

Locating Literature in the Ghost Hoax: an exploration of 19th-century print news media

by

Gabrielle Keane

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This thesis/dissertation was presented

by

Gabrielle Keane

It was defended on

April 12, 2019

and approved by

David J. Birnbaum, Professor and Chair, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Elisa Beshero-Bondar, Associate Professor, Humanities Area- University of Pittsburgh at
Greensburg

Joanna Swafford, Digital Humanities Specialist

Thesis Advisor/Dissertation Director: Amy Murray Twynning, Lecturer II, Department of English

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The industrial revolution brought significant changes to printing technology, culture, and literacy. This thesis explores the way features of orality made their way into fiction through the publication of ghost “hoax” stories in nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals. By examining news stories and fiction together, one is able to see the connections and changes across the century, from news stories in 1804 to fiction stories from 1894. This thesis draws source materials from a publicly available web application developed in conjunction with the thesis. This small, curated collection furthers the argument for digital close reading of historical material within its own context and as context for literature, as well as demonstrates non-digital or digital-adjacent interpretive creation in the form of maps. Through the synthesis of fiction and non-fiction, digital and non-digital, this thesis demonstrates a cross-disciplinary breadth of study that allows for both close reading and broad historical analysis.

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Preface

I would like to acknowledge those advisors who have helped me so much during the time spent researching and writing this these. Thank you to Annie Swafford and Elisa-Beshero Bondar for their undeniably good advice on all things. Thank you to David Birnbaum for the constant support on the code, the theory, and the writing. Thank you to Robin Kear, without whom the research would have been a total mess. Thank you to Alison Langmead for providing me with space to work and think with colleagues every week. Finally, many thanks to Amy Murray Twyning in her role as my advisor—her encouragement, patience, and her ability to dig up any resource I thought up made this ambitious project possible.

This thesis exists in three parts: this paper version, a digital collection available at [<http://obdurodon.org:8080/exist/apps/hoax>], and the hand-drawn figures that appear in both site and thesis.

1.0 Introduction

In nineteenth-century Britain, cheaply printed material was the first interaction many people had with reading. The first generation of consistently literate working-class people learned to read from mass-produced textbooks and penny dreadfuls, rather than handwritten manuscripts or expensive 18th-century books like their wealthy counterparts. The British fascination with ghosts, a long and well-documented love, flourished in new ways during this period (Collings, i). A related phenomenon, The rise of the newspaper “ghost hoax” occasionally caused some panic among the working- and middle-class citizens of London, and in this thesis I examine such ghost hoax stories as the link in print between the habits and tastes of the newly literate generation of the 19th-century working class and the well-known genre of the Victorian ghost story. In this analysis of periodical ghost hoax stories and fictional short ghost stories, I discuss the way genre conventions show close proximity to primary orality through their accretion from oral narrative to news report to short fiction and argue that in Victorian ghost stories can be read the history of cultural transition.

I define the ghost hoax genre in four ways: the simplest definition is that a person dressed up as a ghost to scare his neighbors, either in an effort to anonymously assault women or to get revenge for a petty dispute. The second, and most common, is when a person sees something they believe is a ghost and reports it to others. This type of “hoax” likely happened a lot more than we see in print, because brief investigation could resolve fears quickly. The third is the rapping or

medium hoaxes popular among the middle class after spiritualism arrived from the U.S. (“Victorian Spiritualism”). Finally, the invocation of a folklore ghost or hoax for political purposes can be counted as hoax material as well, as those documents reveal quite a bit about audience and publication attitude toward stories.

To do this, I draw on Walter J. Ong’s *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* and his discussion of the psychological effects of print technology on culture and language. In order to understand the thematic collection of periodical non-fiction I use in this discussion, one must also consider the construction of periodical resources through history and the critical work required to collect, model, and implement digital representations of the material. The synthesis of these ideas is rooted in close and middle-distance readings of text across time—with a thematic collection focused on encoding metadata and contextual information, representing reader experience is neither the goal nor the outcome. Instead, I argue that thematic collections can both contextualize fiction and stand as their own research artifacts, depending on the researcher’s goals.

In the following sections, I will explore symptoms of proximity to primary orality to provide definitions for the genre conventions explicated later on. Next, I will examine these conventions in early non-fiction articles on ghost hoaxes, both to analyze the stories within their historical moment and provide context for analysis of genre ghost fiction from later in the century. Finally, I will explore the history and context of periodical studies in order to argue for a nuanced approach to collections and archives that allows for both historical and literary historical studies.

1.1 Conventions of Oral Culture

The three most important conventions of orality that appear in the stories are as follows: orally-framed narration, “flats,” and relative location. These three tropes tie the stories and articles to primary orality, and I will later look at the ways they change as a result of being brought into primary typographic culture. In order to introduce the conventions properly, I will explain each one and its relation to *Orality and Literacy*, after which I will explore the ways in which “a new technology of the word reinforces the old while at the same time transforming it” by analyzing periodical stories of ghost hoaxes and ghost story fiction from the later part of the century (Ong 153).

Narrative framing brings the reader into closer proximity with the writer; it is a very common feature of 19th-century novels (a well-known example of epistolary style is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*). Oral narrative framing does this by introducing a story as though it is told by someone sitting across from the reader-listener. According to Ong, “the nineteenth-century novelist’s recurrent ‘dear reader’ reveals the problem of adjustment” to text over oral storytelling: “the author still tends to feel an audience, listeners, somewhere, and must frequently recall that the story is not for listeners but for readers, each one alone in his or her own world” (Ong 149).

“Flats,” or type characters, are another symptom of transition to orality: “As discourse moves from primary orality to greater and greater chirographic and typographic control, the flat, ‘heavy’ or type character yields to characters that grow more and more ‘round’, that is, that perform in ways at first blush unpredictable but ultimately consistent in terms of the complex character structure and complex motivation with which the round character is endowed” (151). However, Ong notes that in the transitional period between them, flats are a common feature of story-telling. A clear example of the “flat” in periodicals can be seen in writing about the criminal class—“the

flat” provides distance between the reader and the criminal type. In ghost fiction, the “flat” is often the maid or nurse.

Finally, relative location offers a glimpse at changing relationships to place. “Print...mechanically as well as psychologically locked words into space,” a process that fundamentally changes both conceptions of the word and space itself. In describing the Torah, Ong states that it “set down in writing thought forms still basically oral, the equivalent of

geography (establishing the relationship of one place to another)” by putting together narrative (99). These kinds of relative narratives are at odds with contemporary understandings of place, which are either hierarchical or absolute. I locate myself in a series of territories which become less and less specific (a street address addresses first a single building then an entire country) or in an absolute way on a grid (a geocoordinate). In these stories, we can see the ways that conceptions of place and location change with proximity to primary orality.

In order to understand the ways print technology affected the lives of working class people during the nineteenth century, one must look at education, technology, and the culture of production around news. In the following section, I will explain the ways these forces interacted with one another to produce a unique audience and reading experience.

1.2 Print technology and the literate working class

The technological revolution that underlies the proliferation of newspapers and periodicals fundamentally changed the way people read and learned in England. In 1850, roughly 50% of the

population was literate.¹ By 1900, that number rose to roughly 75%, largely due to education reform introduced in the 1880s (Gillard and Figure 1). Some of this reform stemmed from a desire to compete with Americans, whose blossoming industrial society grew from early seeds of public education (Gillard). In England, the Church resisted the move toward universal education in order to maintain control of the education system. For most of the 19th-century, church schools were the only education available to middle- and lower-class people, especially in rural areas (Gubar). Parents relied upon children for income and labor, and therefore children often learned only what they needed to know to work.

With the institution of state schools came national standards for education. Though not uniformly enforced, the Three R's ("reading, writing, 'rithmetic") gave instructors guidelines on performance (Gillard). Examinations evaluated the effectiveness of each school and partly determined funding, much like the modern American school system. Thus, schoolmasters would drill children in those three skills, occasionally to the point that students memorized their given readers in spite of their general inability to properly read other texts (Gillard). Public debates ensued about whether children in schools were overworked by expanding curricula, which included science for boys and cooking for girls (Gubar). The increase in schooling for working-class children was a crucial component in the rise in literacy that I am charting here.

None of this type of education would be possible without the technological advancements of the printing press, which made printed material cheap and readily available to newly literate folks and their families. "By the 1860s, many skilled workers and artisans were buying an evening

¹ Literacy is defined by the ability to sign one's name. This is a limited definition, but the data on this point are limited.

daily in addition to the cherished Sunday weekly” (Curtis 56). Penny papers were affordable even for the working class, meaning new information and entertainment from around the world was available to anyone who could read or knew someone willing to read to them. New audiences created opportunities for significant change in the ways that news itself was constructed.

