizing) an infinite term. In another contemplative moment, the narrator furthermore reflects, “I very soon came to attach an idea of beauty to his unrecognised presence, the beauty of an old story, of love and pain and death” (87). As already determined, the narrator’s approach to haunting is determined by a figural reconstruction which resembles the procedure of introjection; it is crucial to observe that this traditional approach conceives of ghostly haunting in terms of not only a single word, but in terms of an entire story. In these terms, the work of narrative itself reflects the totalizing grasp toward coherency.

The narrator, ostensibly playing the role of an archetypical protagonist from a traditional ghost story, stakes his narrative claim on the assumption that the unknown can be brought to light and adequately integrated into the status of familiar. As his approach to haunting suggests, the process of figural reconstruction, which attempts to produce a coherence of concepts,
occurs not only in psychic or supernatural terms (through memories and psychoses or through ghosts, respectively), but also in the work of narrative, in language. In fact Abraham and Török argue that introjection, the most primal response to object loss, is observable as early as infancy—and even in its earliest stages, it fundamentally reflects the work of language. They claim that “the initial stages of introjection emerge in infancy when the mouth’s emptiness is experienced alongside the mother’s simultaneous presence. The emptiness is first experienced in the form of cries and sobs, delayed fullness, then as calling, ways of requesting presence, as language” (127). Eventually, as we mature into adults, the “empty mouth” serves as a symbolic link to formalize “the transition from a mouth filled with the breast to a mouth filled with words” (127). According to such an analysis, our traditional assumptions of language are determined by a primal lack that is accounted for by the privative nature of a subject who, despite being able to perceive reality as such, does not properly possess it. In turn, through the premise underlying the procedure of introjection (figurative reconstruction), language presents a metaphor whose substance seemingly restores substance to that lack—it seemingly grasps reality and presents it to the subject. Abraham and Török contend that, “Since language acts and makes up for absence by representing, by giving figurative shape to presence, it can only be comprehended or shared in a ‘community of empty mouths’” (128). When understood as the introjective means to fill a lack, language as such acknowledges and claims to resolve a fundamental deficiency in the experience of reality.

Generally speaking, within a given traditional ghost story, the force of haunting tends to reenact certain forgotten events as though the present served as a screen onto which a narrative reconstruction of the lost past could be projected. In this sense, the characters’ haunted field of vision figuratively operates as a reconstructed narrative of the past, and this figurative narrative,
like the operations of both introjection and haunting, presents anew an unspeakable event in order to make sense of it. One might extend this understanding of narrative scope not only in terms of the characters’ experience of reality, but in extra-diegetic terms as well, where the text itself operates by similar principles. It is possible to read “Sir Edmund Orme”—or, for that matter, any text—as a text dedicated to producing coherence out of an essential incoherence. The impulse to speak the unspeakable reflects the narrator’s outward approach to Mrs. Marden and her situation—that is, through his attempts at “making her name the unnameable (75). If this were the case, the text itself, on a metafictive level, would take place only in order that its supernatural material can be familiarized and in turn exorcized—or, alternatively, in order that the lost past can return to grasp in some degree of coherence. In his analysis of the short story, Arthur Brown argues that the found manuscript which makes up the story proper comprises its author’s attempt, following the death of his wife (whom the reader can only assume to be Charlotte), to reconstruct his dearly departed bride. In fact, Brown asserts that through the very reconstructive forces inherent to narrative as such, Charlotte is just as much a ghost as Orme is—that is, figuratively speaking. According to this claim, Charlotte, as presented in the narrative, reflects the supernatural reconstruction produced by the force of haunting as well as the psychic reconstruction produced by the introjection underlying an extension of the work of mourning. Brown follows a similar line of reason in suggesting that Charlotte “continues to exist as the object of desire—a fact that her death and subsequent appearance in letters reaffirm” (69). Desperate to re-attain his lost object, the narrator embraces the effects of haunting and introjection in the figurative reconstruction of his lost beloved. Finally, by the same token, we might imagine that the text’s composition (as a figurative reconstruction of some unspeakable secret) is determined by James’s desperate need to re-attain some lost truth.
In its full scope, the traditional model of literary haunting is characterized according to its capacity to figuratively reconstruct a lost object—and its processes are given definition through its correlation to the work of narrative and to the procedure of introjection in mourning. Whether produced through the procedure of introjection, haunting, or narrative, the figurative reconstruction of a lost object provides the subject with an opportunity to cling to the metaphor of that object and thereby deny its loss. The pursuit of this opportunity outwardly appears if not commendable, then at least understandable, as the reader inevitably sympathizes with the character’s loss. On a closer look, however, this introjective reconstruction is quite problematic, and its deeper effects are more psychically and socially complex. Arthur Brown concludes his analysis of the short story by contending that the narrator’s attempt to tell Charlotte’s story (to narrate her) amounts to the reduction of her existence in reality into a crude characterization of her. Without saying so much, Brown argues that the manuscript itself emerges precisely as a result of the procedure of introjection—that is to say that for the author in mourning, the manuscript serves as an exercise in the psychic reconstruction of a lost object. By consequence of this reconstruction, Brown argues, the reconstructed copy of the lost object is overemphasized at the same time the original lost object as it existed in reality is deemphasized. Brown accordingly claims, “The acts of writing and reading perpetuate a desiring subject that denies real being—the person referred to in writing becomes ‘Charlotte,’ the narrator’s self becomes ‘I,’ and the reader becomes a ghost” (70). Brown’s observation reflects what overtly appears to be the narrator’s project. As Charlotte is metaphorized, her subjective identity in reality is radically displaced by the metaphor itself—and this could be said of the entire fictional reality of the story, of any object of the process of metaphorization. The work of narrative becomes ethically ambiguous following its various attempts to grasp its object out of being, to figuratively put the
quotes around its name (following Brown’s suggestion), and ultimately to claim it as a possession. In other words, such a traditional approach to textuality is subject to the same criticism Levinas ascribes to any totalizing force, figured as a grasping hand:

The hand comprehends the thing not because it touches it on all sides at the same time (it does not touch it throughout), but because it is no longer a sense-organ, pure enjoyment, pure sensibility, but is mastery, domination, disposition—which do not belong to the order of sensibility. An organ for taking, for acquisition, it gathers the fruit but holds it far from the lips, keeps it, puts it in reserve, possesses it in a home. (161)

To claim possession is to disrespect not only the other, but otherness as such. Levinas makes clear the inherent violence of this procedure when he suggests, “The power of the hand that grasps or tears up or crushes or kneads relates the element, not to an infinity by relation to which the thing would be defined, but to an end in the sense of a goal, to the goal of need” (160). The point is clear: the destructive impetus of the grasp has grave implications which emerge in the metaphorization at the center of introjection, the traditional figuration of haunting, as well as the traditional approach to narrative. Levinas further adds that language is fundamentally unethical any time that it “consist[s] in suppressing the other, in making the other agree with the same” (73). Generally speaking, this suppression underlies the reduction of an object to its image, of presence to its representation, of an event to its narrative, and of reality as such to its mere experience.

Given that the narrator’s approach to love is determined by his approach to haunting and that his approach to haunting is, in Levinasian terms, unethical, it is of no surprise to us that his desire for Charlotte ultimately proves to be neither genuine, authentic, nor pure. In the first place, a close reading of the story actually reveals that the narrator’s interest in Charlotte is considerably lacking. Generally speaking, when Orme appears, the narrator’s attention—as well as the attention of the narrative’s extensive description—becomes entirely consumed by the
ghost. One day at the Marden estate, the narrator observes that due to various circumstances, he has not had the opportunity of spending time with Charlotte; in a brief moment of reflection that betrays his possessiveness, he states that he regrets “not having Charlotte to myself” (80, my emphasis). This regret immediately dissipates, however: “I was too much taken up with another interest to care” (80). That interest, of course, is the possibility that his ghostly companion may reappear at any moment. In another conversation between Charlotte and the narrator, Orme appears, and the narrator instantly neglects Charlotte. Rather than answer her questions, he studies the ghost’s presence and his reactions. Charlotte notices and in turn addresses the narrator’s inattentiveness as she mockingly exclaims, “You haven’t got your wits about you—you shan’t have my hand” (78). Charlotte’s refusal to give her hand in particular reflects her resistance to being grasped or comprehended—she is not an object to be possessed. In this situation, the narrator’s marked preoccupation with the ghost interferes with and compromises his relationship with Charlotte. Diane Long Hoeveler goes so far as to claim that throughout the short story, the narrator never holds any degree of meaningful love for Charlotte; rather, the entirety of the narrator’s desire is instead directed toward the ghost only. She argues that “the tale is not concerned with the heterosexual romance of Charlotte and the narrator; it is focused much more clearly on the ghost of Edmund and his motivations for appearing, not just to the mother and daughter but to the young and handsome male narrator” (124). She contends that the narrator is driven by a fascination with the forbidden desire of a supernatural being that is at once “absent, unavailable, untouchable” (126). In addition to this, Arthur Brown concludes that the narrator’s love for Charlotte “is equivocal to the extent that it is confounded with the desire for thrilling effects or sensations” (66). Again, it is obvious to these critics that the narrator’s desire

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177 Though Hoeveler is primarily concerned with a latent homosexuality represented in this ghost story, the point worthy of our attention is more fundamentally that the narrator’s desire for the ghost—whatever motivates it—is far more profound than his trivial interest in Charlotte.
is less than an authentic display of true love. Associating the narrator’s approach to love with his approach to haunting, Brown adds that, “what Mrs. Marden and the narrator call love seems but the pretense on which the ghost and the ghost story form themselves” (66). When Mrs. Marden explains to the narrator that the other suitors cannot see the ghost simply because “they’re not in love with her as you are” (84), she proposes a seemingly straightforward and obvious causality: the narrator fundamentally desires Charlotte and therefore must submit to attending to the ghost. According to our analysis, however, we might instead infer the inverse: that the narrator fundamentally desires the ghost (and what he represents to the narrator) and therefore must submit to attending to Charlotte. What all of these observations ultimately amount to is the obvious fact that Mrs. Marden has misinterpreted the legitimacy of the narrator’s love for her daughter—and this misinterpretation stems from the misguided assumption that the narrator’s virtue could be established purely from the expanse of his vision. Accordingly, we can conclude from the story’s outcome that the ethics of desire is not predicated on optics.

Not only does the narrator’s distraction by the ghost diminish the authenticity of his love for Charlotte, but in addition, his approach to loving her, to the limited extent that such a love does appear, is seemingly modeled after his approach to haunting. In fact, as we discover how the narrator’s desire includes a possessive grasp, it becomes evident that Charlotte’s concerns about being controlled are entirely founded. In the very first scene of the story, the narrator relates a playful game between himself and a companion, Teddy, in which they vie for the “immediate possession of Charlotte” (68). The entire narrative is generally characterized by the intention to manipulate Charlotte into submitting to the terms of a marriage in which the narrator would effectively possess her as such. The narrator details his strategy in the matter when he admits, “I wanted so to make her like me that I became subtle and ingenious, wonderfully alert,
patiently diplomatic” (87). All along, Mrs. Marden has believed that Charlotte’s assent to marriage would be the culmination of a joyous union of authentic love, expressive of Levinasian desire, which would deliver her, Mrs. Marden, from the plague of haunting. When Charlotte finally offers her hand to the narrator, however, it more closely resembles a wistful surrender than a loving affair. Charlotte’s consent is voiced only through her mother’s exclamation and according to her mother’s inclination: “She will now, won’t you Chartie? I want it so, I want it!” (90). Such desperate pleas expose the fundamental selfishness which underlies the project to bring the narrator and Charlotte together and correct Charlotte’s wayward behaviors. Though the narrator admits to a thrill at hearing the news, Charlotte looks “intensely grave” and refuses to meet the narrator’s gaze (90); nevertheless, she offers no resistance in her solemn address to the narrator, “You’re very good to me” (90). This tacit approval marks Charlotte’s submission to a grasping claim, for immediately, the narrator notices that “she had recognized something, she felt a coercion,” and she begins to “uncontrollably tremble” (90). Provided with this display of horror, Banta’s claim that Charlotte “is saved from her mother’s dread fate, and they marry, to live happily ever after” (114) seems overstated, especially considering that from the story’s prelude, the reader learns that the narrator’s wife—presumably Charlotte—dies in childbirth just one year after the marriage. According to James’s treatment of the story, the narrator’s approach to love, like his approach to haunting, result in parallel lines of defeat.

Not only does the narrator’s engagement with love end with failure, but so, too, does his engagement with haunting. While the ghost appears to be successfully exorcized (after all, the short story ends abruptly with “that was mercifully the last of Sir Edmund Orme” [91]), the victory of this supposed triumph is substantially diminished, as it achieved only at the cost of Mrs. Marden’s agonizing death. At the moment of her passing, the ghost is decisively present,
leaning over her as if to usher her into death and assert his inevitable mastery over her. The event is very tense, and the narrator and Charlotte both experience a “fresh terror” in the lifeless and uncanny “stillness” of the body (90). This fright is intensified a moment later when they hear a sound that the narrator initially supposes may be the “despairing cry of the poor lady’s death-shock” (91). This is certainly not the peaceful death of a soul cleansed of haunted malice.

Even at the end of her life, Mrs. Marden’s work of mourning never recovers from its indefinite suspension, and insofar as the mourning is never properly resolved, she is offered no relief from the haunting that has plagued her so. That the narrator never sees the ghost again suggests that it follows Mrs. Marden through death, in which case there would be no reason to believe that she would find relief there. The narrator’s “mystic enlargement of vision” does nothing to restore a system of coherence to the unstable situation—neither does he “live happily ever after” with Charlotte, nor does he relieve Mrs. Marden of her suffering. With this in mind, one might also conclude that in the scope of the narrative as a whole, the narrator is also unsuccessful in ever truly accounting for the “essence” of the ghost—never is the haunting properly grasped.

As we have seen, the literary figuration of haunting is bound as much to the psychic response of loss as it is to the work of narration. What ghost literature in general portrays to us in terms of its haunting reveals a great deal about our cultural concerns with making sense of the subjective experience of reality. In particular, literary depictions of haunting produce models of conceptualizing the experience of reality (as essentially privative), and the narratological approaches to haunting presented in the literature likewise produce models for engaging that experience. Thus far, however, we have only explored one aspect of literary haunting, the traditional model which is largely defined by its correspondence to the procedure of introjection—a procedure defined by this project as fundamentally unethical. What makes “Sir
Edmund Orme” such a complex text, however, is that concealed beneath the story’s portrayal of traditional haunting lies a portrayal of a secondary, alternative form of haunting, one guided by the logic of melancholia and suggestive of an ethical engagement with alterity. In embracing a traditional approach to haunting, the narrator and Mrs. Marden misread the profundity of this complex form of haunting, and they consequently address it quite inappropriately, to the tragic end. Not only does James critique the traditional model of haunting (that is, in the same fashion Abraham and Török ultimately critique introjection and in the same fashion that Levinas critiques the hand which grasps), but in this tale in particular, James furthermore begins to present this alternative model of ethical engagement. Through this alternative non-nostalgic perspective we can begin to consider the work of narrative—including the narrative production of James’ own manuscript—as an exercise in encountering and embracing (rather than overcoming or exorcizing) the otherness that arises out of melancholic ghostly haunting.

Whereas the effects of “The Ghostly Rental” ultimately fall short of exhibiting a truly Revisionist haunting because the narrative voice does not reflect on or critique the attempt to acquire a sense of mastery over the unknown and unfamiliar otherness, in “Sir Edmund Orme,” James includes a reflective and critical component which emphasizes the processes of addressing and coming to terms with its characters’ failures. It is this component which not only identifies but is responsible for producing a qualitatively different form of haunting. This component effectively arises out of the short but meaningful attention given to the story as a manuscript in the text’s prelude. Without this prelude, the short story would come across as an idle reflection; however, as a written manuscript, it is a deliberate figurative reconstruction of a series of events that serves as the basis for the text’s ultimately Revisionist critique. The very first sentence of the prelude to “Sir Edmund Orme” identifies the story proper as a found manuscript or
“statement,” which, written “long after the death of [its narrator’s] wife,” retrospectively reflects on the tragedy (67). The text’s retrospection functions principally to reconstruct the lost past and the lost wife in an exercise in literary introjection. However, the rest of this brief prelude unhinges this supposed intention. In the first place, the narrator of this embedding frame narrative makes it clear that despite the appearance of the deceased wife (that is, Charlotte) as presumably “one of the persons referred to,” in actuality, there is “nothing in the strange story to establish this point” (67). In other words, the precise referent of the figurative reconstruction, if it is indeed meant to be a tribute to a passed beloved, is lost. In this moment, what we as readers lack is not the lost object itself, but a verified line of reference to a particular lost object. The narrator who presents this “statement” expands the scope of uncertainty when questioning the narrative’s truth value and wondering whether the narrator “intended [the manuscript] as a report of real occurrence” (67). In fact, this found manuscript is presented only on account of its defining characteristic—that is, “because of its oddity” (67). By this account, the text is expressly intended to be fictional entertainment and not the reconstruction a lost reality. If the manuscript’s narrator has not clearly written his story as a mastery of the truth, then “it was written for himself, not for others,” as the manuscript’s discoverer infers (67). Presented as a mere literary exercise, the text is by its very premise a testament to its own failures, and on a close reading, this reflective and critical perspective can be seen not only in the narrative’s prelude and its outcome, but all throughout.

If haunting—particularly Revisionist haunting—exposes the limits of a traditional approach to analysis because, as Abraham and Török suggest, its ghost “remains beyond the reach of the tools of classical analysis” (174), then it requires a qualitatively different approach to approach its significance. At the end of the essay “Notes on the Phantom” (1975) Abraham
ultimately proposes a method for a meaningful engagement with such a complex haunting. This approach, “an attempt at exorcism, an attempt, that is, to relieve the unconscious” (176), ultimately amounts to the simple act: “to stage a word” (176). By its limited explanatory power, this act amounts to reforming one’s experience into language and “placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm” (176). Such an act, which appears fundamentally introjective, seems strikingly counterintuitive, given all that we have seen in the inevitable shortcomings of the work of narrative as a possessive grasp—not to mention Abraham’s and Török’s general caution against misinterpreting language as the mere filling of a gap and nothing more. With Abraham’s abrupt ending to the essay it remains uncertain from this context alone what he means.

However, we find further elaboration of the suggestion to “stage a word” in Abraham’s two-part essay “The Phantom of Hamlet or The Sixth Act preceded by The Intermission of ‘Truth’” (1975), which begins to outline a strategy of looking beyond the visible. This essay begins by pondering the relationship between language and otherness: “To exorcise [the concealed secret which returns to haunt] one must express it in words. But how are we to accomplish this when the phantoms inhabiting our minds do so without our knowledge, embodying the unspeakable secret of … an other?” (188). In turn, Abraham contends that the haunted subject is “caught between two inclinations”: to conceal and to reveal the secret. The haunted subject’s desire to illuminate the cause of his symptoms is met with the absolute refusal of the radically invisible ghost to reveal itself. This tension ultimately gives rise to a haunting which takes the form of “‘gratuitous’ or uncalled for acts and words” (188). Thus, when Abraham suggests that the appropriate response to haunting is to “stage a word,” he certainly does not mean any word, but particularly, he means an uncalled-for word. By virtue of its being
uncalled-for, there is a certain excess or supplementarity inscribed into the haunted word, as though it were an allusion to something beyond its presentation, as though its gratuitousness were an acknowledgment of its own deficiency. We are reminded of the prelude of “Sir Edmund Orme” in which we learn that the found manuscript is offered “precisely because of its oddity,” and that it is “too extravagant to have had a palpable basis,” rendering the narrative as a whole as essentially uncalled-for (67).

When a statement is uncalled-for, the meaning of the message uttered is instantly overshadowed by the very act of utterance itself—and in this case, the act is not called for and thus inappropriate, unexpected, and undetermined. Consequently, when addressing such a text, the reader is confronted with the disorienting fact that “no ready formula is available” (189) for its interpretation, and the result is inevitably a series of “eerie effects” of “hallucinations and delirium” (188). A text haunted in such a manner does not depict and resolve haunting, but rather it produces it. That is to say that for Abraham, “to stage a word” does little to figuratively reproduce the lost object; it does little to effectively ascribe a coherence of concepts to a system of incoherency. In fact, quite the opposite: provided that “the only solution is to continue beyond the combination of dead ends that (might have) buried everything” (190), an uncalled-for text is, as a testament to its own deadendness, the push to continue into the incoherence in order to address its unfamiliar otherness as such. It is a neutralization of the possessive grasp and an affirmation of non-mastery.

