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“A Sisterhood of Reforms:”

The Subversive and Reformatory Power of Spiritualism and the Female Medium in Women’s
Supernatural Fiction in Victorian England

An Essay Presented

by

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Abstract

This thesis will examine the intersection between the influx of female writers of sensationalized Victorian supernatural fiction and the female mediums and participants of the Spiritualist movement as precursors for the early feminist “Woman’s Movement.” This thesis will argue that through the medium of periodicals, short stories, Spiritualist forums, and the séance, women engaged in both spiritual and social boundary crossing, existing in a liminal space of in-betweenness. Thus, the dead become the most fitting emblem for silenced and oppressed women. This thesis will focus on four supernatural periodicals from the authors: Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Margaret Oliphant, Lettice Galbraith, and Rhoda Broughton. Through fictional explorations of Spiritualist practices, these four women worked within the narrow confines of the woman writer to highlight the failings of societal institutions and gendered ideologies such as the “Angel in House,” the marriage narrative, and the domestic narrative. Furthermore, this thesis will examine how these women used the space of the séance and the figure of the medium to highlight the perpetuation of such narratives that reinforce the ideologies of these institutions, which ultimately leave women vulnerable to a patriarchal system. Thus, the woman writer, the female ghost, the female medium, and the professional woman become similarly characterized by disembodiment, a displacement from society, which is created and sustained by patriarchal structures and systems in which women are relegated by notions of traditional gender roles through the perpetuation of harmful ideologies.

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Chapter I : The Displacement of Woman in Modernity

The Professional Woman, the Spiritualist Movement, and the Woman Question

“Let every woman, who feels the chains imposed on her by tyrant custom, resolve to break them, cost her what it may.” (Hill, *The Agitator*).

Late nineteenth-century England bore witness to the genesis of numerous social, political, and religious movements, which emerged in response and retaliation against the suffocating reality of the conditions of Victorian womanhood; two such movements included the Woman Movement and the spiritualist Movement. Both of these serve as the contextual backdrop for the aforementioned quote, in which Miss. S. Hill, author of the spiritualist journal, *The Agitator*, rallies for women’s liberation in the light of blatant social, economic, professional, and personal oppression, which was the reality of the white, middle to lower-class Victorian woman during the span of the late nineteenth century. The timing in which these movements rose is not coincidental. Indeed, both movements were birthed at the eclipse of the First Industrial Revolution, which brought with it a global transition that affected not only economic structures, but completely restructured the professional sphere, specifically through the introduction of mechanical production, global trade, and technological innovation. The transition to a capitalist society preceded the restructuring of gender roles and women’s social roles in society. With the introduction of a capitalist society, middle-class women’s positions were greatly affected, as middle and lower-class women, before this mass industrialization, maintained positions within agricultural and industrial modes of production. Within their realm of domesticity, women maintained positions of professional influence, either through the management of agricultural

property and farms, trades such as clothing and textiles, or through the governance of households and estates. With the technological advancements and the introduction of factories and mechanized labor, women were displaced, meaning they lost the few opportunities they had for participation within the public and professional spheres. Thus, women became economically irrelevant in a mechanized and male-dominated society and were ultimately replaced by mechanized factory production and relegated to unpaid domestic labor such as child rearing or home-making. Thus, the period of transition that followed the First Industrial Revolution left women in a precarious position, economically vulnerable, and unable to participate in the public sphere.

The mass societal transformation was multi-faceted concerning the professional woman. The resulting displacement allowed women to create a space to redefine their roles and modes of participation within society. Thus, this period of transition and precarity witnessed the reconstruction and rewriting of the Victorian woman, the social construction of womanhood, and the Victorian woman's position in society. This structural upheaval became known as the "woman question," which served as a hypernym for the "inter-related and hotly contested issues which [...] directly addressed women's social and political powerlessness. Partly in response to growing middle-class restlessness, new feminist and reformist organizations sprang into life during the 1850s and 1860s, and a series of campaigns around specific women's issues got underway" (Owen 1-2). This economic and societal displacement served as a precursor, forcing the modern woman to rethink traditional conceptions of womanhood and engage in creating, or rather recreation, of her own space in a male-dominated society. The goal of the modern woman involved in these organizations and the "Woman Movement," at large, was faced with a society structured and intrinsically set up against women's participation in the public sphere. Lucy

Stone—women’s rights writer and orator, abolitionist, and suffragist—speaks on the conditions that faced professional women during the mid-to-late 19th century or any woman who desired entrance into the professional domain and public life: “Half a century ago women were at an infinite disadvantage in regard to their occupations. The idea that their sphere was at home, and only at home, was like a band of steel on society [...] But every departure from these conceded things was met with the cry, 'You want to get out of your sphere,' or, 'To take women out of their sphere;' and that was to fly in the face of Providence, to unsex yourself in short, to be monstrous women, women who, while they orated in public, wanted men to rock the cradle and wash the dishes. We pleaded that whatever was fit to be done at all might with propriety be done by anybody who did it well; that the tools belonged to those who could use them; that the possession of a power presupposed a right to its use” (Stone 58-61). This act of creation took the ideological form of the ‘woman question’ and created its organizational counterpart the “Woman Movement,” which emerged in the mid-18th century as a reaction to the precarity of women’s roles in the modern age, as established in the previous quote, and from its ideological foundation established a social movement. The Woman movement arised from two events, the first taking place in 1866, the presentation of the Ladies’ Petition for women’s suffrage to the House of Commons, and the second taking place in 1867, with the defeat of this petition. The proposition of this petition, while unsuccessful, effectively raised public awareness of women’s exclusion from the public sphere, specifically from the ability to participate in political elections. The right to vote was a prefatory struggle, with middle-class women fighting to “initiate measures of charitable benevolence, temperance, and social welfare and to initiate struggles for civic rights, social freedoms, higher education, remunerative occupations, and the ballot” (Cott 3 qtd. in

Cruea 1). Thus, the “Woman Movement” served as the early stage of female suffrage, eventually leading to the modern feminist movement of the twentieth century.

The Woman Movement was also responsible for the creation and perpetuation of the New Woman, who was a political icon that first appeared in 1894, near the winding down of the first wave of the Woman’s movement. The New Woman championed the ideal social reformer: educated, self-supporting, intelligent, and liberated. She was prompted and supported by women’s interest journals and periodicals, such as *Shafts* (1892-1900), *The Woman’s Herald* (1891-1893), *The Woman’s Gazette* (1881-1891), and *The Woman’s Signal* (1894-1899). These periodicals constructed the New Woman as a role model for the 20th century, and would herald women’s transition from the domestic sphere to the public sphere. Indeed, *The Woman’s Herald* recognized the cultural and social shift regarding women’s place in society, and worked to advance her position in English society, “[A] truer type of woman is springing up in our midst, combining the 'sweet domestic grace' of the bygone days with a wide-minded interest in things outside her own immediate circle, extending her womanly influence to the world that so sadly needs the true woman's touch to keep it all that true woman would have it” (qtd. In Tusan 17). Women’s liberation from domestic confines remained in the boundaries of propriety, in which women working within the confines of “sweet domestic grace,” use her feminine sensitivities and influence for social reformation and manipulation of the public sphere.

Furthermore, the New Woman acted not only as a political icon, but as a cultural icon manifesting herself in the fictional and periodical material of the period. The wide circulation of periodical material under the title “women’s interests,” created a framework through which women could share ideas about social and cultural values. The discourse of the New Woman often criticized the systems and structures of society that relegated women to inferior spheres and

roles. Furthermore, the figure of the New Woman, often embodied in the heroines of late Victorian fiction, dissembled the “angel in the house” ideology, that prescribed traditional and limiting notions of womanhood and femininity of women of this period. This fiction targeted the realms in which major social issues of 19th century women rested. These realms were marriage, social liberty and suffrage, and public life and labor.

The fact that the “Woman Movement” emerged decades before increased involvement and widespread circulation of spiritualism, and the “New Woman” emerged directly after the Spiritualist movement is more than coincidental. Secondly, the timeline of its emergence directly links the movement’s formation to the same structural upheaval of the First Industrial Revolution, as witnessed by the “Woman Movement.” It was this same societal restructuring that created the necessary conditions for a complete social and religious upheaval, ultimately enabling the creation of alternative religious ideologies and the eventual creation of the spiritualist movement. This is explored in Alex Owen’s book “The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England” in which she tracks the birth of the spiritualist movement: “[Modern Spiritualism was] officially born mid-nineteenth century America in a region which had already witnessed decades of religious revivalism, sectarianism, and social experimentation, modern spiritualism developed amidst an atmosphere of optimism, radical ideas, and democratic principles” (Owen 4). Thus, the spiritualist movement, specifically the Golden Age of English Spiritualism which stretched from the 1860s to the late 1880s, is another product of the global transition, which in many aspects is directly related to the ‘woman question,’ and indeed becomes a vehicle for female liberation, the emergence of the “New Woman,” and women’s creation of space within a public domain.

