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"MEDDLING WITH SORCERY": HYPNOTISM, THE OCCULT AND THE RETURN OF FORSAKEN WOMEN IN THE 1890S GHOST STORIES OF LETTICE GALBRAITH

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Abstract
Lettice Galbraith's ghost stories are largely excluded from histories of the Victorian supernatural. Despite writing within a genre popular in the 1890s, little is known of her biography, her literary circle or her influences. Like other 1890s writers, Galbraith capitalised on public fascination with the tropes of crime narratives – the foggy London streets, the sensational newspaper snippets, violence and suppressed scandal – as well as the fascination with hypnotism and the occult revival. In the stories "In the Séance Room" and "The Missing Model" (1893) the wronged woman, abandoned, mistreated and objectified, returns as a terrifying spirit, who manifests in disturbing form to shame professional men. The séance room and the art gallery admit the excluded woman who silently petitions for her lost story to be told: the ghostly women have "magnetic" stares, subverting power relations in contemporary discourses of hypnotism. In "The Blue Room" (1897) women's attempts to summon a demon have dangerous consequences and are seen as "meddling with sorcery". Borrowing from the crime narrative with its mysteries, clues, detection and fake identities, Galbraith refashions the Victorian ghost story to hold men accountable for their deception and violence and addresses fears about black magic and hypnotism.

Keywords Galbraith; hypnotism; occult; magic; female detective; séances

Lettice Galbraith's best-selling collection *New Ghost Stories* (1893), which went into three editions, has been largely excluded from histories of the Victorian supernatural. Despite the fact that Galbraith was writing within a genre popular in the 1890s, little is known of her biography, her literary networks or her influences. Only recently Alistair G. Gunn has confirmed that her dates were 1859-1932, she wrote under a pseudonym, and her birth name Lizzie Susan Gibson was altered to "Lettie" for family and friends.[1] Richard Dalby notes that her collection went into three popular editions.[2] Although "The Blue Room", an 1897 story which appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine*,

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and some of her other fiction has been anthologised and reprinted, she is rarely considered in critical discussions. Now that her stories are beginning to appear again in new anthologies,[3] it is timely to consider her contribution to the history of Victorian women's ghost stories and her anticipation of trends in the Edwardian supernatural.

Drawing on the conventions of 1890s supernatural fiction, Galbraith's work would have been read alongside stories by other women writers such as Vernon Lee, E. Nesbit, Marie Corelli and Louisa Baldwin. As Victoria Margree has argued, this decade witnessed the rise of the psychological ghost story, in which "ghosts, whether objectively existing or subjective phantoms – materialise the psychological conflicts of the ghost-seer".[4] The fascination with scientific experimentation and the limits of art as well as psychological explanations for hauntings and hallucinations often underpin the attraction to the ghostly at this time. Women writers were also likely to "queer" or "gender" the supernatural by including the rebellious figures of the New Woman, the female detective or the *femme fatale* in their narratives, challenging assumptions about female agency and control or reconceptualising notions of feminine evil. Gendering the supernatural has recently been identified as a trend of the 1890s, a period of radical transformation when women writers, many of them still largely unread, experimented within the fantastic mode, with their tales of haunted objects, strange spaces and supernatural creatures.[5] The *fin-de-siècle* woman writer often incorporates some of the New Woman's challenge to male authority into her narratives.

The centrality of criminality to the *fin-de-siècle* ghost story has also been investigated by critics of popular fiction. The affinities between the ghost story and detective fiction are prominent at the turn of the century, sometimes seen as the beginning of a "golden age" for crime writing. Michael Cook has noted the shared Gothic origins of the two genres, their drive towards the explained/the unexplained and their successes in the short story format, arguing that the development of detective fiction is shaped by its uses of the supernatural.[6] Clare Clarke has drawn our attention to the diversity of detective fiction in the era of Sherlock Holmes, arguing that it existed "on the borderline of genre – overlap[ping] with the colonial adventure tale, the ghost story, gothic fiction and the slum novel".[7] It is significant that the characteristics which Clarke identifies as making detective fiction "richly atmospheric" – "gaslight, gentlemen's clubs, hansom cabs, and foggy London streets" – often feature in ghost stories of the same period, suggesting a shared fascination with an urbanised space of secrets, lies and fake identities.[8] The "plucky psychical investigator" with his "open-minded willingness to embrace and accept supernatural phenomena" is a new feature of the late Victorian and Edwardian ghost story;[9] women are also shown taking up this role. The figure of the female occult detective appears in a number of Galbraith's stories, challenging the thinking of male psychic researchers and doctors, and uncovering past crimes.