On the surface, “Sir Edmund Orme” is a traditional story of haunting, centered on Mrs. Marden, which mimics introjection in the work of mourning: the haunting produces the ghost as a figurative reconstruction of a lost, unspeakable secret which, in its recurrence, can be grasped, totalized, mastered, and understood. Under this occurrence lies a far more complex one which
mimics the work of melancholia: this form of haunting obfuscates its ghost, and interrupts the means of grasping, totalizing, mastering, or understanding of the situation. This second form of haunting is profoundly uncalled-for in the way that it produces a “deficient, mutilated text,” “messages [the analyst] failed to hear,” and “riddles with no key,” all of which effectively serve to enforce “the analyst’s deficiency” (139)—and also the reader’s.178 Psychically speaking, the precise procedure within the work of melancholia responsible for disfiguring the message is incorporation. According to Abraham and Török, “the fantasy of incorporation,” like introjection, responds to the impression of a loss with the production of a figurative reconstruction of the lost object. However, introjection and incorporation significantly differ in their treatment of that figurative reconstruction. On the one hand, introjection conceptualizes this reproduction as though it were an external object whose presence implies an illusory return of the original lost object. On the other hand, incorporation, as it is governed by melancholia, “results from those losses that for some reason cannot be acknowledged as such” (130). Because it possesses no concept whatsoever of what precisely has been lost, it fundamentally lacks the means to properly conceptualize the reproduction of that lost object.179 As a result, in order to account for a haunting impression of loss that peculiarly lacks a discernible lost object, incorporation radically dislocates its figurative reconstruction from consciousness, imagining that it (along with its reference to the lost object) is irretrievably buried deep within the psyche—as though sealed within a crypt. Incorporation accordingly makes no attempt to compensate for the loss, to recover the lost object, or to reduce the associated otherness as such to any degree of familiarity. Quite the opposite, its work “reveals a gap within the psyche; it points to something that is missing just where introjection should have occurred” (127), and its melancholic subject

178 This is drawn from Abraham and Török’s “‘The Lost Object—Me’: Notes on Endocryptic Identification” (1975).
179 Incorporation furthermore presents “the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss” (127) because “the very fact of having had a loss would be denied” (129, original emphasis).
experiences an “inexpressible mourning [which] erects a secret tomb inside the subject” (130). In the depiction of the effects of incorporation through the imagery of a sealed crypt, Abraham and Török evoke the figurative presence a ghost lodged within the subject’s conscious. Because its tomb is both secret and sealed, however, the ghost remains radically excluded from the situation, and only the indistinct trace of its correspondingly invisible haunting is presented. In other words, the foreign being embodied inaccessibly deep within the subject’s psyche is manifested only through the obscure impressions of an *otherness independent of an other*.

Insofar as incorporation radically defamiliarizes a lost object to the point of absolute invisibility, it exceeds the limits of the traditional figuration of haunting, which, like the procedure of introjection, attempts to reveal that which by virtue of its loss is concealed. Instead, it reflects a strikingly Revisionist model that conversely attempts to *conceal that which is revealed*.

If it can be said that figuratively speaking, introjection produces a metaphor wherein the abstract can be conceptualized in coherent, concrete form, then incorporation, conversely, is a *demetaphorization* process which effectively transforms a coherent, concrete form into an ineffable essence incapable of representation. The “antimetaphor,” as Abraham and Török call it, is therefore a term that has been stripped of its figurative association. As such, an antimetaphor, a representation that fails to represent, is excessively uncalled-for in that involves “not simply a matter of reverting to the literal meaning of words, but of using them in such a way—whether in speech or deed—that their very capacity for figurative representation is destroyed” (132). Just as Revisionist haunting destroys traditional haunting in the way that it undoes all of the signification generically connected with that literary trope’s long history, incorporation “entails the fantasmic destruction of the act by means of which metaphors become possible: the act of putting the original oral void into words, in fine, the act of introjection”
(132). Therefore, incorporation affirms the failure of language to properly produce meaning in a complete and direct system. As Abraham and Török argue, “The crucial move away from introjection (clearly rendered impossible) to incorporation is made when words fail to fill the subject’s void and hence an imaginary thing is inserted into the mouth in their place. The desperate plot of filling the mouth with illusory nourishment has the equally illusory effect of eradicating the idea of a void to be filled with words” (128-9). When taken as an antimetaphor, the work of narration is a deadening affair—its abstraction from reality as such is a grave hollowed out of life, a figurative death.180 Provided that incorporation is shaped by the antimetaphor that interrupts a coherence of concepts, Revisionist haunting, which reflects incorporation, consequently interrupts a coherence of reality.

Whereas the traditional model of introjective haunting in “Sir Edmund Orme” is essentially anchored to Mrs. Marden and her shameful past, the text’s subtle and distinctly Revisionist model of incorporative haunting is centered on Charlotte and her inheritance of her mother’s unspeakable guilt.181 As already suggested, for Charlotte, the transmission of haunting is facilitated specifically through her likeness to Mrs. Marden—that is, through the striking possibility that the daughter may become a repetition of the mother. From the start, the narrative makes it conspicuous that Charlotte is preternaturally similar to her mother—as though she were her mother’s figurative reconstruction. On his first encounter with the two women, the narrator observes, “the resemblance between mother and daughter was wonderful even among such resemblances, all the more that it took so little account of a difference of nature” (68);

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180 In his reading of “Sir Edmund Orme,” Arthur Brown presents an opposition between life and narration so as to suggest that a narrative existence implies a figurative death (that is, an “undying death”). He supposes that the narrator commits a suicide of sorts by writing himself into his manuscript, though the act is a deliberate and productive one: “Yet the narrator welcomes this new existence, this life in the world of undying death, as if what he truly wants is not to be alive but to be part of a story” (Brown 63).

181 While it is true in a figurative sense that the narrator inherits Mrs. Marden’s haunting (like the narrator of “The Ghostly Rental” figuratively inherited Captain Diamond’s haunting), it is more precisely and literally true in Charlotte’s case, and her inheritance is thus far more extensive in its development.
furthermore, he notes, “there were looks and movements and tones—moments when you could scarce say if it were aspect or sound—which, between the two appearances, referred and reminded” (68). With this likeness in mind, when the narrator observes that Charlotte is “a bit of a coquette” (69), he articulates the dimension of a repetition in character and in circumstances. The narrator goes so far as to suggest in one of these early passages that while “one often hears mature mothers spoken of as warnings—signposts, more or less discouraging, of the way daughters may go,” he sees “nothing deterrent” in the likelihood that daughter should follow mother’s path quite directly in this case (68). Ultimately, the short story’s general haunting hinges on the possibility that “the disposition to trifle with an honest man’s just expectations might crop up again” (87). As of yet, however, Charlotte is not guilty of any crime per se, and consequently, she mourns nothing.

Because Charlotte is not privy to any particular loss—neither a lover lost to suicide, nor an innocence lost to experience—she has nothing in particular to mourn. In turn, she is ostensibly not haunted by the ghost of a jilted admirer—her mother is. As it would seem, Charlotte is completely free of guilt, hence her mother’s emphasis on her innocence (“my innocent, innocent child” [79]). However, just beyond the limits of her vision, beyond the thin layer of Charlotte’s conscious awareness, it is obvious to Mrs. Marden and the narrator—and, additionally, to the reader—that there nevertheless lurks a ghost whose shadow falls upon and corrupts her experience of reality. While it can be said that both the narrator and Charlotte inherit an experience of haunting from Mrs. Marden, only Charlotte’s situation is truly of interest here in the way that it reveals a radically different form of haunting. Although her senses are not alive to it, Charlotte is indeed haunted—yet significantly, the form of this haunting is qualitatively different than her mother’s precisely because of her ignorance. In the transmission
of haunting from Mrs. Marden to Charlotte, rather than passing *something* from one generation to the next, it is more of a *nothingness* that is passed on. In other words, what Charlotte inherits from her mother is a secret lodged so deeply that she is not at all conscious of its presence, nor has she ever been. Such a concealed secret, especially one so seemingly intent upon repeating itself, has very obvious psychoanalytic resonance.¹⁸² Charlotte’s particular and unique experience with a haunting characterized by melancholia eludes the grasp of traditional Freudian psychoanalysis (especially in terms of the uncanny), yet it serves as a potent example of Abraham’s Revisionist figuration of haunting. In “Notes on the Phantom,” Abraham presents his model of the ghost as a residual gap that is effectively instituted by another. At the start of the essay, Abraham admits to the intrinsically fictitious nature of his ghosts—that is, that they are “nothing but an invention of the living” (171). This acknowledgment, however, does nothing to reduce their significance as a “metapsychological fact”; if anything, their abstract presence is all the more forceful in light of their capacity to figure (that is to present an image). If ghosts, for Abraham, are not literal spirits of the returned deceased, then they are instead the traces which emerge from the very fissures that define otherness as such: “what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (171). Unlike in traditional figurations, the haunting Abraham theorizes, cannot be merely reduced to an occurrence of the uncanny, or a resurfacing of a secretly familiar but forgotten secret—conversely, in this case, these ghosts result from “a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious,” and consequently,

¹⁸² Initially, Charlotte’s resemblance to her mother, which amounts to her compulsion to repeat her mother’s crime and fulfill the legacy of her haunting, resembles a return of the repressed in the oscillating symptomatic register of knowing/not knowing that is characteristic of the uncanny. On closer examination, however, this buried unconscious secret does not correlate so neatly with a traditionally Freudian conception of the uncanny: unlike Freud’s model, this secret is not material which, once having been conscious, has subsequently been repressed, as “something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it” (“The Uncanny” 222). Instead, this secret imparted to Charlotte is, for her, one that has never been conscious to begin with. It is precisely this factor—that Charlotte’s haunting derives from the impression of a loss without being conscious of a loss as such—which characterizes Charlotte’s haunting as essentially melancholic.
they lie “beyond the scope of symptom-formation in the sense of a return of the repressed” (173). This alternative form of haunting is the presentation of a symptom whose cause is radically inaccessible, just as both Charlotte remains inaccessible to the narrator in his many flirtatious advances and the depth of her haunting remains inaccessible to her.

Such ghosts are entirely concealed from the subject’s consciousness because they do not properly “belong” to the subject—nor did they ever. Abraham’s ghost represents an internalized other which, figuratively speaking, operates independently of the subject’s will. In this sense, the ghost and its effects are incorporated into the subject without being integrated—that is, its otherness as such is kept intact. Like the melancholic in general, the haunted subject in turn faces a radical impoverishment, as though directed by and limited by the will of another who acts “like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography” (173). Though Abraham does little to distinguish his particular phantom from any other figuration out of the literary trope’s long tradition, it will be useful for us to identify it specifically according to its Revisionist and melancholic properties. As an internalized otherness, such a ghost, by its melancholic effects, exposes “a gap that was transmitted to the subject” (174). The ghost, in turn, “bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other” (175). According to Abraham, however, it is not simply any other who is responsible for investing the subject with such unspeakable secrets—in particular it is the parent who is accountable, largely by virtue of the complex figurative relationship between parent (original) and child (figurative reconstruction of sorts). This particular form of haunting is therefore transgenerational: just as in the case of Charlotte and her mother, the buried unconscious secrets of the parent produce a gap within the child. In “Sir Edmund Orme,” Charlotte’s haunting models precisely what Abraham describes: a manifestation of “the effects, on the descendants, of something that had inflicted narcissistic
injury or even catastrophe on the parents” (174). It is as if Abraham were speaking directly of this tale when, in the essay “The Phantom of Hamlet,” he claims, “Yes, the shameful and therefore concealed secret always does return to haunt” (188), for in the case of our short story, it is indeed Mrs. Marden’s indiscretions that threaten to resurface in her daughter’s behavior. As the narrator identifies, “it was a case of retributive justice, of the visiting on the children of the sins of the mothers” (87)—and this visiting is presented through the figuration of a melancholic haunting. The ghost of Orme functions, for Charlotte, as an effect of her mother’s crime so absolutely invisible that it eludes her consciousness. As a result, the debilitating haunting both produces and reflects a profound experience of melancholia.

For Charlotte, properly speaking, there has been no discernible loss—yet this does nothing to prevent her from experiencing the general impression of that loss. Charlotte’s melancholia, an unconscious gap left in place by her mother, is characterized by what the narrator perceives as a certain uneasiness about her, a malaise of sorts that he will eventually learn is in all likelihood the result of an invisible ghostly haunting. The narrator’s interest in such a lassitude begins when Mrs. Marden remarks that there is “something ‘awfully strange’ about Charlotte” (69), as though to indirectly draw attention to her melancholia. This melancholic disposition unmistakably surfaces later when, as the narrator insinuates his desire for her, he observes in her “a dim distress in her beautiful eyes” expressive of “the extreme of solemnity” (81). He studies her movements further, and he discerns that she “cast[s] about, looking vaguely this way and that, as if under a compulsion that was slightly painful” (81). This recalls another moment when the narrator notices Orme’s presence in the room with him and Charlotte, and tracing Charlotte’s gaze, he is certain she is looking straight through the ghost, completely incapable of seeing him: “she had no appearance of looking at him” (78). In both
cases, it is as though Charlotte is aware of something lacking, yet this awareness is made gravely painful by the fact that that which is lacking is, by its essence, irremediably and radically invisible. Like the narrator of “The Ghostly Rental,” Charlotte, without being particularly conscious of it, appears to sense a profound limitation in her experience of reality and, to a degree, in place of an actual lost object, that which Charlotte feels to be lacking is, abstractly, her own complete and direct experience of reality itself. Unable to identify any particular loss responsible for the impression of loss, it is her faculties of perception which consequently appear to be inadequate. As a result, consistent with the experience of melancholia, Charlotte’s ego suffers substantial impoverishment. It is nothing more than the mere vagueness of a ghost’s shadow that has fallen upon her vision. Whereas her mourning mother is haunted by an other (namely the ghost of Edmund Orme), Charlotte, a melancholic, is conversely haunted by otherness as such.

In the broadest sense, Charlotte’s melancholia is shaped by the general powerlessness that accompanies the acknowledgment that our human senses are insufficient and our subjective experience of reality is neither direct nor complete. More narrowly speaking, however, this melancholia has been modeled out of a powerlessness very particular to Charlotte’s individual situation; as Mrs. Marden and the narrator collectively orchestrate her future, Charlotte suffers the loss of control over her own fate, as though she were, ironically, little more than a character in some other author’s narrative. Her first notable melancholic expression of “the extreme of solemnity” comes only in response to the narrator’s playful suggestion that her mother has already promised her hand. Charlotte, in the attempt to retain some degree of power in the situation, defiantly replies, “I think our hands are not our mothers’—they happen to be our own!”

The reader cannot help but wonder if the hopeless compulsion to identify the invisible is not narrowly linked to Charlotte’s unconscious drive to repeat her mother’s crime (which is invisible to her ignorant mind)—or, just as likely, the unconscious drive to avoid it.
(81). It would seem that in her melancholic state, Charlotte is tormented not only by a completely invisible ghost, but also by the effects of a shadowy loss which reflects the loss of her own hand—that is, the loss of her own will. The narrator again observes a marked display of melancholia in Charlotte when he finally professes his love to her directly: she offers only the somber reply, “I wish one could just be let alone,” and he is in turn “struck with something inexorable in [her] sweet sad headshake” (83). It is crucial to note that the ghost bears silent witness to this grave exchange, as though his haunting presence were a substantial contributing factor to Charlotte’s profound melancholia, which, in this case at least, is extended by the narrator’s possessive grasp.

Although Charlotte is not distinctly aware of the source of her haunting (for if she were, it would not be the haunting of melancholia, but rather that of mourning), Mrs. Marden, the narrator, and the reader are. Just as Freudian psychoanalysis posits that melancholia is a fundamentally pathological and detrimental aberration, Mrs. Marden and the narrator likewise view Charlotte’s condition as a harmful affliction. As far as they can see (literally), Charlotte’s experience of reality is corrupted by a melancholic disposition as much as it is corrupted by Orme’s invisible haunting that must be exorcized. The narrator observes of Charlotte that while “innocent and charming, she was close to a horror, as she might have thought it, that happened to be veiled from her but that might at any moment be disclosed” (82), which reflects the “unspeakable dread” Mrs. Marden harbors about the effect the ghost would have on her daughter (86). Consumed with “the idea of protecting her” from seeing what he sees, he vows “to do everything I could to keep her sense sealed” (82). The pledge “to cover her, to veil her face” (90) from the horror of the ghost she cannot see is driven by principles of censorship in the attempt to interrupt the transmission of an experience of mourning (and the haunting which is
attached to it) from mother to daughter. In the end, however, the narrator’s and Mrs. Marden’s efforts to conceal the ghostly presence of Sir Edmund Orme from Charlotte’s vision turn out to be ineffectual. As though it were inevitable from the very start, the ghost’s final visit definitively attracts Charlotte’s attention. As Charlotte literally gives the narrator her hand, “with the definite act—she dreadfully saw” (90). By mere virtue of witnessing the ghostly form firsthand, the suspended work of mourning (as well as the haunting produced out of that suspension) is transmitted from the mother to the daughter. The narrator associates her seeing (he presumes it is the ghost in particular that she sees) with her knowing; as she shrieks and stares in dismay, all of the narrator’s painstaking effort devoted to prevent such a vision from taking place is wasted.

Because they can see the ghost, the narrator and Mrs. Marden (and the reader) face great difficulty in the struggle to identify with Charlotte and her situation. However, their efforts at censorship, though misguided in their attempt to control Charlotte, seem to inadvertently open a meaningful inquiry into an approach of otherness that reflects Abraham’s and Török’s depiction of incorporation as an encrypting of the familiar and knowable. Censorship is the first means of attesting to an essential and insurmountable unspeakability which courses through the text. In an early conversation, the narrator finds himself struggling to comprehend the otherworldly nature of this strange visitor: he asks Mrs. Marden, “Then the gentlemen was—?” (79). Yet he is unable to find the words—the ghost’s nature is fundamentally unspeakable. Similarly, on another encounter with Orme, he stands quietly, anxiously studying the ghost, “wishing he would say something” (78), as though longing for an explanation or a coherence of sorts. Orme refuses to speak, however, and in the place of words, he leaves a discernible gap embodied in a distinct and profound silence: “no silence had ever seemed to me so soundless” (78). Such a profound silence characterizes the essential ungraspability of haunting. Abraham likewise figures his
ghost according to the way that it “pursues its work of disarray in silence” and its haunting is consequently “sustained by secreted words, invisible gnomes whose aim is to wreak havoc, from within the unconscious, in the coherence of logical progression” (175). Beneath the narrator’s speech lies an essential unspeakability, and beneath his grasp lies an essential haunting ungraspability.  