The societal transformation that preceded the Victorian period of English history made it possible not only for the creation of an alternative religious doctrine but also for women to participate in such an organization. According to Owen, Spiritualism was primarily concerned with communication with the spirit realm, and emerged as a reaction to certain social, political, and religious conditions: “The desire for empirical evidence of the immortality of the soul; the rejection of Calvinism or evenangelicism in favor of a more liberated theology; and the desire to overcome bereavement through communication with departed loved ones [...] “Spirit manifestations,” the observable evidence of spirit presence during a séance, addressed the first desire. Spiritualism’s elaboration [...] of a cosmology that contradicted the tenets of orthodox Protestantism satisfied the second desire. The third desire was satisfied when the bereaved recieved messages from the deceased by either automatic writing or verbal communication through a human medium” (Braude 33). These conditions aligned for the creation of a radical religious movement with enough theological flexibility so that women could play a crucial role through the figure of the medium. Through the role of the medium, Spiritualism became a practice through which women gained credible recognition—in religious, political, social, and public realms simultaneously— furthermore, women not only participated in this movement but became central figures, not only within their mediumistic capacities but as public figureheads for the movement. As Owens asserts, “it was firmly held that any individual, male or female, rich or poor, could become the conduit for a dialogue with the spirits" as such “women flourished beneath this overarching rubric. In general, it was considered that women made a vital contribution to any spiritualist group” (5). Female membership led to a gradual restructuring within the movement, that allowed women public platforms, as well as access to the higher, male-dominated professions that were previously inaccessible to women of this period.

Women's entrance into the public sphere, while conditionally accepted in certain contexts such as mediumship, remained dependent upon and determined by propriety and traditional gender roles. Women's power, within the Spiritualist movement, was dependent on their prescribed feminine qualities, which became the determining factor for mediumship. Victorian mediumship contested that the mediumistic power of communication resided in women, and was dependent upon certain qualities associated with femininity and womanhood: passivity (which is opposite to the masculine quality of "will-power"), frailty (opposite of masculine strength), morality, and chastity, or rather a lack of sexuality or sexual instinct. Victorian femininity and the medium were characterized were passivity and powerlessness, which rendered both as merely vessels to be filled. Thus, traditional feminine virtues and characteristics of mediumship align with the Victorian ideal of femininity—the "angel in the house"—and the ideology of the separate spheres. Ideal womanhood and its associated virtues—passivity, chastity, morality, and frailty—became the criteria that formed the feminine ideal of the "angel in the house"—woman as an angelic creature whose rightful sphere of influence was the home and domesticity" (Owen 7). Women's relegation to the domestic sphere was conventional for the period, and is "intrinsic to the consensus view of Victorian womanhood which emerged was the distinction between the relative spheres of operation for men and women, coupled with the suggestion that women possessed an innate moral and spiritual superiority which was best exercised for the benefit of all within the confines of the home" (Owen 7). Thus, even the transgressive capabilities of mediumship were relegated by traditional notions of gender, which remained aligned with the cultural and social milieu of the period. However, this was not always the case. Women were central to spiritualist practice, and through Spiritualism, women fashioned a space through which not only feminist doctrines but female access to the public domain was made possible. Although

access to the public was determined by traditional discourses regarding gender, many women found a means of evasion that allowed them to forego the restraints that bound women to the domestic sphere.

The Spiritualist movement aligned with the Women's rights movement, not officially, but in support of the same social and political aspirations. Spiritualists and mediums within the Spiritualist movement recognizes the stifling and oppressive conditions of womanhood during this period, and used the movement to push a secondary agenda: social reform for gender equality and women's social and economic liberation. Ann Brauer's *Radical Spirits*, asserts that "Spiritualists used the same concepts that guided their campaigns for social change to criticize the relations between husbands and wives [...] Advocates of individual sovereignty called into question all social relations that placed one person in a position of authority over another [...] self-supporting mediums also drew into question the assumption that women needed men for material support" (Brauer 118). Women's rights and Spiritualism advocated for women's autonomy: economic, bodily, and social. These movements aligned in their support for emerging marriage laws and a desire for economic independence, which were the contemporary issues of the period.

Through the Spiritualist movement and the "woman movement," women created a space for themselves in a modern society in which they reversed traditional power structures, asserted their agency, and advocated for women's rights and gender equality. Women unintentionally utilized the many subversive aspects of spiritualism—mediumship, the spiritualist trance, passivity, and public spiritualist platforms—for the assertion of their voice. Subversion and retaliation against the discourse of the time was never the original intention of the women, nor the goal of the movement, however, the rituals practiced within the movement necessitate

subversive behavior when practiced by women. Firstly, the practice of mediumship, specifically the practice of full-trance mediumship, suspended the practitioner's own identity and personality, and “effected the brief disclosure of psychic (psychological) aspects of gendered identity such as fantasy and desire—aspects which, although emanating from the unconscious [...] exist in a reciprocal relationship with social realities” (Owen 206). Within the public and private séance, the female medium was assigned authority over the spiritual proceedings, women were bestowed the power over the séance space, acting as both communicators with and interpreters for the spirits. This practice, although not intentionally subversive, posed “a direct contravention of the female role in polite society, that of the dutiful woman whose required ‘stillness’ ensured strictly controlled conduct and limited and contained access to speech. Within spiritualist circles this same woman became the medium for spirit intercourse, the pivot through and with whom the spirits spoke” (Owen 210). Thus, the modern Victorian woman created for herself a space in which she could operate outside the prescribed gender roles and boundaries for polite behavior, through the séance room.

Not only does the space of the séance room create a means for subversion, but the female medium herself embodied subversive practices. Within the séance room, cultural and social subversion took many varying forms. Not only were the female medium's feminine qualities subverted for an authoritative role and tone, but the female medium actively engaged in subversive behavior, both in private and public. Within the séance room, the medium became a vessel for the departed, thus, the rules of conduct for women become irrelevant, to a degree. As such, many women, under the influence of a spirit, would engage in assertive, profane, or violent displays, which included profane language, physical intimacy, aggressive displays of violence against themselves or others, and offensive behavior or remarks, which under any other

circumstance would have breached propriety and Victorian rules of conduct. However, within the spiritualist circle, this was allowed, even encouraged. Thus, the medium herself became a vehicle of social transgression, moving across spiritual and societal boundaries.

Furthermore, there was the spiritualist practice of inspirational speaking. This practice allowed women a public platform within spiritualist forums, and it was this woman who became the mouthpiece of the spiritualist movement. This woman subverted notions regarding Victorian womanhood and feminine conduct, furthermore, allowing women a public platform to express the will of the spirits and assert their voice. The practice of inspirational speaking, “involved the medium discoursing at length and without prior preparation, apparently at the behest of the spirits, and also challenged the taboos surrounding the conduct of women in public. It established the platform as the medium’s rightful domain and public speech as her *raison d’être*” (Owen 210). Thus, women within the spiritualist women were afforded a specific and subversive authority, not granted to women in any other context. Spiritualism not only offered women a public platform but also, offered them a space to suspend gender identity and the confines of Victorian womanhood.

While the spiritualist movement successfully introduced Victorian women to the public sphere, this was not its only influence on women’s societal roles in Victorian England. These public roles of inspirational speaking and public mediumship heralded the working woman’s entrance into the male-dominated higher professions: “Employment for women in higher professions was slow to open up but the later decades of the century did see a rapid expansion of the respectable ‘white blouse’ job market. At the beginning of the 1870s, for example, female clerks and secretaries were virtually unknown. But within twenty years, nearly 18,000 women were employed in these capacities, and nursing and teaching had also been open up as suitable

professions for women. It is significant that this was the same period which saw the meteoric rise and then demise of the famous female spiritualist mediums of the 1870s and 1880s, some of whom were able to make a good living from their talents. By the 1890s when these mediums began to fade from the scene many thousands of women had already made their way into the public domain via jobs in local government, business, and commerce (Owen 2-3).

By the fin-de-siecle, the Spiritualist movement and the Woman Movement served as a platform for which historically oppressed women found liberation and ultimately empowerment.

Spiritualism offered women a channel through which they could access the public domain and could essentially enter higher professions and public speaking roles, roles in which they had been previously excluded because of their gender.

Chapter II : The Rise of the Woman Writer

The Supernatural, Weird Fiction, and the Woman Writer

In addition to the social reforms, another consequential effect of Spiritualism's sweeping popularity in Victorian culture was its influence and transformation of supernatural fiction, more specifically the traditional English ghost story. As Jennifer Bann, author of "Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter," notes:

"Spiritualism's contribution to supernatural literature was not limited to the séance and all of its trappings; it helped subtly transform the figure of the ghost, from the less-than-human apparitions of earlier narratives into the more-than-human characters of the later nineteenth century" (665). Thus, the spiritualist movement's influence was two-fold, simultaneously, transforming the roles and ideals surrounding women, as well as that surrounding spirits and specters. Both were prescribed agency, to a degree, not before seen. This new ghost, rather than being utilized solely for the conveyance of a message, whether it be moral, spiritual, political, or social, the spectral progeny of the spiritualist movement brought with it the transition from ghost to spirit, and with it a reimagining of ghostliness, and that the spectral figure entails. The spirit, in ghost fiction, thus, transformed from passive messenger to active agent, able to manipulate, destroy, and inflict its will onto its desired subject, either for good or harm. The spiritualist movement became a harbinger of cultural and literary change.

The affordability and accessibility of information and literature, made possible by the technological innovations of the Industrial Revolution, specifically, the printing press,

established an effective means of production and distribution of literature. The accessibility of literature, which was once reserved only for the bourgeois and aristocratic social classes, was now made accessible to the middle and lower classes of Victorian society. Thus, the emerging middle-class audiences necessitated the adaptation to more efficient publication methods which heralded the surge in the periodical marketplace and contributed to the creation of sensational fiction.