By addressing the strange and macabre, Galbraith also fits into new categorisations of "women's weird". According to Melissa Edmundson, women's contributions to the weird mode "complicate and expand more traditional notions of the Victorian supernatural".[10] The borders between the "ghost story" and the "weird story" frequently break down, as women's innovations within the strange and macabre story push at genre boundaries.[11] Whilst she wrote traditional haunted house narratives, Galbraith also prefigured some of the conventions of the Edwardian supernatural, presenting the ghosts of the recently dead rather than ancestral apparitions, making ghost-seeing a collective experience and deploying contemporary settings. She also drew on the contemporary fascination with the occult, magic and mysticism. As Alex Owen has argued in *The Place of Enchantment* (2004), occultism became bound up with and helped to shape "the ambiguities of the modern": mysticism and the "mystical revival" were "one of the most remarked trends of the [1890s]: the widespread emergence of a new esoteric spirituality and a proliferation of spiritual groups and identities that together constituted what contemporaries called the new 'spiritual movement of the age'".[12] *Fin-de-siècle* occultism, with its "glittering appeal," reinvigorated the fascination with the strange and the arcane, with rituals and practices which seemed to extend beyond the limits of science, even as it "allied itself with the idea of scientific validation",[13] all of which took the ghost story in new directions.

This article explores representations of the supernatural and the strange in three of Lettice Galbraith's ghost stories: "In the Séance Room," and "The Missing Model" from *New Ghost Stories* and her late story "The Blue Room." Her "genre-blending" can be understood in relation to shifting conceptualisations of the supernatural as the ghost story borrows elements from other modes such as crime fiction and the weird. I argue that 1890s occultism impacted on her work in the form of a reconsideration of female agency in relation to questions of will, psychic knowledge and the "magnetic" power of hypnotism. In the first two stories, the terrifying spirits are "forsaken" women subject to criminal violence, who return to protest against male objectification of women. With its female occult detective, "The Blue Room" shows a woman using her psychic knowledge to lay to rest the female ancestor preyed upon by a malevolent incubus. By fictionalising séance scenes and addressing women's involvement in black magic, Galbraith also looked forward to developments in the Edwardian supernatural with its increased fascination with spiritualism and sorcery.

Spiritualism and the Occult Revival at the *fin de siècle*

Contemporary debates about spiritualism, hypnotism and the *fin-de-siècle* revival of the occult are a useful framework for Galbraith's fascination

with the spectral return of forsaken women and their lost stories. Christine Ferguson has defined the occult revival in terms of

> a flourishing of popular interest, if not necessarily widespread belief, in forms of knowledge considered to lie beyond the fold of scientific rationalism or contemporary Judeo-Christian orthodoxy, including magic, mesmerism, spirit communication, alchemy, astrology, ancient or non-Western religions, palmistry and reincarnation

and more.[14] The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 by Russian spiritualist Madame Helena Blavatsky, helped to popularise discussions of Eastern religions, astral projection, reincarnation and life after death. Blavatsky arrived in London in 1887, at a time when spiritualism and the occult "had the potential to mask more radical feminist desires" in the era of the New Woman and the challenge to the out-dated ideology of gendered separate spheres.[15] As a 1904 article on Blavatsky published after her death proclaimed, "the tendency to cultivate the esoteric" and to embrace the "magic arts" was paradoxically prominent in modern society, evident in "crystal-gazing, reading in magic mirrors, slate-writing, planchette, the quasi-scientific study of apparitions, of table-turning, of rappings by unseen powers, of telepathy, of the subliminal self, etc."[16] Magic and modernity were very much intertwined.