In Chapter 3 of *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, L. Perry Curtis puts forward a theory of Victorian journalism that offers an understanding of the ways availability of print increased literacy and shaped public tastes. In their brief review of Steve Chibnall’s *Law-and-Order News: An analysis of crime reporting in the British press* (1977), Curtis says that “editors and reporters not only decide what is newsworthy, they also mediate the events in question through the always ambiguous and subjective instrument of language” (Curtis 50). Curtis cites Chibnall as the originator of the idea that “Fleet Street had created a series of artificial crime waves by arranging unconnected incidents into a pattern that appeared to pose a major threat,” thus controlling the behavior of its readership through fear of a criminal class (Curtis 51). Crime reporting, like ghost reporting, became a task of constructing plot points to spark reader curiosity, “even if they turn out to lead nowhere” (Curtis 52). The task of “triage” of a news event by editors and reporters is a necessary and complex one, and it is influenced by everything from fiction to economic pressures to cultural normativity. This is to say that the assertion that newspapers existed to report the news is too simplistic; as is the assertion that they merely reinforced hegemonic cultural values of their moment.

Ghost stories are one of the ways we can track primarily oral narrative as it made its way to print. The technological and educational revolutions of the nineteenth century gave way, not to the first group of ghost stories to be reported in newspapers (those can be traced back as early as the seventeenth century), but to the stories that grew and changed as the press did. According to

Jack the Ripper and the London Press, from 1855 to the end of the century, the Stamp act, abolition of paper duty (1861), improved rotary press technology, and the Linotype (1890) contributed to the “emergence of a mass-newspaper culture,” with thousands of readers every day (Curtis 57).

In the following section, I will discuss ghost hoaxes as examples of how newspapers *created* news and analyze the ways in which they enlisted the expectations of working-class readers while at the same time shaping those readers’ attitudes. I will attempt to consider the plots and details of each story alongside the technological, cultural, and socioeconomic factors that impacted readership and engagement, while bearing in mind the constructions inherent in its writing.

2.0 Hoaxes in non-fiction

The following articles are featured in the digital archive component of this project, which can be found at [<http://obdurodon.org:8080/exist/apps/hoax>]. Each article features a “ghost hoax,” which I define as a story involving a ghost that features misdirection on the part of its author or subject, either for material gain or in pursuit of vengeance. The collection features 36 XML-encoded articles and accompanying maps/visualizations and is explained in further detail in Section 3. These articles were selected based on time period, type of publication, and the textual and thematic features I hoped to explicate. The collection itself privileges the Hammersmith ghost hoax due to its proliferation across the century and the general lack of scholarly work on the subject. Other hoaxes included in the collection include the story of Spring-heeled Jack, whose history is explored in numerous academic books and popular fiction novels.² I choose not to explore them here because of the well-documented history and prevalence in previous studies of folklore and urban information transmission. Additionally, Spring-heeled Jack does not begin to appear until 1837, significantly later than the Hammersmith stories I discuss below. Ultimately, further study of the Spring-heeled Jack material may add to this analysis in the future, though for now it has been excluded from the scope.

² Though not included in this thesis, I used Karl Bell’s history of the legend in my research. Bell, Karl. *The legend of spring-heeled Jack: Victorian urban folklore and popular cultures*. Boydell, 2012.

2.1 The Hammersmith Ghost

This “ghost hoax” is part hoax, part crime drama. The first sightings of the Hammersmith ghost occurred in late 1803. Hammersmith during this period had a larger proportion of Catholics than many other London suburbs. According to Edward Walford’s *Old and New London* (1878), “the village had several good houses in and about it, and was ‘inhabited by gentry and persons of quality’” (Walford). For most of its history, the hamlet was surrounded by farming and garden areas; its proximity to the river Thames made it desirable for agriculture and for aristocratic homes like the Brandenburg and Sussex Houses. In 1806, Hammersmith became home to the West Middlesex Waterworks, which provided water to much of the northern and western metropolitan areas of London. (Walford). The following story takes place quite close to where this waterworks was later built.

Early reports of haunting in the Hammersmith area were said to have scared a woman so badly that she died a few days later (Walford). A large white figure was seen so often that a night watch was established to catch the prankster (or the ghost, as some of Hammersmith’s citizens believed it was). On the evening of Tuesday, January 3, 1804, Thomas Millwood, a local bricklayer was walking home from his parents’ house. As he walked down an alley, Millwood was shot in the face by Francis Smith, likely from only a few yards away. Smith, the night watchmen responsible for protecting the town from its specter, had accidentally shot a man dressed in an all-white bricklayer’s uniform, rather than a ghost. Millwood’s body was taken to the Black-Lion Pub on Black-Lion Lane for an inquest, where Smith was arrested and charged with murder.

Newspaper coverage leading up to the event is sparse. Hammersmith local papers did not yet exist in 1804. Newspapers were largely focused on the whole London metropolitan area, which meant that smaller neighborhoods got less news attention than the larger ones closer to the city

center. Coverage by individual papers differed greatly—I will outline each paper’s coverage, its political and regional biases, and the differences in reporting among them below.

2.1.1 Fears of a Ghost, A Fatal Catastrophe

The Morning Chronicle takes a strong stance on the existence of the ghost from the very beginning, opening its article by deeming the haunting “a ridiculous rumour” making “nocturnal visits to the fields adjacent to Black-Lion lane.” The diction of this article is quite complex compared to the others in the collection; that is perhaps down to its reputation as “London’s leading daily” at the time and its radical editor James Perry (DNCJ 1190). The article leads with information about the shooting, rather than the haunting. This is the closest these publications come to “objective” reporting of facts, though it is clear that the attitude of the paper towards the people who believed in the ghost is less than generous. The piece cites three witnesses, one of whom was the victim’s sister. She heard a voice (presumably Smith’s) say, “Damn you, who are you? Stand, else I’ll shoot you,” followed by a gunshot. In very plain, brief sentences, the article runs down the facts provided by Miss Millwood (whose only attribute in this story is “fine young woman,”) quickly: he wore a uniform of white flannel, he was sober, and she did not believe he had ever tried to dress as the ghost.

The next witnesses, Mr. Lock and Mr. Stow (local merchants), were the first to hear Smith’s admission as they walked home from a local pub. These witnesses corroborate Miss Millwood’s testimony that puts the murder between 10 and 11 PM. They also give important details about the gunshot wound, indicating that Smith was only a few yards away from Millwood when he shot him. Another watchman testifies he had seen a person impersonating a ghost the previous week, citing “a tall figure dressed in a sheet or table cloth...the witness saw under the

sheet the appearance of a dark coat and metal buttons.” The ghost then, was obviously a man, and not someone to be shot from a short distance. The facts of the case are given with little embellishment; in the end, “The Coroner summed up the evidence with great ability and humanity, when the Jury, after some deliberation, returned a verdict of Wilful Murder”. This charge was later overturned and Smith pardoned for self-defense after being convicted at trial, although the article was published before this occurred.

2.1.2 The Ghost of Hammersmith- The Morning Post

This article, also published on January 6th, offers much more detail about the hauntings before the shooting, including proper noun capitalization of the “Ghost” and descriptions of each of his hauntings. The details are much less specific about people—names and descriptions are not listed, nor are witnesses quoted. Descriptions of the ghost include “enormously large horns and cloven feet,” “a strange creature, dressed in white,” with “bladders affixed to his feet, shoulders, arms, body and head; and the noise they made resembled the rattling of pease [sic].” His actions include breaking windows, choking people, and “even maiming several of the inhabitants,” though how that happened is not stated in the article. He frightened a pregnant woman so badly that “her life is despaired of,” though no other reports corroborate this claim. The haunting in this version is a significantly more important part of the story. The second part, which goes over the details of the crime, is very similar to that of the Morning Chronicle’s. The Morning Post’s reputation as a daily paper, however, was very different from that of the Chronicle’s—it was originally founded with the purpose of being an advertising paper (DNCJ 1192). Its owner, Daniel Stuart, was a Tory printer who also owned The Gazetteer and The Courier, a paper significantly more conservative than the Morning Post. This paper’s reputation as a dedicated advertiser helps account for the

length of the story, as this type of sensational news would help it sell. The sensationalism in the first paragraph carries into the later parts of the century quite well; this piece is not “common” for the era, considering newspapers were still luxury items for the middle class in 1804.

