BLUE LIGHT OF THE SCREEN: NOTES ON HORROR

by

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(Under the Direction of Andrew Zawacki)

ABSTRACT

Blue Light of the Screen: Notes on Horror is a memoir of the author's obsession with the horror genre. To that end, it explores depression, visual culture, family trauma, Catholicism, and spectrality. It considers the reality-bending, immersive experience of watching and working in digital screens as a contemporary mode of reverie. It reflects on personal and cultural spiritual beliefs and superstitions in terms of the long-standing connection between seeing and believing. Strongly influenced by Freudian theory but not itself Freudian, *Blue Light of the Screen* investigates memory, fantasy, and hysteria as they are staged in horror television and film, the author's own life, and a variety of cultural sources. While the manuscript begins as a study of the twentieth and twenty-first century horror genre, with a focus on the ghost film in particular, it gradually broadens into an exploration of existential horror and questions of faith. In terms of its form, *Blue Light of the Screen* sits somewhere between memoir, philosophy, and prose poetry, and also contains lists and illustrations.

INDEX WORDS: Memoir, Horror, Ghosts, Supernatural, Uncanny, Visual Studies, Spectrality

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

THE MODERN GHOST STORY: "FROM A VISION STILL MORE INTERIOR"

If the horror genre can be thought of as a mode of philosophy, as Eugene Thacker argues in his book *In the Dust of this Planet*, then I wonder what kind of philosophy the ghost story, as a type of horror, allows us to think through. By examining the formal qualities of literary ghost stories from the genre's mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth century "golden age," I explore how the ghost story produces and suspends a tension between faith and doubt. To this end, I draw attention to the ghost story's use of inset narratives and multiple perspectives and the ways in which the ghost story borrows from other genres, including the detective story, oral legend, and memoir. In the final section of this essay, I discuss Sheridan Le Fanu's "Green Tea," a ghost story about a haunted scholar, for its treatment of knowledge, skepticism, visual perception, and psychological suffering.

Historical Context:

The ghost story flourished in a time of extreme social and technological change. The genre's golden age in the United States and Britain, which is typically placed between 1850 and 1930, coincides with what we might call the golden age of British imperial power: a time of growth for populations and economies, but also one of class stratification, trauma, and racial and national othering. On both sides of the Atlantic, the culture of the long nineteenth century was particularly suited to the production of real and imagined ghosts. Collective anxieties about changing social, scientific, and religious paradigms lent readers a special appetite for horror. As Nick Freeman

explains, the ghost story's era was one of "high mortality rates, very public displays of death and mourning and, at the same time, an increasing skepticism regarding Christian teachings" (106).

Many social changes brought by modernity were explicitly staged in ghost stories. The newly central bourgeois family, which would also become the locus of Sigmund Freud's work, is literally haunted in ghost stories about unhappily married couples and dysfunctional families. Ambivalence about gendered family roles are also suggested in stories about characters who dwell outside of this system, like the haunted bachelors of M.R. James' tales. Tensions about class mobility can be read in stories where the action of the plot is mediated by the ghost-like presence of servants, who are kept always out of sight, and in stories where a ghost returns to settle some issue of inheritance, debt, or property ownership.

Of the many inventions that transformed reality in the ghost story's era, the nineteenth century saw the spread of railways, the standardization of time, and the inventions of photography, the telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, and the cinema. These technologies not only offered new possibilities for transportation, communication, and expression, but fundamentally changed our conceptions of time, space, memory, and the visible world. Accordingly, nineteenth and early twentieth century ghost stories often feature motor cars, trains, and telegrams as harbingers of death. For example, Edith Nesbit's "The Violet Car" is about a grieving couple who are as haunted by the car that killed their daughter as they are by their absent child. Charles Dickens' "The Signal-Man" focuses on the ghost of a railway worker who was killed by a train and reappears to warn the living of this danger. Telegrams are used in many ghost stories to mark mortal time: a telegram's arrival often confirms a death after readers have witnessed a dead man's ghost.

In visual culture, the inventions of the first half of the nineteenth century made optical perception seem increasingly subjective and this blurred distinctions between the real and the unreal. Jonathan Crary argues that in this time, the stereoscope, with its double-image creation of false depth, replaced the reliable camera obscura as the central symbol of human vision. Optical experiments, such as those detailed in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Theory of Colors*, only increased the sense that the human eye was an imperfect and tragically mortal apparatus for perceiving the world. The modern subject began to mistrust her own sight. Correspondingly, the public became increasingly interested in forms of visual entertainment which played with optical tricks, like magic lantern shows. Such spectacles were inherently ghostly, and prefigured the apparitional presences of photography and film. Building on Crary's work, Srdjan Smajic argues that Victorian ghost stories reveal a "tension between ocularcentric faith and anti-ocularcentric skepticism" by staging a "relationship between vision and knowledge, seeing and believing" (*Ghost Seers* 17). While ghost stories from this era are often concerned with other forms of perception beyond the visual—a ghost can be heard or felt as often as seen—it is true that sight and belief have been intimately linked in western culture and remain so.

In other realms of nineteenth-century science, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution challenged Judeo-Christian narratives about mankind's divine origins and purpose. The existence of the human soul, which had already been in question since the Enlightenment, was thrown further into doubt. The Victorian obsession with taming the bestial nature of man and his appetites for sex and violence seemed to grow out of a Darwinian anxiety, as did fears of "degenerate" members of society who were thought to threaten the positive evolution of the species. Human nature (or nature more broadly) is often framed as irrational and destructive in

literature from this period, particularly in stories about half man, half beast monsters like the werewolf, vampire, or split human persona of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Briggs, *Night Visitors* 20). Darwinian fears also emerge in ghost stories like Le Fanu's "Green Tea," where the tormenting spirit takes the form of a monkey, and in W.W. Jacobs' "The Monkey's Paw," which is named after the cursed body part that brings ruin to a family.

In terms of the human body itself, new economic growth brought new perils. Overcrowded urban, industrial conditions made infectious diseases rampant at a time when germ theory was only beginning to develop and so mortality rates were high, especially for the lower classes. While medical researchers developed the stethoscope, anesthesia, and the X-ray for detecting and treating illnesses, on a local level, most physicians only offered ineffective cures such as herbal remedies, a "change of air," or hydrotherapy; modern pharmacology did not began until the end of the Victorian era (Marsh). Mental illness was similarly misunderstood and improperly treated, as the boundaries between psychology, medicine, and spirituality were still porous. Indeed, fads like mesmerism, which began in the eighteenth century, continued to be popular into the mid-nineteenth century because they offered alternatives to unsatisfactory mainstream medicine and claimed to treat the human spirit as well as the physical body.

The mesmerist, like the Spiritualist, was a fraught figure in nineteenth-century society and literature. Thought of as both a charlatan and a possible healer, he provoked an uneasy combination of hope and fear and raised questions of belief. Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall argue that in the nineteenth century, ghost stories and other works of Gothic fiction "were responding to a contemporary debate about the proper contours of science; about whether such putative phenomena as spirits, mesmerism or telepathy really existed and, if they did, could

be investigated and known by scientific methods" (219). Ghost stories from this period often make direct reference to emerging scientific theories and draw on the language of ghost-debunkers, Spiritualists, mesmerists, and psychical researchers when describing fictional hauntings.