The uneasy intersection between spiritualist communication and scientific enquiry infuses *fin-de-siècle* understandings of the supernatural. This can partly be traced back to the influential Society for Psychical Research, established in 1882, which concerned itself with investigation of paranormal and psychic phenomena. In her consideration of literature, technology and magical thinking between 1880 and 1920, Pamela Thurschwell has argued that:

> occult ways of imagining cultural transmission and communication, which organizations such as the SPR are attempting to make scientifically plausible, are used by … writers … to create phantasmatic spaces in which they redefine intimate, sexual, familial and national ties between people against the usual patriarchal models of inheritance and community via marriage and the nuclear family.[17]

Phantasmatic spaces, such as the séance room or hypnosis chamber, reimagined communication channels, often allowing spectral women to tell or elicit stories without direct speech in *fin-de-siècle* ghost stories, whilst mimicking new technologies that shifted the dynamics of exchange. The SPR's research on telepathy (often aligned at this time with other communication forms such as telegraphy and the telephone) suggested that, "the existence of telepathy was taken for granted and became a basis for 'scientifically' explaining the spiritualist claims of contact with the dead".[18] Blavatsky would go on to publish her own collection of strange stories, *Nightmare Tales* (1892) which included tales of psychic magic,

horrific revenants and haunted instruments. One of the best stories in this collection, "An Ensouled Violin", shows how magic and mesmerism might lead to a fear of the unknown limits of artistic expression, as the haunted violin is possessed by the spirit of the dead teacher. The theatre audience listening "spell-bound" to the "extraordinary diabolical power" of the German musician Franz behave as if they are mesmerised by sound.[19] They experience a "collective hallucination", and are "enchanted", "panting for breath, ghastly, and trickling with the icy perspiration of an inexpressible horror … unable to break the spell of the music by the slightest motion", paralysed with rapture tinged with horror at his supernatural talent.[20] If, as the 1904 article on Blavatsky's work suggested, "the remarkable revival of occult arts in this age of ours is a source of wonder to scientific men … [as well as] a reaction against the rampant materialism of the times,"[21] then the ghost story clearly depicted the wonder, enchantment and horror of pursuing magical powers to their limits.

Despite the widespread appeal of spiritualism and the popularity of séances around the turn of the century and in the war years, as Helen Sword has documented,[22] short stories about séances seem quite rare, though the medium remained a significant cultural and fictional figure. Alex Owen has noted the ways in which the medium was subject to scientific scrutiny and accusations of inauthenticity, yet in séances led by women "the acceptance of female mediumship also hinged upon an acknowledgement of women's spiritual authority".[23] Arthur Conan Doyle's "Playing with Fire" (1900) and Agatha Christie's "The Last Séance" (1923) both represent mediums communicating with spirits in a middle-class drawing room, though it is Christie's story which shows the exhausted medium drained of energy by her customer's demands. May Sinclair's "The Flaw in the Crystal" (1912), later collected in *Uncanny Stories* (1923) centres on a clairvoyant medium figure, who has "whatever it was, the power, the uncanny, unaccountable Gift" that enables her to commune with and protect the living rather than the dead.[24] Agatha Verrall thinks in terms of "draw[ing] her circle" around herself and her married lover Rodney Lanyon, in order to keep them "supernaturally safe".[25] Although she fears that without restraint the working of her gift could be "horrible,", "the last treachery, the last indecency", she also senses that she can preserve the holy, "clean" aspects of her power by working her gift "sacredly" to improve his failing health.[26] According to Tatiana Kontou, neo-Victorian fiction often "refuse [s] a clear-cut distinction between spiritualism as fraud or trickery and spiritualism as occult intervention", with a focus on "the thrilling and unsettling ambiguity of the séance – the darkened room; the long shadows; the interplay between desire, fantasy and reality; the construction of an imaginative space between the medium, the spirits and the sitters".[27] The ambiguities of spiritualism, and the interest in mediums' uses of their potentially

"indecent" gifts before an audience, offered alternative ways of conceiving of women's spiritual authority.