2.1.3 Hammersmith Ghost- The Times

In 1800, the Times had a daily circulation of 5,000 and cost 6p (DNCJ 1746). It is difficult to find data on the geography of circulation. The Times was a popular paper, but it was not until the introduction of the steam-powered press in 1814 that it became the preeminent paper of the middle class. The Times’s version of the story begins, “The Christmas tricks of this goblin have terminated in two melancholy accidents.” It then mistakes the victim’s name for “Milward,” rather than Millwood, but takes the position that this event is a tragic one throughout the piece. The writer notes that “we have been at some pains to investigate on the spot,” perhaps because they had to travel west of London to Hammersmith, though the area was by no means rural at the beginning of the century. It also demonstrates the dedication of editors to getting these kinds of stories; they are not considered totally frivolous, but they are not taken seriously as hauntings either.

In 1804, ghost stories might have attracted readers who wanted to feel superior to the working-class people the stories featured. The Hammersmith Ghost happens also to be a crime story, insofar as it is a hoax and a murder. The story has no hero: Francis Smith is unintelligent and violent enough to believe a man in white is a ghost, or cowardly enough to shoot a man in a sheet. The victim’s relations appear to have warned him that he was in danger of being mistaken for the ghost; indeed, he had been warned before and replied to his hecklers with a bad oath and “do you want a punch o’ the head?” (Kirby’s 71). The ensuing court case provided entertainment

for the masses via the press as well, and in fact determined case law regarding the definition of “wilful murder” convictions.³

2.1.4 The St. James’s Park Ghost- The Times

Only a week after the events in Hammersmith, a new ghost story appeared in the Times. This haunting took place much closer to central London, in a small park just outside the theatre district. The Times seems to have covered this story with more zeal than other papers; its first appearance comes about a week after the Hammersmith story, and most mentions of this story I encountered were in the Times. This time, the paper writes about the ghost as though it was a real ghost. It is difficult to tell whether this story derives from a copycat ghost impersonator or a copy report, considering how soon after Hammersmith’s hauntings it occurred. The Morning Post accused The Times of fabricating the story entirely in order to sell more papers and play “upon the public credulity” (Notwithstanding...). In their response, The Times editors cite the quotations, interrogations, and documents they published relating to the story, “the result of our enquiries on the subject...we flatter ourselves, have proved as satisfactory as the nature of the business would admit” (Notwithstanding...).

The St. James’s Park Ghost appears in a white sheet as well, though she appears to have no head. She prefers to torment the night guards of the Coldstream Regiment: scaring one to fits, opening and shutting windows, and calling “out as lustily for a light, as if it had got a boatswain’s head upon its shoulders” (Another Ghost, Notwithstanding). George Jones, one of the guards who

³ Transcripts of the court case can be found through the Old Bailey’s database: <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/browse.jsp?id=t18040111-79&div=t18040111-79>

had witnessed the ghost, swore in a signed declaration, that he had seen a headless figure “dressed in a red striped gown with red spots between each stripe, and that part of the dress and figure appeared to me to be enveloped in a cloud,” rise from the ground before it vanished yet again (Park Ghost 1). Another guard, Richard Donkin, heard “a tremendous noise, which proceeded from the window of an uninhabited house... I heard a voice cry out. ‘Bring me a light! Bring me a light!’” (Park Ghost 1). When he attempted to help the owner of the voice, he heard another “violent noise” as the “sashes of windows lifted hastily up and down” (Park Ghost 1). The Morning Post’s coverage of this testimony does not differ from that of the Times, though it concludes, “it is lamentable that such gross superstition should in the 19th century prevail in the mind even of the most silly or uninformed” (St. James).

This sworn testimony differs greatly from the Hammersmith ghost’s coverage for a few reasons, but most importantly because no one appears to have died in this story. Therefore, the criminality of the story lies with the haunting or the prank, rather than with a murder or manslaughter case. The interest for a reader is no longer the criminality of a known individual, but instead the testimony of the guards. In this case, the reader sympathy may lie with the haunted regiment; they may indeed be our protagonists or heroes. In *The Times*, they are heroes, but the Post deems the testimony “lamentable.” The added drama of the Times’s responses to outside critique likely drew even more attention, and possibly had to do with the squabbling of the papers’ proprietors in an emergent market. According to *Politics of Information: Problems of Policy in Modern Media*, Daniel Stuart (*The Morning Post*), John Walter II (*The Times*), and James Perry (*The Morning Chronicle*) were responsible for the professionalization of the editor role and the expansion of advertising (Smith 191). This was early in the process of professionalization, which meant that the newspaper was still closely tied to the opinions and politics of the proprietor. Editor

feuds became a hallmark of London journalism later in the century; in the early days, however, it is hard to point to any evidence of this conflict being motivated by personal disputes.

In 1804, roughly half the population of the UK could read (see Figure 1). This percentage is likely higher for metropolitan areas, but the cost of reading at the time would have prohibited working class people from reading these types of papers at all. Printing was becoming cheaper, but the invention of the steam-powered press, wood pulp paper, and the linotype had not yet revolutionized the industry. Papers like the ones cited here could expect to circulate thousands of copies per day. For context, the population of the greater London area in 1801 was over one million.

Thus, the readership of these papers was limited to those who could afford to pay 6p, could read well, and lived in the greater London area. Secondary readership may have included personal servants and their families and those who found discarded papers (both groups a day later than publication). The specificity of place, heavy moral and intellectual signaling, and copycatting of stories all point to a highly oral style of storytelling.

The moral and intellectual signaling of the paper, either to an audience or to the historical record for which it sometimes believed itself responsible, is one of the few moments of creative intervention on the part of the author or editor that we can identify today. As I mentioned earlier, sometimes places seem invented, or details embellished, but the facts of a case are still important to the story. Though central details remain important to stories of pranks and hoaxes, specificity is lost to trope.

2.1.5 The Hammersmith Ghost in 1825

In 1825, the people of Hammersmith were once again visited by a ghost, this time covered in the *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, a sporting and life magazine read by people of all class backgrounds (DNCJ 156). The New Hammersmith Ghost is another prankster in the streets of Hammersmith, more than 20 years later. The specific places in this article make it somewhat easier to pin, but the witnesses are never named. Even those characters who speak in the story go unnamed, all except the “Ghosty,” the only character that matters. The article speculates as to who could be pulling such pranks—“it was rumoured that he had been seized one night at Kensington—that he was discovered to be a Nobleman’s son, whereupon the matter was ‘hushed up’”(New Hammersmith 1825). A bounty of “twenty pounds” sat upon the head of “the white-sheeted gentleman,” though he had evaded a night watch “attired like women” at the time of publication.

The only specific details of this story are the places—the streets can be traced by their proximity to the Waterworks and Angel public house. Webb’s Lane was difficult to locate on any map or in any literature that could be mapped onto a physical plane. A brief reference to a pump in Webb’s Lane that I found in the *History of Hammersmith* (Walford) turned out to be impossible to trace to a contemporary place, but its specificity in such an unassuming area suggests that the writer meant to invite people from outside Hammersmith to the area as spectators.

2.2 The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost

When we think about people appearing to hunt a ghost or prankster, the earliest popular example is that of the Cock Lane ghost of the 1760s. In November of 1852, Charles Dickens' *Household Words* ran an expose on spirit rapping, a trendy parlor activity brought over by American spiritualists. A medium would be called to a house and the hosts and their visitors would attempt to make contact with the dead through a séance. Mrs. Maria B. Hayden was one of the famous American mediums who could contact the dead and relay their messages via spirit raps.⁴ The journalists of *Household Words* (*HW*), Brown and Thompson, were skeptical of Mrs. Hayden and her business partner, Mr. Stone, hypnotist and student of "electro-biology." This physio-electrical explanation of the presence of spirits around mediums, who worked "as conductors, as magnet" for them to manifest themselves, was popular among some more scientifically-minded spiritualist thinkers. In their report, Thompson and Brown set out to expose the fraud for what she is; they pay for a session with Mrs. Hayden.

The title of their article, "The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost," comes from a 1762 incident, one of the most famous hauntings in English history. Dickens referenced the Cock Lane Ghost in the first page of *A Tale of Two Cities* and in *Nicholas Nickleby*; there are whole books on the subject.⁵ In an impressive journalistic set piece, the writers put forward the history of spirit rapping through the story of the Cock Lane Ghost in question and answer format. "The first medium was little Miss Parsons," they state. Miss Parsons was a little girl "haunted" by the ghost of her father's former lodger, in an effort to frame the lodger's lover for arsenic poisoning. The plot was found

⁴ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/hayden-maria-b-ca-1852>

⁵ Grant, Douglas, *The Cock Lane ghost*. St. Martins, New York. 1965.

out when the girl was removed to a new house, bound and placed in a hammock, and the noises ceased—she had been using a board and her bed frame to create the haunting.