On a close look of “Sir Edmund Orme,” silent communication—expressions of the unspeakable—occurs frequently throughout the text. On his first encounter with Mrs. Marden, when she apparently catches a glimpse of the ghost and subsequently faints, the narrator observes a “silent question” that is communicated between mother and daughter (71). The silent question does as much as a silent question can do: it merely “seemed to say” (71). Shortly after this, Mrs. Marden turns to the narrator, “her eyes fixed on me with an intense appeal.” This appeal, a silent question of its own, “was ambiguous at first,” and the narrator declares that it “only added to my confusion” (71). Yet, after a moment of pondering, he claims that he suddenly understands “as plainly as if she had murmured” her message (71). On their next meeting, the narrator observes that Mrs. Marden communicates with him only indirectly and through muted hints, as she merely “dropped two or three […] references” to “the mystic initiation in store for me” (72). As the story progresses, the “strange communion” (83) of silent

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184 Interestingly, the ghost actually emerges into the narrative in the wake of a profound moment of unspeakability. While walking to church one day, the narrator considers confessing something significant yet unidentifiable to Charlotte—presumably a love of which he is not yet fully cognizant. In this moment of confusion, the narrator, interested less in seizing Charlotte’s hand than in sharing himself with her, senses “a strong impulse to say something intensely personal, something violent and important”—however, nothing is spoken. A length of silence ensues, and therein the narrator becomes expressly aware of a layer of otherness as such filling the gap of space between himself and Charlotte: he observes that “she didn’t sufficiently know me” (73, original emphasis). He acknowledges an essential interpersonal disconnect. This figurative gap becomes literally manifested when, shortly after this unspoken exchange, they arrive at the church and take a seat—there is an empty seat beside them. Then, halfway through the service, this empty space is filled by the presence of the ghost, visible only to the narrator. It is as though this impossible desire to say “something violent and important” is precisely what draws the narrator to an awareness of haunting—that is, of Charlotte’s haunting. As he later describes the situation to Mrs. Marden, he explains, “I really said nothing to your daughter that was the least out of the way,” and she responds, “It isn’t what you say that makes the difference; it’s what you feel” (76).
yet meaningful exchanges between Mrs. Marden and the narrator quickly becomes the standard means of intercourse: “We communicated so closely and completely now, and with such silent reciprocities” (84). Mrs. Marden on occasion will offer “a long deep look” and the narrator will respond with a “mute response” (83). The narrator accordingly observes, “I was able to read what she didn’t speak” (90). This silent language defines the relationship between Mrs. Marden and the narrator, but it also governs their approach to ghostly haunting. Mrs. Marden, in laying out the terms of engaging the ghost, emphasizes the extreme importance of preserving absolute furtiveness: she first commands, “don’t speak to anyone—don’t tell anyone!” (74), and then later, “don’t notice him—never!” (77). The bond between the two characters is one forged out of a primal secrecy whose sole purpose is, like the procedure of incorporation, toward censorship. Accordingly, their silent communication, despite that they generally seem to understand each other’s concealed meanings, effectively serve as rudimentary exercises in applying an incorporative approach to the work of narrative. Their speech, sustained by “quiet words” (83), deepens the essence of haunting and doubles the “melancholic effect” suggestive of an encounter with otherness as such—that is, it emphasizes a discernible gap and introduces a sense of privation into one’s experience of reality.

At its core, melancholia affirms the subject’s loss of mastery in a situation by emphasizing the extent to which the experience of reality is both indirect and incomplete. While introjective haunting reveals its ghost and the injustice it represents, the incorporative haunting of melancholia conceals its ghost and speaks of no particular injustice. Correspondingly, a manuscript haunted by such principles of incorporation stages its word not to communicate its thought, to reveal its truth, to produce a coherence of concepts, or to make presence of essence. No, such a manuscript is uncalled-for, and it is nothing if not an articulation of its own inability
to properly articulate. In the moment referenced earlier in which the narrator struggles to speak the term *ghost* (he asks, “Then the gentlemen was—?” [79]), he falters and eventually abandons the attempt to conceptualize it in language. Instead, the narrator merely reflects, “I couldn’t even say a word” (79). The narrator, in attempting to address the situation, can only express the impression of inexpressibility. On the one hand, this haunted manuscript, like Abraham’s ghosts who “wreak havoc, from within the unconscious, in the coherence of logical progression” (175), defies closure, censors itself, and refuses to presume complete and direct mastery over its subject matter. On the other hand, this haunted manuscript also draws awareness to another form of haunting—the haunting of otherness as such, a haunting without a ghost, the residual effect latent within any encounter with an other. By Abraham’s measure, the ghost is effectively laid to rest “only when its radically heterogeneous nature with respect to the subject is recognized” (174); however, in the absence of the ghost (as an other), there emerges, with the newly recognized otherness as such, a haunting without a ghost. The manuscript haunted by such principles of incorporation accommodates a confrontation with otherness as such which arises out of an acknowledgment of one’s subjective limits.

Whereas an introjective understanding of Charlotte as a subject who unwittingly serves as a text produced by her mother’s haunting must be seen as essentially unethical, an incorporative reading shows the extent to which a supposed “figurative reconstruction” can be construed as an ethical issuance of difference from its supposed “original.” Levinas’s notion of “paternity” (or, to take a gender-neutralized perspective, we can use the term parenthood [*parentalité*]) depicts a fundamentally ruptured lineage in “the discontinuity of generations” (*TI* 304). This concept of parenthood opens the possibility that under Mrs. Marden’s intention to coerce her daughter into reciprocating the narrator’s love and thereby correct her own mistakes, there lies the possibility
that she can accept the shame of her sin—even if she does not take advantage of it. For Levinas, the parent’s connection to the child is depicted as a step outside of oneself into alterity, as a figurative death and rebirth of the subject in a way that ultimately “puts an end to the monotony of its identity” (*TI* 304). Levinas’s *Time and the Other* addresses the topic most directly, formulating a “structure of transcendence” (36) in the “victory over death” (90) that is achieved through parenthood.\(^{185}\) Within the child, the parent visualizes simultaneously an image of otherness and of sameness: parenthood is, Levinas argues, “the relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me” (91). In other words, for the parent, the child serves not as a reconstruction of self (pulling the other toward sameness in a process of familiarization), but a deconstruction of self (pushing the self toward alterity in a process of defamiliarization). The child then serves as a conceptual field onto which one’s own internal tension between sameness and otherness is projected and maintained. It is through the child—that is, through seeing oneself depicted *through an other*—that the parent comes to recognize his or her relationship to otherness.

As I argue, the story simultaneously sustains an introjective and incorporative view. Ultimately, Mrs. Marden refuses to abandon her introjective approach to haunting. In her final moments, she speaks silently to the narrator with her eyes, and he is “able to read what she didn’t say,” which, ironically, is: “I’m really very ill, but appear to take what I say exactly as I say it” (90). Her embrace of the meaning of language, even if not spoken through words, is evident in this silent communication. Her agonizing death marks the defeat of her stubborn refusal to relinquish the possessive grasp of mastery. Whether or not Mrs. Marden reforms to embrace an

\(^{185}\) In the preface, Levinas alludes to the situation in which “the possible offered to the son and placed beyond what is assumable by the father still remains the father’s in a sense” (36, original emphasis).
alternative approach to haunting is ultimately insignificant, however, as it merely serves as an example from which the narrator—and perhaps reader—can learn. To be sure, the narrator’s concern with the ghost of Orme articulates his overt preoccupation with Mrs. Marden’s mournful haunting and Charlotte’s melancholic haunting. Indeed, he is so overly attentive to his mourning-like reading of others’ haunting that he essentially fails to recognize his own melancholic haunting—that is, the privation of his own subjectivity. In other words, he generally fails to acknowledge the limits of his experience of reality or to acknowledge any degree of otherness as such. Even in the very end of the story, he is moved by the thrilling news that Charlotte at last consents to be his, and correspondingly, in the climax of the story, “sprung towards the creature I loved, to cover her, to veil her face” (90, emphasis added). Throughout the narrated events of the story, the narrator, too, seems to have reformed no more than Mrs. Marden. However, all of this can be said only of the character at the time of the narrated events; in fact, when he reflects on the situation and writes them into manuscript form, the work of narration provides him the opportunity to reconsider himself in fictional terms.

The crucial question thus becomes: does the narrator ultimately compose his manuscript according to the principles of introjection (in which the manuscript serves as the means to recover a relationship to his lost wife) or according to the principles of incorporation (in which the manuscript serves as the means to obscure that relationship and, by so doing, acknowledges its absolute inability to recover). Given the brief prelude to the story, the reader is encouraged to consider a separate version of the narrator who, much older, revisits through the written manuscript certain events of this younger version of himself, and therein emerges with a renewed perspective. Accordingly, we can begin to conceive of two separate versions of the narrator: the narrating-narrator (the aged widower, who sits down long after the events of the story to put
them into words) and the *narrated-narrator* (the young lover who takes active part in the events of the story). Given that the manuscript is mournfully written “long after the death of his wife” (67), the narrating-narrator is presumably given a great length of time to reflect upon and establish the basis of a criticism for the narrated-narrator and his follies. With this in mind, the production of the manuscript mirrors Mrs. Marden’s situation brought about by Orme’s haunting: the older narrating-narrator is given a chance to restore possession of his lost object through the reconstitution of himself in the form of the fictionalized younger narrated-narrator. Both cases reflect a system of parenthood in which a haunted character, who has experienced an event rendered unspeakable, is seemingly given a voice (through the magic of the supernatural in one case, and through the magic of the work of narrative in the other). When considering this question, the reader immediately recalls the surface of ambiguity (and “oddity”) presented in the prelude. It is also significant that the narrator, who has the power to portray his lost object as he chooses, deliberately refrains from reconstructing a willing love object in Charlotte—far from it, her resistance to his advances creates no sympathy for the narrator nor for his possessive grasp. The failure to depict a happy union in the final scenes ultimately attests to a farewell that releases Charlotte’s supposed presence into mere “essence”—not the opposite. Though relatively implicit, in his reflection and critique of the original situation, the narrator abandons at least some of the traditional strategies at engaging otherness embraced by his earlier, more naïve self. As a result, when interpreting the manuscript as an affirmation of the profound dislocation between the subjective experience of reality and reality itself, the text seemingly serves more as a *farewell* to the departed than an illusory return in the form of a figurative reconstruction.

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186 Clair Hughes argues that if the reader keeps in mind that Charlotte presumably dies a year into her marriage with the narrator, “the death of Mrs. Marden is thus not only an act of ghostly revenge, but a sinister parallel and portent which reflects us back to the beginning of the narrative circle” (17). In this sense, the narrative forms a double.
Through “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” and “The Ghostly Rental,” James begins an exploration of ghosts that cannot be seen through the lens of a profound sense of mourning. As the mourning intensifies, so does a force that emerges from beyond the specific object loss. These first two stories begin the inquiry into the complexities of mournful loss, and “The Ghostly Rental” in particular considers its profound effect on the extent of human perception and cognition. This investigation culminates in “Sir Edmund Orme,” however, with a far more explicit articulation of the impression of loss. This third story illustrates a complex dichotomy of haunting, one traditional form, which is tied to the ghost, and one Revisionist form, which functions independent from the ghost. The former is essentially a manifestation of the literary supernatural, and its existence is predicated on its ghost’s presence, and accordingly, it can presumably be exorcized. The latter, however, emerges from the inescapably narrow limits of human perception and cognition, and is thus intrinsic to the experience of reality. Ultimately, through the narrative’s preface that frames the narrated events as a manuscript, James begins to articulate this second form of haunting, a force of incomprehensibility, through narrative. As the narrated is incorporated into the text, he becomes fictionalized; he haunts his own narration, and the dislocation between his experience of reality and reality itself is affirmed. It is precisely through this development that James goes on to write The Turn of the Screw (1898), his most celebrated ghost story. I contend that The Turn of the Screw derives its principle success not only from the craft of the story itself, but from the meaningful articulation of melancholic haunting and its negotiation through the composition of a literary text. As I have situated my reading through an explication of the work of melancholia, the larger philosophical stakes of the later work is evident in James’s first three ghost stories. In fact, the implications of this study are perhaps still wider because the explorations of the limits defining encounters with the other are
present even (or especially) in late James, such as in *The Golden Bowl* or *Wings of the Dove*, where so much is communicated through innuendo and silence, and where enormous gaps punctuate even the most intimate of relations. One wonders if the ghost is really just an extreme version of the metaphysical relations inscribed among all of James’ characters, and thus functions as an especially graphic and readable instance of them.
Beginning in such Revisionist texts as Maupassant’s “Le Horla” (1887) and Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), there emerges a new literary depiction of haunting that is predicated on absolute invisibility. These stories are principally concerned with a form of haunting that appears independent of its ghost, marking a significant departure from the traditions of the genre as a whole. As these ghost stories portray the effects of an encounter with haunting as impenetrability and excess, they propose a number of questions surrounding the ethics of engaging otherness—not merely engaging an other, which always runs the risk of a reduction into an encounter with the same, but rather engaging otherness as such, which by virtue of its radical alterity, eludes all attempts at reduction. The effects of these encounters in Wharton’s “Afterward” (1910) are various as they: a) inform the essentially unrecognizable nature of the tale’s ghost, despite its appearance as a ghost in the narrative (unlike in Maupassant’s and Gilman’s stories); b) informs a larger engagement with otherness in the literature of haunting at the turn of the century characterized by the work of narrative’s ultimate inability to produce a complete and direct system of comprehensibility out of incomprehensibility; and c) invites speculation about the ways the ghostly other might stand in not only for a range of encounters with historical others during the period (such as women, lower classes, and immigrants), but also for the other in general—that is, any other.

While “Le Horla” and “The Yellow Wallpaper” establish an indispensable foundation for the new direction that the Revisionist subgenre of the literary ghost story begins to take, the extent of their Revisionism is hindered by the extreme ways they refigure the trope of haunting.
This is to say that their conspicuous exclusion of actual ghosts, as well as their drastic formal innovations of narrative self-reflection, potentially invite a reframing entirely outside the ghost story genre. James’s ghost stories subsequently retrieve the Revisionist trajectory from the very borders of the genre and reorient it within the mainstream, though without compromising the integrity of its essential innovations. This stratum of Revisionism continues the significant work already underway in previous explorations of a more complex haunting, but it does so by incorporating them within a familiar and recognizable framework. James’s work, by situating a fresh depiction of haunting within an overtly traditional ghost story, now demonstrates the practice of Revisionism in the truest sense of the word, as an articulation of the radical dislocation between subjectivity and otherness. “The Ghostly Rental” (1876) and “Sir Edmund Orme” (1891) not only begin to explore the complexity of a haunting concealed beneath (and essentially independent of) a conventional ghost, but they simultaneously revisit the traditional treatment of the trope and revise the assumptions made by the established practice of our readership toward an interpretation of the work of narration as itself a category of excess, at once uncalled for and responsible for the transformation of material into the immaterial. Readership is thus rendered ghostly: a ghostliness further characterized as the traversal a series of dead ends, and as a blind exploration not determined by discovery that boldly opens the narrative into the vastness of invisibility through the gaps in its presentation.

187 The word *incorporating* is not chosen arbitrarily here. This word references the process detailed by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török in which the subject (that is, the mentioned short stories in this case), in response to the impression of a loss and additionally in response to the inability to properly identify the object of that loss, intuits the existence within the psyche of some internalized (incorporated) reference to the loss and/or the lost object. That this reference is necessarily inaccessible (ungraspable) by virtue of the intrinsic absolute invisibility of the loss (and the lost object), it is conceptualized as sealed within a crypt (from which emerges not the radically excluded ghost, but only a haunting as the trace of *otherness as such*). In this case, James’s short stories seem to respond to what might be understood as, in the spirit of revisionism, the loss of meaning and significance of the ghost literature tradition, a loss effected perhaps through the deadening of convention—or perhaps it was never there to begin with. According to the fundamental argument of this project, the tales reviewed in the previous chapter articulate an essential lack that has been conceptually incorporated to their narratives.
By the time Edith Wharton delves into ghost stories in 1902, James’s substantial revisions to the genre were already underway. Even Wharton’s first work in the genre evinces a complexity and profoundly innovative style—reflective perhaps of James’s influence within the subgenre. As does James, Wharton inserts Revisionist haunting into the frame of traditional work. As she intensifies the radical dislocation between subjectivity and otherness as such, she emphasizes a profound sense of melancholia and, along with James, furthers a new model of haunting, effectively raising the stakes of its challenges to the genre by increasing the tensions between Revisionism and traditional ghost story frameworks. Wharton’s contribution lies in the way that her ghost stories not only expose the inevitable limits of human subjectivity, but how, beyond James’s initial inquiries, they directly speculate on the process through which her characters come to terms with such limits—a process of self-reflection that is furthermore embodied in and guided by a unique practice of narrative reflection that involves affirming the discontinuity of meaning.

**Afterwardsness**

While biographical reflection is often not interpretively compelling in a project such as this, in this specific case, it is worth observing Wharton’s experience with typhoid fever at the age of nine, particularly in terms of its haunting effects on her. Years after recovering from the disease, she suddenly started experiencing a debilitating and panicked dread that the awful disease would return at any moment. This detail, though seemingly trivial, informs not only Wharton’s assumptions about literary haunting, but also her work of narrative and her Revisionism (pertinent to her ghost stories in general, though “Afterward” above all). Wharton’s characters are frequently filled with dread over the eventual reappearance of a ghost, probably in large part because of the author’s definitive association of literary haunting with recurrence, which she directly articulates.
unique experience with the disease establishes two points: first, an intimate relationship with the effects of melancholia, and second, a lasting theoretical speculation on what I call deferred experience.

In the first place, Wharton’s childhood experience of profound dread resembles the melancholic haunting depicted in some of James’s Revisionist ghost fiction. Though written decades in advance of Freud’s foundational essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), James’s ghost stories often express a cognitive perspective on the experience of loss that anticipates and is broadened by Freud’s definition of melancholia. Unlike mourning, which responds to the discernible loss of a concrete object, melancholia emerges out of “the loss of a more ideal kind” (245)—that is, out of the mere impression of loss, an impression entirely devoid of any discernible loss or lost object. James depicts what I call melancholic haunting, a haunting dissociated from a ghost, which imposes the impression of an invisible presence beyond the limits of human perception and comprehension without revealing that presence as such.¹⁸⁹ Such melancholic haunting figures what Wharton identifies in autobiographical reflection as a longstanding suspicion that her own life itself is “a world haunted by formless horrors” (“Autobiographical Postscript” 302). She describes her condition as “a state of chronic fear. Fear of what? I cannot say—and even at the time, I was never able to formulate my terror” (302). Wharton depicts the impression of an invisible presence beyond her perception and comprehension. Wharton’s intimacy with the unidentifiable and inescapable force of privation provides her with an exceptional adeptness at depicting the experience, which in turn empowers her figurations of melancholic haunting as a particularly emblematic of Revisionist efforts.

¹⁸⁹ Contrary to Freud’s speculation that melancholia is aberrant and pathological, James’s literary presentations of a corresponding condition imply it to be intrinsic to the subjective experience of reality.
The profound dread Wharton faced as a teenager not only establishes her attunement to the haunting forces incomprehensibility, but it also constitutes the foundation for what is arguably her most significant contribution to Revisionism: her speculation on a phenomenon that I call *deferred experience*. Wharton’s biographer R. W. B. Lewis informs us that in the years immediately following the original trauma, “there were no traces of the typhoid fever” (24), and for a few interim years, she experienced no fear. In fact, the “choking agony of terror” (25) did not begin until years later with the occurrence of one very singular event: “when someone put in her hands a tale of mystery and violence” (Lewis 24-5). By her own account, this story “brought on a serious relapse, and again my life was in danger” (302). In other words, Wharton experienced an original event, though the full extent of its experience (including the weight of the associated trauma) was *deferred* until a second event occurred, a literary encounter that recalled the initial event.\(^\text{190}\) This phenomenon essentially uninges a single experience and presents it in two distinct components: the original event (the experience as it occurs) and the secondary event (the experience as its significance is revealed). Related as such, there exists a tension between two opposing forces: discontinuity (the work of deferral) and continuity (work of reflection). On the one hand, the work of deferral extends the dislocation between the two events, consequently prolonging the unrecognizability (and thus incomprehensibility) of the original event. On the other hand, the work of reflection narrows the dislocation, consequently restoring the recognizability (and thus comprehensibility) of the original event.

The phenomenon of deferred experience closely resembles the Freudian concept of *afterwardsness*,\(^\text{191}\) a concept whose elaboration will inform Wharton’s dread and her narratives.

\(^\text{190}\) Though the original event was undoubtedly troubling for Wharton, as she depicts her entire youth, she places far more emphasis on the experience of terror and dread in her teenage years.