Hypnotism and the séance: "In the Séance Room"

Galbraith's story "In the Séance Room" illustrates the prevalent view of feminist historians that "actions that would have been considered outrageous 'in the ordinary world' were normalized in the séance room."[28] For Galbraith, to inhabit the darkened room is to confront the spirits of those resisting speechlessness in the face of male control. Margree's argument that "women's ghost stories repeatedly stage scenarios of women's silencing and exclusion"[29] is relevant to the behaviour of mediums and female spirits in the séance room, who often remain silent whilst performing their desire for male submission. Eyes are a prominent symbol in Galbraith's fiction, linked to the bid for hypnotic power, with the spectral woman's capacity to look back at her male tormentors a recurring trope. The Svengali-like hypnotizing villain may be a staple of *fin-de-siècle* fantasy and horror literature,[30] yet hypnosis was also used by women as a defiant, transgressive act. The mesmeric healer Chandos Leigh Hunt, a British medium with Theosophical leanings, known for her mesmeric performances and publications on magnetism in the 1870s and 1880s, identified the "great powers of mental concentration" required for the "piercing" and powerful "Magnetic Gaze."[31] The spectral use of the gaze in Galbraith's ghost stories, magnetizing and terrifying, symbolises a subversion of responses to female sexuality and the objectifying male gaze.

Addressing "the dangers of hypnotism, telepathy, and the potentially harmful powers wielded by medical and psychical professionals,"[32] the story presents the haunting of ambitious doctor and "strong magnetiser" Valentine Burke. A member of the Society for the Revival of Eastern Mysticism who "offered no objection to semi-private exhibitions of his powers", Burke's experiments with "the disintegration of matter and cerebral precipitation" in many drawing-rooms are jokingly referred to as a substitute for telegraphic communication, showing the connections between science, spiritualism and technology typical of the era.[33] The doctor's career progression and marriage to the wealthy Elma Lang are in jeopardy due to the scandal of his past affair with the possibly pregnant Kitty Greaves. In the opening of the story Kitty appears in the glow of the street lamp outside Burke's home, petitioning him to keep her "safe". The spurned woman operates as a ghostly presence, "practically dead" due to her loss of social position but also physically ailing, "a wreck of womanhood", "an unconscious form", "a spoiled, ruined thing" to be thrown carelessly on the doctor's sofa: "With her dishevelled hair and rain-soaked garments, she had all the appearance of a dead body".[34] She stumbles over the threshold into his home, manifesting the threat of his medical career being "darkened by poverty and disgrace".[35]

Whilst recognising the power of "the man of science",[36] Galbraith's stories mock and belittle this figure, suggesting that the educated professional man who professes his interest in psychical research or the occult may use his knowledge for violent purposes. Valentine's final suicide mirrors but only partially atones for the disappearing woman, "outcast" from society.

Hypnosis is a signifier of devious masculine evil in the story, though women's adoption of hypnotic strategies offers a counterpoint to the usual gendering of this practice. In late-Victorian fiction, argues Susan Pozner, hypnosis is not usually represented directly:

> the deliberate occlusion of explicit scenes of mesmerism highlights their daemonic nature and suspenseful threat … since mesmerism is often linked with figurative sexual violation … writers might have considered such scenes of conquest too intimate and delicate to portray.[37]