The amount of research and information in this article is a departure from the simple reportage of the hoax events from earlier in the century. Articles appeared in papers and magazines—either in support of or against the existence of the ghost—regardless, with only the details of recent incidents. “The New Hammersmith Ghost” referred to an old haunting in the same area, but to comment on a pattern, rather than the origin of the legend. A magazine article like this *HW* piece could not have appeared until the 1850s, however, because of a lack of readership. By the time spiritualism arrived in England, the press was prepared to cover it. *HW* had a weekly circulation of 38,000 copies, costing twopence each. The monthly versions and biannual collections were “aimed at affluent middle-class families and people of influence, no less than at working-class readers interested in ‘trading up’” (DNCJ 785). Literature and social journalism had reached the working class, but mostly it pervaded the lives of the middle class. Anyone who would read this piece on the Cock Lane ghost perhaps would have heard of the legend, considering its popularity as an oral story (this is perhaps how Dickens originally heard it) and as a reference in the 1838 *Nicholas Nickleby*. The comparison between Mrs. Hayden and the Cock Lane ghost’s rapping serves to show the reader how fake each story really is. Mrs. Hayden will not reveal her secrets, but the journalists learn from a Mrs. Culver about the process of rapping with one’s toes, the “trickery being all clumsy and common-place enough.”

After a painfully incorrect séance with Mrs. Hayden during which she calls upon one’s very much still-alive mother to communicate with her, the two journalists deem the trend a “miserable delusion, the ghost of a dead ghost, this clumsiest of all cheats that ever offered folly to be bolted by the greedy appetite of superstitions...now this ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost,

having been laid a second time, makes a third appearance, more faded than ever.” The responsibility of the press, it seems, is to protect its readers from this superstitious nonsense, even suggesting that it could not survive in America, “The Land of Promise to the Mormons, and to many other sects of fanatics” (Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost).

2.3 On location and selection

I have not yet discussed the locations and places in which these pieces are published. Largely, this project focused on London’s papers covering “hauntings” in the greater London metropolitan area. It was common practice for these stories to be reprinted in smaller regional papers, although records of such papers are more difficult to access. This, in itself, is a major drawback of periodical studies today. Large metropolitan areas have more robust, accessible records, while rural areas often have less to archive, incomplete archives, or non-digital archives. In the later part of the century, articles began to move the opposite direction: stories from smaller cities and rural areas would be republished in London papers. One such example is a story from Altrincham and Sale “A Substantial Ghost Story” (1875), originally published in the Altrincham Guardian and reprinted in *The People’s Advocate*. The haunting, apparently the work of a disgruntled servant, resulted in the amusing hijinks of two local vigilantes. The story never supposes the existence of the ghost; the story is about the ridiculous characters who attempt to catch the prankster in the act. The place references in this story are totally ambiguous, other than that we know the event took place at a house in Sale. The paper it was reprinted in was a short-

lived weekly, so small and insignificant to not warrant an entry, or even mention, in the Dictionary of Nineteenth century Journalism.⁶

6

http://gdc.galegroup.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/gdc/ncco/atp/AboutThisPublicationPortletWin?p=NCCO&mode=view&u=upitt_main&action=e&mCode=4VUB&prodId=NCCO&>windowstate=normal

3.0 Making ghosts fiction

3.1 On making the ghost story good

In his essay “Some Remarks on Ghost Stories,” famed ghost story author and critic MR James claims, “very nearly all the ghost stories of old times claim to be true narratives of remarkable occurrences.” (James, Berfrois). His interests, however, lie with “the avowedly fictitious ghost story,” a branch of fiction he cites as “astonishingly fertile.” Unlike James, I do not deign to decide which stories are true or false, but instead wish to look at the way “true narratives” found their way into the kind of canonical fiction MR James and his predecessors wrote. In the following analysis, I will look at stories from MR James, Sheridan Le Fanu, Oscar Wilde, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charles Dickens. I have purposely left off Henry James, an author whose work with ghost stories depart from the tropes that constitute our contemporary understanding of the genre.

In the introduction to *Meddling with Ghosts*, a collection of ghost stories that influenced or were influenced by MR James, Ramsey Campbell sites James as “the most influential British writer of supernatural fiction” (Ramsey i). For the period I write about, this is absolutely false: he was born in 1862, after much of the fiction discussed here was already published. However, James does a great job of summing up the best parts of the ghost stories of the nineteenth century. His departures from the genre came in the form of “grisly and physical” spectres, rather than the rapping, ethereal haunts of the earlier stories. After exhausting many of the stories I discuss as well, he concludes that “the reading of many ghost stories has shown me that the greatest successes have been scored by the authors who can make us envisage a definite time and place, and give us

plenty of clear-cut and matter-of-fact detail, but who, when the climax is reached, allow us to be just a little in the dark as to the working of their machinery. We do not want to see the bones of their theory about the supernatural” (James, Berfrois). While this approach has more to do with plot than the conventions I outlined at the beginning of this thesis, time, place, and detail are all important factors in creating the suspense and interest needed to sustain a ghost story. It’s worth noting that James specifically wrote his stories to be read aloud. Not only do the tropes indicate a proximity to oral culture, but that proximity is instrumental to each story’s ability to sustain suspense and interest.

3.2 Le Fanu and the evolution of narrative frames

“An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street” is an early work of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, the Irish ghost story writer whose work contributed to the Dickensian and *fin de siècle* forms of ghost stories that people often think of as “genre,” though he passed away in the 1870s. His work appeared in Dickens’ “All the Year Round” during 1869 and 1870. While Sheridan is a well-known horror writer, this version is not widely read. A later version of the story appears in *In a Glass Darkly* as “Mr Justice Harbottle” in a significantly different form. Here, I will focus on “Aungier Street” with some comparison to the later text. First, I will look at the relation to oral forms of storytelling and print, next the tropes, and finally a comparison to “Harbottle.”

Le Fanu sets the stage for the oral form in his bashful introduction. Rather than begin with the details of the story, he addresses the reader and himself: “It is not worth telling, this story of mine – at least, not worth writing. Told, indeed, as I have sometimes been called upon to tell it, to

a circle of intelligent and eager faces, lighted up by a good after-dinner fire on a winter's evening, with a cold wind rising and wailing outside, and all snug and cosy within..."(Le Fanu 104). He postures for the readers, suggesting perhaps that they should not read such a story, or if they do, they should imagine they are in front of a storyteller on a cold evening. He also signals that this story is a true one, and one that happened to him. Although at times he departs from the awareness of the physical reality of printed text, he returns to it again with the printed oath, "Now, I may add thus much, in compliance with the immemorial usage of the realm of fiction, which sees the hero not only through his adventures, but fairly out of the world. You must have perceived that what the flesh-blood-and-bone hero of romance proper is to the regular compounder of fiction, this old house of brick-wood-and-mortar is to the humble recorder of this true tale. I, therefore, relate, as in duty bound, the catastrophe which ultimately befell it" (121). Here, the narrator reestablishes the connection between the haunting and the physical place, the "brick-wood-and-mortar," that falls victim to tragedy and haunting. His responsibility is to "relate" the story—in this case through the oral tradition on paper. He ends in that tradition as well by saying, "I have now told you my own and Tom's adventures" (121). "To tell" and "to relate" in the above quotes refer to the text without awareness of textuality. They commit neither to verbal communication nor to written, instead lingering between them.

One could, and indeed readers of the time often did, read the story aloud to others without shattering the illusion of the story. The reader feels as though they are with the storyteller, so much so that the boundaries of story and real life nearly vanish. This is reflected in the narrator's awareness of the reader's interests and immediate future. By imagining the reader in detail, the text brings the reader into closer proximity with the story. The narrator requests of his reader, if "you can induce your friends to read [the story] after nightfall...if you will secure me the *mollia*

tempora fandi,⁷ I will go to my work, and say my say, with better heart” (104). The quality of the story, and of the narrator’s experience of telling it, will be influenced by the experience of the readers. Should it be shared at the “opportune time for talking,” that is all the better for everyone involved. The story ends with the narrator wishing his listener “a very good-night, and pleasant dreams,” which envisions a future beyond the end of the story and imagines each actor outside the relation of the narrative, thus confirming the proximity of reader and writer.