Whereas society at large may have felt optimism about the promises of science, in ghost stories, medical and technological advances were treated only with skepticism and paranoia. As Kelly Hurley writes, nineteenth-century Gothic fiction (a category which includes the ghost story) was "opportunistic in its relation to science, borrowing from any number of scientific discourses, psychology included, in order to further its project of the making-strange of human identity (179). This "making-strange" reflected modern feelings of alienation, confusion, and anxiety that arose in the face of seeming cultural progress. While there was much to marvel at in this era, there was also much to fear. As Julia Briggs explains,

> Progress in medicine and the ability to prevent or cope with epidemics lagged far behind industrial techniques and the accompanying growth of conurbations that largely caused them. Then as today there was a strong sense that man's new power was an enemy as well as a friend, that the science of understanding man—body, and most importantly, mind—had fallen far behind the development of mechanical skills. (*Night Visitors* 19-20)

The ghost story's ineffective doctors, haunted patients, and scenes of mental and physical breakdown are part of what Margree and Randall identify as the "Gothic fin de siècle:" an end-of-century mood rooted in concerns about industrial, political, and scientific development (218).

On a spiritual level, while religious belief did not disappear in the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, the prevailing discourse had become more secular. Darwin, Marx, and Freud offered non-religious paradigms for explaining mysterious forces in the human mind and society at large. At the same time, new technologies and their eerie immateriality offered believers new ways to justify the existence of a spirit realm. Spiritualism arose in the 1840s as the religious answer to the telegraph, presenting a human medium who could send and receive messages across vast distances and through seemingly impossible means. Spiritualists employed the metaphors of telegraphy to explain how a psychic could speak to the dead, and used photography, with its indexical link to visual reality and time, to stage "evidence" of ghosts through photographs of ectoplasm and phantoms. Occultism in general experienced a resurgence in the mid-nineteenth century through World War I years, as magic, like religion, seems to return with greater force whenever it is repressed. Even for those who identified as secular materialists and skeptics, the supernatural was a popular source of entertainment in visual and print cultures.

In golden age ghost stories, the reappearance of a supposedly dead paradigm is as horrifying as the ghost itself. Many characters and objects in stories from this era symbolize the return of beliefs thought to be banished and the failure of more modern ways of knowing. Phantasmagoric ghosts, dubious doctors, futile religious leaders, meddling antiquarians, cursed occult texts, and urban settings haunted by the wild magic of nature suggest fear about old beliefs. Briggs writes that the ghost story's age was a time “when the material and spiritual conceptions of life were locked in a continuous conflict which no intellectual could entirely avoid. Questions of faith and doubt were considered of paramount importance where there was leisure for thought at

all." (Briggs, *Night Visitors* 16-17). While not all ghost stories from this period stage intellectual investigations of faith and doubt, I think that the best examples from the genre do.

In addition to philosophical suffering, the ghost story's golden age was also filled with plenty of actual death and pain. The American Civil War, the spread of colonial power, and World War I mark major occasions of trauma. In Simon Hay's analysis of the British ghost story, he argues that political forces "haunt" even those stories which do not seem to reference imperialism, proposing that: "If empire is a structural absence rather than a central concern for much nineteenth-century British literature, then in the ghost story, structural absences are themselves a central concern" (11). Hay's socio-political analysis of the genre is typical of one strain of criticism which draws, retrospectively, on Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*.

While part of the ghost story's appeal is its connection to perennial questions about the human soul, life after death, the nature of evil, and the interpretation of history, the popularity of the genre between 1850 and 1930 suggests that this was a time when such questions were felt with urgency and pressure. Ghost stories came out of a period of indeterminacy and ambivalence about a number of things: individual perception, emerging scientific and philosophical theories, new technologies, the integrity of modern life, one's relationship to social others, and how the past should be understood. As the dreadful mood of the ghost story reveals, this uncertainty was experienced with horror and pathos.

In explaining the decline of the ghost story after World War I, Briggs suggests that twentieth-century authors were less willing to sincerely engage questions that Freudian theory seemed to have already answered. In addition, the real-world horrors of wartime may have made the entertaining horror of the ghost story feel irrelevant or superficial. Briggs argues that most ghost

stories of the 1930s and after were exercises in wit and style and lacked the emotional stakes that gave older ghost stories their power (Briggs, *Night Visitors* 23).

If Freudian theory to some extent replaced the "psychological" ghost story of earlier decades, it is because both discourses arose from the same anxieties. As Terry Castle observes, Freud "invented" the uncanny in part through his analysis of horror literature—a process most clearly evident in Freud's reading of E.T.A Hoffman's short story "The Sandman" in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny." For this reason, Simon Hay argues that psychoanalysis is a poor lens for examining the Victorian-era ghost story, writing that:

> Freud's version of the psyche and of the psychoanalytic process are so thoroughly modeled on the ghost story, that to try to turn around and explain the ghost story in terms of psychoanalysis is a circularity that will get us nowhere. Yes, we will be able to say; this ghost story looks like it references the psyche; but only because Freud's conception of the psyche was always built out of references to ghost stories anyway. (5)

It seems we now read golden age ghost stories as particularly "psychological" because we view them backwards through Freud's legacy. The supernatural logic of the ghost story resembles the eerie logic of the unconscious and the return of the repressed, and ghost stories, like Freudian case studies, narrate the collapse of the modern self and its ways of understanding the world. It is important to remember, however, that terms like "uncanny" and "unconscious" would not have been known by nineteenth-century ghost story writers; instead, their fictions anticipate Freudian conclusions. In addition, certain narrative motifs which seem psychoanalytic, such as characters who enter visionary states through dream, hypnosis, intoxication, or feverish illness, grew out of eighteenth-century Gothic tropes and were a response to the Enlightenment's culture of reason.

The Gothic and Horror:

While I place the ghost story within the larger generic body of horror, it is typically understood as continuation of the Gothic, a term with which horror overlaps. Indeed, as Nick Freeman writes, "The crucial distinction between Gothic and earlier literary ghosts is... that in fiction from the 1760s onwards, the ghost's purpose was primarily to frighten and horrify rather than to teach moral lessons" (94). In contrast with ghost stories from folklore, mythology, and religion, the ghost in Gothic novels and nineteenth-century ghost stories is there to provide a certain kind of negative thrill. Because horror literature has received the most critical attention as a type of Gothic, it is difficult to pull the two terms apart. At the broadest level, horror is a genre defined by affect: horror literature simply descries work which produces (or aims to produce) the feeling of horror in readers. Yet even this label has lead to debate, as scholars argue about what the precise feeling of "horror" is and how it differs from terror or simple fear. Many novels and short stories which we would not classify as horror literature tell narratives of human cruelty and suffering and are meant to frighten readers; there is a distinction between how impossible horrors (such as supernatural monsters) and real-world horrors (war, disease, murder) appear and affect us.