Rather than occluding violation, Galbraith chooses to represent the male act of hypnosis but only to report the male falling victim to the same control, overturning the tendency of "the mesmeric/hypnotic session to highlight the helplessness and self-alienation of women".[38] Kitty's impending death is signified by her doubling with the woman found drowned in the newspaper report, "Mysterious Disappearance of a Young Lady", who has been wrongly identified as herself. The doctor's "evil smile" is activated by his realisation of this proximity; both women are "suddenly disappeared", "enshrouded in mystery", and Kitty's death could similarly be passed off as a suicide from "a fit of temporary insanity, resulting … from an unfortunate love affair".[39] Male hypnotic control is signalled in the image of their eyes meeting "in that fixed stare – his cold, steady, dominating, hers flinching and striving vainly to withstand the power of the stronger will".[40] Behaving "mechanically", Kitty then acquiesces in her own drowning in Regent's Park, occupying the role of "the 'sensitive' on whom he was experimenting", with the narrator intervening to suggest that the man is "prostitut[ing] his spiritual gift to mean and selfish ends".[41] "Popular interest in hypnotism", argues Thurschwell, "often centred around its relation to criminal activities", which raised questions about female agency also significant in writing about mediums.[42] Kitty's death is head-lined as the "Determined Suicide in Regent's Park", in a story about the bravery of the doctor who tried to save her. In reality, he is traumatised not only by bruising and the symbolic loss of the ring gifted by Elma (which slips off in the water) but by Kitty's death gaze: "He wanted to forget the clutch of those stiffening fingers and the glazed awful stare of the dead eyes through the water".[43] The ending shows the distraught wife appropriating hypnotic powers to extract Kitty's lost story from her sleeping husband. Female hypnosis is not directly represented but is indicated in Elma's letter justifying her actions, "Was I to blame if I used against you a power which you yourself had taught me?".[44] This tear-stained missive recalls

the tear-stained letter sent by Kitty and burned by Valentine; the plurality of women's communications, the combined uses of their psychic power, are ultimately shown to subdue men into submissiveness.

The séance scene takes place at the house of Madame Delphine, "a medium of extraordinary power", four years after Kitty's death, and at the acme of Burke's career; he is now "an authority on psychic phenomena," an "immense success", assisted by his wife Elma who prepares notes on the séances he attends.[45] Spiritualism is both "triumphant" and related to "alleged frauds" in the story, as "phenomena of the most startling kind had baffled alike the explanations of both scientist and occultist".[46] In order to combat potential fraudulence, the medium is bound in her chair, her power circumscribed. Dismissing his female clients as "hysterical fool[s]" and laughing about his lack of belief, the untrustworthy Burke appears to be playing a part, like the medium. Noting the masculine "cynical skepticism" used for self-advancement, Indu Ohri has argued that Burke's "debased motives limit his ability to wield the supernatural compared with the female characters".[47] According to Ohri, "Galbraith portrays the value in obtaining proof of the supernatural's existence even as she exposes the arrogance and hypocrisy of psychical researchers who claim to exercise rationality in evaluating the occult", with Kitty's ghost challenging assumptions about women's occult powers.[48] But Ohri's argument is primarily concerned with Elma's role as female occult detective, whereas there is more to say about the horrific appearance of Kitty's malevolent spirit and her power within the phantasmatic space.

In the séance chamber, the female spirit takes control, an alternative manifestation of the ways in which the occult "offered a sort of mystical liberation for women".[49] Before the spectacle of the returned murder victim, all of the observers are speechless and terrified, including the guilty doctor/murderer, the suspecting wife/occult detective and the constrained medium:

> His nerve was deserting him, and his eyes roved vacantly round the semi-darkened room, as if in search of something. A sudden silence had fallen on the audience. A cold chill, like a draft of icy air, swept through the *séance* chamber. Mrs Burke shivered from head to foot, and drew closer to her husband. Suddenly the stillness was broken by a shriek of horror. It issued from the lips of the medium, who, like a second Witch of Endor, saw more than she expected, and crouched terror-stricken in the chair to which she was secured by cords adjusted by the test committee. The presence which had appeared before the black curtain was no white-clad denizen of "summer-land", but a woman in dark, clinging garments – a woman with wide-opened, glassy eyes, fixed in an unalterable stony stare …
>
> Of the twenty people who looked upon it, not one had power to move or speak.
>
> Slowly the terrible thing glided forward, hardly touching the ground, one hand outstretched, and on the open palm a small glittering object – a diamond ring![50]

In this scenario, the medium becomes witch-like, an enchantress frightened by what she sees, whilst the apparitional woman in black is aligned with the dark aesthetic of the séance. The drowned spirit with her "clinging garments" also has the fixed stare and glassy eyes, which recall her accusatory death gaze, a rebuke to the abusive hypnotic power previously exercised by Burke. Suggesting links with the weird tradition, the ungendered "terrible thing" is able to pass objects over the border between life and death – the ring symbolising Elma's wealth and the written note accusing the doctor of hypnotising her four years earlier. This spirit follows other "manifestations", including a "white-robed" child, the "dead darling" of a nervous mother, whose "passionate entreaties" had "harrowed" the other listeners.[51] The "terrible thing" is clearly visible to the whole audience; whether this is a "real" spirit as opposed to a fraudulent or hallucinatory response to a grieving mother remains ambiguous. If the séance room calls up the "dead darlings", lost women are more likely to offer accusation than consolation.