\(^\text{191}\) This term also appears as *Nachträglichkeit* in Freud’s German, *après-coup* in Lacan’s French, and *deferred action* in Strachey’s original English 1966 translations.
The term afterwardsness first appears briefly in passing early in Freud’s career in “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (1895). Freud illustrates its occurrence by example, through one of his patients, Emma, who finds herself subject to “a compulsion of not being able to go into shops alone” (353, original emphasis). Her psychotherapy eventually reveals that long ago at age eight, young Emma was sexually assaulted by a shopkeeper. However, given her age and yet undeveloped sexuality, the event was essentially meaningless and its significance (and the experience of trauma it ought to have provoked) was deferred until four years later when, as she encountered a similar scene (which she connects to the original one), that the trauma took its overwhelming effect. At the moment of this secondary event, she suffered a relapse and experienced the deferred trauma, now seemingly for the first time; for Freud, this exhibits “the case of a memory arousing an affect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change [brought about] in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered” (356). In the standard experience of trauma, the affect of disturbance commences immediately. However, in both Emma’s and Wharton’s cases, the experience of trauma is deferred through the work of afterwardsness, and it lies dormant until, with the occurrence of a correlative secondary event, the significance of the original event is retrospectively attributed.

Freud continues to articulate the work of afterwardness in his study on the Wolf Man in “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918). At the age of one-and-a-half, the Wolf Man (Sergei Pankejeff) witnessed the primal scene—that is, his parents engaged in coitus a tergo. Because this event occurred when he was too young to process it, its significance and traumatic

192 By Freud’s assessment, when Emma, at age twelve, walked into the same shop alone and encountered two shop-assistants laughing, it reminded her “of the grin with which the shopkeeper had accompanied his assault” (354). In Emma’s mind, the circumstances are similar enough that her mind draws an associative link between this scene and the original.
effects were deferred and subsequently lay dormant until, at age four, a dream about wolves recalls the initial scene. In this case, the dream serves as a secondary event that, in its associated link to the first one, releases the deferred trauma. Freud thus explains:

> He understood it at the time of the dream when he was four years old, not at the time of the observation. He received the impressions when he was one and a half; his understanding of them was deferred, but became possible at the time of the dream owing to his development, his sexual excitations, and his sexual researches. (182ff)

This secondary event (a dream for the Wolf Man, a “scene” for Emma, a short story for Wharton) reproduces the circumstances of the original event with such striking realism that it can be, for the first time, recognized as such—and with it, the extent of the original trauma. On this note, Freud contends of the dream at four years of age, “The activation of the picture, which, thanks to the advance in his intellectual development, he was now able to understand, operated not only like a fresh event, but like a new trauma” (250). In other words, as he experiences the secondary event, he retrospectively renders the “primal event”; as a result, the event’s deferred significance awakens from dormancy, it is recognized as such, and the trauma sets in.

While the work of reflection in general will recall the experience deferred from the original event, it seems as though Freud posits that a more directed form of reflection, as particularly analytical, will not only recall the experience, but furthermore, its significance. While the original experience may be recognized in at any time—such as in a dream, in the Wolf Man’s case—its significance comes through more deliberate procedures. Provided that the significance of the original event “was concealed from [the patient’s] consciousness and was discovered only during the treatment” (185), Freud suggests that the recognition is made during therapy through the work of analysis. For Freud, the psychoanalytic process, guided by rational and objective analysis of the situation, will with due diligence reveal the hidden truth. The
analysis in the work of reflection reconstitutes meaning by establishing continuity across two distinct events, and original and a secondary.\(^\text{193}\) This continuity is reinforced first by connecting the two events according to their similar circumstances and second by treating the experience of trauma as singular in its extension between the events. In particular, the dormancy of the original event’s significance serves to deemphasize the essential dislocation between the two occurrences. As it is formalized through Freudian psychoanalysis, therefore, afterwardsness relies on the assumption that what is initially incomprehensible can be illuminated and perhaps overcome through a retrospective ascription of meaning made possible through establishing a continuity with a later event.

The extent to which this concept fundamentally adheres to a traditional ghost story framework (as opposed to the Revisionist ghost literature in particular) is evident in its resemblance to introjection, which plays the role of illusorily recovering the loss in such stories. Insofar as introjection is responsible for diminishing the impression of loss through the work of mourning, it represents the work of filling a perceived emptiness. In essence, introjection denies that the loss has taken place by illusorily restoring the lost object—in the form of a figurative reconstruction. By the same token, the concept of afterwardsness, by interpreting the secondary event as a repetition, similarly produces a figurative reconstruction of the original scene in which, through its abstract—and perhaps even unconscious—re-experience, the lost significance (merely deferred and dormant, by definition) is restored. The Freudian interpretation of afterwardsness, given its assumptions of repetition, furthermore loosely corresponds to the process of *déjà vu* in light of the way that the latter, through its cognitive assertion that an

\(^{193}\) As if suggesting that afterwardsness marks a distension of a singular event across two experiences (one bodily, one psychically), Teresa de Lauretis claims that for the subject who never recognized the original significance to begin with, it is not a matter of repetition, but of extending through deferral; she explains that the original trauma returns “in a recurrence afterward […] that is not simply the delayed effect of an earlier bodily event but a new, psychic event” (139).
objectively unfamiliar event is subjectively familiar (by assuming it to be a repetition, something *already seen*), reinforces the sense of a situation’s comprehensibility. Such correlations accentuate the implications underlying the work of afterwardness in which, by conceptualizing the possibility of a deferral in which the significance of an experience is perfectly preserved through its extended dormancy, the incomprehensible is divested of its essential *incomprehensibility as such* and is in turn reconceived as merely *not comprehensible yet*.

Afterwardsness, as figured by Freudian psychoanalysis, manifests the attempt to reveal that which has been concealed (in order to connect it with its repressed antecedent), and accordingly, it reflects the traditional model of ghostliness that assumes the incomprehensibility of haunting will diminish once the message of its ghost is decoded.

Ned Lukacher, in his extensive critique on Freud’s explanation of afterwardness, explores the theoretical implications of such a reversal. Essentially, Lukacher alludes to a tendency in the analyst to influence the construction of meaning in the clinical field: “What Freud is reluctant to recognize […] is that in his search for the even more primordial question, the analyst inevitably not only ‘stages the question’ but also writes the patient’s script as well. The analyst finds it difficult to stage such questions in an absolutely neutral way” (147). As such, Lukacher questions to what extent the very act of interpretation (the reflective return to the original experience) *creates* truth more than it discovers it. Insofar as interpretative analysis, because it is too often guided by the expectation of predetermined results, recapitulates the trauma it seeks to exorcize, Lukacher claims that “nothing can halt the process of deferral in which the notion of the original and the etiology of the event are caught” (141). As such, he ultimately concludes that “there will always be the need for yet another version of the primal scene” (141). Significantly, if we closely examine Freud’s approach to the afterwardness involved in “the
behaviour of the four-year-old child towards the re-activated primal scene” in the Wolf Man’s case, we will find in an inconspicuous footnote Freud’s admission that the original scene itself may in fact be nothing more than a fantastical reconstruction: “it is also a matter of indifference in this connection whether we choose to regard it as a primal scene or as a primal phantasy” (262ff). Though it is quietly voiced, this concession belies the primacy of the original scene, which vastly reorients the nature of the process that explicitly aims to refamiliarize the unfamiliarized.

The success of Wharton’s Revisionist ghost stories derives from a similar criticism of the ability to restore significance to an original event through reflection. In subverting the assumptions underlying the Freudian articulation of afterwardsness that insist on decryption, Wharton’s narratives explore the extent of incomprehensibility in their initial narrative conditions (strengthening the narrative’s ultimate resistance to a traditional resolution). Particularly in figuring loss (that is, the loss of meaning in the initial conditions) through the experience of melancholia rather than of mourning, Wharton intensifies the characters’ and reader’s disorientation and consequently disrupts their expectations of an eventual resolution.

While haunting in general obstructs a character’s or reader’s ability to “see” or “grasp” a particular objective detail, it generally does so under the implication that the deficiency lies within the object, not the subject. Melancholic haunting, on the other hand, implies that the deficiency is the subject’s—not only in the ability to perceive the world (to see or to grasp it), but also, by obscuring precisely that which is lacking, in the ability to make sense of it (to comprehend it). Wharton’s success as a Revisionist derives secondly from her stories’ eventual reanimation of their deferred significance. In contradistinction to Freudian afterwardsness, Wharton’s literature suggests an alternative model through which to interpret deferred
experience, a model that I term *belatedness* in order to emphasize the extent that its *ex post facto* ascription of significance is, by Wharton’s implication, *too late*. In this sense, the efficacy of the narrative’s attempt to restore the supposedly dormant comprehensibility is significantly compromised—not only because of the inadequacies of her melancholic characters, but also because of the narrative implication that the material recovered from dormancy is both imperfect and belatedly irrelevant.

The extent of Wharton’s Revisionism becomes evident at the end of “Afterward” when the protagonist Mary, overwhelmed by the sudden realization of how little she has known about her situation, explicitly initiates the process of an extended reflection, as if to think through the entire events of the story one more time. As the story’s last lines repeat the first, the narrative establishes a continuity (and, in a sense, a circularity) between the collective entirety of the story’s narrated events and the moment of reflection that organizes and narrates them. Whereas initially, the work of afterwardsness applies to Mary’s inability to recognize the ghost’s appearance because of the ambiguity of haunting, though through the narrative gesture and because of the ambiguity of the experience of reality, it is the entire breadth of the past six months that she cannot properly recognize at such. According to the traditional work of afterwardsness, it is the second event that restores lost significance to the original, incomprehensible event, which means that in this case, it should be the narrative reflection that retrospectively restores meaning to Mary’s confusion. However, testifying to her truly Revisionist spirit, Wharton breaks up the assumed continuity across the dislocation and preserves invisible haunting as a profound force of otherness as such that inevitably remains as immune to the grasp of the work of narrative as it is to the experience of reality. In the place of this failing
grasp emerges not only an affirmation of the radical dislocation between subjectivity and otherness, but also revolutionary reopening of possibilities.

“The Lady’s Maid’s Bell”

Following the pattern established by the previous chapters, the analysis of “Afterward” will be deferred in favor of first considering Wharton’s first ghost story, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” (1902), under the assumption that this early prototype will identify a continuity of essential Revisionist characteristics that remain consistent across Wharton’s oeuvre. Such a comparison will expose the substantial revision at work not only between this story and “Afterward,” but also in a larger scope between traditional and Revisionist approaches to haunting. “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” which appeared very early in Wharton’s writing career, may not have been a complete failure in the eyes of literary critics (as was the case with the initial attempts at the genre of her Revisionist predecessors), yet it was not especially admired compared with her countless far more developed works. As the story unfolds, however, we find a narrative that depicts a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar,\(^\text{194}\) with the local effect that the haunting disrupts assumptions of comprehension, and the larger implication that, through the work of narrative deferral, comprehension exists only belatedly in relation to its situation. In a formal sense, Wharton inserts the tradition of certain generic conventions within a new setting, most identifiable in the setting and characterization—that is, in the placement of an English protagonist into an American landscape.\(^\text{195}\) Furthermore, in the figuration of the story’s ghost, Wharton resorts to relatively traditional depictions familiar to the Gothic reader (“a thin woman

\(^{194}\) Again, this also corresponds to a tension between the visible and the invisible, between coherence and incoherence, between a narrative and its event, between the old (tradition) and the new (revision), and so on.

\(^{195}\) Not only the narrator an English emigrant, but it is also implied that so too is the story’s ghost, the former maid Emma Saxon, whose very name conspicuously recalls the English lineage of this Gothic story.
with a white face, and a dark gown and apron” [14]) while at the same time disguising that familiarity as essentially unrecognizable as such. In the way that this short story fundamentally negotiates the familiar and unfamiliar through a layering of narrative deferrals in recognition, it establishes the premise for the radical dislocation in narrative reflection within Wharton’s vastly more complex in its Revisionist work, “Afterward.”

In “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” the first person narrator, Alice Hartley, following a prolonged recovery from typhoid, is referred by an acquaintance, Mrs. Railton, to service as a maid at the Brympton estate in upstate New York. On her first night, Hartley encounters an ominous female figure in the hallway—though she does not know it yet, this is the ghost of the former lady’s maid, Emma Saxon. Though Hartley enjoys the company of her lady, the routine is generally uneventful, especially given the stern master’s frequent and extended absences, and her imagination is thus especially entertained by the house’s minor mysteries. As the mysteries intensify, however, the story’s tone grows more somber with the implication of something urgent beneath the narrative’s initially lighthearted veneer. One day, Hartley discovers a photograph of the dead former maid, and she immediately recognizes her as the pale woman she encountered on her first night. Weeks later, the ghost finally materializes (and is immediately recognized as such) and leads Hartley to the house of Ranford, the neighbor, then disappears without explanation. That night, the ghost momentarily reappears and impels Hartley to the lady’s room. Though it is not immediately recognized as such, Hartley interrupts a tryst between Mrs. Brympton and Ranford, and Ranford hides. Hartley’s entrance is followed by Mr. Brympton, having returned unexpectedly early from a trip. Before Mr. Brympton can discover Ranford in

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196 Interestingly, Wharton’s only two works that feature a first-person female narrator are “All Souls” (1937), a ghost story and the very last tale she ever wrote (published posthumously), and this story, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” her very first ghost story (Haytock 84, Lewis 523). Jennifer Haytock informs us that “the rest of her short stories are told from an omniscient point of view or by a male first-person narrator” (84).
the closet, the ghost appears and blinds him long enough to conceal Ranford’s escape. The excitement overshadows Mrs. Brympton, who, presumably overcome by the crisis, submits to death.

Driven by imagination and insatiable curiosity like the archetypical protagonist of a conventional ghost story, Hartley almost compulsively explores the mysteries, intent on verifying and resolving her conclusion that “there was something about the house—I was sure of it now…” (21, emphasis original). However, Hartley’s inquisitiveness takes the particular form of anticipating what she expects to be the ghost’s inevitable reappearance. She reflects that, in the company of the other servants of the house, “I didn’t take much notice of their talk, for I was watching to see the pale woman in the dark gown come in” (15). She furthermore frequently lies awake, anticipating a ghostly reappearance: “night after night I used to lie awake, listening for [the bell] to ring again, and for the door of the locked room to open stealthily” (28). As though something has already happened that she has not yet properly recognized, she anxiously awaits a second encounter in the hopes that, this time adequately prepared (precisely by the attentiveness provided by her sense of anticipation), she will recognize the significance as such and comprehension will be restored to the situation.

197 In the introduction to The Oxford Book of Victorian Ghost Stories, Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert connect the Victorian ghost-hunt to detective genre. Through this likeness, they identify the extent to which the narrative structure of the traditional ghost story depends on a system of deferral. As they argue, narratives from both genres tend to rework their expressions of the conventions (which should not be confused with the Revisionist unsettling of the conventions themselves). Such slight modifications produce a mystery (that is, uncertainty, incoherence, and innovation) that seems fresh enough to captivate the reader. However, Cox’s and Gilbert’s argument implies that this captivation depends on the narrative capacity to defer solving its mystery to a promised point at the end in which all is revealed (that is, certainty, coherence, and tradition are restored). Such a reading accents the extent to which the basic premise of afterwardsness is essentially traditional in significantly limited deviance from and its inevitable return to normalcy. In Cox’s and Gilbert’s words: “The successful ghost story, like the successful detective story, depends on using conventions creatively. The ghost story’s basic dynamics are settled in the reader’s expectations at the outset. We know that we are to be shown a climactic interaction between the living and the dead, and usually expect to be unsettled by the experience. The skill comes when an author is able to work closely within the limited conventions of the form whilst at the same time reassembling familiar components into something that can still engage and surprise” (xi).
While any ghost story depends on a level of tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, as conventionally dramatized by a character’s curiosity against a series of resisting mysteries, “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” challenges the limits of the traditional framework by emphasizing the extent of its forces of unfamiliarity beyond standard practice. In other words, though relatively underplayed within the narrative, the story tentatively diverges from the strict assumption that the ghost’s principle function is to present (or at minimum allude to) information. In this story, Wharton’s depiction of haunting is at least partially characterized as a force of censorship against the certainty of familiarity. Not only do the mysteries resist revelation, as they do to some extent in most traditional formulations, they furthermore effect a silence about them. In terms of the ghost, despite—or perhaps precisely because of—her appearance in relative comprehensible terms (as a living human), her familiarity is in actually misrecognized. As a result, her presentation propagates a certain incomprehensibility under an illusory assumption of comprehensibility. Furthermore, unlike a traditional ghost whose principle vocation is to reveal a hidden crime, the ghost of Emma Saxon works to actively conceal the crime (of infidelity in this case). In the climactic scene, the ghost’s final reappearance, marked by its unavoidable presence, prevents Hartley, Mr. Brympton, and the narrator from witnessing what is presumably Ranford’s escape: “all was dark behind her, but I saw her plainly” (35). At this moment, Mr. Brympton responds by “[throwing] up his hands as if to hide his face from her” (35)—in the face of the ghost’s appearance, he takes active and complicit part in directly obscuring his own vision and thus comprehension of the situation. Though the narrative’s portrayal of ghostly censorship is most evident in this final confrontation, it exists subtly throughout the story as well. For example, the mere subject of haunting brings
the members of the house’s staff to utter silence, as if collectively conspiring to absolute secrecy; Hartley ultimately acknowledges, “If I questioned them they would deny everything” (27).

Generally speaking, the traditional framework of the ghost genre inevitably relies on such procedures as censorship that exhibit some form of resistance to a complete and immediate comprehension, a narrative coherence that would betray the conventional mystery of the ghost. Beyond a mere temporary impediment to the narrative force of the protagonist’s curiosity, however, Wharton’s haunting censorship, evinced even as early as this first attempt at the genre, effectively extends into a relatively profound sense of subjective privation, reflective of the melancholic haunting as initially formulated by some of James’s ghost fiction. A close examination of Wharton’s literary figuration of the melancholic experience, such as it appears in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” not only exhibits Wharton’s continuation of its Revisionist figuration, but more significantly, it begins to reveal the way that it informs and shapes what is arguably her most substantial contribution to the subgenre: her unique model for deferred experience.

As Wharton (mostly) characterizes Hartley’s narrative experience by the impression of loss isolated from an actual discernible loss or lost object, she reinforces the incomprehensibility of haunting, one of the defining features of her Revisionist ghost literature. In the broadest sense, Hartley’s failure to recognize the ghost as such on her first encounter reflects a form of loss (in recognition, in meaning)—and, having failed to recognize what was lost in the first place, her impression of loss is undirected and ambiguous and thus essentially melancholic. However, the narrative features far more occasions in which Hartley experiences a vague sense of gloom. Although the ghost-hunt begins lightheartedly, it is quickly overtaken by a graver tone whose source is not quite identifiable, at least until the ghost returns and is finally recognized as such. Hartley observes, “I had nothing to complain of; yet there was always a weight on me. I
can’t say why it was so, but I know it was not the loneliness that I felt” (19).198 Within the house, she senses the presence of something invisible—that is, she senses a nonpresence—through the gaps within the certainty and familiarity of experience, exposed by the force of haunting. The door to Emma Saxon’s old room, which must always remain locked—particularly reflects the extensive constraints on Hartley’s experience, namely her sense of sight.199 While the impenetrable boundary of the door itself burdens her ("the thought of that locked room across the passage began to weigh on me” [20]), it is truly the uncertainty of a presence beyond that door that produces Hartley’s melancholia, and she begins to imagine that “someone was cowering there, behind the locked door, watching and listening as I watched and listened” (29, original emphasis).200 As her expectation that something materialize goes unmet, she is overtaken with melancholic anxiety.

Hartley’s haunting melancholia is manifested in an awareness of a certain impoverishment in her experience of reality, but also in an impression that she may be influenced by forces beyond her command and understanding. For example, overcome by a fear of the darkness one night, Hartley nearly cries out, but stops short; she then explains, “at the last moment something held me back,” and she then identifies feeling the control of “some other feeling that I couldn’t put a name to” (29). She is "spell-bound" (29) here, as though she were the mere ventriloquist of some external and invisible power. In several other instances, Hartley

198 As for the rest of the house, during the rare periods in which Mr. Brympton returns home, there is a distinct shift in mood that temporarily overtakes the house, a mood whose sombreness is in butler who looks “as if he’d been getting ready for a funeral” [17]). By contrast, Hartley’s general gloom is not temporary, nor is it consciously linked to any discernible source: ambiguously, it may be localized within the house, but it not of the house, as she ponders, “It was not a gloomy house exactly, yet I never entered it but a feeling of gloom came over me” (20).

199 When asked about the room, the cook merely replies, “That’s nobody’s room” (14), a phrasing that (unlike her quick correction, “It’s empty, I mean” [14]) suggests that the room belongs to the vacant presence of the term “nobody,” as though the emptiness were embodied in an actual albeit invisible presence.