While the occasional “dear reader” or “good friend” interjection appears to remind each actor of their place, the narrative itself is largely conventional in form. The story begins when the two cousins agree to move into a house recently acquired by Uncle Ludlow and find it haunted. Tom Ludlow, who dies, “poor fellow... a sacrifice to contagion,” is described in no definable terms as “sedate but frank,” and “cheerful” (104). Dick, the narrator whose name we learn only in dialogue with Tom, is a superstitious fellow who finds his new home very spooky. Tom is more of a skeptic, although after a few encounters with the ghost he leaves the house to visit Uncle Ludlow in the country. The two men decide to seek other housing, but it is not until Tom returns to Dublin that he admits his fear and belief in the ghost to his cousin. All elements of the ghost story are here: a haunted old house, a logical and brave upper-middle-class narrator, a servant who delivers the history of the haunting in thickly-accented English, and a ghost with unfinished business; where this story departs from convention is in its narrative framing.

Many of the quotes I have given as examples thus far have been taken from the first and last paragraphs of the story. They introduce and conclude the story by eliminating the narrator’s

⁷ A quote from Vergil’s *Aeneid* meaning “the most opportune time for talking.” Aeneas uses the phrase when trying to decide how to break it off with his lover. Thanks to Dr. A. Korzeniewski for identifying this citation.

distance (and thus the text's distance) from the reader, whereas the later version of the story that appears as "Mr. Justice Harbottle" in *In a Glass Darkly* uses many different narrative frames to distance the reader from the haunting. The short story collection is framed as the posthumous papers of a supernatural detective named Dr. Hesselius. His investigations, which intersect with medical, spiritual, and supernatural occurrences, supposedly appear in full with short prologues by an editor giving a few notes on each case. "Mr. Justice Harbottle" is a case with another narrative gap. According to the editor's notes, Hesselius preferred a Mrs. Trimmer's account, but instead appears Mr. Anthony Harman, Esq.'s version of the story for its detail, "caution and knowledge" (103). The editor, although perturbed at his inability to locate the Trimmer narrative, believes its "strictly scientific view of the case would scarcely interest the popular reader," thus he prefers to publish the Harman narrative in this collection. The narrator, then, the "I", is actually Mr. Harman, who is being told the story of Mr. Justice Harbottle, a mean-spirited judge, through letters with an elderly friend. After a bit of introduction, the "I" becomes the elderly friend via reproduced letter. The father of this "I" knew formidable Judge Harbottle in the 1740s (140 years before the short stories are published), when the judge experienced a haunting by those who had died by his gavel.

Though each frame offers some corroboration or support of the narrative, none offer the same kinds of oaths of truth as "Aungier Street" street's narrator. The editor takes the story from Hesselius's papers, who takes it from Harman, who takes it from a friend, who heard the story as a child. The oral communication of the narrative only happens between two characters, who are temporally removed from the printed story with which the reader interacts.

The stark contrasts owe much to the twenty-year gap, but also differences in medium. "Aungier Street" was first published anonymously in *Dublin University Magazine*. The story is set

in a real Dublin street.⁸ Le Fanu's popularity in the intervening years means it has survived until today, but had he not become famous it would likely be lost to an archive. *In a Glass Darkly*, published in 1872, sets the "Harbottle" story in London, but without such specificity of place. The audiences were different, the stories diverged considerably, but they demonstrate an important advancement in the history of the genre. By the latter part of the century, ghost stories were not merely something told by the fireside before bed, but fodder for experimental narrative and text. Mass printing made both of these interventions into the oral culture possible, but the later story made use of the constraints of that technology rather than attempting to mimic oral construction.

3.3 *The Canterville Ghost*

Oscar Wilde's only ghost story, "The Canterville Ghost," makes parodic use of many genre and common textual conventions, both in conversation with and as criticism of the cultural moment. The story begins when an American minister, Hiram Otis, purchases the Canterville estate from Lord Canterville, who warns him that the house is haunted by a former owner. The minister responds, "...but there is no such thing, sir, as a ghost and I guess the laws of Nature are not going to be suspended for the British aristocracy" (195). The family, minister, wife, daughter, and two "delightful boys...the only true republicans of the family," are soon parted with their beliefs of Nature and British aristocracy by a large blood stain in the sitting room that reappears no matter how many applications of "Pinkerton's Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent" Mrs. Otis applies. The housekeeper, an old woman named Mrs. Umney, informs the

⁸ Home to Dublin's oldest house: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/historic-treasure-on-dublin-s-aungier-street-1.1897404>

family that this is the blood of “Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that very spot by her own husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575...his guilty spirit still haunts the Chase” (197). After a few more attempts to solve the symptoms of the haunting with other brand-named products (a play on advertising in periodicals), the family resigns themselves to his somewhat amusing presence. The boys terrorize the ghost more than the ghost could ever terrorize the family.

By the time Chapter 4 begins, the ghost is “very weak and tired” (205). He determines that the family is “on a low, material plane of existence and quite incapable of appreciating the symbolic value of sensuous phenomena,” that his job is merely to haunt his former home, but fear is an entertainment these Americans just won’t have. This is where Wilde’s serious engagement with the form begins; what critic Anne Markey calls the “comic inversion that results in a light-hearted but essentially critical probing of serious issues” (Markey 127). Sir Simon’s awareness of what a ghost *should* do (“appear in the corridor once a week and to gibber from the large oriel window on the first and third Wednesday in every month,” paint blood stains on the floor, and rattle his chains around the halls at night (Wilde 205)) are all derived from the conventions of the established genre. Wilde “mocks the extravagant paraphernalia of the conventional ghost story while simultaneously reinscribing its concerned fascination with the continua between the natural and the supernatural, life and death, and past and present” (Markey 127). At the end of the story, Miss Otis, a girl of fifteen, helps Sir Simon attain peace and a final resting place. In this moment, the “ghost” is solved, but by a young woman rather than by an educated man, an inversion of conventional character tropes.

The story also draws from traditional Irish folklore, which Wilde was exposed to through his mother. “The description of the abominable yet affable Sir Simon, for example, reflects [Lady Wilde’s] account of the popular belief that spirits who are ‘too bad for heaven, too good for hell’

are condemned to remain on earth as restitution to those they have wronged” (quote from Lady Wilde’s *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*) (129). Not only does he draw inspiration from Irish folklore, but he reflects in his story “the Irish oral tradition, whose transmission depends upon individual enunciations of a collectively owned set of narratives” (Markey 125). The orality of the text does not appear just in references to folklore, but in the way it takes the genre’s tropes and spins them in playful, original ways. “Pastiche” is working to incorporate high and low, but also printed and orated cultural artifacts. The language in the story is literary, particularly Sir Simon’s dramatic dialogue, but the subject matter is pulled directly from the tropes of Irish and British ghost stories through history. A family arrives at a haunted house, they experience haunting, but then comically, and perhaps tragically for the ghost, they haunt the ghost out instead. According to Markey, “Wilde annexes existing sources in order to disturb and entrance his reader. If ‘The Canterville Ghost’ fails to achieve its desired outcome, the fault lies with that unimaginative reader’s lack of receptivity and does not detract from the true artistry of Oscar Wilde” (Markey 136). Although the genius of Wilde’s pastiche may be clear to myself and other critics, this is not a very good ghost story. It provides none of the suspense of an MR James story, nor the familiar orality of “Aungier Street.”

3.4 Putting tropes to good use

Two stories that exemplify the tropes with which Wilde is playing come from Dickens’ *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Old Nurse’s Story” was first published in *Household Words*’ 1852 Christmas issue, “A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire.” In the story, an old nurse begins a story for her young charges, “You know, my dears, that your

mother was an orphan...” (Gaskell 1). The nurse’s charge in our ghost story, then, is known from that point on as Miss Rosamond, rather than “your mother,” as the framing device has served its purpose for now. The direct second-person references continue throughout the story, however, which means the reader is constantly reminded that they are not supposed to feel like a reader, but instead like a listener.

The familiar feeling enhances the specific details of place that become important to the story later. At the beginning, the old nurse spends three paragraphs just describing the house she and her charge will stay in for the remainder of the story. The most important details of place are underscored by the second-person interjection of an otherwise prose narrative style. After paragraphs of list-like description, the old nurse says, “At the opposite end of the hall, to the left as you went in—on the western side—was an organ built into the wall, and so large that it filled up the best part of that end. Beyond it, on the same side, was a door; and opposite, on each side of the fireplace, were also doors leading to the east front; but those I never went through as long as I stayed in the house, so I can’t tell you what lay beyond” (Gaskell 4). In these two sentences are all of the details relevant to the plot. Other descriptions create the world in which the story takes place, but the reader’s sense of familiarity with these details is the most important part. We are supposed to remember these details more than we remember the others, so the familiar “you” signals to us that we need to *listen* more closely than when we are merely readers. This is one way Gaskell builds suspense through oral detail; without the successive, almost list-like description, there could be no final detail upon which she can hang anticipation.