One point at which horror is clearly differentiated from the Gothic is in film theory. There is a livelier discourse about horror as a film genre than as a literary one, except perhaps in discussions of fiction by twentieth-century authors like H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King, whose writing, incidentally, lends itself to film adaptation. Recent studies of literary horror like *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature* rely on horror film scholarship to discuss literary texts in retrospect. This is done through a comparison of narrative similarities rather than a discussion

of medium-specific techniques. Along these lines, I also understand the ghost story as a horror subgenre which spans centuries and mediums, as it crosses from literature to film and television. In terms of the golden age ghost story of the 1850s through 1920s, however, the genre offers a type of horror which is most rooted in the Gothic.

Like the Gothic novel, the golden age ghost story was a popular, commercialized form. Like the Gothic novel, the ghost story shows readers the dark, irrational underside of secular humanist culture by disrupting ideological binaries, transgressing social boundaries, and relating to history with a mix of fascination and fear. The nineteenth-century ghost story also shares the Gothic tendency towards pessimistic conservatism, where the possibilities of progress or social revolution are refused. As a form of the Gothic, the ghost story is ambiguously positioned between subversive and conservative gestures.

In contrast to the Gothic novel, the golden age ghost story tends to offer endings where the supernatural is not explained and horror has not been vanquished by a protagonist's sudden marriage, inheritance, or rational discovery. As Simon Hay writes, "The explicit project of the ghost story, as of horror literature more generally, usually seems to be to unsettle, to point to the incomprehensible and to irresolvable contradictions" (58). While particular late Gothic novels like Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* allow the mysterious horror of the supernatural to persist at the end, most follow the lead of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which offers a rational explanation for ghostly events. It seems that the horror of the ghost story, or the fear that it is best at raising, is one of uncertainty.

Along these lines, I believe that the ghost story is particularly suited for dealing with irresolvable questions of faith and doubt. Because ghost stories are about the supernatural, they

resemble narratives of religious revelation but lack religion's dogma, and so offer a place to imagine other links between the living, the dead, and the spirit realm. Ghost stories stage anxieties about capitalism, otherness, and imperialism, as I have said, but they are also ideal for dramatizing psychological struggles, questions of perception and memory, and existential spiritual concerns. The emergence of a ghost in a ghost story is always a challenge to materialist, positivist views of the world, which are too simplistic to account for the strangeness of existence. Accordingly, skeptical, materialist characters are often punished in ghost stories or portrayed as foolishly arrogant and ineffectual.

As a subgenre of horror, the ghost story's unsolvable mystery is crucial to the way it produces fear. As Noel Carroll writes in *The Philosophy of Horror*, “The point of the horror genre… is to exhibit, disclose, and manifest that which is, putatively in principle, unknown and unknowable” (12). Carroll writes that "horror stories are predominantly concerned with knowledge as a theme” and that they "engage us in the drama of proof," appealing to our innate curiosity about unknowable subjects (127-128). This is why ghost stories are so often linked to detective fiction. However, in Carroll's strict genre definition, horror stories should always end with a firm conclusion about the reality of a supernatural monster. "Once the supernatural agent is shown, that's it," Carroll writes, "there is no further question of its existence" (151). A ghost story which hovers between multiple explanations or fails to give an explanation at all is, for Carroll, a "fantastic" narrative rather than a horrific one. He believes a horror story needs to offer proof of a monster's existence to wipe away all doubt.

In contrast to Carroll, I believe the ghost story fulfills the requirements of horror because of (not despite) its uncertainty. The ghost story fits Robin Wood's oft-quoted formula for horror as a

narrative wherein "normality is threatened by the Monster" because it tells stories of frightening spirits who disrupt and transgress the boundaries of the ordinary world (31). The ghost's purpose is to cause characters to question "the validity of rationality," which in turn makes readers wonder about the limits of their own reason (Pinedo 17). If the philosophy that horror performs is, as Thacker writes, "the thought of the unthinkable," then the ghost story would weaken its power if it gave easy answers to unthinkable questions and showed us the exact nature of the ghost (9). Along the same lines, Isabel Pinedo has argued that ambiguity and lack of closure are features of post-modern film horror, which would make the ambiguous nineteenth-century ghost story ahead of its time. We should remember, however, that lack of closure, narrative fragmentation, shifting perspectives, and genre hybridity are much older techniques, and can be found not only in early horror cinema, but also in Gothic literature.

Formal Characteristics:

As a type of short story, it is essential that the ghost story is not very long. This is partly a function of the genre's historical context. Victorian ghost stories were often published in periodicals for middle class, family readerships, and therefore made to appeal to both men and women and an array of ages. The appetite for short ghost stories in this time was due to the proliferation of magazines and the growth of the reading public following British educational reforms (Freeman 101). Compared to other kinds of horror, the Victorian ghost story was family-friendly (lacking sex and graphic scenes) and well-paced enough to be read aloud to a group. The telling of ghost stories was an important part of English Christmastime traditions—a fact which complicates the genre's intent to scare. The ghost story is also linked to the rise of bedtime reading as a past-time. As Freeman observes, "the content of stories often echoed the

circumstances of their consumption, and transformed the bedroom from the traditional place of safety and repose into a site of unrest and horror" (94-95). The ghost story shifted the exotic locales of the Gothic novel into domestic situations which were familiar to readers.

The brevity of the ghost story also allows it to maintain its suspense. When ghost stories were occasionally longer, such as Henry James' novella *The Turn of the Screw*, they maintained a similar form as their shorter counterparts. Julia Briggs observes that *The Turn of the Screw* employs what is "essentially a short-story structure, introducing only a few main characters within a strictly limited series of event" (*Night Visitors* 13). Briggs writes that *The Turn of the Screw*, like other book-length ghost stories, attains "greater length and complexity" through devices such as nested narration and shifting viewpoints (*Night Visitors* 13). Before the nineteenth century, ghost stories often appeared as very short inset narratives in novels where they served to advance the plot, add to the mood, or "contribute to the tension between natural and supernatural explanations," much as a dream description would (Briggs, "The Ghost Story" 179). Once the ghost story stood on its own, it still tended to present itself as if it were inset in a larger narrative through framing techniques. Such frames could stand in place of more traditional beginnings or endings and could be incredibly complex. For example, a manuscript of a first-hand account of a haunting is passed to a character who writes a letter to another character about the story (quoting parts of the manuscript), and that letter is received by a third character, who reads it aloud to a group of people, which the readers of the actual story "overhear" in the pages of the text. Through this nested narration, the ghost story is both returned to its status as an oral legend and made into a complex intertextual and meta-textual event.

The Oral Legend and the Status of Truth:

In contrast with a supposedly true oral ghost story, the literary ghost story is more suspenseful, frightening, and carefully structured. In most first-person accounts of supernatural encounters, the signs of a haunting are banal: a flickering light, a sense of dread, a cold area in a home, or a recurring nightmare. These would be frightening experiences for the person who endures them, but not for listeners or readers. Oral ghost stories often do not have any meaning or purpose except to tell of anomalous experiences; they are as singular as memories. As such, oral legends are even more irresolvable than literary ghost stories because they lack the section of the narrative that resembles a detective plot, wherein a haunted person calls upon outside authorities for help or engages in their own process of research and discovery.