The literary industry became not only an efficient means of information distribution but also contributed to a cultural transformation with the introduction of transgressive women's sensation and supernatural fiction. Sensation fiction—as a product of middle-class readership, the efficiency of the printing press on the periodical publication market—transformed not only the speed in which written content was received but opened up a new market of readership that necessitated content tailored to middle-class sensitivities and values. Sensation fiction, as a genre that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, is defined by several generic tropes, which according to Susan David Bernstein's paper, "Dirty Reading: Sensation Fiction, Women, and Primitivism," specifically focuses on "criminal acts within the home [...] rendered through tidal waves of suspense designed to put the reader's nerves on full alert [...] This critical term "sensation" also functions repeatedly in midcentury vernacular as a condensation for Victorian anxieties over a range of issues including cultural aesthetics, sexuality, class, race, and religion" (Bernstein 3). Thus, these works of sensation fiction function as a mode of critique of Victorian ideals and values, presented through figures and symbolic interpretations of transgression and boundary crossing.

Among the many conventions of the sensation fiction form exists its capacity as a mode of transgression for traditional gender roles, through its representation of transgressive women

who defy previously established ideals of womanhood and femininity. Furthermore, Susan Bernstein notes that the “flood of sensation fiction on the Victorian literary marketplace of the 1860s posed a social catastrophe that threatened to erode literary standards and to undermine domestic tranquility, the guiding fiction of middle-class life. This panicky critical reception excoriated sensation heroines and female sensation readers as unhappy evidence of what some today might term declining “family values.” [...] These “women-driven wild with love” were an affront to the domestic ideal of the genteel heroine of mainstream fiction cherished by the literary establishment” (Bernstein 213-214). Thus, the genre of sensation fiction, a sub-genre of the Victorian short story, is not only the progeny of cultural transformation but becomes a medium of social and cultural transformation. The emergence of a new conception of Womanhood that retained traditional values of femininity but moved beyond the public and professional restrictions, paralleled the same transgressiveness of the Spiritualist woman, who transgressed gender boundaries and the ideological spheres to which women were relegated, while, remaining within the realm of propriety.

Critical analysis of women-authored ghost stories and sensation fiction of the Victorian era, although have recently witnessed a surge in popularity and critical acclaim in the academic field, most of the women responsible for a majority of the textual output of such literature remain relegated to the proverbial backburners, with credit for the genre assigned to their male counterparts, figures such as Henry James, M. R. James, and Sheridan Le Fanu. This speaks not to these women’s perceived lack of authorial talent or skill, but rather points to a larger and more urgent systemic problem: the erasure of female voices in Victorian ghost and supernatural fiction. Victorian women writers were faced with a history of systematic oppression, repression, and exclusion from nearly every dimension of the public sphere. Furthermore, Vanessa D.

Dickerson, author and professor of English at De Pauw University, examines how the structural transformation of modernity further displaces women from societal positions of power in her book *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide*: “The changes which have taken place during the last centuries [of] ‘modern’ civilization,’ have tended to rob woman, not merely in part but almost wholly, of the more valuable of her ancient domain of productive and social labour; and, where there has not been a determined and conscious resistance on her part, have nowhere spontaneously tended to open out to her new and compensatory fields” (Dickerson 4). However, the societal restructuring that shifted the social and professional landscape that paved the way for the female medium, also paved the way for the female writer, through periodical publication and the short story. The short story was the mode through which many women engaged with the public sphere. According to Diana Wallace’s paper, “Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story as Female Gothic,” women’s fiction remained relegated to the realm of the short story, a sub-section within the literary mediums of the magazine, “The short story has long been associated with the marginalized – Irish, black, post-colonial and, especially, women writers – writers who often use it as a vehicle for ‘knowledge which may be in some way at odds with the “story” of dominant culture . . . to express something suppressed/repressed in mainstream literature.’ The ghost story, of course, deals precisely with the return of the repressed: the dead who return” (Hanson qtd. in Wallace 58).

This transgressiveness many times took the form of the supernatural, in which supernatural and sensation fiction merged to create a unique mode of representing the cultural and social transformation witnessed in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The supernatural sub-genre of sensation fiction was intrinsically influenced and transformed by the newly emerging Spiritualist movement. The Spiritualist movement’s most apparent impact on

supernatural fiction, took the form of the fictional ghost or spirit. According to Jennifer Bann's essay "Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency:" "spiritualism and the ghost story grew rapidly in the 1850s, peaked in popularity during the last decades of the nineteenth century, and faded to relative obscurity by the 1930s" (Bann 2). The cohesion of the relative movements cannot be mere coincidence, as Bann notes further: "Spiritualism's contribution to supernatural literature was not limited to the séance and all of its trappings; it helped to subtly transform the figure of the ghost, from the less-than-human apparitions of earlier narratives into the more-than-human characters of the later nineteenth century [...] spiritualism newly imagined spectrality as something inherently powerful and transformative. As they [spirits] assumed a more central narrative role, the spectral figures of the literary ghost story brought with them a unique kind of power and psychological depth" (Bann 3). Spirits and specters capacity shifted in relation to the Spiritualist movement, in which spiritualism's transition from ghost to specter serves as representational for the shift in perspective of nature and role of the spirit. The ghost, emblematic of the pre-nineteenth century conception of the spirit, is defined by its passive narrative role as conferrer of moralistic wisdom and patron of the common wealth. In the convention of the pre-spiritualist ghost story, the ghost is depicted are seen as spirit guides in a sense meant to confer some motivation for the characters or bestow a moral message. Thus, the ghost was utilized to further the action of the narrative, merely a plot device, without depth or complexity of character. However, the pre-Spiritualist ghost became the post-Spiritualist spirit, a figure largely influenced by the Spiritualist's relationship to the departed. The spirit, rather than passive catalysts, were regarded as complex spiritual beings whose transition beyond the veil signaled transcendence and empowerment. Rather than losing power and autonomy, as the pre-Spiritualist

convention dictates, the disembodied spirit gained power in the conventions of the Spiritualist movement.

Furthermore, the spirit as boundary crosser and transgressive active participant in the narrative, parallels the female medium of the Spiritualism, whose role in the séance becomes not only socially transgressive—as she takes on masculine qualities, dominating the séance circle, and taking on public speaking roles—but also serves as a spiritual boundary crosser, between the phsyical world and the afterlife. Furthermore, the spirit becomes a fictional representation for women in the modern world. This becomes apparent, when placed in the context of female authored supernatural fiction. Female authored supernatural fiction, applied many of the post-Spiritualist tropes to their ghost stories, as a means of critiquing the social order of the mid-to-late nineteenth century and traversing the ideological spheres. In these ghost stories, many of the spirits took the form of women, thus, the ghost story becomes the point of convergence for the Spiritualist movement, the professional woman's entrance into the public sphere, and the ghost story. This paper seeks to analyze the convergence of these separate movements and how the women in both movements used spirit and spirit communication to transgress the boundaries prescribed by traditional nineteenth century gender roles. In both the Spiritualist movement and the conventions of the ghost story, the dead become the medium for silenced and oppressed women, a means through which they can trangress social boundaries. Thus, the female writer, the female ghost, the female medium, and the professional woman become similarly characterized by disembodiment, a displacement from society, which is created and sustained by patriarchal structures and systems in which women are relegated by notions of traditional gender roles through the perpetuation of the seperate spheres ideology. Thus, the threshold of death become anagolous to boundary crossing of female mediums and female

writers, represented by spirits and haunted spaces in the Victorian ghost story, all of which transgressed the boundaries of the domestic sphere securing their voices were heard in the public sphere.

Chapter III:

Haunted Spaces and Haunted Spheres in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's "The Shadow in the Corner" and Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window"

The cultural effect of the Spiritualist movement, as a precursor to the women's rights movement, is most strikingly seen in the sensation fiction of the period, particularly the women authored sensation fiction. Women authored supernatural fiction shows a prevalent unification between the specific issues and ideologies of both movements, especially concerning women's issues. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's "The Shadow in the Corner" and Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window" were two such stories concerned with supernatural. However, rather than depicting female spirits, Braddon and Oliphant's ghost stories depict the haunted spaces in which women operate. Both stories are occupied with the construction of space, specifically the contrast of the female domestic spaces with male academic spaces embodying the public sphere of intellectual academia and higher learning institutions. This construction of space serves as a figurative manifestation of Victorian society and Victorian gender roles in which women are relegated to the spheres denoting femininity and propriety. Thus, the haunting of these spaces becomes analogous to systematic female oppression through exclusion from opportunities for university education, on the same level as men, and exclusion from the public sphere, in general. Furthermore, this construction of space parallels the Spiritualist's medium construction of the séance room, as a space in which power dynamics and gender roles are reversed. Margaret

Oliphant's depiction of the separate spheres ideology is manifested in the division of space within the story, in which three spaces figuratively represent the private, public, and academic spheres. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's depiction of the separate sphere is represented similarly, through the distinction of space in which men and women operate, signifying the distinction between the domestic and intellectual. Both of these authors use the haunted space and the supernatural to represent the female condition and the exclusion of women from the public sphere and the field of academia.

In Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window," published in 1896, the young, unnamed narrator is visiting her aunt. Their life is described as going "on in a routine never broken. She [the narrator's aunt] got up at the same house every day, and did the same things in the same rotation, day by day the same" (Oliphant). Indeed, the narrator frequently remarks on the mundanity of their routine, stating that, "[her aunt] often gave me a smile when she saw how I built myself up, with my books and my basket of work. I did very little work, I fear—now and then a few stitches when the spirit moved me, or when I had got well afloat in a dream, and was more tempted to follow it out than to read my book, as sometime happened" (Oliphant). As a result, of the narrator's monotonous and mundane existence she spends a lot of time occupying the drawing room window, in which she listens to the conversations of the people passing by her window. The narrator's role in society as a young woman is thus relegated to the mundane routine of womanhood and domesticity. The narrator and her Aunt, as single women, occupy this claustrophobic space which is the domestic home and operate according to its boundaries and conditions, as determined by Victorian society. While the narrator's Aunt seems comfortable in the routine of her respective sphere, and finds pleasure when her niece occupies herself with traditionally feminine pursuits, such as stitching, the narrator herself is dissatisfied. Thus,

Oliphant is characterizing the domestic life of unmarried women as consisting only of dull repetition of routine, and the mundanity and monotony of feminine pastimes that offer no intellectual stimulation.