The anticipation grows with consistent references to the closed east wing, which the old nurse emphasizes throughout her story. The mystery intensifies when winter arrives and Miss Rosamond disappears into the night. “Can she have got into the east wing and hidden there?” asks

the nurse. The other servants think no, and so the search goes through the whole house. Yet another list describes house, until finally the nurse runs into the cold night, where she sees “little foot-marks” in the snow going up to the Fells. After being rescued, Miss Rosamund explains that she had followed a pretty little girl outside, as she beckoned her “round the east corner” of the house (Gaskell 8-9). But only one pair of footprints appeared in the snow. Another mystery of the old Furnivall Manor.

The ghost girl’s appearance is apparently not new to the other servants, who warn that the child will lure Miss Rosamond to her death. The elderly Miss Furnivall, the house’s only occupant, shrieks “Oh, have mercy! Wilt Thou never forgive! It is many a long year ago—” (Gaskell 11). When the old nurse finally sees the ghost girl, the organ begins to play, “So loud and thundering,” and though the girl seemed to “wail and cry, no faintest touch of sound” was heard. The house servants are finally prevailed upon to tell the ghost’s story, though little oral framing, scene description, or dialogue appears. Instead, the reader is told the story as though it is heard second hand; simply, “she said she had heard the tale from old neighbors...it might not be true, or it might, what she had been told” before the nurse launches into the story itself (Gaskell 13).

The story is of two sisters, Miss Grace and Miss Maude, their foreign musician beau, and their cruel, music-loving father. After Miss Maude secretly married and had a child with the musician beau, she and her sister grew increasingly bitter, still in competition for the musician’s attention until he finally abandoned them both. The west side of the house then was Grace’s, and the east belonged to Maude, neither disturbing the other. The child, who until then had been raised at a local farmhouse, could finally be brought to the main house to live with her mother, under the guise of her being “a cottager’s child [Maude] had taken a fancy to” (Gaskell 15). Grace’s vengeance, then was to tell her father, who hit the child and caused Maude to flee the house, where

her daughter died in the frost. The old lord died within a year; his son and heir chose to live elsewhere, leaving Miss Grace to live with the guilt, the ghosts, and the old organ.

The tropes, a big haunted house, an act of vengeance, and a child ghost, all advance the established genre. I include this story not because it is exceptional, but because it has many of the common features of its contemporaries. Unlike the Wilde story, this story is scary and it has a moral. These ghosts are not mere nuisances, but a threat to the child and torture to the old Miss Furnivall. In the final scene of the story, the ghosts appear to Miss Furnivall, Miss Rosamond, and the nurse, acting out the moment of betrayal: Lord Furnivall hits the child with his crutch and a ghostly figure of Miss Furnivall, the one who is still alive, looks on without acting. Witnessing the scene kills her, but before she dies she spends the night in bed, muttering, “what is done in youth can never be undone in age,” over and over, her lesson thoroughly learned (Gaskell 18).

This story is exceptional in one important way. The narrator is a servant woman. Ong would refer to this type of character as a “flat” in the other stories. She usually appears to tell the backstory of the ghost to the male protagonist (as in “Aungier Street”), speaks with a thick accent that is reflected phonetically in the text, and she appears only to further the plot. In “Old Nurse’s Story,” the “flat” characters are the other house servants, though their speech is not quoted or reproduced. The narrator’s accent, if she has one, is not reflected in either her speech or the narration. Wilde’s “flat” is not very flat either but is instead a melodramatic support to the ghost’s tragic lead, going so far as to pretend to faint in front of the Otis family. These characters are not just plot devices in the story but play key roles in the narration and creation of suspense or action. This can be seen as a reflection of the attitudes of authors like Gaskell, Riddell, and Wilde, who wrote for female audiences in a way that their male counterparts simply could not. In these stories, the servant women are not props, are not looked down upon by their male counterparts or masters,

and are instrumental to each story's development. This reflects a unique literary audience shift; as print became cheaper, women who were somewhat like these characters could afford to purchase something like the *Household Words* Christmas special edition or *The Court and Society Review*.⁹

3.5 A walk-about ghost story

Another example of genre-building is a Dickens story from 1865 called "To be Taken with a Grain of Salt." The story first appeared in *All the Year Round*, Dickens's second magazine after the dissolution of *Household Words* in the drama of his divorce. *AYR* differed from its predecessor in circulation (significantly higher), its lack of satire and social journalism, and its publication in the US (DNCJ 62). Stories like "The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost" were gone, but Dickens more than made up for it with serialized novels. "To be Taken with a Grain of Salt" was published in 1865, well into the publication of life of *AYR*, which meant circulations were regularly above 100,000 per issue.

The narrative framing of this story speculates on the difficulty of "imparting [one's] own psychological experiences when those have been of a strange sort," thus setting us up to be both generous and skeptical listeners. The narrator assures us that he has "no intention of setting up, opposing, or supporting, any theory whatever" (Dickens 94). He is merely telling us his observations and trusting that we will do with it what we will. He then goes on to describe a

⁹ This *Household Words* Christmas edition went for threepence, or fourpence stamped. Previous year's editions could be purchased for twopence each as well. <http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-vi/page-360.html>

“Murder,” though anonymized, perhaps for fear of retribution from the murderer or his family. This anonymity is an odd device in a fiction story, but it serves the character’s constant wavering well. The reader should not believe anything he says, yet they will exactly because they should not.

The narrator begins his extraordinary specificity with the first supernatural premonition: when he first reads about the murder in the paper, he suddenly feels “a flash – rush – flow” where he sees clearly “the absence of the body from the bed” (Dickens 97). He tells the reader that he has this vision at his home in “Picadilly, very near to the corner of Saint James’s Street” (Dickens 97). Disturbed, he goes to look down at the street outside. A pillar of leaves in the wind directs his gaze to two men, who look up at him as they walk down the street: one had “an unusually lowering appearance... the face of the man who followed him was the colour of impure wax” (Dickens 97).

In *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society*, Sue Zemka explores the ways Dickens’s “peripatetic novels” exhibit a mastery of “the moment of literary sensation” through the walking-ness of his novels (Zemka 103).¹⁰ The scene described echoes the peripatetic moment, as the two men pass in the street below the narrator quickly. Zemka asks, “what have we missed by approaching Dickens’s fiction through interpretive methods descended from Jamesian standards – the standards of wholistic forms, and retrospectively discernable patterns of meaning? Or of ideology critique, the novel’s political unconscious?” The question echoes in periodical studies as well: with the view of the whole, are we missing the view from the street? “The Dickensian urban

¹⁰ Zemka also notes that Dickens is “something of a disappointment when it comes to making momentary figures deliver answers to the questions set in motion by his stories” (103). This fair and reasoned assessment does not quite apply to the short stories, though.

novel sees things at street level, whereas subsequent criticism of the urban novel sees it as a semiotic map,” says Zemka. She goes on to critique Franco Moretti’s view of the urban novel as a “pattern of meaning superimposed on the city,” or a text to be read, mined, and interpreted, when really the 19th-century urban outlook was street-level, relative, and often disconnected. In the case of this scene, the narrator centers his supernatural experiences at the street level, looking up from only a few stories. Through the recreation of moment in text, Dickens is invoking the orality of the incident by stretching it out. By extending it in the text, he lends this scene significantly more space—a whole street block’s worth—than if he were to merely tell us that the character gazed out his window to see two suspicious looking men.

4.0 Mediating and remediating text

Zemka's criticism comes into play in my own digital project. I began by attempting to map the points referenced in each story, but as I did so, I realized that nothing digital is ever simple, and nothing I was illustrating added to my analysis. Instead, I created interpretive "Drucker" maps—visualizations that transcend the digital but are still based on data.¹¹ In order to better iterate over these images, I used tracing paper and my laptop screen. I used contemporary street maps to lay down a rough scale, then adapted them based on comparison with maps from the historical moment (see figures 3 and 4). Then, I could see things like general proximity easily, thus allowing myself (or the viewer) to better imagine a street-level view. To descend to street-level in Google Maps also gives the viewer a great departure from the bird's eye: while this functionality would be nice, I did not want to create a digital tool that did this because it would require me to use Google's non-open-source mapping API.