The ambiguity of the literary ghost story therefore requires and derives from its form, where framing devices instruct readers to interpret what they know to be fictional as if it were factual. The "true story" is used as a device. This oral legend or first-person written account appears in ghost stories whenever the reader overhears a haunted person's testimony or reads, as if over the shoulder or through the eyes of a character, a document about a supernatural experience. This framing creates what Simon Hay calls a "decentering" effect: "Narrators can tell stories about people telling stories (about some hero). The protagonists of ghost stories often suffer a further and final decentering, when readers discover at the center of the narrative, as its occult agency and driving force, *not* the protagonist at all but rather the ghost, ineffable, intangible, largely unknowable" (81). The ghost story itself is therefore held apart from these intermediaries: it is the cold, untouchable heart of the text.

These frames and figures of the ghost story are under the sway of the author, of course, and while he or she simulates an eye-witness experience for readers, we become more drawn to the

artifice of this project. The ghost story's relationship to truth is again called into question. Susan Stewart observes that the horror story, which is synonymous with the ghost story in her essay, dwells "between the real and the fictive; hence its proper assignment to 'legend' in oral form. Yet, while the horror story is placed in historical time and told as if it were believed to be true, it often makes these claims ironically, 'in frame' only" (35). In shifts of narrative perspective and temporal position, one narrator recedes to become the listener to another narrator's tale, which means that "the story eerily begins to tell itself" and the position of the actual reader becomes more confused (Stewart 37). This confusion serves to align the reader with the haunted victim, which provokes the reader's fear: the primary goal of horror. Additionally, the reader can find herself aligned with the ghostliness of a narrator who has passed away and whose story of the supernatural is received posthumously through old letters or diary entries. Stewart writes that the boundary between truth and fiction and between characters and readers, "is continually drawn and effaced. Both the story and the context of telling dissolve into a uniformity of effect. Hence the 'didn't really happen' of the fiction is transformed into a 'really happened,' a fear which is 'real' yet which has no actual referent" (35-36). It is this liminal, de-centered epistemological status that makes the ghost story so fascinating and frightening.

The Detective Story and Realism:

Another way to think about the ghost story as a genre is through its relationship to other nineteenth-century forms. The golden age ghost story stands in contrast to and critiques the project of the realist novel, but is not simply its inverse. Hay argues that both ghost stories and realist fiction are engaged in questions of "cognitive mapping;" they both provide frames for understanding reality, but the ghost story's frames only end up making the world more

mysterious and unknowable (22). Formally, ghost stories also do this by excluding certain details or offering too many. Like the detective story, a sister genre that arose at the same time, the ghost story poses epistemological questions and launches a process of discovery, building suspense through offering readers details which act as clues. Unlike the detective story, however, the ghost story does not answer the questions it raises in a self-contained, rational way; its mystery exceeds the facts of its narrative. While in a detective story, each detail is eventually accounted for as either a useful clue or a red herring, ghost stories leave out key descriptions of supernatural and natural events, settings, and characters, so that the reader is required to fill in these gaps with her own imagination. This is another strategy for building horror of a particularly uncertain kind. As Hay writes:

> Almost invariably, the conclusion of a ghost story is not so much horrific as horrifically disappointing, refusing us narrative solution or resolution. Indeed, so pervasive is this failure, and so popular the genre despite this failing, that we have to call it not a failure but a refusal, an active project of a certain kind. Ghost stories seem to insist on their status as fragments at this formal level. (87)

In place of a detective story's total explanation of a murder or other crime, the ghost story only offers fragmentary inset narratives and ambiguous conclusions. Hauntings continue at the ends of stories or are pushed forward into the next offerings from the genre, just as ghost story authors remain obsessed with the same settings, characters, and scenes. The antiquarian protagonists of M.R. James continue to rifle through church archives and university libraries; Sheridan Le Fanu's ghost-seers commit suicide when their hauntings become unbearable; Edith Nesbit's brides are invariably doomed.

The Memoir:

A less expected genre to consider in relation to the ghost story is the memoir. In Kalliopi Nikolopoulou's essay on *The Turn of the Screw,* she argues that in addition to reading Henry James' novella as a ghost story, detective story, and Freudian narrative, we should also consider it a complicated form of autobiography or an "allegorization of autobiography," because the inset narrative of the governess' experience is presented as a manuscript that the governess wrote based on her memories (7). Nikolopoulou calls the governess' ghost story an "auto-spectro-graphy" because it recounts her traumatic memories of a haunting (14). Memoir, Nikolopoulou claims, is a generic link between the ghost story and the detective story: "a hybrid form born out of the union of ghosts (the otherworldly intruders who derange us) and ghostbusters (the detective self in its presumed self-sameness and potency)" (8). The complicated narrative framing of the governess' account, which comes to readers through several layers of mediation (an oral story, a manuscript, a second oral story, a letter, a revised text) and the extensive critical scholarship on whether or not the governess is a reliable narrator, raise questions about the project of memoir in general. Although the governess is a fictional person that James invents, her autobiography, which *is* the ghost story of the novella, shows how all memoir is "haunted" by unprovable memories, traumatic gaps, and the conscious omission of details.

Trauma as Form:

The fragmented, inconclusive aspects of the ghost story's form also make sense at the level of content. Ghost stories are about trauma: the trauma of haunted characters and the trauma of the ghost itself. Simon Hay writes that trauma "leads to failed narratives, gaps in consciousness, slippages in epistemology. A traumatic history has trouble saying what *causes* those gaps,

failures and slips, though they can perhaps be reconstructed retrospectively" (4). He continues: "Ghost stories are a mode of narrating what has been unnarratable, of speaking such history belatedly, of making narratively accessible historical events that remain in some fundamental sense inaccessible" (Hay 4). Because the ghost is a figure of doubt—a remnant of a traumatic past that only haunted characters can perceive—the ghost story is an ideal site for narrating trauma. In addition, Hay argues that the ghost story follows "a logic of melancholy, rather than mourning, in the Freudian sense: rather than the substitution of one love-object for another in a healthy process of development (mourning), this kind of narrative repeats again and again what it refuses to give up, what it declares un-exchangeable (melancholy)" (88). As I will show in my analysis of "Green Tea," ghost stories are often tales of despair as well as stories of the supernatural, and so stage two kinds of melancholic repetition. In addition, the fragmented, traumatized features of the ghost story are part of what make the genre modern. The ghost story offers only micro-narratives and micro-histories through its stories of haunted lives, and therefore claims only particular and incomplete truths. The genre relates to history through its anxieties and omissions: the past is staged as inherently traumatic and we question our own knowledge about what has come before us.

Spiritual Ambiguity:

In another reading, the logic of the ghost story is not that of trauma or depression but of the non-human spiritual realm. Briggs write that in order to dodge realistic narrative closure:

> Ghost stories commonly provide an alternative structure of cause and effect, in which the supernatural is not explained away but offers its own pseudo-explanation according to some kind of spiritual law of action and reaction: an unburied corpse, a murder victim or

> some other secret apparently buried safely in the past returns to haunt the perpetrator. (*Night Visitors* 177)

This, then, *is* a type of closure offered by the genre, in contrast to what most ghost story scholars have said. The ghost story *does* end in a satisfying way for its readers, and this end is meant to be as unsettling as the rest of the narrative. I would argue that the best ghost stories offer a both/and ending instead of a simple either/or. The supernatural is shown to be both possibly real and possibly a delusion. Or put differently, a physiological or psychological problem allows a haunted character to see into the supernatural world and what that person sees is more real than a hallucination.