200 Hartley’s panic over the invisible haunting having no material or human form culminates in her attempt to address it (as though it possessed human subjectivity), imploring its materialization: “Whoever you are, come out and let me see you face to face, but don’t lurk there and spy on me in the darkness!” (29).
surprises herself by saying or doing something unexpected, as though compelled against her will. For example, when first meeting Mrs. Brympton, she discloses that she could never feel lonely in her lady’s company, an intimate response certainly out of character for a maid newly making the acquaintance of her employer—though very much in the character of a former [deceased] maid long in the service of and quite intimately familiar with the lady. Upon speaking these words, Hartley quickly notes, “the words surprised me when I’d spoken them, for I’m not an impulsive person; but it was just as if I’d thought aloud” (15), as though she is somehow unknowingly channeling the ghost. Later, when following the ghost to Ranford’s, Hartley feels powerless to resist: “it was as if she had dragged me with ropes. After that I followed her like a dog” (31).

Via such depictions, the melancholic haunting reflects an impression of alienation from reality as such—in terms of limitations in both perception and active agency.

This sense of melancholia persists most forcefully through the first half of the narrative, though it takes a significant turn when the ghost returns for a second visit, a visit that this time, Hartley does recognize as such. Particularly as the ghost seems to appear in full human form, her return, as it is properly acknowledged, marks an unambiguous restoration of that which had been lost. However, even as Hartley stares in silence at the ghost in her complete presence, she identifies the impression of a feeling she cannot identify: it is not fear, but “something deeper and quieter” (30). She still lacks a perfect awareness and comprehension of the scene. In fact, despite letting Hartley finally perceive the ghost, Wharton hesitates in allowing the narrative to

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201 In the short story’s climax, Hartley feels the compulsion of a force outside of her subjectivity one final time. As though the haunting has commandeered her subjectivity, Hartley accosts Mr. Brympton in an effort to prevent him from finding Ranford in the dressing-room: “I don’t know what I thought or feared; but I sprang up and caught him by the sleeve” (34).

202 It is worth nothing that the figure is nevertheless recognized not as the likeness of the deceased maid (as a ghostly, semi-transparent image), but certainly as the maid herself: “There, in the door, stood Emma Saxon” (30, original emphasis). In other words, as Hartley perceives it, the ghost has merged into reality, shedding its very ghostliness. To some extent, the depth of melancholia is lifted insofar as the lost object, the deceased, seemingly returns, and not merely as a figurative reconstruction: not a matter of representation, but of presentation itself.
completely reveal the depth of the mystery either to its characters or readers, and in this sense, Wharton preserves some degree of invisible haunting beyond the materialization of the ghost.

The ghost’s reappearance, despite being visually intact, remains characteristically silent and incommunicative; to Hartley, “her face was just one dumb prayer” (30). Hartley intuits that the ghost has some message to convey, imagining that she “would tell me if she could” (32); however, it quickly becomes evident that the ghost cannot. Hartley, powerless to guess what the secret might be, ponders, “How in the world was I to help her?” (30). As a result of the essential disconnect between the living and the dead that Wharton ultimately preserves here (despite materializing the ghost), the interaction between Hartley and the ghost is significantly disrupted, and seemingly neither can communicate to the other: “I felt there was something I ought to say or do—but how was I to guess what it was?” (31). Just as they reach Ranford’s house, Hartley determines to address the ghost aloud, though as Ranford suddenly appears at the door, the possibility for dialogue with the ghost is foreclosed; Hartley feels the ghost has “left me all alone to carry the weight of the secret I couldn’t guess” (32). With the ghost gone, Hartley is again left in the wake of a ghostly encounter with no comprehension—that is, without having recognized as such the significance of the event. The melancholia persists through this encounter as Hartley continues to feel a “sense of helplessness” (32); she reflects that “her last look had pierced me to the marrow; and yet it had not told me!” (32), capturing the depth of gloom that overcomes her. Because of the ghost’s failure to properly signify, Hartley feels “more desolate than when she had stood there watching me” (32).

In this scene, the presence of the ghost, despite appearing in full human form, serves to obscure the truth more than to reveal it, exposing instead a profound privation in the experience of reality. As this situation continues to imply a melancholic haunting despite the recognized
materialization of its ghost, it testifies to the persistence and fortitude in the narrative’s commitment to preserving the force of haunting through the emphasis of an inextinguishable nonpresence or incoherence. In fact, given Hartley’s and the reader’s sympathies for Mrs. Brympton (and Ransford), the entire outcome of the story is determined by the ghost’s capacity, against the conventional formula, to conceal the “crime” of their affair. More precisely, Wharton’s beneficent ghost is tasked with preserving the force of haunting by keeping the narrative’s secret essentially incoherent, unfamiliar, invisible, and nonpresent. Through most of its duration, the narrative remains Revisionist; however, by the very end, the story does ultimately fall back upon a relatively traditional tendency to explain its mystery, restore comprehensibility (suggestive of a permanent extinguishment of the unfamiliar, invisible, and nonpresent). Through the various allusions Wharton inserts, the careful reader can easily infer the details of the secret. It is unclear if the ghost or its haunting force (as orchestrated by Wharton) ever means to conceal the details of the mystery from Hartley or from the reader, though it is certainly clear that the principle vocation of the ghost of Emma Saxon is to ensure Mr. Brympton does not find out. Yet, just as the reader can ultimately interpret the ghost’s “mute prayer,” it is implied that Hartley and Mr. Brympton can as well. With Mrs. Brympton dead, Ranford exposed as an adulterer, and the ghost’s purpose revealed, there is seemingly no degree of uncertainty remaining. In the last scene through Mrs. Brympton’s funeral, there is no indication that either the ghost or the melancholic effects of its haunting persist—both seem to be forever gone. Within the final words, “and we servants went back alone to the house” (35), there

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203 On the night of the climactic scene, Wharton provides several clues that in part illuminate the tryst: Mrs. Brympton dismisses all of the servants early that night; the door opens and closes in the middle of the night; there is movement heard in Mrs. Brympton’s chamber behind the door; there is also movement heard later in the dressing-room behind the door.

204 In taking note of Ranford’s cane, Hartley adds, “I fancy Mr. Brympton noticed it too, for the red spot came out sharp on his forehead, and all through the service he kept staring across the church at Mr. Ranford, instead of following the prayers as a mourner should” (35).
exists the possibility that a solitude and loss opened through the word *alone* will figure a new instance of haunting, though the literature does not support this possibility.

In the end, the narrative is, by Revisionist measures, a failure insofar as the comprehensibility is presumably restored. By the same token, however, by traditional accounts, the narrative is a success, and the principle reason for this lies in Wharton’s reliance on a model of deferred experience that remains essentially unchanged from what will initially be formalized through Freudian psychoanalysis as afterwardsness. The extent to which the traditional account of afterwardsness remains functional in this short story has first to do with the very particular nature of Hartley’s character that contributes not only to her suitability for and devotion to the position as a maid, but also to her susceptibility to seeing the ghost. This point is emphasized when Mrs. Railton, initially suggesting the position to Hartley, indicates, “And you’re the very woman I want for my niece” (13). Outwardly, she seems to have in mind that Hartley is “quiet, well-mannered, and educated above [her] station” (13). However, given that in passing, Mrs. Railton briefly (and perhaps covertly) notes that, “A year ago I would as soon have thought of shutting a rosy active girl like you into a vault” (12-3), it seems most likely that she assesses Hartley’s suitability according to her experience with typhoid. It seems probably that Mrs. Railton means to imply that because the disease has somewhat disfigured Hartley, leaving her

205 It seems that none of the other servants are capable of seeing the ghost; however, Ellen Powers Stengel argues instead that though presumably *capable* of seeing of seeing the ghost, none of the servants will admit to it due to a “conspiracy of silence” instituted by Mrs. Brympton, forever mourning the death of her devoted former maid—for example, on the first encounter with the ghost, “Agnes overlooks Emma because she is busily engaged in suppressing her memory” (5). Whichever the other servants can see the ghost or not, the point remains: there is something unique in Hartley that accommodates her relatively unmediated encounter with the ghost—that is, either the ability or the willingness to see the ghost.

206 For a variety of reasons, many critics place considerable emphasis on the passing detail that the story commences “the autumn after I had the typhoid” (12). See for example Jacqueline Wilson-Jordan’s “Telling the Story that Can’t be Told,” which performs a thorough reading of the story as a narrative of marginalization situated at the intersection of femininity, disease and invalidism, and haunting. Additionally, Megan Bardolph associates Hartley’s “weak and tottery” disposition with her “fallibility as a trustworthy narrator” (141). Similarly, Sherrie Inness suggests that Hartley’s condition, marked by the disease, allows the story “to reveal some of the hidden secrets of domestic service, like the many cases in which women servants become the subject of unwanted sexual advances” (342).
“so weak and tottery” (12), she will fortunately be immune from Mr. Brympton’s lustful desire. However, we might also consider the possibility that, as Jacqueline Wilson-Jordan points out, the disease has also contributed to “her identity as author” insofar as it seemingly implies not only a tendency to withdraw into the interior space of her imagination, but also a predilection toward the ingenuity and fantasy of horror (as was the case with the story’s author). After all, the last qualification Mrs. Railton asks about relates to her literary aptitude: “You read aloud well, I think?” (13). As the narrative seemingly implies, the unique marking in Hartley’s capacity to engage the haunting (her ability to write and read) points to the same precise marking that qualifies her effectiveness as a narrator: in her nature as essentially reflective.

The degree to which Hartley is a reflective character determines her ability to establish a system of comprehensibility out of the initial incomprehensibility, which in turn indicates the effectiveness of the narrative’s ventures in afterwardsness. Given the atmosphere of the haunted house in terms of all its mysteries, misrecognizing the significance of an event as it occurs seems inevitable, and the likelihood of the recovery of that deferred significance therefore seems to hinge on one’s aptitude in the work of reflection. Hartley, who admits her appreciation of “time to turn things over in my mind” (25), demonstrates the efficacy of her retrospective recognition in several trivial examples throughout the narrative. For example, when leaving on errands one day, she suddenly realizes how out-of-touch she has been with herself, observing, “I hadn’t known till then how low my spirits had fallen” (20). Similarly, when sitting down to sew, she suddenly becomes aware of an established sense of anxiety that she had previously failed to recognize: “Not till I had settled down to my afternoon’s sewing did I realize how the events of the night had shaken me” (27). Due to her inclination for reflective musing Hartley possesses a

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207 On Hartley’s first encounter with Mr. Brympton, he initially looks her over with seemingly desirous intention, but immediately turns his back; Hartley in turn surmises, “I was not the kind of morsel he was after. The typhoid had served me well enough in one way: it kept that kind of gentleman at arm’s length” (18).
particular aptness to interpret, albeit belatedly, that which is otherwise incomprehensible. In this sense, Hartley successfully works through a process of belated reflection in which, after some deferral, she effectively rescues the significance of a prior event from its dormancy.

The most crucial instance of narrative deferral at work in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” occurs in relation to the ghost of Emma Saxon. In this more structured and detailed case, the ghost initially appears, though since she is not immediately recognizes as such, the truth of the scene lies dormant. For this period of deferral, what is significantly also not recognized is the situation’s incomprehensibility itself, insofar as it, as a result of the primary misrecognition, is overshadowed by a presumed, false sense of comprehensibility. It would seem that, unlike the former maids who could not stand to remain in the haunted house, Hartley in her imaginative spirit proceeds, reflecting on the depth of the situation until finally, she can retrospectively recognize the incomprehensibility of the original encounter and in turn replace it with a genuine comprehensibility, not a presumed, false sense of one. This moment, as the secondary event of afterwardsness, occurs precisely when Hartley discovers the photograph of Emma Saxon.208 As Hartley studies the photograph, she is overcome in the epiphanic moment in which the recognition begins to set in: “I picked it up and sat looking at it in a maze. It was a woman’s likeness, and I knew I had seen the face somewhere—the eyes had an asking look that I had felt on me before. And suddenly I remembered the pale woman in the passage” (27, my emphasis). Hartley suffers a relapse, and as she races out of the room, “cold all over,” she notices that her “heart seemed to be thumping in the top of my head” (27). As an associated link is drawn between the pale woman in black from the original event and the photographed woman in this

208 This slightly resembles the moment when young Wharton, upon encountering the book of “perilous reading” (302), suffered a severe relapse in which the trauma of the original event occurs. One might note that in both cases, the secondary event is prompted by an encounter with some representation (reflection) of reality: for the author, it was a short story; for Hartley, it is a photograph.
secondary event, Hartley in all of her cognitive powers works through the process of belated reflection, correcting the initial misrecognition, recovering the significance of the original event from dormancy, and restoring a sense of comprehensibility to the situation as a whole. Just as the case in which the narrative itself retrospectively discloses all of its prior secrets (consequently dissipating the ghost of Emma Saxon), Hartley’s persistent reflective faculties interpret the situation and, in the end, retrospectively apply the deferred meaning and order to the original incomprehensible scene. Both gestures equally assert that the haunting is resolved, and the Revisionist allegiance to the preservation of the incoherent, invisible, unfamiliar, and nonpresent is in turn diminished. In other words, the narrative, through its reliance on traditional models of reflection and interpretation, ultimately presents a traditionalist solution to a Revisionist problem.

The significance of the Revisionism in Wharton’s ghost story is in part undermined by its ending, which falls back upon the traditional framework; however, the short story as a whole remains indispensable as an explication of not simply melancholic haunting in and of itself, but more precisely, melancholic haunting as a formidable force that opposes the traditional operations of reflection and interpretation. From this ghost story her next one, “Afterward,” Wharton will keep intact the prevalence and pervasiveness of melancholic haunting. Again, this Revisionist force will render the haunted situation especially susceptible to the folly of misrecognition for its characters, and again, it will be the task of the heroine, another reader, to reflect upon the situation. However, in “Afterward,” Wharton reconceives the operations of deferred experience in order to drastically accentuate the profound belatedness of its ex post facto presentation. The curious reader similarly speculates on the effects of belatedness in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” even though the issue is entirely undeveloped in its narrative: for example,
by the time the mystery of Mrs. Brympton’s and Ranford’s affair is revealed to the reader, Hartley, and Mr. Brympton (an affair which has presumably been taking place for some time though simply never recognized as such), Mrs. Brympton has already passed on, and the information is no longer relevant. Could the ghost’s disappearance, in the wake of her utter failure, be indicative of her own outdatedness as well? In the following story, “Afterward,” by contrast, Wharton will effectively preserve the incomprehensibility of the invisible by allowing the narrative to profoundly meditate on the critical suspicion that here is left completely untouched by the literature, present only nascently at best: to what extent is the significance of the original event, as it is recognized only belatedly in the retrospective epiphany of the secondary event, too late?

“Afterward”

As we saw in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” even Wharton’s first ghost story demonstrates her remarkable gift for maintaining the pervasiveness of incomprehensibility. However, in the end, Wharton dilutes the Revisionist endeavor by limiting the persistence of her force of haunting. As it turns out, Hartley, due to her curious and reflective nature, successfully restores an impression of comprehensibility to the situation, wherein the plot accommodates her effectiveness in drawing meaningful retrospective significance from deferred experience. While Wharton’s Revisionist potential is evident in this initial story, it is not fully realized until the following short story, “Afterward” (1910).

209 The Revisionist achievements of this tale arise

209 In 1910, eight years after “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” Wharton published “Afterward” alongside a few other notable ghost stories in the collection Tales of Men and Ghosts. Her biographer R. W. B. Lewis informs us that the collection itself was not well received—he claims that “some reviewers dismissed them all as no better than run-of-the-mill magazine fiction; others, on the contrary, accused Mrs. Wharton of an excess of subtlety beyond anything the average magazine reader could enjoy” (296). While Lewis personally praises one ghost story in the collection, “The Eyes,” as a “small masterpiece,” he conversely disapproves of “Afterward” as a story that “begins promisingly but wilts into melodrama” (296). In actuality, it is precisely what Lewis interprets as melodrama that this project
from its extensive presentation of incomprehensibility (also expressly articulated in terms of misrecognition) that not only matches the degree of the previous tale, but surpasses it considerably. Again, the ubiquitous (and melancholic) force of haunting profoundly delimits the subject’s sensory and cognitive faculties not only through the story’s initial narrative conditions but throughout the entire narrative; yet, in addition, haunting is variously manifested in its explicit articulation, its diegetic effects on the characters’ experience of the fictional world, and its extradiegetic effects on the reader’s experience of the text. In addition to this, “Afterward” persists where its predecessor relented, namely in Wharton’s cardinal Revisionist gesture: in reconfiguring the presentation of deferred experience or belatedness so as to expose its effects as imperfect and irrelevant. Unlike “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell,” this story, especially in its circular plot structure, forecloses the possibility of a stable resolution and presents instead a profound inquiry into subjective meaning in spite of the inevitability of intrinsic incomprehensibility. As a result, the productive labor of approaching a text (such as the narrative of an event, the memory of an experience, or the experience of reality, for example) exposes its otherness as such, not as a repetition of a prior original, but as a radical original itself, never seen.

Told in third-person limited omniscience, “Afterward” follows Mary Boyne as she and her husband Ned, retire from America to the remote country estate of Lyng in southern England after “a prodigious windfall” in a mining speculation makes them instantly rich. The couple’s friend, Alida Stair, recommends to them a property, though she warns them that it is haunted by a very peculiar ghost that, by the logic of its haunting, cannot be immediately recognized as

will explore in detail as a powerful Revisionist articulation of drawing meaning from an inevitably incomprehensible experience. This story, like the previous one, commingles American and English elements, as though forcing a dialogue between the literary genre’s innovative and traditional styles. However, in this case, formally speaking, it is the American perspective placed within the genre’s conventional English setting, which in a rather abstract sense implies not the application of a conventional formula to an unfamiliar situation, but conversely the application of an innovative formula to a conventional situation, so as to approach anew, for the first time, through a second sight—a re-vision.
such: “you’ll never know it […] not till afterward, at any rate” (59). Outward from this premise, the narrative is divided into two parts. In the first half, Mary playfully seeks out the ghost, despite its supposed unrecognizability. Her two sightings are almost comic in their characteristic misrecognition: in one encounter, she misrecognizes Ned (as a ghost), and in the other, she misrecognizes the ghost (as a handyman). Then, almost exactly halfway through the story, after a second encounter with a stranger (whom, at the story’s climax, she will eventually learn to have been the ghost), Mary sends the man in to Ned, only to later discover Ned’s mysterious disappearance. In the second half of the story, the stakes shift, and the tone darkens as Mary searches frantically and helplessly to find Ned, though to no avail. Through the loss of her husband, Mary experiences a deep sense of privation. In the final scene, Mary is visited by Ned’s lawyer, Parvis. Through a conversation with him, she learns how Ned has slighted a man named Bob Elwell in the mining speculation, and as a result, as the Boynes celebrated their wealth, the Elwells fell to ruin, and Bob killed himself. When she sees a photo of the man from Parvis’s newspaper clipping, she suddenly recognizes him, much belatedly, as the “man” connected with Ned’s disappearance—at this moment, she experiences an epiphany reflective of the secondary event of the work of afterwardsness. At the very end of the tale, Mary, upon reflecting on the entire series of events recounted in the narrative, comes to recognize the full gravity of the tragedy and acknowledges some degree of responsibility in it. In this crisis, she explicitly begins to reflect on the past events, drawing the closing narrative back to the first lines of the story.