Indeed, it is the window in her Aunt's drawing room which provides the narrator with a means of escape. It is established early on in the story that this window acts as a portal, which provides access to the bustling noise and public life of the street. The "harsh tones and the stumbling steps" of the public streets and side-walks are contrasted with the quiet domesticity of the narrator's world and her aunt who "never said a word" (Oliphant). Thus, the window, as a portal between the domestic space of the narrator's home and the exposure of the public space, embodied by the sidewalk. The narrator's isolation and exclusion from the public sphere is signified by her physical isolation inside the home, which only changes when the narrator opens the window, through which she is "conscious of things to which [she] paid no attention. Even when reading the most interesting books, the things that were being talked about blew in to [her]; and [she] heard what the people were saying in the streets as they passed under the window" (Oliphant). The distinction between the narrator's home and the street establishes Oliphant's literary construction of the ideological spheres, in which she textually divides the space within the story into three distinct spaces, each representative of an ideological sphere: the domestic, the public, and the academic. The narrator and her aunt operate within the domestic sphere, as befitting unmarried women of their station. However, the opening of the window and the narrator's consciousness of people passing outside the window signify a mode of boundary crossing from the domestic into the public. As Tamar Heller, professor of Victorian literature at the University of Cincinnati, states in her essay, "Textual Seductions: Women's Reading and Writing in Margaret Oliphant's 'The Library Window,'" this boundary crossing represents "a

slippage between public and private spheres, the boundary crossing that was a locus of cultural anxiety in the Woman Question debate. By reading in the window seat, the narrator gains access to the street, in Victorian sexual geography the realm either of men or of prostitutes” (Heller 26). Oliphant avoids the controversy of the narrator fully entering the public sphere, by placing her adjacent to the window in which she can indirectly access the dialogue of the public sphere. Thus, the narrator accesses the public sphere within the realms of propriety, representation of the means through which Victorian women operated in public through publication, political protest, business, and education under the generalization of women’s issues. Similarly, the narrator engaged in the feminine pastime of reading, within the sphere of domesticity, is still able to transgress this boundary without raising the anxieties often associated with women’s entrance in the public.

Beyond access to the public sphere, the narrator’s widow provides her access to the imagined space of academia. The narrator’s window, aside from a portal to the public sphere of the sidewalk, offers a view of the College Library window, which “was, and still is, the last window in the row, of the College Library, which is opposite my aunt’s house in the High Street,” which the narrator perceives is occupied by “a gentleman [...] the Librarian or one of his assistants [who] made of him good fortune as he sat there, so constant in his writing for hours together” (Oliphant). The College Library window, like the narrator’s window, becomes a secondary manifestation of the portal between the spheres, this one embodying the exclusive sphere of academia and educational institutions. While, the narrator’s window is a physical window, the college library window is an imagined space of the narrator’s concoction. As Minna Vuohelainen, professor of Nineteenth-century literature at Edge Hill University, notes in her essay “A Feeling of Space”: Margaret Oliphant’s Supernatural Short Fiction in *Blackwood’s*

Edinburgh Magazine, “however, the “feeling of space” the narrator spies behind the apparent window eventually evaporates as “an optical illusion,” a pitiful “dream.” Calder rightly notes that the library “window may suggest opportunities of looking out into another, bigger world, but it is only an illusion of opportunity. You can *see* through glass, but not move through it” (Calder qtd. in Vouhelainen). Thus, the significance of the illusory nature of the library window is suggestive of the narrator’s connection to the academic world. The narrator is only the one to see beyond the window into the imaginative space of the library, while the other characters that inhabit the domestic world—the narrator’s aunt and the housemaid, are unable or unwilling to see beyond the glass. Thus, the narrator is denied any access, direct or indirect, to the world of academia, of which is exclusively occupied by men. The image of scholarship offered by the library window doesn’t allow for any means of boundary crossing.

This academic sphere doesn’t allow for boundary crossing because Oliphant asserts that academia is exclusively associated with patriarchal tradition, and thus, becomes a patriarchal institution. After observing the college library window for some moments, “[the narrator] saw as [she] looked up suddenly the faint greyness as of visible space within—a room behind, certainly dim, as it was natural a room should be on the other side of the street—quite indefinite [...] I saw dimly that it must be a large room, and that the big piece of furniture against the wall was a writing-desk [...] there was one like it in my father’s library at home” (Oliphant). The writing desk becomes analogous to the scholarly space and the academic tradition, which, through its association with the young male writer who owns the desk and the narrator’s father, who owns a desk like it, is established as a patriarchal tradition. Thus, the right to higher education and the economic independence of property ownership, specifically the private library, is a privilege relegated and excluded to the narrator’s male counterparts. The young writer who irregularly

occupies the college library is seen by the narrator: “sitting in the chair, which he must have placed for himself [...] with the back of his head towards me, writing [...] One had heard of so many things like that—a man who had to take up some other kind of work for his living, and then when his leisure-time came, gave it all up to something he really loved—some study or some book he was writing. My father himself at one time had been like that [...] his daughter, however little she might know of other things, could not but know that!” (Oliphant). This male exclusivity is extended not only to academia but to the professional world as well. Male exclusivity is the reason why the narrator cannot access the sphere of academia. The window offers false visions of opportunity of scholarship, thus, Oliphant establishes the act of writing and scholarship as associated with the young writer and the narrator’s father, and thus the patriarchal tradition.

While, Oliphant asserts that the academic sphere is solely relegated to the male tradition, the narrator is able to transgress the social and societal boundaries of the ideological spheres through her psychical second-sight. The narrator’s ability to perceive this imagined window, at all, originates from the gifts of her second-sight, which the narrator asserts that one must have—“the sight in her eyes”—to perceive such imagined spaces. Thus, not only is the narrator’s supernatural gift become linked to modes of boundary crossing, but also becomes the medium through which she constructs imaginary spaces. This “second-sight,” as the narrator calls it, makes her aware of the happenings outside of her window, in which “[she] did hear what [she] couldn’t help hearing, even when [she] was reading my book, and [she] did see all sorts of thing, though often for a whole half-hour [she] might never lift [her] eyes” (Oliphant). In addition to the direct access afforded to the narrator by the portal of the window, her supernatural second-sight affords her the capability to transgress this boundary between public and private.

Furthermore, the narrator's voyeuristic act of looking, particularly her obsessive observation of the spirit without his knowledge, subverts traditional power dynamics. The act of looking establishes a power dynamic between the narrator and the spirit: observer and observed, powerful and powerless, dominant and dominated. In this instance, the narrator's psychic gift endows her with power over the spirit, effectively subverting traditional power dynamics and bestowing the woman with the power and dominance of the observer. In many ways, the supernatural nature of her second-sight provides the narrator with the same transgressive supernatural abilities as the Spiritualist medium, specifically that of boundary crossing, space construction, and power subversion. Thus, the narrator becomes analogous to the Spiritualist medium for the same purpose: the transgression of social boundaries dictated by social norms and gender roles through the medium of the supernatural.

The narrator's supernatural abilities are prescribed with the ability to cross boundaries, not only of the constructed spaces of private, public and imaginary, but the boundary between the physical and the spiritual. In many ways this boundary crossing is analogous to the same boundary crossing exhibited by the Spiritualist medium, both use the supernatural to gain entrance to the inaccessible spheres of existence: public and academic. The narrator describes her second-sight as one of passivity, in that she becomes a passive vessel for the supernatural which blows conversation to her, opens her awareness, and bestows her visions of the haunted space of the library window. As Ann Braude, director of Women's studies in the Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School, states in her book *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, passivity is a major requirement of Victorian mediumship, in which "the medium may be man or woman—woman or man—but in either case, the characteristics will be *feminine*—negative and passive [in that] women were "negative," and men

were “positive [...] In order to facilitate the transmission of electrical currents that spirits used to manifest their presence, circle should seat men and women, “or positives and “negatives”” (Braude 23). Thus, mediumship was associated with inherently feminine characteristics—passivity and piety—reflective of the characteristics culturally associated with women during the Victorian period. The narrator reflects this same passivity, however, like the Spiritualist medium, the narrator uses the feminine traits and reappropriates and manipulates them for entrance into the public sphere. While, the narrator is having outside conversation thrust upon her, she is still engaging with the public sphere, even if indirectly through the sitting room window.