4.1 The database and periodical studies

Before the rise of the periodical database in the 2000s, popular periodicals were bound as books, so many volumes were available in one place. As Margaret Beetham pointed out in 1990,

¹¹ Drucker, Johanna. *Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display*. DHQ, Vol 5, Number 1. 2011.

<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/5/1/000091/000091.html>

“the modern reader of nineteenth-century periodicals is, however, confronted with a paradox... Putting several numbers into one bound volume changes all this, not least by suggesting that *really* the periodical is a kind of book and the numbers are incomplete sections of the whole” (Beetham 23). This perspective is compounded by the reprinting of fictional works that originally appeared in periodicals all at once in collections. Many of us who read the novels of the 19th-century read them all at once. Digital media has helped us mediate this to an extent, with such projects as Dickens’ Journals Online’s Weekly Readings.¹² From a literary historical perspective, it is nearly impossible to read a piece as a subscriber might.

The notion that reading periodical pieces as part of a book or collection is in the process of being displaced by large databases such as Hathi Trust and Gale Group. The British Newspaper Archive, which is run by the British Library through a company called Find My Past,¹³ is a largely public-facing record database. Find My Past is a DNA ancestry company in the UK; the foreboding trend of selling those interested in family history into biological data collection is a morally difficult. Many academic databases have access to the British Library’s records, but to use the easy, beautiful interface of this specific archive, one must pay roughly 20 p per month.

Periodical research no longer requires one to leave the home institution (though it does still require one to have a home institution), but it does require one to interface with databases. Some databases are quite well-documented, such as Hathi Trust, but some research tasks require technical skills in order to interact with the API (application programming interface).¹⁴ Larger

¹² <http://www.djo.org.uk/no-name-reading-project/no-name-introduction.html>

¹³ <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>

¹⁴ https://www.hathitrust.org/digital_library

groups, like Gale, the resource from which most of the items in this collection are taken, claim copyright protection over the images, fail to provide plain text (though they use it to facilitate full-text searching), and sometimes obscure or omit metadata. They offer visualization tools, which although interesting, do not offer proper documentation for what and why they include certain items in each category. Finally, the DJO offers a more bespoke option for those wishing to study something specific. In the case of DJO, the material is relatively regular and presented both as images of collected originals and as plain-text. The project is licensed under Creative Commons By guidelines, which means users can take anything from the project with a proper citation. The creators are easy to contact via email and were forthcoming with their documentation and internal materials.¹⁵

The field is largely dominated by large databases, which are scans of either broadsheets or collected books. These databases do not appear to have been designed for humanists or by humanists. They do not anticipate needs of researchers, not because they have not tried, but because that is a nearly impossible task. My collection is a bespoke piece with full-text search and annotation, grounded by but not limited by my research goals. The idea of creating a dedicated project space for these kinds of documents is somewhat antithetical to most digital edition projects, as their subject matter tends to be based on manuscripts, like books, short stories, poems, or collected letters of important people. These kinds of digital editions privilege the authors in a way that simply is not as useful in periodical studies. Katherine Bode's *A World of Fiction: Digital Collections and the Future of Literary History* argues for a balanced, representational approach to data, rather than a totalizing one: results are skewed "if the literary data analyzed do not effectively

¹⁵ Thank you to Professor John Drew of University of Buckingham for sharing these materials.

represent the historical context we seek to understand. I draw on the theoretical and practical foundations of textual scholarship to constitute what I call a scholarly edition of a literary system: that is, a model of literary works that were published, circulated, and read—and thereby accrued meaning—in a specific historical context, constructed with reference to the history of transmission by which documentary evidence of those works is constituted” (Bode 4). With this project, though it is small, I hope to model the way one may go about subject-focused periodical collections. I think the process of collecting and remediating these texts is a departure from the ways in which we have collected texts, both physically and digitally, since their publication. Whether it is useful to anyone except me, I am unsure, but I think that the process of creating this kind of collection might be useful to others.

As shown in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, each early story can be traced to the street level easily, based on references in the story. This specificity of place lends itself well to modern digital and physical mapping because of the way location was expressed: near this building, between these two streets, down the street from this pub, etc. The process of digitizing and mapping these places by modern spatial informational standards requires a several levels of mediation. First, I found the spot I thought a place might be on a modern digital map. Next, I used a variety of vintage maps to verify the place. If the geocoordinates matched on the contemporary and georeferenced vintage map, then I recorded the place and its metadata in an XML gazetteer. Places, of course, can contain other places; thus neighborhoods like Hammersmith contain all the data for every place referenced in all the pieces in the collection. In the cases where this process failed, I had to search out other historical data that might lead me to the area being referenced. These resources are included in the bibliography under “Selected Geographic Data Sources.” Occasionally, the data represented in the gazetteer is a best guess. Notes for relative or ambiguous places were used to help keep track of

such guesses. The mapping part of this project is meant to be interpretive, and not representative of a historical reality—I intend to remediate the information and present it in a way people at the time may not have imagined. That is not to say that the information is sourced carelessly; I was deliberate about each point in space and often cross-referenced points across multiple maps. That being said, there are streets referenced that I am convinced were fictional: it is difficult to know whether the historical record is failing you or trying to trick you.

4.2 Conclusions

In those moments of furiously googling, for example, for a small pump featured in a single poem from the eighteenth century, I often found myself most at home with my research. I have purposely not attempted to do a distant reading of the phenomenon discussed in this paper, because I think it would be an impossible and irresponsible approach to this type of data. Instead, I chose to analyze fiction and non-fiction together, as equal and indelibly connected media artifacts. To do this, I curated a collection of ghost non-fiction stories that both demonstrated and supported theories of proximity to orality early in the century, though I thought I was merely collecting ghost hoax stories. To understand the features of these stories, I also explored the socio-economic and cultural history of literacy during the period, a context without which neither fiction nor non-fiction analysis would be possible. Through tracing the accretion of three literary conventions, it became clear how stories, tropes, and features made their way from newspapers to periodical stories to an established genre. Oral narrative framing, references to relative location, and “flats” are all conventions that appear, change, and reappear later in new forms. This breadth of study, which

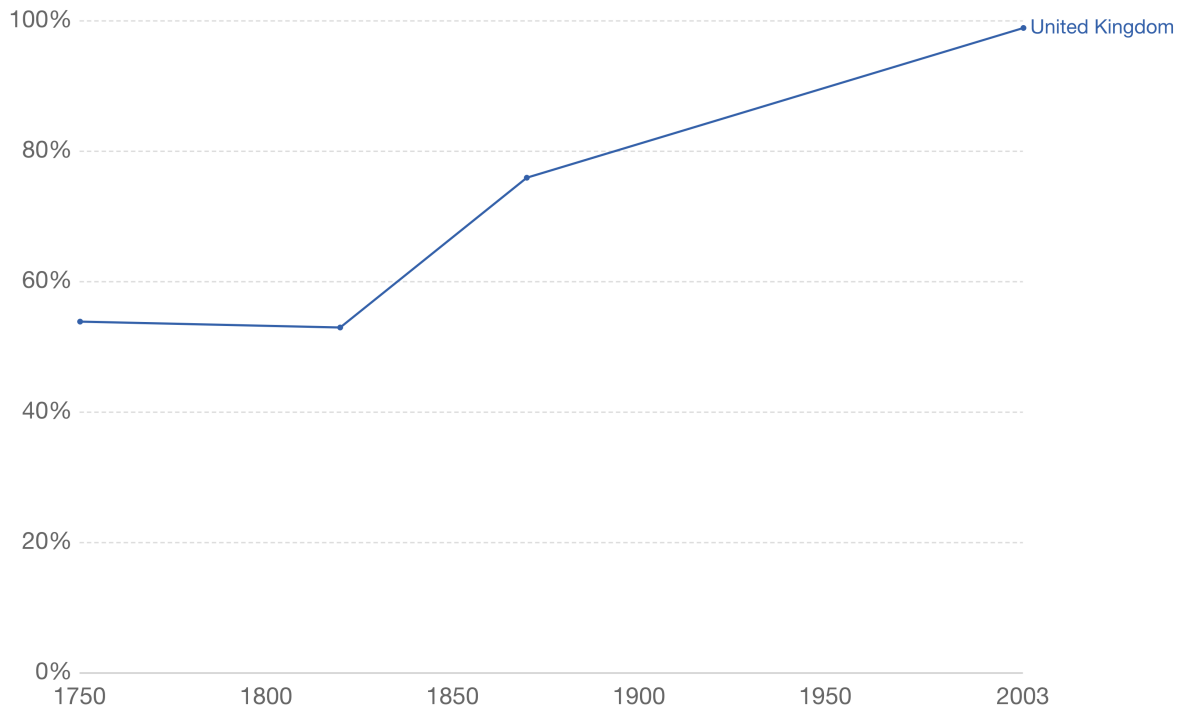
continues to unfold in all directions even as I complete the writing of this thesis, allowed me a fuller understanding of the experiences of writer, reader, and my own role as curator and scholar.