Interpreted as a text of the Realist tradition, “Afterward” could easily be read as the surfacing (or resurfacing) of repressed material that somehow sheds light on certain injustices or archaic hierarchical structures. For example, Ned Boyne’s “survival of the fittest” model of
cutthroat capitalism problematically results in a suicide and the ruination of a family. His idyllic *nouveau riche* lifestyle is disrupted by its hideous underbelly that is exposed through the family at whose expense the Boynes buy their way into leisure. The gendered domestic situation and the exclusion of the feminine from the business and literary realms is vulnerable to similar breakdown as the potentially resentful female protagonist is inadvertently situated into an active role, suggesting a cultural shift in feminist perspective. In each case, it might appear on the surface that ghost uncannily appears—like the return of the repressed—according to a traditional formula in order to unearth buried secrets and to vengefully interrupt the simplicity and apparent innocence of the Boynes’ peaceful habitation. On the surface, Wharton demonstrates sympathy for the marginalized in her deconstruction of the era’s social, political, and economic foundations; as such, the tale seems to deal justice and “liquidate[s] the arrears of some haunting moral obligation” (343). However, such an interpretation may be inclined to read the story’s complex ghostly effects only in terms of their relationship with Ned, and it may be further inclined to reduce those ghostly effects to mere vengeance (observing an eye-for-an-eye model for justice). While such traditional readings begin to acknowledge the short story’s intricacies, even more interesting than this retributive symmetry of law is Wharton’s exploration of the possibility of subjective meaning in the face of a level of incomprehensibility that exceeds the logic of retribution—an incomprehensibility that suggests the possibility of justice beyond law.

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211 For example, Karen Jacobsen notes, “Wharton not only joins the Progressive outcry against the period’s corruption but also attempts to distinguish the moral aristocracy from those who gain wealth through unscrupulous means. Her problem is not with great wealth but with how wealth is acquired. Through the details of Ned’s wrongdoing, the story’s subtext functions as a defense of the Old Money class, a plea to the reader not to judge all the wealthy by the sensational cases making the news” (104).

212 See John Tibbetts’s supposition that the short story “could almost be an allegory of divorce and separation, of a woman left alone, paralyzed, and bereft of any purpose in her life” (49).

213 While the narrative does seemingly invite a reading strictly of social commentary, particularly given its presentation of various “historical others” (such as women, lower classes, immigrants), one is at the same time
The strength of “Afterwards” as a Revisionist narrative derives from its efficacy at establishing a set of initial narrative conditions that orient the reader within the network of traditional generic assumptions, only to profoundly stress the immensity of its eventual subversion. In order to present the illusion of its traditional framework, “Afterward” first fixes the tension between the two principle and opposing generic forces (the work of deferral against the work of reflection). The work of deferral assumes a fundamental incomprehensibility in the narrative’s initial situation, and this is immediately enforced through the setting: the couple, who are strangers in a haunted land, find themselves in “old house hidden under a shoulder of the downs [which] had almost all the finer marks of commerce with a protracted past” (327).

Uprooted and displaced from their recognizable environment, the couple is especially prone to the forces of miscomprehension. Furthermore, the work of deferral is figured primarily through the ghost, namely through articulating the logic of its haunting as a force of incomprehensibility. Attesting to the unrecognizability essential to the confirmedly haunted situation, Alida identifies the (non)presence of a ghost, though she cautions, “Oh, there is one, of course, but you’ll never know it” (325). In turn, Ned, characteristically pragmatic, preempts the reader’s confusion in the matter, asking, “But what in the world constitutes a ghost except the fact of its being known

reminded of Wharton’s approach to ghost literature, as she explicitly articulates it in the preface to *Ghosts* (1937): “the ‘moral issue’ question must not be allowed to enter into the estimating of a ghost story. It must depend for its effect solely on what one might call its thermometrical quality; if it sends a cold shiver down one’s spine, it has done its job and done it well” (10-1).

In their well-earned retirement, Mary and Ned deliberately isolate themselves; for them, “no existence could be too sequestered: they could not get far enough from the world, or plunge deep enough into the past” (327). In the moment Mary first encounters the ghost, she recognizes nothing peculiar: “At the time the occurrence had been less than nothing” (334). However, recognition does occur, albeit belatedly, as the narrative allows brief access to Mary’s perspective from a later time when she recognizes the ghost as such (and with it, Ned’s corresponding uneasiness): “Distinctly, yes, she now recalled she had seen, as she glanced, a shadow of anxiety, of perplexity, rather, fall across his face” (332, emphasis added). Mary further reflects on the process of deferral as she ponders, “Mary could not say that any one of these considerations had occurred to her at the time, yet, from the promptness with which they now marshaled themselves at her summons, she had a sudden sense that they must all along have been there, waiting their hour” (335). Following a period of deferral through which “one just has to wait,” the narrative perspective is afforded due reflection and thus becomes capable of acquiring the significance of the narrative presentation.
for one?” (325). Alida has no answer, and reasonably so. Not only is the ghost itself unknowable in the moment of its encounter, but furthermore, the details of its logic are equally unknown.

However, the narrative’s initial conditions correspondingly present the work of reflection as a force more capable of demonstrating discontinuity than continuity. It is crucial that Alida’s prophecy actually comprises two parts: not only does she warn that “you’ll never know it,” but she adds several lines later, “Well—not till afterward, at any rate” (325). Though these two statements are significantly dislocated from one another, the deferred articulation of the second part is integral to the narrative’s implications; namely, that the work of reflection will interrupt the work of deferral. In terms of the situation’s incomprehensibility, this means that the misrecognition is only temporary, and in time, comprehensibility will be restored. As Alida directs, “One just has to wait” (326). A curious, courageous, and reflective protagonist in the midst of a haunted (and thus relatively incomprehensible) situation, Mary seems prepared for the task. While it is true that one will eventually recognize the ghost, the narrative ultimately demonstrates that by the time this happens, it is too belated to be significant.

While Wharton has established what appears to be a relatively conventional foundation for the short story, the extent of her critiques to the traditional assumptions of afterwardsness as capable of restoring significance belatedly becomes increasingly evident. In the first half of the story, Mary has three “ghostly encounters.” The encounters in themselves each seemingly confirm Alida’s prediction (which itself is an instance of applied afterwardsness) because the significance of each encounter, not immediately recognized as such, is restored afterward. In the first place, Mary looks out the window one day and sees that “a figure shaped itself far down the perspective of bare limes” (335). She watches the figure approach and studies its ambiguous
features. In this recognizing the incomprehensibility itself, she thinks she has spotted her ghost: she thinks, “It’s the ghost!” (336). However, once the ghost begins “gaining substance and character” (336), she realizes she has indeed misrecognized her husband as the ghost. She confesses the “folly” to her husband. In this case, a misrecognition occurs, though the duration of its deferral is relatively short and is corrected within minutes. The other two sightings, in which Mary encounters the actual ghost and misrecognizes it as simply a traveler or foreigner, occur similarly except that their period of deferral is substantially longer: Mary does not recognize the significance of those events until the last pages of the story.

Outwardly, it would appear that such oversights as misrecognizing a ghost are the result of the objective presentation—that is, due to the ghost’s ambiguous presentation, such as its “blurred impression of slightness and greyishness, with something foreign, or at least unlocal” (333). On a closer look at Wharton’s figuration, it becomes evident that the incomprehensibility is less an outcome of incomplete objective presentation than of Mary’s incomplete subjective experience. If the ghost is misrecognized as “but a blurred impression of slightness and greyishness,” it is only so because that is exactly what Mary’s “short-sighted eyes had given her” (333). In fact, in all three instances of misrecognition, the narrative explicitly emphasizes Mary’s “weak sight” (336) and her “short-sighted gaze” (346). As it turns out, Mary’s sight, and correspondingly, her capacity to perceive and make sense of the situation, is obfuscated through the lens of her chronically myopic vision. Therefore, when it comes to

Another of Wharton’s ghost stories, “Miss Mary Pask” (1926), presents a similar circumstance: throughout the entire narrative, the protagonist assumes that the ghostly woman he has encounter is indeed a ghost, only to learn in the climactic epiphany that he has simply misrecognized her—she is merely a living woman, plain and simple. Wharton herself, in the introduction to Ghosts, argues, “The more one thinks the question over, the more one perceives the impossibility of defining the effects of the supernatural” (10). She similarly implies that the mere process of thinking interrupts the capacity of a ghost to be thought of. At one point in the story, Mary correspondingly ponders the “fundamental dilemma: the fact that one’s greater or less susceptibility to spectral influences had no particular bearing on the case, since, when one did see a ghost at Lyng, one did not know it” (331).
perceiving the ghost (or not), the inevitable misrecognition is determined by her own subjective limitations. Furthermore, when Mary is overtaken by a dizziness on her first encounter with
the ghost; however, it is not the ghost that makes her dizzy; rather, the force of haunting exposes
and emphasizes her already-existing “slight tendency to dizziness” (333). Haunting, then, does
not necessarily produce incomprehensibility; rather, it exposes the subject’s intrinsic and
preexisting susceptibility to miscomprehension.

The work of reflection ultimately exploited this susceptibility to miscomprehension as it exposes a fundamental discontinuity across a deferred experience. In examining the reflective epiphanies—that is, the results of the work of reflection—it becomes strikingly clear that the more consequential examples of belated recognition are not celebrated events. While encounters with the ghost in the period of deferral are momentarily captivating, the true event central to the short story is Ned’s disappearance, for this occurrence, situated at the exact middle of the narrative, seemingly determines the transition from the period of deferral do the period of reflection. Significantly, the disappearance, which at first seems facilitated by the ghost, is neither depicted in narration nor witnessed by Mary or anyone else. It eludes all perception, and is incomprehensible in other terms as well. The extent of this incomprehensibility lies in what she calls “negative information” (361)—that is, material whose significance, by virtue of the work of deferral, has been displaced. Significantly, the only clue Mary encounters is a letter: “There remained no possible thread of guidance except—if it were indeed an exception—the

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On this note, Banta suggests in her analysis of the story that haunting exposes an already-present condition inherent to being: she claims, “Wharton realizes that the wish to escape inside, away from the ghosts lurking outside, merely lays one open to the ghosts that wait within” (4). This is to say that underlying an encounter with a ghost is necessarily a corresponding encounter with its haunting, an internal force that corrupts the extensiveness of our experience of reality. Similarly, John Tibbetts contends that in this story, Wharton demonstrates “that there was much that was real in the ghostly and much that was ghostly in the real. The two worlds were so interwoven that they seemed at times scarcely distinguishable from each other” (44). In such an indistinguishability, produced through an exposure of the essential impoverishment (or ghostliness, perhaps) of the human experience of reality, the subject faces a profound disorientation.
letter which Boyne had apparently been in the act of writing when he received his mysterious summons” (360). The fundamental issue with the letter, however is that, in its incompleteness, it “yielded little enough for conjecture to feed on” (360)—it is her task to interpret the other half, to restore the significance that is lacking.

The first reflective epiphany worthy of attention is the moment Mary recognizes Ned’s absence as such. The general incomprehensibility of his disappearance is evident right away when she enters the library and looks all around, “expecting to discover him there” (349). In other words, she does not immediately recognize his absence—that is, that in being elsewhere, his presence is effaced. In fact, it is only moments later, with due reflection, that “gradually it became clear to her that he was not there” (349). After searching blindly about the house for a short while, she returns to the library and finds it in the exact same state as in her prior visit. In this second visit, however, she has an epiphany in which the full force of Ned’s absence overcomes her, and she newly recognizes what she could not recognize originally. In terms of deferred experience, as this secondary event occurs, Mary reflects and now belatedly recovers some of the deferred significance of the original event. However, this experience, as it is depicted in narration, is marked not by triumph and accomplishment, but by shock and horror. Rather than feeling empowered by a restored sense of comprehension (if that is indeed what she is experiencing), she is overcome by the impression of profound subjective privation. On the one hand, at the moment Mary belatedly recognizes Ned’s disappearance, she becomes immediately vulnerable to the experience of mourning insofar as she is now strikingly aware of the precise object of her loss: Ned. On the other hand, however, as she is left in profound solitude with neither ghost nor husband, a new form of haunting emerges whose formlessness

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219 Mary reflects that absolutely nothing has changed: “the library was still empty, and with an unwonted exactness of visual memory she observed that the papers on her husband’s desk lay precisely as they had lain when she had gone in to call him to luncheon” (354).
intensify a severe experience of melancholia. In this moment of reflection, Mary is “seized by a vague dread of the unknown” (354). In the desolation of the dark room, “her short-sighted eyes strained through [the shadows]” (354). Previously, Mary’s myopia is referenced only during the misrecognition of so-called ghostly encounters; accordingly, the insertion of such a reference here implies a ghostly presence. However, there is none; there is only emptiness. The “intangible presence” (354) is precisely a haunting without a discernible ghost. What Mary faces in this moment is not simply the product of Ned’s absence—the mournful absence of an other. Instead, this immensely privative experience is the melancholic impression of nonpresence—the invisible presence of otherness as such, of radical alterity, of the trace left by haunting, that all-pervasive force of absolute incomprehensibility. This scene reflects the extent of Wharton’s depiction not only of Mary as ultimately incapable of overcoming the haunting, but of the belatedness of a deferred experience as ultimately incapable of restoring meaning. As it turns out, the occurrence of a secondary event that belatedly recovers the significance of an original event does not produce the expected results; Mary feels no more secure than she had prior to the secondary event—in fact, her suffering intensifies considerably as the impression of incomprehensibility sharpens.\(^\text{220}\) As though this revelation has resulted in a profound crisis, it has only redoubled her sense of loss, and the deferred experience seems to beg another secondary experience.

In confronting an overwhelming force of radical incomprehensibility, Mary’s only recourse is to imagine a coherence of a form out of the formlessness: “her dread seemed to take shape and sound, to be there breathing and lurking among the shadows” (354). Before her shortsighted eyes, she almost begins to visualize a figure with not only human form but with a sense

\(^{220}\text{Meditating on the work of reflection in general, Mary identifies the persistent emergence of “new problems perpetually bubbling up from the cloudy caldron of human experience” (361).}\)
of human agency, “an actual presence, something aloof, that watched and knew” (354). The ascription of the cognitive agency of the imagined presence to a formless nothingness effectively attempts to reduce *otherness as such* into the comprehensible term of *an other*. In other words, in her inability to accept the haunting force of radical incomprehensibility, Mary resorts to producing a figurative image with which to fill a gaping lack. The act amounts to the introjective process of figurative reconstruction and is symptomatic of her continued reliance on traditional assumptions, namely, on of reducing the incomprehensible to the comprehensible. In a sense, Mary conceptually differentiates her feeble and severely limited subjectivity from a seemingly omniscient objective force. More than this, however, Mary’s preservation of the very possibility that the objective truth of the situation exists (even if it exists inescapably external to her diminutive experience) reflects *yet another* deferral of that truth.

The crisis invoked when Mary belatedly recognizes Ned’s absence foreshadows the reflective epiphany that defines the narrative climax in which she belatedly recognizes not only that the figure associated with the disappearance was a ghost, but that in her failure to recognize its ghostliness as such, it was she who was responsible for admitting it. Ned’s lawyer Parvis, like an “indifferent, implacable emissary of some dark, formless power” (366), visits Mary and illuminates enough details of the original event to allow her work of reflection to finish its course to an epiphany. As he provides her with the photograph from a newspaper clipping in particular,

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221 In another scene, displaces the comprehensibility of the situation onto the house itself, imagining it with a form of cognitive agency: “The house knew; the library in which she spent her long lonely evenings knew. For it was here that the last scene had been enacted, here that the stranger had come, and spoken the word that had caused Boyne to rise and follow him. […] There were moments when the intense consciousness of the old dusky walls seemed about to break out into some audible revelation of their secret” (363). Also, in Mary’s search for Ned throughout the small town, she imagines “the little compact populous island” of England itself as “a Sphinx-like guardian of abysmal mysteries, staring back into [her] anguished eyes as if with the wicked joy of knowing something they would never know!” (359).

222 In a substantially less dramatized scene, once Mary connects Ned’s disappearance with the stranger she admitted to the house (later revealed to have been the ghost of Bob Elwell), she is not satisfied with the answer, but rather asks more questions: “The stranger—the stranger in the garden! Why had Mary not thought of him before? She needed no one now to tell her that it was he who had called for her husband and gone away with him. But who was he, and why had Boyne obeyed his call?” (358).
she recognizes the photographed man, Bob Elwell, as the man associated with Ned’s disappearance. In learning of Elwell’s death, she in turn realizes that her encounter with him must have been more precisely an encounter with his ghost. A line of continuity is thus established between Alida’s prophecy and Ned’s disappearance. At first, Mary seems satisfied that she has finally achieved a sense of clarity over the original event, as she “nodded at Parvis with the look of triumph of a child who has worked out a difficult puzzle” (373). However, this triumph immediately dissipates, and “suddenly she lifted her hands with a desperate gesture, pressing them to her temples” (373). This transition defines the climax of the short story and identifies a severe disconnect between Mary’s expectations and the result of the work of reflection. Following traditional generic assumptions, Mary expects that with an explication of the inexplicable event, she will recover a sense of resolution that will confirm the essential integrity of subjective experience in terms of transparency and coherence. What the belated recognition exposes to her instead, however, is a sense of powerlessness so profound that her subjective experience begins to collapse.

In the first sense, Mary is overwhelmed by a sudden awareness of the extent of her human inadequacy. By virtue of its deferral, the work of reflection always exists posterior to its material, and consequently, the reflective subject is profoundly dislocated from the original event and is thus incapable to affect or influence it. In other words, no amount of information can reverse Ned’s disappearance; no depth of reflective insight is capable of restoring him. Whatever explanation she encounters will be useless; it will be the excessive revelation of the spirit of the staircase, l’esprit de l’escalier (the wit of the staircase) in which one formulates the

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223 In fact, the narrative mood of the entire period of reflection is determined by Mary’s desperation and insecurities. In her search around Dorsetshire, she imagines the island of England itself “as a Sphinx-like guardian of abysmal mysteries” glaring at her mockingly, taunting (359). Her mood is markedly despairing to the extent that, regarding the permanence of Ned’s absence, “she saw herself domesticated with the Horror, accepting its perpetual presence as one of the fixed conditions of life” (362).
perfect reply to a situation only after having left the situation, when it is too late, the significance of the reflective insight is diminished. The work of reflection thus principally exposes the essential human inadequacy: first the extent of the original misrecognition and second the belatedness of the proper recognition. In the narrative, moments of reflective epiphanies reinforce Mary’s sense of powerlessness; in the conversation with Parvis, Mary ponders, “Was it possible that she really knew as little as she said?” (364). In the story’s final pages, Mary realizes not only that she was powerless to prevent Ned’s disappearance, but more narrowly, she was complicit in the event precisely because of her inability to recognize the situation properly: “Oh, my God! I sent [the ghost of Elwell] to Ned—I told him where to go! I sent him to this room!” (373). What her culpability seems to account for, however, is less a sense of guilt than a sense of inadequacy. The crisis invoked by Mary’s reflective epiphany mirrors the one of the earlier scene in the library when she belatedly recognizes the disappearance and experiences two distinct forms of loss. First, the Ned’s permanent absence (which is now recognized more as a nonpresence—that is, a presence that paradoxically persists through its absolute invisibility) is again reinforced, and Mary correspondingly experiences a mournful loss. Second, however, she experiences a melancholic loss when she realizes precisely how much she had not previously known—that is, when she realizes the extent of immense privation in her experience of reality as well as the pervasiveness of the force of incomprehensibility. As a result of the work of belatedness, the deferred recognition of the loss of a particular object threatens to expose a more profound impression of loss that encompasses an essential human inadequacy.

As depicted in the narrative, at the crucial moment of reflective epiphany when Mary ought to recover the significance that has been lost in its dormancy, she encounters instead the

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224 In an earlier scene in which Ned explains the speculation in the mine, Mary experiences a similar realization: “Now, for the first time, it startled her a little to find how little she knew of the material foundation on which her happiness was built” (341).
extreme of melancholia, an impression of loss so immensely profound that all traces of a lost object and the loss itself are obscured beyond comprehension. In encountering the extent of the falsity underlying her basic assumptions of subjective experience in terms of transparency and coherence, she begins to withdraw from reality into a fictional existence. Increasingly through the final scene with Parvis, Mary begins to gradually dissociate from reality. When she first sees the photograph, she notices “Parvis’s answer seemed to come to her from far off, down endless fog-muffled windings” (369). A moment later, as the connection further solidifies, “Parvis’s voice was almost inaudible” to her (372). Mary’s experience dissociates further and further from its reality until finally she suffers a complete psychotic break: “she heard Parvis, a long way off, through the ruins, crying to her, and struggling to get at her. But she was numb to his touch, she did not know what he was saying” (373). In dissociating from reality, Mary suffers a profound crisis of subjectivity.225 It is crucial not only that this scene is situated in the library, but also that in her crisis, she literally feels assaulted by the weight of the literature: “she felt the walls of books rush toward her, like inward falling ruins” (373). In imagining the weight of the book, she further imagines that they build an impenetrable wall that seals off reality at the same time that it encloses Mary’s experience within a false—that is, fictional—reality.226 These details reflect the previous scene in which, after the starting awareness of the vastness of

225 This crisis recalls the final scene of “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) in which the subjectivity of unnamed narrator and the subjectivity of the haunting figure behind the wallpaper collide.