What seems like a failure in the ghost story to provide a realistic, logical explanation is therefore the strength of the genre and what makes the ghost story frightening. Briggs writes that the ghost story's ambivalence "between the familiar and the feared, between rational occurrence and the inexplicable... is the ghost story's chief source of power" (*Night Visitors* 176). When readers of ghost stories are offered pseudo-rational explanations, these only heighten our sense of horror, which has now become a cognitive, existential dizziness. However, there is pleasure in this suspension of disbelief and derangement of the rational. Readers are called to decide what has happened for themselves or can choose to evade decision: to float in the inconclusive both/and ending, unsure of what the story has to say but deeply engaged with its content.

Setting, Narration, and The Uncanny:

The golden age ghost story is typically set in an ordinary, familiar location in order to lull its readers into a false sense of security. As M.R. James instructs in his introduction to *Ghosts and Marvels:*

> Let us, then, be introduced to the actors in a placid way; let us see them going about their ordinary business undisturbed by forebodings, pleased with their surroundings; and into this calm environment let the ominous thing put out its head, unobtrusively at first, and then more insistently, until it holds the stage. It is not amiss sometimes to leave a loophole for a natural explanation; but, I would say, let the loophole be so narrow as not to be practicable. (James)

This merging of the familiar and the unfamiliar—whether the unfamiliar is trauma, death, otherness, or a world without meaning—also marks the ghost story as the premiere uncanny genre. However, as I have noted, both Freudian theory and nineteenth-century ghost stories arose from the same modern pressures, and so rather than simply interpret ghost stories through a psychoanalytic lens, we should use both genres to reflect upon each other.

As part of its production of the uncanny, the ghost story uses skeptical, rational characters and narrators. These voices of reason and cynicism anticipate the doubts of modern readers, who will be more likely to suspend their disbelief if a story is told by a character as incredulous as they are. This is another reason for narrative nesting: when the reader is told a "true" ghost story at two or three narrators' remove, each narrator adds a layer of credibility. An unreliable ghost-seer like the governess in *The Turn of the Screw,* who is dead by the time of the story, is reinterpreted with a skeptical eye by the narrators and therefore partly redeemed as a witness. Even in ghost stories which lack complex narrative layering, the first-person voice of the ghost-seer frames his supernatural experience in the cautious, plain language of the "true story" to create the appearance of veracity.

In stories with more removed narration, the emotionless or ironic narrator's voice "itself becomes an image evoking fear" rather than a source of rational stability for readers (Stewart 44). Stewart writes, "Like those traces of the supernatural, the ephemeral signs of warning that appear within the narrative, the voice of the narrator is increasingly both ambiguous and omnipresent, trapping us between the past and the future in a present of unknowable consequences" (44). While in this section of her essay, Stewart is discussing oral horror stories, her observation applies to literary ghost stories which pose fictional occasions of speaking. The affective disconnect created by the detached, cynical narrator and the horrible, violent events he describes leads to further emotional and cognitive disturbance for readers.

The "Professor Horror" Subgenre:

In addition to employing a skeptical narrator, the golden age ghost story often features characters whose professions deal with knowledge. There are many psychic doctors, detectives, and academics in these tales. Some of these men (for they are always men) are converted from skepticism to belief, while others serve to interpret the supernatural from a trenchantly materialist perspective. Such characters are depicted as ruthlessly short-sighted in their insistence on reason.

Unlike the strictly rational lawyer types who step in to resolve a haunting, the scholar character is usually the victim of a ghost and the cause of its appearance. This is because the scholar is situated between credulity and skepticism, and through his research, seems to transgress hidden spiritual laws. As Stewart argues, these characters "awaken ambiguous objects into the inappropriate context of the present" (44). In other words, they raise ghosts. While the professors, archivists, and clerics of M.R. James' stories reflect the author's career as a provost

and vice-chancellor at major English universities, these character types also signal a dysfunctional relationship to the past and a disconnect between modern experience and the collective knowledge of history. The archival materials that scholar characters bring into ghost stories (as factual information, ancient objects, or quoted primary sources) work as a form of proof or "found-footage" that push the ghost story towards non-fiction. For example, excerpts from medical, philosophical, and religious texts are sometimes embedded in ghost stories for readers to look over, which lends credence to a fictional story, though at times, these external texts are inventions of the author. In either case, the ghost story which incorporates and reflects on scholarship takes on the appearance of another genre of writing: the academic article.

The "'professor horror" subgenre or motif, as I like to call it, persists in contemporary supernatural TV shows and films whenever a plot require an expert on occult manuscripts, dead languages, or ancient rituals. In our current age (as in the previous century and a half), it seems that one can only find such figures in the strange world of academia. About these character types, Simon Hay writes: "Their very ways of knowing are themselves outmoded, persisting into a modern world in which such forms of knowledge are increasingly marginal. They are odd heroes: fusty and fussy, with some sense of the dust of the library or the chapel lingering on them" (96). The ghost story is a genre that simultaneously elevates the quiet work of scholarship by investing it with melodramatic excitement and also one which condemns it as dangerously akin to necromancy.

At a socio-cultural level, ghost stories about skeptical, scholarly characters who are tormented by the supernatural allowed nineteenth-century readers to explore their doubts about the pursuit of knowledge. As Briggs writes, the ghost story "seemed at the outset to invite the reader's

modern cynicism, only to vanquish it with a reassertion of older and more spiritual values. Even amidst its superficial terrors it might thus provide subtle reassurances" (*Night Visitors* 17). Similarly, Srdjan Smajic argues: "The soul that lingers in a haunted chamber, scaring visitors out of their wits, is a debased form of the human spirit, morally unfit for a Christian afterlife, yet one promising, nevertheless, that the afterlife is more than just an illusion" ("The Trouble with" 1129). The way that the ghost story reassures readers about the existence of the spirit world is more complicated, however. While some ghost stories of the golden age (and our contemporary era) do provide the comfort of a Spiritualist seance or devotional religious text, where ghosts are evidence of the afterlife, God's plan, and the continued existence of loved ones, most ghost stories stage the spiritual world as horrifying. This makes whatever faith is gained through the horror story an object of anxiety. While all ghosts cause trouble for materialist characters by rupturing their worldview, a haunted skeptic's conversion from doubt to belief often destroys his sanity, endangers his life, and pulls him from the fabric of modern society. If faith in the spirit world was largely repressed by post-Enlightenment thinkers, then it seems to return, uncannily, in only its hellish form.