5.0 Figures

5.1 Figure 1

Literacy rate

Estimates correspond to the share of the population older than 14 years that is able to read and write. Specific definitions and measurement methodologies vary across countries and time. See the 'Sources' -tab for more details.



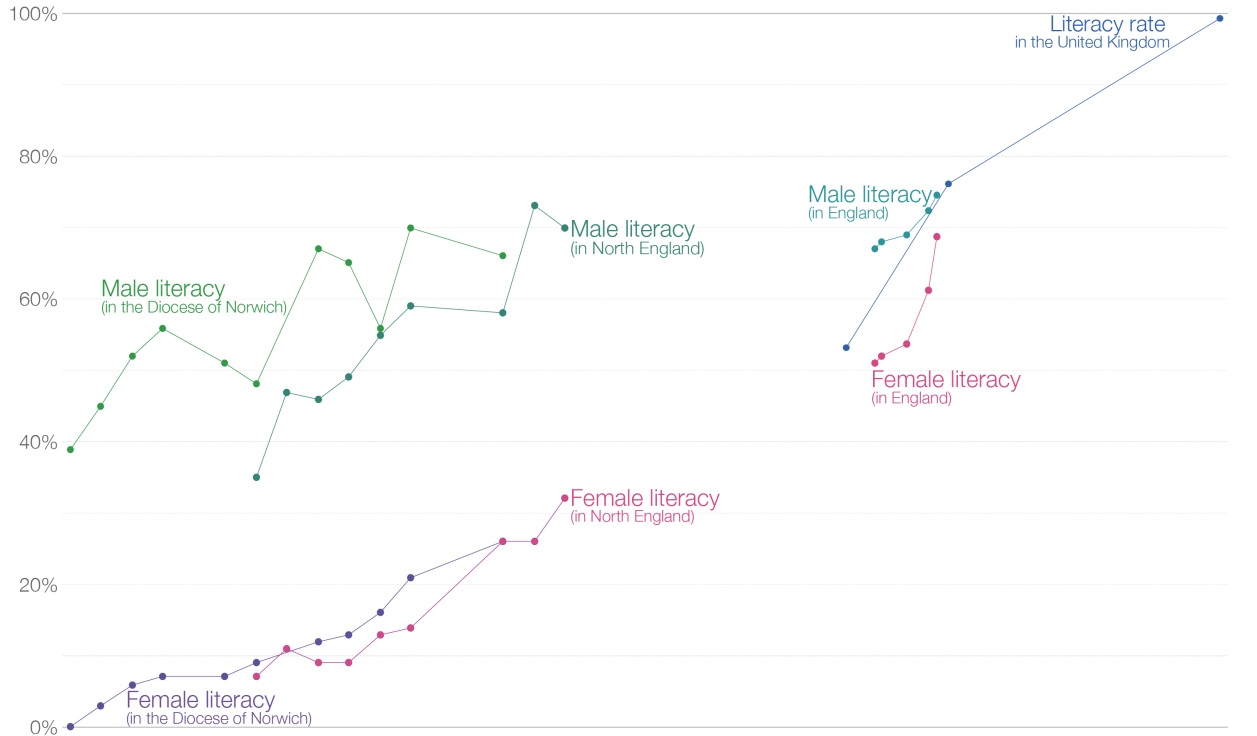
Source: WDI, CIA World Factbook, & other sources

OurWorldInData.org/literacy • CC BY

5.2 Figure 2

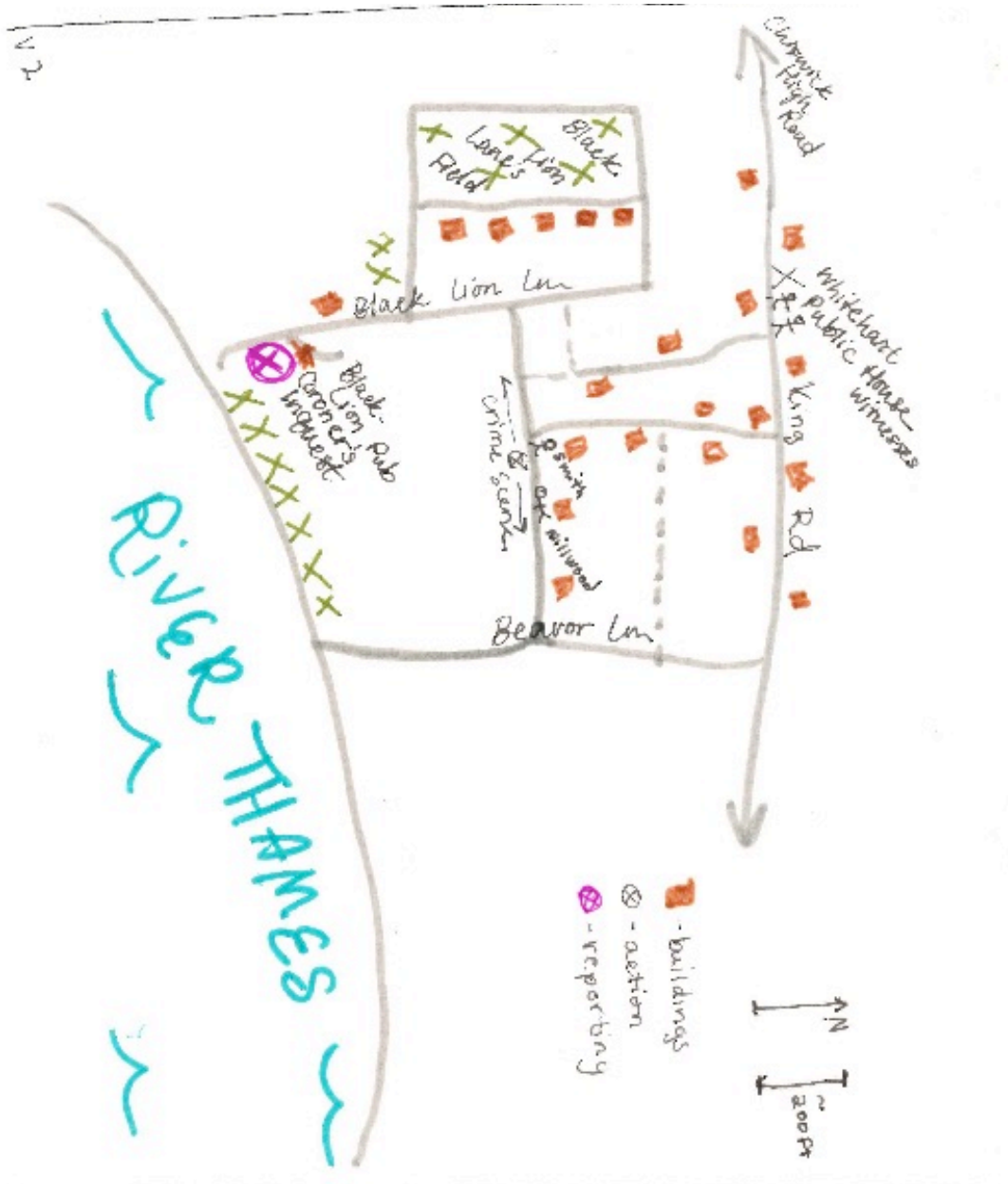
Literacy rate in England and the UK since 1580

Historical estimates of literacy in this chart are based on the percentage of men and women who could sign documents. See the source description for more details.



Data source: Data for 1840-1900 from Schofield (1973), % of men and women who sign marriage registers (England); 1640s-1740s from Houston (1982), % of witnesses who sign court depositions (North England); 1580-1720 from Cressy (1980), % witnesses who sign ecclesiastical court declarations (Norwich Diocese); Data for the UK for 1920 and 1970 via Broadberry and O'Rourke (2010) and refers to the ability to sign a document. The estimate of 99% for 2003 is from the CIA World Factbook. This is a visualization from OurWorldinData.org, where you find data and research on how the world is changing. Licensed under CC-BY-SA by the author Max Roser.

5.3 Figure 3



5.4 Figure 4



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