226 Mary is often characterized by her watch for an encounter with the unfamiliar: her “experience as the wife of a busy engineer, subject to sudden calls and compelled to keep irregular hours, had trained her to the philosophic acceptance of surprises” (353). More than simply accepting surprising occurrences, however, Mary seems inclined to anticipate them so as to divest them in advance of their unexpectedness. This strategy is evident in the way she conceives her retirement as “the life they had yearned for, to the point of planning it in advance in all its daily details” (326). There is one particular scene that precisely captures the tone of this (misrecognized) narrative period of deferral: as Mary and Ned watch a sunset from the rooftop after Mary discovered access to the roof when she “pressed (like a novel heroine) a panel that opened on a flight of corkscrew stairs leading to a flat ledge of the roof” (332). Because her mode of understanding is predicated on deferral, Mary envisions herself as a novel heroine; that is, she cannot properly recognize even her own immediate presence. She defers her understanding of herself, interpreting her situation as the existence of an essentially fictive person in a real world—and the parenthetical presentation of this fact only serves to accentuate it.
unknown forces around her, she imagined that the formless dread materialize into a form. Here again, Mary, in a panic, resorts to an impulse to figuratively construct something out of the nothingness. However, given her reliance on the assumptions woven through the genre’s tradition, her only recourse is to defer the significance of the present moment in hopes that it can, in the future, be explained. The effects of this act of deferral are twofold: first, she conceptually refigures her present self as nonpresent (as fictional, like a novel heroine) and second, she conceptually refigures the nonpresent nothingness as present. The difference this time is that, rather than simply imagining a vague form, she constructs something very precise and elaborate: Mary meticulously arranges—arguably to the degree of excessive detail and profound accentuation—a narrative.

Significantly, “Afterward” both begins where it ends and ends where it begins: with a reflection on Alida’s words. The narrative therefore does not merely present these words so as to mock Mary, but rather to suggest that when, “through the tumult she heard but one clear note, the voice of Alida Stair, speaking on the lawn at Pangbourne” (373), her reflective faculties are producing a narrative. The epiphany and the abrupt end seem to necessitate a sequel as the beginning of a narrative is provoked at the end, and given the circularity, the sequel to “Afterward” is another reading of “Afterward.” In other words, to continue the narrative beyond its last line is to follow Mary’s train of thought as she narrates the events of the story—that is, as she, through the work of reflection, returns to an original series of events that are hitherto incoherent. Consequently, by its formal arrangements, “Afterward” demands two passes in its reading. The embedded narrative is the material we have thus far been attuned to; it span the narrated time of the past from June to December and covers the events of the ghostly misrecognition, Ned’s disappearance, and the search for Ned. In terms of deferred experience,
this narrative accounts for the original event—that is, the period of deferral. Under the shadow of this primary, original narrative, however, there lies the barely-perceptible embedding narrative, the time of narration that takes place this final December evening in the moment of reflective crisis as the books collapse upon Mary (or just afterward). In layering these two timescapes, Wharton critiques and extends the complexities involved in Freud’s underdeveloped depiction of afterwardsness.

Thus far, this narrative has been one of loss, and to not follow the consequences implied by Wharton’s complex opening of a second reading of the text is to leave it as such. In exploring Wharton’s culminating Revisionist gesture, however, we will encounter the articulation of a meaningful approach to the subjective experience of reality, via the readerly experience of narrative, in the face of what threatens to be nihilism. In direct conflict with the expectations established by the initial narration conditions, “Afterward” has presented several opportunities for Mary to revise her approach to reality—that is, to renounce her naïve expectations for meaning, resolution, and salvation to come from some deferred moment. The narrative has identified several times through its course that belated reflection does not affirm an unshakable impression of comprehensibility as traditional models assume it to. Because Mary has seemingly not learned the lesson the text has been attempting to impose on her, she has one last chance: the present moment of crisis, which has up until now been understood as a moment of reflection, is reconfigured and newly understood as a moment of deferral because it cannot be comprehended. With this act, the text strikingly resembles Ned’s unfinished letter—the text, and we might be

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227 In reference to approaching past events, historian Edward Wagenknecht contributes to this dualism in the narrative treatment of the past. He claims, “In factual and fictional writing alike, there are two ways to write about the past. One may confine himself to the period under consideration (or try to), viewing the times through the eyes of a contemporary and permitting backward glances but none toward the future. Or one may remain where he is and view the past in the light of all he knows, from wherever it may have been derived” (Wagenknecht ix). It is becoming increasingly clear that “Afterward,” in its fundamentally literary treatment, exhibits both approaches simultaneously.
right to infer from this *any text*, is itself incomplete without its subsequent interpretation. Thus explains her dissociation away from reality and thus explains the production of a reflective text. In her final narrative gesture, Wharton again splits the text in two, though this time, it is between the entire text itself as the embedded narrative and the entire text itself as the embedding narrative—that is, the text is divided into two passages, one to be written (experienced), one to be read (interpreted, reflected upon). This division mirrors the aforementioned division of the embedded narrative into its two constituent linear halves, the period of deferral and the period of reflection. It is finally, in this last opportunity, that Mary reapproaches her experience and demonstrates Wharton’s revisionist model for understanding experience.

In returning to the text the second time, reading it as an embedding narrative, the reader is immediately struck at a remark made in the first few lines. After repeating Alida’s prophecy: “The assertion, laughingly flung out six months earlier in a bright June garden, came back to Mary Boyne with a sharp perception of its latent significance as she stood, in the December dusk, waiting for the lamps to be brought into the library” (323). Knowing what we now know, this paragraph contextualizes the relationship of the two separate timescapes as well as establishing two different versions of Mary. From the initial conditions of this second reading however, the expectations for resolution still seemingly remain. First, Mary is awaiting a lamp, as though figuratively hoping to illuminate the dusky darkness of her despairing December presence. Second, the supposition that the “latent significance” is now perceptible implies a persistence in Mary’s faith in the efficacy of belated recognition. However, as we read on, this “latent significance” takes a different form.

In order to appreciate the depth of Wharton’s Revisionist attitude of haunting, it is necessary to see how she depicts the complex relationship between the two timescapes as not
merely one of necessary linkage in which the reflection is determined by the original, but possibly one in which the original is conversely determined by the reflection. Early in the story, as Alida Stair explains the nature of the ghost that haunts their new estate, Mary reflects on the matter, and her sudden shift in tone jarringly breaks the lighthearted atmosphere as she “spoke up as if from cavernous depths of divination” (325). This malapropos solemnity, furthered by the “sepulchral sound with which her question fell” (326), is seemingly informed from beyond the context of the moment—as though retrospectively determined by the somber mood of the narrator who will eventually reflect on this moment six months later. Such narrative moments suggest the susceptibility of the original event and its meaning to be created artificially and shaped by the trauma’s secondary recurrence.

Afterword

Lukacher reinterprets the nature of Freud’s Wolf Man study: the “crucial issue,” he argues, is “the Wolf-Man’s divided and contradictory patterns of identification. Less important than the scene itself is the nature of the double-bind that it precipitates” (159). The splintered subjectivity that results from the scene, itself a defamiliarization of selfhood, is thus Freud’s central concern. This issue becomes immensely more complex, however, when Lukacher’s references Abraham’s observation of “the way the analytic session itself incorporates and repeats the primal scene” (160). To Abraham, the work of reflection “reveals the opaque indeterminacy of the distance that separates the reflecting subjects from themselves” as it explores “the space that separates the ‘I’ from the ‘me’ […] in this nonpresence of the self to itself” (“The Shell” 84, emphasis original). As such, interpretation will inevitably defamiliarize the subject from him/herself and “the false ‘I’ will then be reconverted into the third person” (“The Lost Object”
Correspondingly, in the story “Afterward,” the attentive reader realizes that the whole tale is simultaneously happening on two levels of temporality, in its two timescapes, and in turn, it becomes clear that not only is the narrative accordingly splintered, but so is Mary’s subjectivity. As such, there are two versions of Mary: respectively, the one being narrated and the one narrating. This splintered subjectivity, which begins to take shape at the end of the tale Mary’s experience becomes unhinged from its reality, ultimately takes form in the structure of the narrative as it occurs in the third-person, which dissociates the narrated subject from its narration by transforming the subject (“I”) into an object (“me”). Though subtle, Mary seemingly prophesizes this precise fragmentation in subjectivity when she contemplates the deferred recognition of the ghost: “Suddenly, long afterward, one says to one’s self, ‘That was it?’” (325, emphasis added). This articulation of the logic of deferred experience exposes the subjective displacement intrinsic to the work of belated reflection.

Throughout the first chapter, the narrative emphasizes this division by presenting two distinct versions of Mary: the original version (a narrated character marked by her active role through the narrated events), and the secondary version (a reflective narrator marked by her passive confinement to library on that fateful December evening). The latter, as she is involved in the work of narrative reflection, is directly referenced within the text; in this sense, the narrating Mary has written herself into her text, though invisible to her characters, as if haunting the narrative. By implication, Mary’s work of narrative reflection is not a passive readership, but an active immersion; it is a full experience. Immediately following the introductory dialogue between the Boynes and Alida Stair, the narrative creates a context in which the narrating Mary

228 Though less pronounced, this same effect of dissociation occurs in “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell.” For example, when trying to make sense of an incomprehensible occurrence (when she hears someone emerge from Emma Saxon’s room), Hartley addresses herself, narrating the situation: “‘Alice Hartley,’ says I to myself, ‘someone left that room just now and ran down the passage ahead of you. The idea isn’t pleasant, but you may as well face it. Your mistress has rung for you, and to answer her bell you’ve got to go the way that other woman has gone’” (24).
exists: the narrating Mary thus reflects on her work of narrative reflection, currently taking place:
“It was to sit, in the thick December dusk, by just such a wide-hooded fireplace, under just such
black oak rafters, with the sense that beyond the mullioned panes the downs were darkened to a
deeper solitude” (326). In comparing the narrating situation with the narrated one, the narrative
established an associated link between the timescapes, and thus reinforces the sense that the
figurative reconstruction produced through reflection is a repetition of sorts of the actual past.
However, underneath this, the solemnity of the “deeper solitude” also suggests a distinction in
tone and thus an inevitable distance between the two timescapes as well.

This return to the past allows Mary to revisit the first encounter with the ghost; knowing
what to expect, she can be prepared, and she can recognize it as such this time. However, rather
than devoting her narrative efforts toward this preparation, she instead studies Ned. Paying close
attention to what she identifies as an “undefinable change” (329) in his demeanor, she seemingly
begins to contemplate the possibility of an approach to reflection not predicated on grasping,
mastering, or comprehending. Significantly, in the midst of her narrating reflection, Mary, as
though growing tired of waiting for the lamps, “rose from her seat and stood among the shadows
of the heart” (328). This seemingly inconsequential movement is indeed symptomatic of an
emergent shift in perspective—for seemingly the first time, Mary voluntarily and comfortably
moves away from the light.229 For the first time, Mary seems to be comfortable with the
darkness, the characteristic figure for incomprehensibility as such. She subsequently
reapproaches the haunting, exploring “a new sense of its meaning” (330). From the shadows of
the December library, she plainly acknowledges that “the room itself might have been full of
secrets. They seemed to be piling themselves up, as evening fell, like the layers and layers of

229 After all, the light seems more threatening than the dark in this text, for the ghost only appears in the light, and
Ned actually disappears in the light: “The sunny English noon had swallowed him as completely as if he had gone
out into Cimmerian night” (359).
velvet shadow dropping from the low ceiling, the rows of books, the smoke-blurred sculpture of the heart” (329). This reflects another observation in the text in which Mary figures the library as an active agent, projecting: “The house knew; the library in which she spent her long lonely evenings knew. […] There were moments when the intense consciousness of the old dusky walls seemed about to break out into some audible revelation of their secret” (363). The difference between these two moments, however, is that this new one, during the moment of reflective narration, occurs with a sense of acceptance, devoid of any anxiety. As though finally attuned to a complex form of haunting that appears not until the second half of the story (that is, the haunting of otherness as such that appears without the accompaniment of a ghost), the narrating Mary wonders about the possibility that her husband had, at sometime early in their stay, seen the ghost without her knowing, and was “silently carrying about the weight of whatever it had revealed to him” (331).

This reading culminates with the narrative’s return to the first ghostly encounter with Mary and Ned on the rooftop—after all, this marks the secondary event’s return to the original event. It is here, in this arrangement, in the experience of a belated event, that she finally demonstrates an alternative perspective. In the reflection, which proposes to offer an objective perspective, Mary significantly does not pay attention to the ghost, but rather to her husband. In reviving the memory, she “now recalled that she had seen, as she glanced, a shadow of anxiety, of perplexity, rather” (332) in her husband’s face. She has a striking realization at this moment: that “her husband had apparently seen more” (333). She identifies a lack, and, for the first time, there is no attempt to fill it. Just following this, the presence of the narrating Mary recedes entirely from the narrative frame, as though it is precisely she to whom Ned was referring a

230 It is not insignificant that Mary identifies in Ned a certain knowingness, as though he recognizes the ghost in its experience. If this is the case, then Alida’s prophecy (and the virtue of afterwardsness) is invalidated.
moment ago in discussing their imperceptible ghost: “And thereupon their invisible housemate had finally dropped out of their references, which were numerous enough to make them soon unaware of the loss” (330). After this scene, the narrating Mary is not to be seen again through the story’s four remaining chapters; she becomes invisible in her presence, and only the trace of her narrating reflection can be felt. The epiphany of this particular work of reflection is not a restoration of what is missing, as the work of introjection proposes to supply, but an acknowledgment of an inescapable and intrinsic missingness as such—she seemingly finally identifies herself as the imperceptible ghost haunting her characters through the work of reflective narration. Strikingly, Mary does not attempt to overcome the gaps in her narrative. Even in the act of piecing together the details, the narrating Mary, who singlehandedly composes the text, does not theorize what exactly happens to Ned in the library when Elwell comes; she acknowledges his disappearance without qualifying it. Additionally, as she presents the story, despite knowing well in advance that Elwell is the ghost, she refrains from treating him as such in her reconstruction. Thus, Mary’s recollection is not given with the attempt to supply missing details, to access the truth of the situation with the mad accumulation of knowledge, nor to correct her short-sightedness or her weak sight; instead, in terms of its embedding frame, it eventually becomes the articulation of the holes bored into the experience of reality.

According to traditional models, especially as articulated in Freud’s articulation of afterwardsness, the work of reflection aspires return to an original meaning, and as it retrospectively applies meaning to an otherwise incoherent original event, it closely resembles the interpretation of symbols. Abraham explores the conventional means of analytical interpretation, especially through an understanding of language as it narrates events and ideas, and begins to formulate an alternative approach, one that reflects Mary’s presently emerging
shift in perspective. Defining symbols as “a series of enigmas whose worth lies in their allusion to something other than their manifested meaning” (394), Abraham initiates an inquiry into the analysis of symbols, a work inevitably tied up with haunting that undermines the possibility of a meaningful reunification of a symbol to its lost wholeness (as in the tradition of Freudian afterwardsness). The nature of the symbol, Abraham suggests, derives from the Greek concept of the symbolon, which Esther Rashkin describes in detail:

The symbolon was a piece of pottery or earthenware that was broken in two prior to someone’s (usually a warrior’s) voyage. One of the two pieces remained at the site of departure while the other was carried by the traveler and ‘voyaged’ with him. Upon his return (often many years later), the traveler’s piece of pottery served as a sign of recognition and as proof of his identity when it was rejoined with its matching complement. (47)

A symbol, which represents the broken fragment of what was once an original unity, recalls the “unfinished phrase” (364) of Ned’s letter, which impels Mary to analyze and establish a coherence of the fracture out of which he disappeared. Insofar as the work of analysis works to establish continuity between an original and a secondary event, it is guided by the focused attempt to restoration of an original unity. That is, the work of traditional analysis, by Abraham’s means, following the deferral of meaning, “restores to the symbol its missing part” and thus consequently “changes it back into its original” (394). The significance of the letter lies in terms of, for this feature is precisely what in general characterizes a text’s (or a situation’s) very need for reflection, or, more specifically, the work of analysis that organizes coherence out of the various reflected components.

Abraham contends however that the transformation back into wholeness does not happen magically on its own: it “does not always succeed—far from it—by means of meta-psychological ‘sorcery’” (394). Indeed, there is often an obstruction to this transformation of

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231 From the essay “Notes from the Seminar on the Dual Unity and the Phantom,” [“Notes du séminaire su l’unité duelle et le fantôme”] (1974-5). Subsequent translations from this text are my own.
meaning due to the presence of a ghostly presence hidden within the unconscious (that is, “the presence of a stranger in the unconscious”), within a figurative crypt in the Ego (394-5). The ghost, the other housed within the subject, interrupts the transmission of meaning through the interpretation of symbols. The haunting, born from the break [“la coupure”] of the unity into the symbol, is the force of difference that defines otherness. As a result of this particular form of haunting that emerges out of the invisible presence of a symbol’s missing other, there occurs a figurative “separation which takes place within [à l’intérieur]” (397).

According to Abraham’s reading of psychoanalysis, the figurative separation from the mother in terms of subject-formation is the event which establishes the original trauma that will be reenacted throughout the subject’s life through the use of language (which serves as a repeated secondary event through which the trauma is persistently experienced anew, as though always for the first time). The cleavage from the mother, the “primal event” or “radical beginning” par excellence, establishes the model from which all other original, unrecognizable traumatic events emanate.

Whereas the figurative mother was once, to the semi-conscious infant, an oceanic everything (“amnion, warmth, nourishment, mainstay, body, cry, desire, rage, joy, fear, yes, no, you, me, object, and project” [“Shell” 96]), the subject is always already dislocated from being, from reality as such; that is, dislocation is a characteristic essential to subjectivity. In this sense, subjectivity is the incorporation of the lost element within, a living fragment: a symbol.

In citing Freud’s fort/da game, Abraham suggests that language is the means by which the subject copes with the lost unity—with the mother, that is. Abraham argues that the infant

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232 It is not an insignificant matter that in “Afterward,” the ghost’s arrival interrupts Ned’s letter-writing. Mary identifies the ghost as the figure “who had come in that day to call Boyne from his unfinished letter” (370), as though it were indeed the ghost’s sole purpose to interrupt the text.

233 See Beyond the Pleasure Principle, wherein Freud observes a particular one-and-a-half-year-old boy who “had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business” (13). Freud observed that the boy would say “O-o-o-o” for fort [gone] and “da” [there], and he notes, “This, then,
discovers the word of the mother, the pieces of the mother, and perhaps most importantly, the edge of the mother ["bout-de-mère"], and at this limit, “language [les paroles] is decentered from the person, even from the mother, in order to name objective events” (414). It is language which lies at the very center of the trauma of the individuation of subject-formation. Not only is the trauma of loss recapitulated for the subject (as was the case for the little boy in Freud’s *fort/da* game), but furthermore, language, was responsible for this originary separation in the first place in the way that it forced apart objective and subjective space. In other words, language creates a “difference which, through the magical effect of the coincidence created between words and things, henceforth separates for the child the conscience from the unconscious of the mother” (414), and consequently, “in the place of the unconscious of the mother, the word will signify the objectivity of the exterior world” (414). Despite that the fragmentation into the symbol occurs precisely because of the use of language—and its essential *symbolic* nature—Abraham notes that the attempt to make meaning in symbols and in language nevertheless establishes the attempt of the fractured subjectivity of the child to reconstitute itself retroactively with its original wholeness. For Abraham, therefore, the work of analysis, the use of language to figure events into narration, is fundamentally an act that continues to fracture experience, to illuminate our essential dislocation, and to enforce incoherence as though through haunting.