"Green Tea:"

Sheridan Le Fanu's "Green Tea," first published in Charles Dickens' magazine *All the Year Round* in 1869 and reprinted in Le Fanu's collection *In A Glass Darkly* in 1872, tells the ghost story of a bachelor scholar who has spent too much time researching arcane subjects and loses his grip on reality (Sullivan 12) This haunted man, Reverend Jennings, is clergyman and theologian who began to neglect his clerical duties in favor of researching and writing a book about "the religious metaphysics of the ancients" (Le Fanu 121). Jennings becomes obsessed

with this project and spends several years in isolation, reading late into the night, energized by his frequent consumption of green tea. Although this process gives him pleasure, Jennings explains that "it thoroughly infected me" and was "not good for the mind" (Le Fanu 121). We might say that the Reverend becomes haunted by the texts he reads. On one rare occasion when Jennings leaves his study to track down an obscure book in the city, he spots a black monkey with glowing red eyes in the corner of the omnibus. He soon discovers that this beast is spectral (his umbrella goes right through it), that no one else can see it, and that it is malevolent. The spirit follows him home and torments him, interrupting his scholarly work, his private prayers, and his church sermons. To the outside world, it appears as if Jennings is suffering from sudden fits of illness when he falls silent and his face goes pale. As a result of this ongoing torture, Jennings becomes a terrified invalid who is unable to work and even more isolated from society. Despite Jennings' attempts to save himself through prayer, medicine, and the help of doctors, his haunting only worsens, and to escape, he slices his own throat with a razor.

This is the ghost story put into my briefest summation, but it is not how Le Fanu offers it to readers. Like other ghost stories of its era, "Green Tea" tells us about Reverend Jennings' haunting through complex narrative framing. In the diegesis, the story has been arranged for readers by the speaker we are introduced to in the prologue: an unwell would-be physician who became an acolyte of the famous metaphysical doctor, Martin Hesselius, and worked as Hesselius' secretary and personal archivist. After Hesselius' death (of old age, presumably), the unnamed secretary came into possession of some letters that Hesselius had written to another academic, Professor Van Loo of Leyden, decades earlier. In these letters, which are sent to the secretary after the death of the professor, the secretary finds an interesting supernatural case

which he edits in order to "amuse or horrify a lay reader" (Le Fanu 106). Before we even begin the ghost story and meet Reverend Jennings, we have been given three characters: all of them academic men and two of them deceased. Reverend Jennings' story takes place at least sixty years earlier than the present tense of the prologue.

The story that follows as "Green Tea" is made entirely from the text of Hesselius' letters but does not read as epistolary. Except in the last chapter, there is no mention of Professor Van Loo nor any sign of a reciprocal correspondence. The reader must suspend her disbelief that Hesselius really copied down his research word-for-word into his letters, and that he accurately quoted his conversations with Jennings. Le Fanu (via the secretary) has arranged the story into numbered chapters with telling subtitles, such as "Chapter VI: How Mr. Jennings Met His Companion" (120). This strong editorial hand means that the secretary's intervention in the story nearly disappears. Besides the prologue and a single note in the middle of the text about an omission, "Green Tea" reads like a linear ghost story told in Hesselius' first-person voice. It begins with Hesselius' first meeting with Jennings and continues to Jennings' death, with a short afterward. The reader nearly forgets this complicated frame once events have been set into motion, but at moments when Hesselius' perspective seems hard to believe or difficult to sympathize with, we are encouraged to think beyond the narrators we have been given. At such times, we might also remember the secretary's disclaimer in the prologue, where he tells readers he has "interpolated nothing," although he has translated Hesselius' letters from German and French, omitted certain passages, shortened sections, and disguised names (Le Fanu 106). This is all part of Le Fanu's project of irony and meta-textual commentary, which serves to destabilize

the ghost story even as he tells it. While the secretary becomes the readers' guide, we don't know how much to trust him, and yet the work he has done to shape the text lends it more credibility.

"Green Tea" is an interesting and unusual ghost story for several reasons. First, it is not about a proper human ghost: the spirit that haunts Jennings seems more like a demon who had taken the shape of a monkey, a feature that has been read by critics as a Freudian symptom, an allusion to Darwinist atheism, or a sign of anxiety about British imperialism. Another unusual feature of "Green Tea" is that it is not about a haunted house, as many ghost stories are, although its settings are dark, old-fashioned, isolating, and troubled. Instead, Jennings' mind is the haunted site, and so the spirit follows him wherever he goes. This makes the story particularly modern and psychological.

As a contemporary reader who is familiar with other horror subgenres and supernatural religious narratives, it is easiest for me to read "Green Tea" as a story about a demon because the spirit attaches itself to a clergyman who has strayed from Christian doctrines. The spirit becomes especially enraged whenever Jennings goes to church or tries to pray and fills his mind with evil, violent thoughts that eventually push him to suicide. This is a standard demonic possession plot and the interpretation of the story I think Le Fanu most suggests to readers. However, there are other elements that complicate this reading and make "Green Tea" into more than a cautionary tale for Christians.

For example, Le Fanu's focus on seeing, visual surveillance, and "interior sight" in "Green Tea" conveys the fascinations of his era. As Terry Castle writes, modern culture went through what she calls a "spectralization" of the psyche in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (141). When the belief in God and ghosts was repressed as irrational, it re-emerged in cultural

obsessions with spectral visual entertainment, supernatural literature, and eventually, the Freudian uncanny. Castle writes: "By the end of the nineteenth century, ghosts had disappeared from everyday life, but... human experience had become more ghost-ridden than ever. Through a strange process of rhetorical displacement, thought itself had become phantasmagorical" (144). Jennings' strictly mental haunting reflects this new notion of the psyche but also raises the possibility of a real supernatural presence. In "Green Tea" and other ghost stories, the line between madness and haunting is made thin or erased.

Furthermore, when Jennings first sees the monkey spirit, he doubts his own sanity, explaining to Hesselius that he had "a misgiving about myself and a terror" rather than trusting his own vision (Le Fanu 123). Jennings continues, "I had read, of course, as everyone has, something about 'spectral illusions,' as you physicians term the phenomena of such cases" (Le Fanu 125). Jennings' near-cynical awareness of "spectral illusions" here casts him as a reliable, rational character. It also shows us how Le Fanu positions "Green Tea" within the nineteenth-century discourses of science, medicine, and spirituality. Jennings and Dr. Hesselius are educated men of their time, but Jennings' knowledge fails to give him courage or make the evil spirit vanish. "Green Tea" questions the value of such knowledge and the notion of modern progress more broadly.

Le Fanu also emphasizes the link between seeing and believing by making Jennings' haunting one that came about through sight. It seems that when the spirit noticed Jennings gazing at it on the omnibus, it looked back at the man and the two became attached through vision. After this, the haunting remains mostly optical. Jennings describes how he is surveilled by the spirit: "In all situations, at all hours, it is awake and looking at me... Its eyes were never off me. I have never

lost sight of it, except in my sleep, light or dark, day or night, since it came here, excepting when it withdraws for some weeks at a time, unaccountably" (Le Fanu 126). Because the spirit is visible in any kind of lighting and vanishes only when Jennings is unconscious (or by its own mysterious volition), it is clearly not a physical object perceived through the bodily eye. Because Jennings can always see and be seen by the spirit, he loses his ability to think. This is how closely vision and thought are connected. In Jennings' final note to Hesselius before his suicide, he writes that the spirit "knows every word I have written—I write," and here, readers are put in the moment of also seeing these words as Jennings composes them (Le Fanu 133-134).