Other than the narrator’s psychic abilities for second-sight, her supernatural powers extend to spatial construction. The female constructed imagined space mimics the female constructed imagined space of the séance room for the purpose of boundary crossing, and a reversal of traditional power dynamics by appropriating the male sphere of academia. The vision gifted by the second-sight allows the narrator entrance into the male scholar’s world, in which the narrator “rather wanted, I believe, to think that there was some particular insight in me which gave clearness to my sight” (Oliphant). This insight allows her visions of “the gradual course of events leading up to this, this finding out of one thing after another as the eyes got accustomed to the vague light: first the room itself, and then the writing-table, and then the other furniture, and last of all the human inhabitant who gave it all meaning” (Oliphant). The narrator envisions a space of scholarship, providing a vision of the opportunities for transcendence from the domestic to the academic. Her sight allows her to imagine a space in which she occupies the role of the young scholar. Likewise, the medium transformed the home—the domestic space—into the subversive territory of the séance room. The séance room was conducted under the power and

control of the head medium, who was in charge of the rituals and protocols of the séance and subsequent spirit communication. According to Ann Brauer, the séance room consisted of “twelve investigators, equally divided between men and women, seated close together around a table, hands either joined or laid on the table. They stressed the necessity of harmony among the circle’s participants [...] with serene silence, meditation, interior prayer, and the singing of appropriate hymns” (Brauer 20). The medium appropriated the domestic space: reshaping the layout and organization of the room, rearranging furniture, prop and technology installations, lighting, séance tables, the medium cabinet, even the bodies of the attendees were considered an element of the séance space. The domestic space was literally reshaped and rearranged for the production of the séance. Through this appropriation of space, the domestic space was made public. With the séance circle, the medium likewise envisions a space of opportunity passing between ideological spheres, and from the physical to spiritual realm. This is paralleled to the narrator’s construction of space, through which the narrator envisions a space of opportunity through which she can pass between the ideological spheres, signaling her entrance from the private to the public.

The haunting in the story is three-fold. Firstly, the haunted space of the college library. The opportunities associated with the college library and academic spaces—economic independence and intellectual freedom—haunt the narrator. The narrator constructs the imaginary space of the college library as a form of wish fulfillment, a vision of scholarship unattainable to women of this period. Secondly, the narrator is haunted by the apparition of the young male writer, or rather the autonomy and independence of the young male writer. The young writer as the embodiment of spatial transmutability—to traverse the ideological spheres, haunts the narrator, who attains this transmutability but through subversive, secretive means. Lastly, the

narrator herself comes to haunt the college library space. The narrator voyeristically encroaches on the male territory of academia through use of her second-sight, in which she states “you can never see into a place from outside” (Oliphant). While, her supernatural capability allow her this ability to cross boundaries that would have otherwise been inaccessible to a young woman of her station, the narrator is unable to ever fully discern the room beyond the window. This signifies the dissatisfaction of voyeristic looking, in which the narrator may experience the freedom of the public sphere second-hand, but not actively participate in such a space. As the narrator says, “it is a longing all your life—it is a looking—for what never comes” (Oliphant). This is the curse of the women of the narrator’s blood. The women of her family are forced to partake in the passive, voyeuristic experience of looking, but never the active experience of participation. Indeed, Oliphant maintains the illusory nature of the window, as an unattainable dream of female scholarship for Victorian women. Thus, the narrator uses the supernatural–imaginary spaces and second-sight—to create a space for women to engage in intellectual and academic pursuits, and ultimately transgress the societal boundaries and exclusionary and oppressive gender roles of Victorian society near the fin-de-siècle.

Margaret Oliphant’s ghost story, “The Library Window,” explores the societal boundaries reinforced by the repeating imagery of windows, streets, and sidewalks, all of which act as boundaries form the various spheres of Victorian society, of which women are excluded from. The street becomes analogous for society and public life, the spirit’s window is analogous for the professional and academic sphere. While, the narrator’s window is representative of the domestic sphere. The spirit opens the window of the imagined space of academia, suggesting that the supernatural or the imagined can act as the means through which one transgresses these societal boundaries, overcoming socially established oppression through imagined spaces which allow

women to transgress spheres and domains and spaces. The imagined space acts as a projection of her own desires, and ultimately the fulfillment of desire to transgress said boundaries, for the breaking of the dull monotony of domestic routine. The supernaturally heightened senses are indicative of a perception of oppression, her supernatural gift renders her conscious or sensitive to such spaces, she is able to manipulate or see through the darkness, to accurately ascertain the truth of the boundaries that surround and determine her life. Ultimately, Oliphant's story appropriates the ghost story mode to comment on the nature of the Victorian woman's oppression and the various power structures that reinforce this systematic oppression of the ideological spheres ultimately relegating women to the domestic.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's "The Shadow in the Corner" similarly explores the hauntings of the imagined space of academia. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's story, published in 1879, is imbedded in the heart of the haunted house, rather than acting as a spectator to the haunting. Braddon uses the form of the ghost story in its traditional sense—to terrify and disturb. However, the nature of this literary haunting stems not from the haunted spaces and the ghost in the attic, but the inherent power dynamics and gendered social conflicts behind these supernatural forces. Like Oliphant, Braddon uses the ghost story to construct a haunted space to emphasize the gendered division of the ideological spheres, through the similar construction of gendered spaces, with the male characters operating the sphere of professionalism and academia and women operating a position of subjugation and domesticity. Ultimately, Braddon uses the supernatural elements of the ghost story form to explore the precarious position of women in Victorian society and the harm of systematic gender oppression.

M.E. Braddon uses the supernatural generic element of the haunted house, or the haunted space to establish the Victorian social dynamic of the ideological spheres. "The Shadow in the

Corner” is the story of a housemaid, Maria, who begins work at Wildheath Grange, ignorant of the tragic suicide of the previous tenant: Anthony Bascom. The estate is owned and controlled by Michael Bascom, the nephew of Anthony Bascom, a retired professor of natural science.

Wildheath Grange is intrinsically connected to Michael Bascom, in that “ it would not have been difficult to have traced an affinity between the dull grey building and the man who lived in it.

Both seemed alike remote from the common cares and interests of humanity; both has an air of settled melancholy, engendered by perpetual solitude; both had the same faded complexion, the same look of slow decay” (Braddon 48). Bascom’s association with and ownership of Wildheath Grange creates a spatial ownership, in that Bascom is analogous with the space of the house. The space house itself is constructed and controlled by Bascom and his “love for scientific research” which “filled [the house] to the brim with labours that seldom failed to interest and satisfy him” (Braddon 48). Thus, the space of the house is constructed and owned by Bascom, thus it becomes a space in which he maintains complete control and holds the power to manipulate the space itself. As Bascom and the house becomes one and the same, the house becomes a physical manifestation of male scholarship and the academic tradition, and thus analogous to the academic sphere. Thus, not only does Braddon establish Wildheath Grange as an academic space, but a patriarchal academic space controlled and regulated by men.

Beyond, the spatial construction of the academic sphere, the house embodies the professional, through Bascom’s butler Daniel Skegg, and the domestic spheres, through his wife, Mrs. Skegg, the kitchen maid. Daniel Skegg becomes analogous to the professional sphere, as he operates within the home as the butler, he manages all aspects of the home in place of Mr. Bascom. Thus, he operates as an extension of Mr. Bascom, managing Maria and Mrs. Skegg, he has the ability to traverse the sphere of academia, professionalism, and the women’s sphere of

domesticity. His social situation and gender give him this ability to traverse, in which he acts as an interlocutor between spheres, as Mr. Bascom rarely “degrades” himself to enter the north end of the house occupied by Mrs. Skegg. Conversely, Mrs. Skegg is relegated to the domestic servitude of the kitchen, and is thus characterized as “an individual with whom [Bascom] rarely came in contact with. She lived for the most gloomy region at the north end of the house, where she ruled over the solitude of a kitchen” (Braddon 50). Mrs. Skegg spends her days wearing her life away in the labour of domestic servitude and is described as “a good plain cook, of severe aspect, dogmatic piety, and a bitter tongue [who] ministered diligently to her master's wants” (Braddon 50). Mrs. Skegg becomes the embodiment of ideal femininity and servitude: diligent, attentive to her master, pious, and content and comfortable in her work. Mrs. Skegg is associated with the space of the kitchen, and is thus relegated to this space. Furthermore, Mrs. Skegg is able to survive this space because she maintains the status quo; she maintains her role with dogmatic piety becoming of a domestic servant. Within the construction of space in Wildheath Grange, Mrs. Skegg occupies the north end of the house, which is characterized as gloomy and solitary. Furthermore, Mrs. Skegg is unable to move beyond her designated region, and thus rarely comes into contact with Bascom. Mrs. Skegg and Mr. Bascom operate in different spheres, there is no transgressing the societal class and gender boundaries for Mrs. Skegg, however, the “rarely” implies that Mr. Bascom has the ability to move between the spheres. This ability to move between spheres is closely associated with his class position and gender, Mr. Bascom is an aristocratic, property-owning scholar, which gives him the power and ability to cross the spherical boundaries. Conversely, Mrs. Skegg is a poor, kitchen maid, thus her class position and gender keep her from engaging in this boundary crossing under the semblance of propriety. Through this gender apartheid space, Braddon establishes a clear power dynamic between Mr.

Bascom, Mr. Skegg and Mrs. Skegg. She denotes Bascom and Mr. Skegg an ability to move between the ideological spheres, thus assigning them with a social power over Mrs. Skegg, who remains in the domestic sphere without the ability move beyond her current status.

Maria, the orphaned housemaid brought on by Mr. Skegg and Mr. Bascom, occupies a liminal space of in-betweenness, which is a product of her supernatural sight, her education, and her role as housemaid. She remains in-between spaces ultimately becoming the embodiment of the New Woman's social in-betweenness and the Spiritualist medium's spiritual in-betweenness. Maria is introduced as respectable, which Mr. Skegg states "she's too good for the place. She's never been in service before [...] Her father was a small tradesman at Yarmouth. He died a month ago, and left this poor thing homeless [...] She'd had an easy time of it with her father, who had educated her above her station, like a fool as he was" (Braddon 50). Maria is considered too educated for the domestic role of the housemaid, however, it is the role she is relegated to because she is an orphaned woman, which leaves her with very little options as, according to Alex Owen, professor of history and gender studies at Northwestern University, "educational opportunities were restricted and paid work was considered demeaning for middle-class girls [...] employment for women in the higher professions was slow to open up [and] a woman was considered to have no separate legal identity, she could not control property, and was unable to enter into contracts or incur debts in her own right" (3). Maria becomes victim of her social condition, in which her dependence of men, as dictated by the laws and institutions of Victorian England, put her in a position in which she is unable to fulfill an opportunity of higher education or pursue an respectable profession. However, a lot of attention is brought to her education, in which she is considered too respectable for a housemaid but not respectable enough, as the middle-class daughter of a tradesman, to pursue any opportunity beyond her station. This is the

same situation which faced the New Woman, who embodied this same liminal in-betweenness and displacement. The New Woman of the Victorian period was characterized by displacement, unable to fully occupy either the domestic or the professional. Thus, Maria's lack of economic independence and autonomy leave her financially vulnerable and socially stymied.