Spectral femininity, as Rebecca Munford has argued, underlines the spectralisation of femininity itself, as the spectre and its paradoxical position as seen/unseen, insubstantial/material, may render identity categories such as gender and sexuality similarly "uncertain and undecidable".[52] The "ghastly sight" of the drowned Kitty Greaves is not a consolatory denizen of "summerland" (a spiritualist name for heaven),[53] but an avenging figure warning of male power and deception, whose message is both for the violent husband and the wife also subject to his magnetic control. The fearful proximity of the spirit, with her disturbing gender uncertainty, recalls other revenants in 1890s ghost fiction like E. Nesbit's "From the Dead" from her collection *Grim Tales* (1893). In Nesbit's story the dead wife is also defeminised but horrific in her strangely alluring materiality, "nearer and nearer 'it' came. Now it was close to him. He could feel the deathly dampness of its breath".[54] Galbraith's doctor is rooted to the spot, deprived of agency, subject to the accusatory eyes and publicly shamed. Like the medium who is "half-dead with fright," Burke suffers "agony", like one in a trance: "his eyes were fixed as though he were still confronted by that unearthly presence".[55] The dead woman refuses to "conform to the rules of the séance" as advised by the medium, instead exerting her power across the borderland in order to negate her false identity as "determined suicide".[56] The revelation of Kitty's "horrible tragedy" under hypnosis to his wife shows a further appropriation of male occult knowledge; the woman's lost story can only surface after this power reversal has taken place in the ambiguous séance space.

"The Missing Model", Murder and the Revenant as Magnetiser

Like contemporaries such as Marie Belloc Lowndes, Galbraith capitalised on public fascination with the tropes of crime narratives – the fog, the police-

men on the corner, the sensational newspaper snippets, violence and suppressed scandal – to reinvigorate and "urbanise" the ghost story genre. Clarke has written about 1890s "detective-ghost story hybrid series" in which areas of investigation for initially dubious male detectives include the occult and the spirit world.[57] In "The Missing Model" the returning spirit occupies the artist's studio and the public art gallery, taking the place of another absent model in order to draw attention to her own murder. Once the mistress of a wealthy client and Australian millionaire, Violet Lucas mysteriously disappears before her ghost leads the way to her buried remains, her death presumably orchestrated by the millionaire. Edmundson has interpreted both "The Missing Model" and "In the Séance Room" in relation to "the ghost as vengeful revenant represent[ing] a 'coming back' of hidden secrets, regret, and repressed guilt," where the spectral appearance works directly to reveal the murderer.[58] At a time when London is "stiff with models," their disappearance is both routine and threatening to the men's artistic practices and sharing of women.[59] Opening with a discussion between two male artists Gordon Mayne and Faucit about the problems of "divine" models giving up modelling for marriage, it borrows from 1890s stories of the objectified model as muse. Yet by granting supernatural agency to women, Galbraith ensures that the spirit of the dead model can manoeuvre the men into doing her bidding and rethinking their regressive attitudes. The missing woman, "vanished off the face of the earth," generates a search by detectives and a dragging of the canal;[60] though no clues are found, this again reinforces the suicidal tendencies of the age and the need for men to use their powers of deduction to uncover and "explain" women's lost stories. There is no female occult detective here to take Violet's side. Modelling for "Oenone Forsaken" at the time of her disappearance, the model, like her Greek counterpart, (the first wife of Paris abandoned for Helen of Sparta) appears to be another forsaken woman trapped in a man's world. Yet on her return to the studio, she uses her beauty to acquire a terrifying agency, turning the artist's gaze of adoration into a stare of horror.