Whereas traditional Freudian psychoanalysis privileges a structured analytical procedure in order to force coherence between events, Abraham proposes a more creative approach of reflection that explores the nature of the fracture and does not attempt to conceal the lines of its fissures. In “Afterward,” Mary’s reflective narrative serves not to overcome a fundamental
distance between her experience and what she has hitherto considered to be reality, but rather to affirm it. Abraham and Török illuminate this dislocation, suggesting that, “Reality can then be defined as what is rejected, masked, denied precisely as ‘reality’; it is that which is, all the more so since it must not be known; in short, Reality is defined as a secret” (“Topography” 157). The traditional model for analysis, as it enforces an associative link between an original, incomprehensible event and its secondary reflection, reduces reality as such from its infinite existence into a fictional coherence, and in the process, the depth of reality is compromised and diminished. Consequently, when considering the work of analysis in the approach to deferred meaning, one must ask the hypothetical question: “What if the ‘crime,’ the secret content we choose to call Reality, were nothing but fantasy? Or, at the very least, a case of faulty recognition after the fact of an innocent past?” (159). Haunting, which ultimately inhibits one’s capacity to properly comprehend an event as it occurs, alienates the subject from reality as such—or more precisely, an engagement with haunting reveals that the subject has always been alienated from that reality.

Through narrative reflection, Mary experiences a profound lack in her dislocation from reality, and it truly begins to indicate to her (and to the reader) the inefficacy of the work of reflection—that is, its inability to recover the deferred significance as such. Unlike the figurative reconstruction of introjection that illusorily presents itself as the return of a lost object, this work of narrative reflection, Mary seems to identify, is imprecise. In one sense, the work of reflection recognizes the significance of the original event too late for it to be relevant, but in another sense, the work of reflection itself, like any act of translation, is fundamentally reductive in its procedures, and the reflection is therefore subject to inaccuracy.234 The reflection, the narrative

234 Though subtle, there are a few inconsistencies in Mary’s presentation of material that together suggest the imperfection of either her recall or her narration capacities. In the final scene of the short story, Mary remembers
seems to suggest, is not necessarily determined directly in relation to the original event. Mary’s “new sense of it meaning” is not equivalent to the recovery of a lost object; rather, it is an awareness of her presence in the work of creative reflection. In fact, through this scene, Wharton presents an alternative mode of reflection that proposes an approach to the text that is not determined by its comprehensibility—that is, by the extent to which its reader can literally grasp its material. Rather, it is an affirmation of the insurmountable disconnect between an original event and its secondary event; it is the dislocation between an event and its narration, between reality and its experience. It is as though this reflective moment is not understood any longer in terms of its dependence on a prior moment—its dislocation establishes it as radically unique, experienced for the first time, *jamais vu*. In this sense, it is the creation of an experience of the radical present.

In this rooftop scene in which the couple watches the sunset together, there is very touching tenderness. The narrating Mary, layered into the text as an observer, watches the fictionalized version of herself and Ned as they connect for just a brief moment:

She remembered still how, standing at her side, he had passed his arm about her while their gaze flew to the long tossed-line of the downs, and then dropped contentedly back to trace the arabesque of the yew hedges about the fish-bond, and the shadow of the cedar on the lawn. ‘And now the other way,’ he had said, gently turning her about within his arm; and closely pressed to him, she had absorbed, like some long, satisfying draft, the picture of the gray-walled court, the squat lions on the gates, and the lime-avenue reaching up to the highroad under

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Alida’s words (“Through the misty surgings of her brain she heard the faint boom of half-forgotten words” [370]); however, where the final scene presents them as, “You won’t know till long, long afterward” (373), the opening scene presents them as, “Not till long long afterward” (325). There is a similar distortion between Mary’s two different accounts of Ned’s unfinished letter, between “I have just received your letter announcing Elwell’s death […]” (356) and “I have just heard of Elwell’s death […]” (360). Though seemingly insignificant, the difference in presentation undermines the premise of perfect reflective accuracy and in turn proposes that literary reconstruction takes certain liberties with truth procedures and does not always seek to fill in the gaps of knowledge as precisely as possible.

In her preface to the collection *Ghosts*, Wharton implies her belief that readership (and the work of reflection by association) is active and creative: “I was conscious of a common medium between myself and my readers, of their meeting me halfway among the primeval shadows, and filling in the gaps in my narrative with sensations and divinations akin to my own” (8).
This scene, arguably the most poignant of the narrative, is presented not as tense, desperate, or desolate; it is loving, gentle, and affirming. The lengthy description of the landscape is relaxed, and it is seemingly the narrator’s pleasure to lose herself in writing it as much as it is the character’s pleasure to lose herself in viewing it. As Ned and Mary view the scene from afar, they are at peace; Mary “absorbs” it, but in a very figurative way, as entirely without the measure to grasp, to master, or to comprehend. In that the sublimity of the scene is not possessed by its viewer, it is appreciated from its insurmountable distance. In precisely the same way, the narrating Mary looks upon this narrated memory. It is not understood to be the exact return of a lost object; the narrating Mary appreciates it from her inevitable dislocation not in terms of what it represents (that is, Ned, the lost object), but instead in terms of its very presentation (that is, according to what it is: a scene, a view, a reflection—and nothing more). The moment does not last, for just as the ghost’s arrival interrupted Ned’s letter-writing, so too it interrupts the connection of lovers. Having seen noticed something in the visitor, Ned leaves the scene; both the narrating Mary and the narrated Mary watch him “push past her with a sharp ‘Wait!’ and dash down the twisting stairs without pausing to give her a hand for the descent” (). The narrating Mary watches him disappear, but she makes no effort to stop him, nor does she express despair. Furthermore, it is not important what he has seen; the narrative makes no attempt to account for it. It is only important that he leaves and that this time Mary can watch acceptingly. This reflection affirms the mournful loss of a direct object (Ned, a tender moment shared between lovers, even her own innocence). Even more, this reflection affirms a melancholic loss, an impression of loss in general, independent of any particular loss, independent of any particular lost object. This reflection affirms not precisely the ghost, which often announce the force of
haunting, but rather it affirms *haunting as such*, as a figurative force of incomprehensibility, maintaining the invisible existence of all things just beyond our human senses, our human cognition, our human comprehension. It is an affirmation of the essential dislocation that opens every moment of reflection to absolute newness. It is an affirmation of *presence as the creation of an experience always incomplete, always dislocated, yet radically unique*. 
CONCLUSION

In a comically playful though poignant portrayal, Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon* (1997) explores the shift from a traditionally English perspective on haunting into what this project henceforth will call a Revisionist perspective, amplified by the title characters’ foray into the unfamiliarity (the American wilderness). From its Postmodernist perspective, the novel caricaturizes the popular English conception of the Romantic Gothic ghost through the minor recurring character, the Ghastly Fop. The fop exemplifies the traditional model of the literary ghost through his association with figuratively restoring [financial] equilibrium and stability by settling unresolved debts of the past. In presenting the ghost through such essentially laughable characterization, however, *Mason & Dixon* accentuates and critiques the essential naïveté in the traditional assumptions of haunting. The ghost is illustrated as follows:

The Ghastly Fop. He’s seen at Ridottoes and Hurricanes, close to Gaming-Tables, as to expensive Nymphs. But he speaks to no one. No one approaches him. ‘Not I, thank you,—much too ghastly,’ is the postventilatory Murmur among the Belles attending. He is reported to be the Wraith of a quite dreadfully ruin’d young man come to London from the Country, who can return neither there, nor to the World of Death, until sizable Debts in this one be settl’d. [...] The Ghastly F., true to his legend is engaged in the long, frustrating, too often unproductive Exercise of tracking down ev’ryone with whom he yet has unresolv’d financial dealings. To some, he seems quite conventionally alive, whilst others swear he is a Ghost. That no one is certain, contributes to his peculiar Charm, tho’ Admirers must ever sigh, for but One Motrix commands his Attention and Fidelity,—the Account-Book. Some of those nam’d therein have cheated him of money he must collect, others are creditors whom he must repay, and so forth. (527)

Within the fictional world of *Mason & Dixon*, the Ghastly F. appears in scores of literary accounts circulating in the 1760s, depicting his adventures collecting and paying debts and generally “righting Injustices” (527). While Pynchon accurately portrays the historical interest in the ghostly motif according to the imperative to settle “sizable Debts,” he principally does so
in order to illuminate the problematic assumptions underlying such early portrayals. First, Pynchon parodies this Romantic Gothic depiction of the ghost as laughable and frivolous, and thus insignificant. As a rake, neither the readers of the series nor the characters within them take the ghost seriously. Second, the fate of the Fop remains perpetually suspended within unresolved debt through the unending volumes of publications; as he is presented, there is seemingly no possible terminus of this series of absurd length.

Through the Ghastly Fop’s indefinitely indeterminate state, Pynchon underscores the fundamental irresolvability latent within the desire to resolve such complex issues as the unpresentability of otherness. In characterizing the literary accounts of the fop as seemingly eventually expansive, *Mason & Dixon* seems to allude to an ultimate inability to properly contain, master, or address ghostly haunting through a literary text. Within the traditional model to which nearly all instances of the modern ghost can be traced, however, Pynchon actually presents a contrast to the conventional tendency to overshadow and compensate for the disruption caused by the ghostly. As a profound counterpoint to this traditional treatment of the ghost, however, Pynchon weaves beneath the surface of its parody a second, more significant ghost: Mason’s deceased wife, Rebekah. Quite distinct from the Ghastly Fop, Rebekah listens more than she speaks; her presence uniquely appears “uncontroll’d by any apparent End or Purpose” (540), and she provides no details of her ghostly existence, which thus remains enshrouded by her otherness. When Mason tells her of his superstitious rituals to commemorate her, she responds, “Lit Candles? I am past Light. Pray’d for me ev’ry Day? I am outside of Time” (172). If she is marked by anything at all, she is marked—like the Postmodernist novel itself—by an inevitably impenetrable alterity (not a correction of it). The ghost of Rebekah, in contrast to the Ghastly Fob, presents a haunting that is fundamentally indirect and incomplete. Granted, Pynchon’s text

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236 For a detailed analysis of Rebekah, see Daniel Punday’s “Pynchon’s Ghosts” (2003).
is a work of “historiographic metafiction,” and the ghost of Rebekah is depicted according to sensibility far more of a Postmodernist slant than one of the 1760s; nevertheless, the novel articulates the essential point that latent within the American experience is the capacity to reimagine haunting as an encounter with otherness that cannot be reduced to any network of sameness. It is precisely this contrast which underscores the critical distinction between the traditional treatment of haunting (characterized by the Ghastly Fop) and what emerges near the end of the nineteenth century, which this project identifies as Revisionist haunting (characterized by Rebekah).

Though it is unlikely that our cultural fascination with ghosts will ever again rise to the level it enjoyed at the height of the Age of Spiritualism, currently, there is an undeniably significant revival of the subject. Granted, interest in ghostly matters—in both practical and literary terms—never completely died away following the recession of American and English occultism at the close of the Victorian era; however, the extent of its current conspicuously rising popularity is striking. In recent decades, America in particular has witnessed a considerable broadening of the ghost’s cultural resonances, evident in its penetration into such diverse literary and cinematic meta-genres as comedy, romance, drama, action, science fiction, thriller, and horror. Even more than this, a progressively widening appreciation for the figure of the ghost is reflected across a broad range of cultural productions, including: an increase in literary publications on the matter (including a marketing toward the young adult audience so substantial as to necessitate the creation of such sections as “Teen Paranormal Romance” in bookstores), Hollywood’s relentless widespread release of ghostly features on the big screen, the

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237 For an extended discussion of Linda Hutcheon’s term, see The Politics of the Postmodern (62-92).
238 Peter Buse and Andrew Stott claim that “the nineteenth century, with its spiritualists, mediums, table-tilting séances, spirit-rapping, Ghost Club and Society for Psychical Research, was the most accommodating historical period for the ghosts which have fallen on hard times in the late twentieth century,” and consequently that today, “ghosts seem a little dated, paling in comparison with such sophisticated other-worldly phenomena” (1).
sudden emergence of countless paranormal reality television programs narrowly devoted to hunting ghosts (and a corresponding surfacing of internet venues promoting various do-it-yourself ghost-hunting equipment), and the reappropriation of the term in diverse theoretical circles. Without question, the figure of the ghost has returned to secure an increasingly prominent corner of the pop culture industry.

The extensive resurgence of the figure of the ghost has in many ways effective reestablished its longstanding cultural and literary tradition into popular imagination. In nearly all of its modern literary manifestations since Hamlet, ghostliness is inextricably bound to a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar. This tension is especially evident in the peculiar nature of the ghost: a subject, who, originally existing in familiar human terms, is, through the event of his or her death, displaced into absolutely unfamiliar terms—however, in the return from death, the form of a ghost, now skirting both conflicting identities, is a confused comingling of the comprehensible and the incomprehensible. However, according to its longstanding traditional treatment, the incomprehensible tends to be vastly overshadowed by what proves to be a compulsive preference for comprehensibility. In order to reinforce the popularly acceptable impression of prevailing subjective mastery, generic standards seemingly demand that their ghosts be situated only in terms of their predetermined exorcism. Consequently, as ghosts are eventually overcome, so too is their haunting—in turn, traditional, normative structures are restored. According to such formulations, the ghost’s ultimate relevance as a literary trope lies not in its capacity to depict the incomprehensible, but instead in its capacity to overcome (and produce a coherence) the incoherent.

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239 This opposition between the familiar and the unfamiliar has many dimensions, and can be variously expressed in such similar ones as presence and nonpresence, reality and fiction, self and other, and so on. For the sake of simplicity, I will resort only to the terms familiar and unfamiliar here.
While today’s renewed interest in ghostly matters partially resembles the pervasive cultural fascination of centuries prior, it is also distinguishable from it principally in terms of its audience’s reception. Perhaps the most pronounced difference between today’s ghost story and its immensely popular Victorian predecessor is that the latter was written for an audience that typically held at least a tentative belief in the subject matter. As Edith Wharton claims in her 1937 preface to the collection *Ghosts*, “Since first I dabbled in the creating of ghost stories, I have made the depressing discovery that the faculty required for their enjoyment has become almost atrophied in modern man” (8). If the ghost was an outdated figure in 1937, it is even more so today. However, though popular belief in the matter may no longer be as prevalent as it once was, the richness of the trope has not suffered—if anything, it has redoubled. Generally divested of its vocation (and even obligation) to reflect a practical belief, contemporary ghost fiction finds itself substantially freer to challenge the expectations of its generic conventions. Certain recent literary explorations have demonstrated the extensiveness of haunting as the trope that has grown beyond the limits of its longstanding tradition, one that newly articulates an essential incomprehensibility of otherness lying beneath our experience of reality.

Generally speaking, the traditional approach to ghostly haunting, predicated on the eventual affirmation of mastery, coherence, and familiarity, has narrowly dominated the scope of the genre throughout the history of the modern ghost story since the rise of the Gothic novel. The recent revival of a literary, cultural, and theoretical fascination with the ghost, however, has increasingly opened the trope of haunting to its capacity to articulate the forces of incomprehensibility. For example, the immeasurable success M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Sixth Sense* (1999) has enjoyed purely by virtue of its memorable twist ending that completely subverts its characters’ and audience’s conventional expectations, for instance, illustrates the
genre’s ripeness for the substantial and numerous challenges made to its traditional framework. More than simply exploiting the simplicity of conventional expectations, however, *The Sixth Sense* presents a wide range of complex inquiries into the nature of haunting which ultimately contributes to a wider expression of radical revision. When it is climactically revealed the film’s protagonist, Dr. Malcolm Crow, has in fact been a ghost throughout the entire story, haunting is correspondingly implied to be not something temporary to be addressed and eventually resolved, as it once was, but rather something inevitable to be acknowledged and affirmed as a critical component of subjectivity. As such, upon this realization, Malcolm must revisit his entire recent history (through reflective narration) and admit to a shortcoming in the assumptions of his experience of reality. Through a series of flashbacks, the film returns to pivotal moments and corrects them according to a more objective outlook, not originally accessible due to Malcolm’s (and the audience’s) inherently narrow subjective confinement.240

Following the cultural success of *The Sixth Sense*, countless other ghost narratives subsequently begin to emerge, all similarly concerned with exploring the possibility of a hidden component of a character’s subjectivity.241 In exploiting the characters’ and the audience’s pretenses of the fictional reality, such Hollywood films tend to articulate a fundamental challenge to the true extensiveness of subjectivity, and the general popularity of their release attests to the correspondingly widespread cultural acceptance and even appreciation of such

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240 George Wilson’s “Transparency and Twist in Narrative Fictional Film” (2006) traces a wider corresponding trend within recent mainstream cinema toward “a positive explosion of epistemically twisted movies” (81), exploring the depth of such systematic violations in classical cinematic conventions. According to Wilson, a violation in the spectator’s expectations of transparency in the presentation of narrative material provokes a crisis wherein the spectator becomes aware that he or she can no longer rely on sensory perception to attain the truth of the situation. In other words, when a film violates the expectation of transparency, it demonstrates that its narrative apparatus cannot determine whether the perception of the event “constitutes an objective situation in the world of the fiction” or whether “it is merely a content of the visual experience of some character in the film” (94).

revisions. In terms of depicting a profound and inevitable limitation of the experience of reality, the ghost as a literary figure provides substantial depth to this seemingly aporiatic ontological-phenomenological inquiry. This development has seemingly culminated in various speculations on a form of haunting unique to its radical revision that, not extrinsic but intrinsic to human experience, is expressive of something unknowable and inevitable underlying reality—something which, by virtue of its absolutely invisibility, exists to us only in terms of its insurmountable radical otherness. In confronting the depths of such otherness, certain recent explorations of literary haunting newly reflect on the profound limits of human subjectivity according to the ultimate inability to properly master its situation.

As certain exemplary currents in ghost literature and film have recently begun to reconsider such traditional framework, they have exhibited a powerful, concerted effort to open the genre to a multitude of complex and fresh reimaginings. Broadly speaking, such alternative explorations extend beyond the limited figuration of the ghost as a discernible yet temporary suspension in the work of mourning and conversely into a thoughtful inquiry into such complex notions as peripheral spaces, freedom, justice, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy. Such tangled concerns outwardly appear to be the product of a principally Postmodernist experiment, and one might therefore expect such a corresponding radical revision to the ghost story genre to be capable of emerging only from within a context narrowly localized to the later portion of the twentieth century and beyond. However, this project has demonstrated that such a drastic shift in generic assumptions initially emerges not at the end of the twentieth century, but rather with the first appearance of the Revisionist ghost story an entire century prior.

In contemporary theoretical philosophy, the figure of the ghost, some instances more subtle than others, has been indispensable in the articulation of new models of subjectivity that
are predicated upon internal otherness, irrationality, and indeterminism. Levinas’s ethics of otherness, for example, seems to draw from the same current of invisibility, unfamiliarity, and otherness as do the Revisionist ghost stories that precede it. Appearing relatively early in the wave of contemporary philosophy, his work arguably provides a substantial theoretical framework that significantly contributes to the development of poststructuralism, post-colonialism, gender and queer theory, and postmodernism—one might even say that these later models are in some sense haunted by Levinas. By precisely the same turn, this project inquires into the degree to which Levinas (and Abraham and Török, as well as several other twentieth-century thinkers) may in fact be indebted to (haunted by) the Revisionist ghost literature that, in its emergence decades prior, presents the demand for radical shifts in thinking through subjectivity. The fact that an increasingly substantial set of theorists explicitly turn to the figure of the ghost in the articulation of their concepts seems to affirm this supposition, and perhaps there is some truth in what Peter Buse and Andrew Stott say in the introduction to their collection *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (1999): that “chances are, ghosts will make another comeback” (1).

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242 Though Jacques Derrida’s coinage of the term *hauntology* in *Specters of Marx* (1993) most prominently marks the theoretical appropriation of ghosts and haunting, many other significant theorists throughout the past several decades have resorted to the literary trope in order to articulate their philosophies in some way another, for example: Emmanuel Levinas, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Paul de Man, Nicolas Abraham, and Slavoj Žižek, among others.

243 Colin Davis claims that Derrida’s recent reanimation of literary ghostliness into theoretical discourse in *Specters of Marx* (1993) “has spawned a minor academic industry” (376).
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