Maria's economic and social vulnerability, as well as her role of domestic servants prescribed an aspect of ghostliness to the female condition, in which women themselves were as ghosts, characterized by invisibility and in-betweenness. M.E. Braddon depicts the female condition through a working class lens, by focusing on Maria's role as domestic servant, and prescribing her with the capability to cross the boundaries of private and public. Thus, Maria is essentially able to meld the public and the private, through the fusion of the domestic space and female labor. Wildheath Grange is, ultimately, a domestic space, as it is Bascom's home, thus, the role of the domestic servant is that of boundary crosser, as the domestic servant's professional capacity is relegated to the domestic space. Thus, this places Maria in a place of in-betweenness, which provides her access to both public and private. This in-betweenness parallels that of the Victorian spirit, in which, the spirit exists between two planes of existence—the material and the spiritual. The historic invisibility of the domestic servant is explored in Anne McClintock's book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, where she writes, "The housewife's labor of leisure found its counterpart in the servant's labor of invisibility. Servants were ordered to remain unseen, completing the filthiest work before dawn or at night, dodging their employers, keeping to the labyrinthine back passages, remaining, at all costs, out of sight" (163). This description of the domestic servant evokes the generic tradition of the spectre: disembodied spirits existing between the planes of the material and spiritual, invisible, and holding no real power or place in society or in relation to material people. Through

Maria's occupation as domestic servant, and the various aspects that come with this occupation—in-betweenness and invisibility—Braddon depicts Maria as the spirit of this story. However, rather than having Maria haunt the home, she comes to haunt the constructed patriarchal space of Wildheath Grange. In the face of the patriarchal male spaces of academia, even to male controlled domestic spaces, Maria and Mrs. Skegg are rendered invisible, powerless, and vulnerable, thus, women are essentially spirits haunting the patriarchal structure of Wildheath Grange, characterized by male dominance and male scholarship.

The fusion of spheres also parallels the fusion of the domestic and female labor of the Spiritualist medium and the modern woman. Many of women's professional roles in society during the Victorian period took on the same quality of the domestic servant, traversing between the domestic and the professional, or public. This is due to the contradictory nature of Victorian ideas on female labor, which asserted that women should not work, while a large portion of the work force was occupied by and dependent on female labor, including domestic labor, factories, or heavy labor such as mining or steel production. Likewise, the Spiritualist medium traverses the boundaries of domestic and public, as mediums often help public forums, as well as public and private séances. Indeed, the séance itself was a meld of the public and private, through which the medium would disrupt and manipulate the domestic space for professional means, their occupation. Thus, the medium takes control of the domestic sphere, manipulating the furniture, lighting, as well as performing in front of and leading both intimate and large audiences, thus, melding the domestic with the public aspect of female labor. Thus, Maria takes on the same transgressive qualities as the Spiritualist medium, aligned with her uncanny sixth sense, which allows her to see the physical manifestation of the oppression of the haunted attic space, in which she states that she “felt weighed down in my sleep as if there were some heavy burden laid upon

my chest. It was not a bad dream, but it was a sense of trouble that followed me all through my sleep; and [...] I woke suddenly [and] in the corner between the fire-place and the wardrobe, I saw a shadow—a dim, shapeless shadow” (Braddon 53). Thus, Maria takes on the same transgressive qualities as the Spiritualist medium, aligned with her uncanny supernatural sixth sense. Her vision to see the haunting of the shadow in the corner of the room, is aligned with the narrator’s in Oliphant’s “The Library Window,” thus both women are prescribed with the supernatural sight, which gifts them with the ability to recognize their vulnerable position in society, as young, educated, single women whose desires for social mobility are thwarted by the patriarchal structures and societal systems in which they reside.

Similar to the Spiritualist medium, the prescribed qualities of in-betweenness and invisibility become the same means which allow Maria to transgress and traverse the ideological spheres of the house, and disrupt the male controlled and regulated public, professional and academic spaces. Shortly after hiring Maria, Mr. Bascom is disturbed by her sudden appearance in his study, in which she is “busy dusting the volumes which were stacked in blocks upon his spacious writing-table—and doing it with such deft and careful hands that he had no inclination to be angry at this unwonted liberty” (Braddon 51). Maria’s entrance into the space of the study are viewed as transgressive, as “Old Mrs. Skegg had religiously refrained from all such dusting, on the plea that she did not wish to interfere with the master's ways” (Braddon 51). Thus, not only does Maria transgress the boundaries of domestic servant into the space of male scholarship, which under the influence of the patriarchal system as ordained by Mr. Bascom relegates the space to singularly male members of the household, but, she disrupts and manipulates the space itself. Maria uses the boundary-crossing nature of her occupation, to cross from private to public, and effectively unsettle the status quo of Wildheath Grange. Furthermore, Maria disrupts the

books themselves with her dusting, effectively, Maria is disrupting the space of the patriarchal structure, through which she is able to gain access to academic spaces of the study and literal embodiments of knowledge and academia, books. Thus, Braddon suggests that the ghostly nature of women's in-betweenness allows them to capacity for mobility, while they belong neither sphere fully, they are able to gain entrance to either. Thus, Braddon prescribed the freedom of choice and social mobility to the modern woman, and elevates her condition from historic invisibility to one of empowerment.

However, there is another aspect to Maria's in-betweenness, as it becomes the reason for her displacement in the constructed space of Wildheath Grange, in which she is relegated to the haunted space of the attic, which is likewise characterized by a spiritual liminality: in-between the spiritual and the physical. The spacial division of Maria, Mr. Bascom, and Mr. and Mrs. Skegg creates an inherent power dynamic, which for Maria is less apparent. Each person is relegated to a different space within Wildheath Grange: Mr Bascom, occupies the floor on which his studies resides—aligning him with the academic space or the public sphere; Mr. Skegg and Mrs. Skegg are regulated to the servants quarters with Mrs. Skegg relegated to the kitchen, thus, Mr. Skegg is still involved in the public sphere, as a domestic servant, but Mrs. Skegg remains confined to domesticity. However, Maria remains separated from all Wildheath's occupants, as Mr. Skegg orders her to “sleep in the attics [...] The big [room] at the north end of the house” (Braddon). Upon this revelation Mr. Bascom, concerned about the nature of the room asks Mr. Skegg if that is the haunted room, which Mr. Skegg replies “Of course it is [...] but she doesn't know anything about it” (Braddon). The first implication of this interaction is that Maria occupies a different space than the other occupants, which signifies her disembodiment within Wildheath, she is relegated to the haunted space of the attic, likewise characterized as a liminal

space, in which Mr. Bascom's uncle committed suicide year prior, thus effectively constructing the space as a barrier between the physical and spiritual. Thus, with her association with this space, the modern educated woman is recognized as being displaced in a patriarchal society and can only exist in a space characterized by a similar in-betweenness, between the public and the private, the professional and the domestic. Furthermore, this construction of space creates an inherent power dynamic, in which Maria remains ignorant of the dark and potentially fatal nature of the space in which she lives, and Mr. Bascom and Mr. Skegg, who know the space's past but refuse to share this information, maintain a power over her. They operate with complete knowledge of the space they have constructed, thus they are able to traverse the space according to their knowledge. However, Maria has no prior knowledge of the system, thus, she has no idea how it operates and is left vulnerable to the supernatural forces of the house. Thus, Braddon acknowledges the patriarchal systems of oppression which keep women ignorant by excluding them from institutions and opportunities for education.

Ultimately, M.E. Braddon and Margaret Oliphant use the form of the ghost story to construct a space representative of the ideological spheres to represent the failure of the societal systems—education, property ownership, and legal autonomy—to support women beyond the domestic sphere. Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window," showcases the New Woman's desire for equal access to the public sphere and the academic sphere through the construction of space which is partitioned by windows and window-frames. Furthermore, the constructed spaces are haunted by the spirit of the young scholar and the unnamed narrator herself. The scholar occupies the imagined space of the library, thus, the library is constructed as a patriarchal space relative to the patriarchal nature of academia. The unnamed narrator's supernatural second-sight allows the ability to transgress and traverse the spacial boundaries of the windows, for a vision of

the opportunities of scholarship. However, the space is ultimately an imagined space, in that Oliphant, recognizes the inability of women to actually access this space. Thus, Oliphant captures the condition of the Victorian New Woman's desire for equal opportunity and the boundaries which keep her partitioned from these institutions. Ultimately, Oliphant is concerned with society's failure to accommodate women into the social and public sphere. Likewise, M.E. Braddon captures the Victorian woman's condition with more dire consequences. Braddon's construction of the patriarchal space becomes a fatal system of oppression for the transgressive or boundary-crossing woman. The failure of the system to support Maria, who was educated and intelligent but relegated to hard labor of domestic work, which led to her demise. Thus, M.E. Braddon and Margaret Oliphant use the supernatural as a vehicle through which women could access a means of education, however, both women were ultimately thwarted. Braddon's ending, in which Maria is consumed by the shadow in the corner and subsequently hangs herself, suggests that working class women are especially vulnerable to the patriarchal system that not only fails to provide for women of independent means, but ultimately preys on them. Thus, Oliphant and Braddon use the supernatural genetic tradition of the ghost story to comment on the historic invisibility and vulnerability of the independent woman, while portraying their attempts of social mobility and desires for equal access to education, as possible through supernatural channels—the creation of an imagined space through which Maria and the Narrator can engage in female scholarship, either through the writer's or Mr. Bascom's study. Thus, with these stories, Braddon and Oliphant, themselves, engage in this same imagined spacial construction for vision of female scholarship and social mobility, through which their female protagonists can visualize educational opportunities, transgress gender boundaries and reverse the power dynamics of male scholarship for their own benefit.