The female spirit here is associated with the occult, with an emphasis on her hypnotic eyes as she appropriates the powerful "Magnetic Gaze" of the medium. Mediums sometimes exhibited their mesmeric healing, and performances of "stage hypnotism" by figures known as "magnetisers" remained fashionable in spiritualist circles.[61] Crossing Mayne's threshold from the twilight then "slipp[ing] past him into the darkness", the spectral Violet does not parade her ghostliness;[62] rather, she is an example of what Margree has identified as "ghosts who pass for the living," a common trope in Edwardian ghost stories by writers such as Violet Hunt.[63] With her "powers of endurance", the dead model's ability to pose for long hours borders on the superhuman and strange, so that painting becomes a mystical experience,

"like an introduction into a new and unknown world".[64] Posing as the female figure in a painting called "Avenged", she significantly plays the role of a woman "against a curtained doorway" in the process of "rais[ing] the veil from her face".[65] Always associated with veiling, doorways and the crossing of boundaries, the ghostly Violet also "threw back the veil" on entering the studio, as well as when she appears in the gallery, signalling the unveiling of her story and the "exquisite features" which have precipitated her doom. What is more, like the hypnotiser, her beauty "exercised over him an almost magnetic influence" and she remains "surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery," disappearing when visitors arrive and only disclosing her name and address if they are to be kept secret.[66] This magnetic influence of women over men is also apparent in a later story in the collection, "A Ghost's Revenge," in which Katharine Deverel's spirit lures powerless men towards the scene of their drowning. The heir Jack Chamberlayne "his eyes fixed with an expression of nameless horror on some object, invisible to all but him" is doomed to follow a "ghostly vision" towards the "fatal pond" in the grounds of the ancestral home.[67] However, in this instance, the curses of the witch-like Katharine prove ineffective in the face of the male rescuers. In her stories Galbraith draws on the language of hypnotism to show how the spectral woman can challenge male control but that women's magnetic gaze is limited.

If "occult transmission can be doubly transgressive, disrupting both sense boundaries and traditional codes of behaviour and alliance", as Thurschwell attests,[68] then the spectral appearance overturns the male dominance of the art world. The manifestation of the spirit in the private viewing at the Royal Academy occurs when a female viewer interrupts the male conversation to read out the name of the painting, "Avenged". Visible to only some of the spectating men, "the missing Violet Lucas" has the most terrifying effect on her murderer, the Australian millionaire McCandish, a purchaser of the Oenone painting, and on Mayne, who rushed outside to find her, still believing her to be alive. Faucit counters his disbelief at the vision of the woman in black by remarking, "I do not believe in spiritualism and that sort of thing, but I mean to get to the bottom of this business", urging his friend to communicate with her.[69] The communication is now on the woman's terms, as having released an address only to be used "on urgent necessity", she draws the men to the scene of her own death. The men discover that that the shut-up suburban villa, empty for the past three years, is owned by McCandish under an assumed name and visited only late at night, leading them to suspect that Violet is "concealed about the premises".[70] With the help of a detective, the two artists break into the house and pick the lock into the cellar, discovering "a clue at last", a long silky hair. Digging up the brickwork, they discover "*the perfect skeleton of a woman* … all that remained of the most beautiful model in London – the

girl whose fate had for three years been wrapped in mystery – the original of Deveril's "Oenone", Violet Lucas".[71] As the boundaries between ghost story and detective fiction blur, the group of male detectives follow the clues to "get to the bottom of" female disappearance. In the séance scene of "In the Séance Room", it is significant that Burke hears or hallucinates the accusatory word "Murderer!" spoken by Kitty's revenant, as this connects the ghostly appearance to the resolution of the crime plot.[72] The ending of this story also offers resolution, as if Violet too had pointed to her murderer but seems harder to recoup for a feminist reading. The ghost's magnetic gaze helps to uncover her lost narrative and to validate the power of the female spirit, yet without a female occult detective on her side the "perfect" skeletal remains of Violet Lucas highlight the model's vulnerability to commodification and the true horror of the objectification of women.