Jennings and Dr. Hesselius are both interested in the same metaphysical theories about what they call "interior" spiritual vision, which is one answer to what Smajic calls the "ocular skepticism" of the late nineteenth century. Earlier in the story, Jennings criticizes a strictly materialist physician who wrongly diagnoses him as suffering from a problem of the "optic nerves" (Le Fanu 128). Because this first doctor cannot solve Jennings' haunting, he seeks the help of Hesselius, who claims to have a psycho-spiritual solution. The two men bond as intellectual equals once Jennings learns that Hesselius is the author of "Essays on Metaphysical Medicine," a text that greatly influenced him (Le Fanu 109).

Dr. Hesselius is an interesting mix of archetypes—psychic, medical doctor, scholar, detective—who also calls to mind the Victorian mesmerist in his theories of invisible, spiritual fluids which circulate within the human body. Like a mesmerist, Hesselius is simultaneously positioned as a person of power and a delusional opportunist. Smajic calls Hesselius "the first overly occult detective in literature" and Barbara Gates calls him "a careless empiricist, a derelict in duty, and a very materialistic spiritualist" (*Ghost-Seers* 150; 22). Hesselius' brand of philosophy merges

speculative medicine with spirituality in contradictory ways that reflect the tensions of Le Fanu's time and the dilemmas that the ghost story genre brings to light. Hesselius refers to himself in his letters as a "medical philosopher," but what this really means is that he holds occult beliefs about the relationship between spiritual and physical worlds. He thinks the two are inextricably linked and that an imbalance in one will cause a problem in the other. Hesselius explains that he believes "the essential man is a spirit" but that this spirit is "an organized substance... as light or electricity is," which shows that he connects new electrical technologies with ghostly beliefs, much as Spiritualists and mesmerists did (Le Fanu 109). About his own book, "Essays on Metaphysical Medicine," Hesselius admits that his essays "suggest more than they actually say," which is true of all of his theories (Le Fanu 109). This places Hesselius' work between the rational and the irrational or between the scientific and the superstitious. Hesselius is a scholar of obscure spiritual interests, as is Jennings, but is more self-assured and extroverted whereas Jennings is isolated and retiring. While the two men act as foils of each other, because Hesselius is our primary narrator, his is the lens that we are asked to interpret Jennings' haunting through. Therefore, we are told that Jennings suffers from a spiritual derangement caused by too much green tea, which opened his "inner eye" to the spirit world and the appearance of the monkey. In this diagnosis, Hesselius doesn't make a connection between the work that Jennings' was engaged in while he consumed the tea and his resulting haunting, which clearly mirrors the content of his occult scholarship. This is why Hesselius seems more like a fraud than a person with spiritual insights, as Gates observes; he is an authority that readers are meant to question.

In what is the most suggestive section of "Green Tea," Hesselius arrives at Jennings' study early and waits for him while browsing Jennings' vast personal library. Hesselius' eyes are drawn

to a volume by the occult philosopher Emmanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Caelestia*, and he notices that certain pages have been marked. He copies down these passages (and presumably puts them in his letter to Professor Van Loo) so that the reader is given quotations of Swedenborg in the middle of the story. But here, Hesselius' (and, by default, Le Fanu's) use of an outside source is incredibly selective. While the inclusion of scholarly quotations offers credibility to Jennings' and Hesselius' identities as learned men, the actual fragments of Swedenborg we read serve mostly as clues about how the plot will develop and how we should interpret Jennings' haunting.

Appropriately, the quotes from Swedenborg are all about "interior sight," "internal sight," "interior visions," and the work of evil spirits (Le Fanu 114). In an endnote for this section by Michael Newton, however, we learn that one passage from Swedenborg which reads "There are with every man at least two evil spirits" "does not seem to refer to any particular paragraph from the *Arcana*, but expresses an idea found often in Swedenborg's writings" (387). Similarly, Jack Sullivan observes that while Le Fanu (via Hesselius) includes the passage from Swedenborg about spirits who can harm mankind, he omits the section which explains that spirits won't attack the faithful because God protects them (Sullivan 22). "Le Fanu's version (of Swedenborg) represents a distortion, or at least a darkening of the original," Sullivan argues (22). As befits a ghost story writer, Le Fanu has taken the most exciting parts of Swedenborg and made them more horrific in service of his plot. Readers receive this darkened Swedenborg through several layers of mediation: the selectivity of Le Fanu's quotes, the letter meant for Professor Van Loo, Hesselius' own hand which copies down the quotes as he reads them, and the eyes of Jennings, who enters the room as Hesselius is reading and surprises Hesselius by appearing behind his shoulder in a mirror. The chapter which contains this scene is subtitled "Four Eyes Were Reading

the Passage," which suggests not only the pairs of Jennings' and Hesselius' eyes, but also the eyes of the evil spirit, the eyes of the professor who receives the letter, and the reader's own sight (Le Fanu 115).

At the level of content, these passages of Swedenborg set forth an idea of the spirit world that is more horrific and chaotic than the Christian paradigm. Le Fanu makes his victim a clergyman to show the failure of Christianity in the face of a more malevolent, unknowable world: what Thacker calls the "cosmic horror" of a "world-without-us" that is hostile to human existence (Thacker 5). The nineteenth-century ghost story may have appealed to readers in part because it offered an assurance that, as Briggs writes, "there *was* something beyond. Man was not, as he had come to fear, alone in a universe infinitely older, larger, wilder, and less anthropocentric than he had previously supposed" (240). However, the spiritual world that ghost stories like "Green Tea" offer is not reassuring. This is not to say that Le Fanu and other writers actually believed the universe was run by evil spirits, only that Victorian minds found this paradigm frightening.

At the end of "Green Tea," readers are not only disturbed by the hellish spirit world that the haunting reveals, but also by the emotionally distant Dr. Hesselius. In the context of Le Fanu's time, Hesselius stands between the religious exorcist and the psychoanalyst and fails both roles. Perhaps he acts most like a detective because his diagnosis of Jennings is incomplete until after Jennings is dead. This is like a detective who works backwards in time beginning with a murder, though in this case, there are no other authorities or facts to test Hesselius' claims. And so, in an inversion of the typical detective story, readers do not easily accept Hesselius' final, contradictory conclusion that Jennings' haunting "is the story of the process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyses the tissue that separates

those cognate functions of the senses, the external and the interior" (Le Fanu 136). Hesselius simultaneously asserts that the haunting was caused by the "poison" of green tea (a non-toxic beverage) and also that Jennings' suicide was from a "totally different malady," which he labels "hereditary suicidal mania" (Le Fanu 138).

Readers also doubt Hesselius' claim that he could have cured Jennings if he'd been given more time. This is because Hesselius's advice to Jennings before his suicide is unhelpful and inconsistent with Hesselius' own semi-medical theories. He tells Jennings to pray to God and trust in Him, but also to consider his haunting a strictly physical illness. Hesselius tells Jennings that the spirit can't harm him and that he won't be haunted forever; Jennings merely needs to "repair" "the veil of the flesh, the screen" through which he perceives the spirit (Le Fanu 131). Hesselius' failure to save Jennings before he commits suicide is due to his incompetence and carelessness. After promising to rush to Jennings' side at the moment the spirit reappears, Hesselius misses the note that Jennings sends and arrives at the man's home after it is too late.