Chapter IV:

The Spiritualist Investigator & The New Woman in Lettice Galbraith's "In the Séance Room"
and Rhoda Broughton's "Behold, It Was a Dream"

The spacial creation of ideological spheres witnessed in Braddon and Oliphant's stories, as well as Maria and the Unnamed Narrator's uncanny supernatural abilities that allow them to transgress the boundaries of these space, provide an early framework of the New Woman in supernatural fiction, while still adhering to conservative Victorian ideals of the *angel in the home*. These early embodiments of the New Woman are rendered ineffectual with either passive or destructive endings which ultimately eliminates the agency and social mobility of the supernatural woman to change her situation. This rather conservative ending for both of these women is transformed with the introduction of the female medium and occult investigator within the Victorian supernatural serial fiction. The professional female medium and occult investigator signal the reconciliation of the supernatural and the professional within the realm of literature and fiction, as well as the transition of the New Woman from domestic to professional. This emblematic change is reflected in a very distinct shift in female-authored supernatural fiction, specifically witnessed in the treatment of female characters with supernatural proclivities, such as Lettice Galbraith's "In the Séance Room" and Rhoda Broughton's "Behold, It Was a Dream." Both Broughton and Galbraith's stories collectively showcase three iterations of the New Woman: the professional female medium, the economically-independent investigator, and the ghostly female intercessor.

Lettuce Galbraith explores the New Woman through three figures: Katherine Graves, the malevolent murdered spirit of the Victorian Angel, Elma Lang, the economically independent psychological investigator, and Madame Delphine, the female medium. The tale begins with Katherine Graves murder by Dr. Valentine Burke, who “dabbled in psychics, and had written an article on the future of hypnotism [...] He was a strong magnetiser” (Galbraith). Dr. Burke is introduced as a callous ex-lover to Katherine, to which he promptly abandoned after “he had made lover to her, *pour passer le temps*” (Galbraith). Thus, in this situation, Katherine becomes an emblem of the Victorian fallen woman, characteristic of this period. When Katherine shows up at his practice, dishevelled and frantic, it is remarked that “there was nothing before her but shame and misery. She would be better off dead” (Galbraith). This passage offers a portrait of the sexually transgressive woman within the ideological framework of Victorian social mores, in which the woman is better off dead as she faces complete social exclusion and exile. Galbraith offers the condition of the Victorian woman seeking sexual or social autonomy, in which Katherine, an embodiment of the Victorian Angel ideal, faces the destructive consequences of transgressive sexual experience. The cultural anxieties regarding the transition from angel in the home to New Woman is reflected in the rhetoric which Galbraith describes Katherine as such: “The gaslight flared coldly on the white face, drawn by pain and misery [...] The skin was strained tightly over the cheek-bones and looked yellow” with “her dishevelled hair and rain-soaked garments, she had all the appearance of a dead body” (Galbraith). The women who transgress the Angel in the Home ideal is likened to a dead body, in that she is effectively dead, socially and thus economically. Not only does her appearance reflect this corpse-like appearance, but she is further described as “crouched in the corner [...] sobbing and shivering” (Galbraith), prescribing the behaviorisms evocative of hysterical femininity. Through both portrayals,

Katherine is stripped of the agency of choice and relegated all the rights and mobility of a corpse perscribed the hysterical emotions characteristic of femininity. Galbraith offers a potentially conservative depiction of sexually liberated woman, however, Katherine's transfiguration from corpse-like Victorian woman to emancipated, if not malignant spirit, reflects an ideology of female autonomy evocative of the liberated New Woman.

The séance chamber and the intercession of Madame Delphine, the Spiritualist medium, marks the return of the forsaken woman, but as an autonomous spirit. It is through the séance chamber that both Kitty Grave and Elma Lang break from the hypnotic predatory control of Dr. Valentine. The Spiritualist platform allows a means through which the female characters to escape the oppression and domination. The séance itself takes place in Madame Delphine's home, who is described as "a medium of extraordinary power [who] had flashed like a meteor into the firmament of London Society" (Galbraith). Madame Delphine commences the séance, which Kitty's spirit takes control of, manifesting as, "a woman in dark, clinging garments—garments, to all appearances dripping with water—a woman with wide-opened, glassy eyes, fixed in an unalterable stony stare. It was a ghastly sight. All the concentrated agony of a violent death was stamped on that awful face. Of the twenty people who looked upon it, not one had power to move or speak. Slowly the terrible thing glided forward, hardly touching the ground [...] It moved very slowly, and the second or so during which it traversed the space between the curtain and the seats of the audience seemed hours to the man who knew for whom it came" (Galbraith). For Kitty's spirit the séance becomes a means through which she can accuse her murderer and subseuwnetly subvert the established power dyanmics, thus the séance becomes a space for female liberation in which the Spiritualist woman gains a fundamental power over her own autonomy. Furthermore, the female spirit's presence in the room carries with

a supernatural power that effectively rids the audience of any mobility. This shift in the power dynamics of the space, mirrors the subversive power of the medium who, in the space of the séance chamber, takes control of the room and becomes the absolute authority of the space. As such, Kitty's spirit transgresses the rules and the space of the séance, "travers[ing] the space between the curtain and space," and through such a transgression redirects the power of medium to herself. Her transformation is further marked in the syntax of the passage, specifically in Dr. Valentine's use of "it" to describe Kitty's spirit. The deontation of "it," signals her transformation from her earthly form to spirit. In eyes of the male perpetrator, she is transformed into a monstrous creature, a liberated spirit, an instrument of justice standing before her killer to enact a sort of justice. She is no longer the vulnerable, Angel in the Home ideal of femininity, she is transformed and her presence pronounces judgement. Her voice is employed but once after her death, in which her "distorted lips parted-formed a single word. Was it the voice of a guilty conscience, or did that word really ring through and through the room-"Murderer!" (Galbraith). Not only does she gain liberation from the hypnotic gaze of Dr. Valentine, but she gains a voice, which she employs to use against his malicious schemes. Ultimately, the purpose of her presence is twofold: to posthumously convict Dr. Valentine and to warn Elma Lang, his wife, who remains in his hypnotic control.

The séance chamber is used not only for the liberation of Kitty Graves, but also for that of Elma Lang, who is freed from the hypnotic trance and predatory persuasion of Dr. Valentine. Miss Elma Lang is described as a member of "the Society for the Revival of Eastern Mysticism." Furthermore, her social situation is described as such "Miss Lang was an orphan. She had full control of her fortune of thirty thousand pounds. She was young, sufficiently pretty, and extremely susceptible" (Galbraith). At the time of Kitty's murder, Elma was engaged to Dr.

Valentine, as a result of his mesmeric power and hypnotic influence, eventually leading to their marriage. However, after Kitty's spirits' manifestation, Elma who "always felt there was something [about Valentine]" (Galbraith 110), leaves her husband after he denies any connection to Katherine. It is through the séance's power of revelation and Kitty's intercession that Alma regains a sense of autonomy and sovereignty of self enough to leave her husband: "I shall have left you forever. The only reparation in your power is to refrain from any attempt to follow me [...] Was I to blame if I used against you a power which you yourself had taught me? In the last hours I have heard from your own lips the whole story of Katherine Greaves. Every detail of that horrible tragedy you confessed unconsciously in your sleep" (Galbraith 112). Not only is Elma's leaving an act of liberation from masculine control, but her use of mesmerism on Dr. Valentine acts as a complete reversal of the established martial power dynamics. Elma uses the supernatural gift of mesmerism to draw forth the truth of Kitty's murder, and then in an act of self-governance leaves her husband penniless and destitute in a ironic reversal of his own treatment of Katherine. Thus, Valentine becomes the embodiment of the fallen woman, and the role are reversed, allowing Elma to regain power through the very means in which Valentine exploited both herself and Katherine. In which, the supernatural, once again, becomes a means through which these women regain their social and bodily autonomy, through the subversion of gender hierarchies and structures befitting Spiritualist conceptions of the spiritual and supernatural.

The female medium, the conjured spirit, and the psychical investigator in Lettice Galbraith's "In the Séance Room," are three women fundamentally connected by and a product of the séance room, in which the mystical space becomes a feminine spacial construction acting as a vehicle for liberation and justice. For the spirit of the murdered Kitty Graves, the séance

room becomes a space which enables her physical manifestation and through which she is able to enact justice on the male perpetrator, Dr. Valentine. Furthermore, the séance room acts as a subversion of gendered power dynamics. Ultimately, the séance is headed by Madame Delphine, who also owns the house the séance is held in. Thus, the séance room is a female constructed space, by the medium Madame Delphine, through which other women with supernatural procivilities and abilities find liberation from the patriarchal domination in societal structures such as marriage. This is the case for Elma Lang, for which the séance room breaks the power of Dr. Valentine's mesmerism and predatory leeching and Elma is made aware of Dr. Valentine's true nature. Ultimately, the literature of the Victorian period reflects the Spiritualist culture through one of its most noticeable practices: the séance. The literature of the period uses the space of the séance chamber for the same purpose as the female medium: a space for the liberation and assertion of autonomy of the female body.

The spacial construction of the séance is not the only liberating aspect witnessed in culture of Spiritualism's influence on the supernatural fiction of the period. The medium herself became a cultural icon, through which patriarchal ideologies and structures were dismantled with pre-feminist discourse of women's liberation. In Rhoda Broughton's "Behold, It Was a Dream!" the middle-aged spinster Dinah Bellairs is prescribed the role of the medium through her capacity as a clairvoyant seer. Like, the unnamed narrator in Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window," Dinah is gifted with the supernatural gift of second sight, however, her gift is more prophetic. Upon the invitation of Jane, a childhood friend, Dinah arrives at their country home and is plagued by visions of Jane and Jane's husband's violent murder: "Perhaps it came as a warning; such things have happened. Yes, say what you will, I cannot believe that any vision so consistent—so tangibly real and utterly free from the jumbled incongruities and unlikeliness of

ordinary dreams—could have meant nothing” (Broughton 6). Not only are her uncanny prophetic visions reflective of gifts of the Spiritualist clairvoyant, but her visions, which she asserts have “come for som purpose” (9), are followed by what she describes as “unaccountable instinct” (Broughton 11). Dinah’s embodiment of the New Woman is doubled, by her simultaneous spiritual unnaturalness which is made social by its intersection with her precarious social position as spinster. Dinah’s clairvoyance subsequently others her from contemporary conceptions of femininity, ultimately making her into something beyond the natural.

The cultural anxieties surrounding Victorian spinsters is witnessed in Dinah’s disruption of the domestic space and Victorian family unit, which is made doubly unnatural in its juxtaposition with her mediumistic clairvoyant visions, which align to present an image of feminninty that is simultaneously disruptive and transgressive. Dinah is introduced as living “in Dublin, frolicking round ball rooms with a succession of horse–soldiers, and watching her Majesty's household troops play Polo in the Phoenix Park” (Broughton). Dinah’s spinster lifestyle is starkly contrasted to her childhood friend, Jane Watson, effectively producing an opposition between Jane, who embodies the Victorian Angel ideal of domesticity, and Dinah, who is in every way othered to Jane. Jane is described as “lead[ing] an exclusively bucolic, cow–milking, pig–fattening, roast–mutton–eating and to–bed–at–ten–o'clock–going life,” in which she is transformed, by domesticity, from the “peaky sour virgin” and “elderly eldest daughter of a large family, hustled into obscurity, jostled, shelved, by half a dozen younger, fresher sisters” into “a gracious matron with a kindly, comely face, pleasure making and pleasure feeling” (Broughton). The opposition described between the two women constructs the contemporary thought of the fin de siècle and the clashing ideologies of femininity and the deconstruction of traditional gender roles of the period. The otherness of spinsterhood which

Dinah embodies reflect the same anxieties as the emerging New Woman, in which Dinah's fluid positionality and refusal to remain within the binary of the marriage plot and female social roles—wife or mother—marks Dinah as a representative of transgressive femininity, transcending beyond the traditional notions of femininity.

Jane's adherence to the traditional aspirations of womanhood and subsequent introduction into the domestic sphere effectively catapulted her transformation from sour virgin to a gracious matron. Thus, Dinah's spinsterness is made uncanny through the violent visions of murder and death that haunt her dreams, however, this uncanniness is transferred to the space of the domestic and made nightmarish through Dinah's visions. The first night Dinah spends in Jane's home is haunted by images of death in which she witnesses "a sound of muffled struggling, and once I heard a sort of choked strangled cry [...] it seemed to me as if that bed were only one horrible sheet of crimson; but as my sight grew clearer I saw what it was that caused that frightful impression of universal red [...] I saw you both—you and your husband, lying dead—murdered—drowned in your own blood!" (Broughton). The dream itself, as a signifier of future events, is also a signifier of the trauma and horrors of marriage and domesticity, in which the domestic space, specifically the bedroom, is likened to the female body. In Dinah's vision "Jane, had evidently been the one first attacked—taken off in [her] sleep—for [she was] lying just as [she] would have lain in slumber, only that across [her] throat from there to there" (touching first one ear and then the other), "there was a huge and yawning gash" (Broughton). Jane's transformation from virginal maiden to matronly Angel in the House is signified through the bodily horrors of her murder; thus, marriage and domesticity signify the death of Jane's autonomous self. The significance of the fact that Jane's bloodied corpse was found in her marriage bed is evocative of her marital consummation and her transition from virgin to matron.

The gash is evocative of female genitalia, while the nature and violent imagery used to describe the gash constructs an image of violent marital consummation (Williams). Furthermore, her throat is slashed, rendering her voiceless and unable to speak mirroring the woman's relative silence in the Victorina angel narrative. This image of bloodied corpses prescribes a sense of horror and trauma to the female body, and characterizes the act of marriage as irreversible and traumatic. Dinah's supernatural sight allows her to see the violent separation of the ideological spheres. Dinah's clairvoyance prescribes her a set of preternatural powers which allows her to transgress the realm of the known, and likewise her mediumistic power of clairvoyance allow her the supernatural insight to peer beyond the veil of the ideological sphere which she does not inhabit—the domestic. Thus, the supernatural vision of violence and the stripping of economic and bodily autonomy as symptomatic of a woman entering into marriage allows Dinah to escape the marriage narrative and to transgress the boundaries of the marriage bed and the domestic sphere.

Dinah's presence in Jane's sphere of domesticity, which embodies the status quo and the Victorian family unit, is effectually disruptive, not only because of her fluid social positionality but also her clairvoyant visions. Through her entrance into the domestic sphere of Jane's home, Dinah introduces a disruption characteristic of unmarried economically independent women, which was ultimately lost when Jane married her "old man." Subsequently, reestablishing Robin Watson's, Jane's husband, anxiety of uncontrolled femininity within the Victorian household. This anxiety takes the form of disbelief and his continual attempts to discredit and disprove Dinah's clairvoyant dreams and intuition, as "a dream, a fancy—a nightmare!" (Broughton). Thus the masculine predilection towards logic and reason, as dictated by Victorian gender roles, influence his behavior and reasoning: "I was staggered for a moment, I will own [...] but I have been

thinking it over and on reflection I have come to the conclusion that the highly excited state of your imagination is answerable for the heightening of the resemblance which exists between all the Irish of that class” (Broughton). Thus, Dinah’s feminine supernatural instincts clash with Robin Watson’s masculine rationality, evocative of the Spiritualist tradition of associating the spiritual processes of the practice with the innate passivity of femininity and womanhood.

According to Ann Braude, “mediumship was closely identified with femininity [...] The medium may be man or woman—woman or man—but in either case, the characteristics will be feminine—negative and passive [...] Spiritualists used the language of electricity, also current in mesmerism and phrenology, to describe the relative positions of men and women in spirit communication. Women were “negative,” and men were “positive” (23). The passivity of femininity was considered more conducive to spirit communication, a property which Dinah conveys in her capacity for second sight. Thus, through Dinah’s alignment with negative passivity, and her opposition to masculine rationalism, Dinah is subsequently characterized as an Spiritualist figure with a mediumistic capacity of foresight.

Chapter V: Conclusion

In all six of the tales examined, the coalescence of the Spiritualist movement and the Woman's movement was witnessed in the supernatural woman's boundary transgression, and ultimate dissemination of the ideological spheres for the construction of a feminine space. This construction of feminine space manifested in the space of the séance room or the professional sphere, which these women accessed through uncanny supernatural abilities such as clairvoyance or second sight. The ultimate purpose of these fictional supernatural women mirrored that of Spiritualism and the succeeding Women's movement, to bolster women's entrance into the professional sphere and ushering in early manifestations of the "New Woman." Both movements converges to reconstruct ideals of womanhood and undermine the conditions of the Victorian woman. These ideological reconstructions are most noticeable witnessed in the periodical and short story publications from sensation and weird fiction authors, who were historically overlooked in their generic history.

For all of these facets of Victorian culture, the dead became a medium for the silenced and oppressed women, a means through which they can transgress social boundaries. These boundaries imposed on women in these stories worked within the contractions of Victorian ideals regarding propriety and proper womanhood, while simultaneously highlighting the failings of societal institutions to support or include women, such as women's economic precarity and women's exclusion from academia. Furthermore, these stories bring attention to how the perpetuation of such narratives, as the marriage narrative, the domestic narrative, and the Angel in the Home trope, reinforce the ideologies of these societal institutions, ultimately leaving

women vulnerable to a system, in which they have no place. Thus, the woman writer, the female ghost, the supernatural woman, the female medium, and the professional woman become similarly characterized by disembodiment, a displacement from society, which is created and sustained by patriarchal structures and systems in which women are relegated by notions of traditional gender roles through the perpetuation of harmful ideologies, such as the separate spheres ideology. These four women—M.E. Braddon, Margaret Oliphant, Lettice Galbraith, Rhoda Broughton—present a societal oppression only transcended by supernatural means, which serves as a mode of boundary crossing. Thus, the threshold of between the real and imagined become analogous to the creative construction of space and boundary crossing of female mediums and female writers, which transgressed the boundaries of the domestic sphere securing their voices were heard in the public sphere.

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