The various explanations that Le Fanu gives at the end of "Green Tea" through the unreliable narrator of Dr. Hesselius seek to undo any kind of stable conclusion. Unlike a detective story, as I have said, the ghost story does not offer simple endings. In the story's prologue, which is subtitled "A Word for Those Who Suffer," Hesselius suddenly addresses the Professor Van Loo directly as "My dear Van L," and reveals that the professor suffered from a similar haunting until Hesselius cured it with the ridiculous-sounding application of "iced eau du cologne" to his body (Le Fanu 137-138). While this is surprising to learn, what is more terrible to discover is that Hesselius says he has treated "fifty-seven cases of this kind of vision" (Le Fanu 137). The idea that there is an epidemic of spirit visions among modern men is quite frightening, if also absurd.

Whether Jennings' vision of the spirit monkey was a psychotic illusion, a psychotropic reaction to green tea, or a true vision of a supernatural being, his tragic ending is equally sad and disturbing. What Jennings' suicide means remains a mystery; a horror (a trauma) we cannot solve. Jack Sullivan similarly observes: "The absurdity of the premise—the lethal apparition is, after all, a monkey—weakens the impact not at all; indeed the strange power of the tale lies in the irony that something intrinsically ridiculous can drive a man to destroy himself" (14). Le Fanu places suicide, like the supernatural, beyond human comprehension. At the end of "Green Tea," Hesselius' arrogant denial of his own culpability seems to set the stage for a new haunting through the unhappy ghost of Jennings. When readers are told of the fifty-seven other cases of similar spirit visions, we are called from the singularity of Jennings' haunting to the multiplicity of others in the past, present, and future. This ghost story, a fragment of a larger archive of Hesselius' case histories, is more frightening because of the other stories it suggests. And so the ghost story genre renews itself by failing to conclude and pushing ever forward to its next tale.

Coda:

It is fitting that scholars have begun calling certain aspects of twenty-first century culture "neo-Victorian" because many problems that troubled our nineteenth-century ancestors remain unsolved. Our era's technological, social, and medical advances also raise new questions about human perception, the integrity of the self, and the connection between physical and immaterial realms. In addition, contemporary anxieties about the destruction of the ecosystem, the threat of nuclear war, the collapse of world economies, and the etherealization of social life and labor have made much of human experience feel ghostly. For these reasons and others, ghost stories continue to be written and filmed. As Jack Sullivan argues, "when things appear to be falling

apart, supernatural horror stories provide their authors and readers with a masochistic, but relatively safe, means of fantasizing the worst" (3).

We can read the literary ghost story and its relation to its era as part of a longer exchange between horror and media history. As the genre began to wane in the 1920s, film and radio were on the rise. The first "talkie" was released in 1927, which lead to a more complete illusion of liveness in cinema, and the "golden age" of radio lasted from the 1920s to the 1950s, when television took its place. It seems that from the 1930s onward, the ghost story shifted its residence from literature to film and emerged in cycles of ghost films that include the 1940s ghostly romances, the 1970-1980s haunted house films, and the 2000-2010s supernatural family melodramas. The kind of horror that began in nineteenth-century short stories continues, with some modifications, into our own time.

While the manuscript that follows this introduction is concerned primarily with television and film depictions of supernatural horror, many characteristics of ghost films and TV shows would not exist without the ghost stories of the genre's golden age. Similarly, the late twentieth century's "spectral turn" towards thinking of political history, social life, and contemporary media as haunted by the past and future is a discourse indebted to eighteenth and nineteenth century obsessions with optical illusions, haunted psyches, supernatural fiction, and Spiritualism. In my manuscript *Blue Light of the Screen: Notes on Horror*, I explore how a memoir about horror and ghost stories, aware of its own generic mixing, takes on many of the ghost story's unresolvable questions and formal characteristics. There are also parallels between my memoir and the haunted scholar's plight in "Green Tea" that I think will become apparent.

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DISSERTATION:

BLUE LIGHT OF THE SCREEN: NOTES ON HORROR

*

The TV is a stone or it is overcome with movement. Slim volume of granite with a sheared-off, polished face. The TV, like a mirror, is a portal.

Most nights inside my house it is a lake of streaming images: a ghost wants to reclaim her feral children; a well-dressed, pale-skinned man will slowly drain a girl of all her blood. *You will be sick and trembling again*. A blue-lit box where phantom flowers bloom.

*

In this world, which is our world
enough sun must spiral out
that lovely eyes can wade through
blue night-woods

The blue light is the night's name
is a filter on the day

The first moon in the sky
masked by the second moon

*

Television is a medium of ghosts. Its false liveness and simultaneity—the virtual reality that the watcher enters into—aligns TV with other modes of illusion: psychic vision, fantasy, hallucination, dream. To watch horror narratives on the screen is to enter the mind's dark theatre. The experience of watching opens up a room for thinking about evil, violence, grief; psychological and physical pain; death and possible afterlives. To welcome ghosts instead of struggling to banish them. To raise the dead. To get to know each thing that merits fear.

*

Blue language of the dead

My favorite subgenre of horror is the ghost story. The horror of the ghost story is grief. The more I've watched, the more I've learned that these narratives begin with a character who loses something, and that loss, like a crack, lets in a world of danger. So many haunted house films revolve around a family in crisis: a child or spouse has died, divorce has taken place, some act of violence happened, or pure financial ruin has unmoored them. The family moves to its new home (which is always an old home—grand and strangely underpriced) out of desperation and in an attempt at a fresh start.

But there are no new beginnings in the ghost story—all ghosts are backwards-facing. Time cycles, returns. The temporalities of past (the ghost) and present (the family) are always thatched

together. The ghost becomes a shimmering figure for this interruption: a disjunction of our sense of time that is horrific in itself.

The Shining (1980): A family heads to an isolated hotel for the winter where an evil and spiritual presence influences the father into violence, while his psychic son sees horrific forebodings from the past and of the future.

Insidious (2010): A family looks to prevent evil spirits from trapping their comatose child in a realm called the Further.

*

Spirit box

Since its inception, TV has been criticized and feared for its uncanny ability to suck in and trap viewers.

electronic nowhere
electronic wasteland
technicolor netherworld
underworld
otherworld

Some claim the act of watching is a dangerous though passive vice. As if TV has the power to annihilate one's sense of self, moral values, true desires, thoughts. The "overwhelming vividness" of TV—its techno-magical ability to conjure liveness and the feeling of existing in two places at the same time—has provoked extreme responses: mass devotion and strict censure. Perhaps because of this, St. Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) was retroactively named the Patron Saint of Television in 1958 by Pope Pius XII. During her lifetime, she experienced a televisual miracle: too ill to go to church, she watched an entire mass projected on the wall of her convent room. The picture was so clear that she could easily name the friars who performed the service. St. Clare, my namesake. Patron saint I share with the TV.

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The Wicker Man. Directed by Robin Hardy, British Lion Films, 1973.

Carrie. Directed by Brian de Palma, United Artists, 1976.

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The Evil Dead. Directed by Sam Raimi, New Line Cinema, 1981.

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Cursed. Directed by Wes Craven, Miramax Films, 2005.

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