"The Blue Room" and Black Magic

Fin-de-siècle best-sellers, Ferguson argues, could be seen to "repurpose[] and popularize[] occult ideas for sensational effect".[73] The publication of texts such as Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) may have inspired further acts of repurposing by women writers. As Nick Freeman has argued, popular black magic narratives in the *fin de siècle*, which explored how supernatural power could be used for wicked or selfish purposes, often presented alluringly charismatic villains, who used their hard-won occult knowledge to summon the "powers of darkness with mysterious rites, rituals and grimoires".[74] Adopting the contemporary settings of "modern" Gothic, they also "shared Gothic's willingness to challenge the belief that an alliance of technology, science and secularism constitutes "progress', and that "new" knowledge matters far more than old".[75] This opens out the possibilities for representations of the ghostly in terms of spirits that could be "called up," rather than appearing of their own accord. Summoning demons with magical rituals is reminiscent of the strangeness of telephonic exchange, the calling up of the dead.

In Galbraith's later story "The Blue Room" (1897), a tale of black magic and occult investigation, women are subject to sexual threat in the blue tapestried bedroom at Mertoun Towers, renowned for its resident ghost. As Annette Lapointe suggests, this "fuses the conventions of the Victorian great-house ghost story with deeper and more magical horrors … a bed which, however newly made, makes itself instantly slept-in proves to be the least disturbing element in that dangerous chamber".[76] The manifestation in this space, as a final footnote to the story coyly explains, is not a ghost but "the *incubus* of the *Malleus Maleficarum*", a devil assuming human shape in order to sexually assault women. Frequently appearing in horror literature, incubi are "male demons that, according to folklore

and legend, engage in sexual intercourse with human beings, draining their life force and, if allowed to continue, eventually destroying them."[77] As in Blavatsky's story of the diabolical violin, the figure of the devil is another common *fin-de-siècle* trope figuring possession and the ancient dangers of sorcery that threaten the modern world.

If "magic is all about power," as Owen claims,[78] then Galbraith's variation on the black magic narrative sets out to overturn power relations between the genders. Like the spirits called up by the medium, the incubus responds to the sorcery of Lady Barbara Mertoun, after tearing a leaf from her father's demonology books. Frightened of being cut off from financial aid if she could not produce an heir from her dying consumptive husband, Lady Barbara had "got desperate and had recourse to black magic".[79] As in a séance, this calling up and participation in "nocturnal rituals"[80] is represented as a draining of female power, resulting here in a shameful early death and her father's "refusal to admit her body to the family vault".[81] The blue room is associated with queerness and the strange; the bedspread becomes weirdly crumpled, its linen marked by a "strange indentation", that "queer crease".[82] In a scene from the 1840s the demure lady's companion Miss Wood is discovered "frozen with terror" lying across the bed "in the very place where that crease had been", killed by the "shock" of sexual outrage.[83] The "strong-minded" Edith Erristoun, a New Woman of the 1890s, is however able to exorcise the demon and marry the master of the house. All of the women who are threatened in the room are sexualised in terms of their abundant hair, and seem at risk because of their lack of nerve, yet their knowledge of "sorcery" can be seen to disturb patriarchal lineage and hierarchies.

The female occult detective gains authority through her esoteric knowledge, not in this instance "employ[ing] modern technology to interrogate and alleviate hauntings," a technique identified by Sarah Bisson.[84] Aligned with the sceptical view that ghosts can be traced to natural causes if "people had courage and science enough to investigate them thoroughly", Edith refuses female nervousness, "if a girl with a sound constitution and good nerve were once to spend the night in that room, your charming family-spectre would be discredited for ever"; "Most of the gentlemen doubted whether any woman's nerve would stand the ordeal".[85] She unconventionally expresses her interest in demonology and the missing page from the demonology text, and brushes off the "chorus of dissent" to her theories and her decision to sleep in the haunted room. However this power is again fragile; when the demon appears, she is unable to remember the spell, and also seems to be partly "sacrificed" to the "whims" of the "odd" Mr Maxwell, a house guest aligned with psychical research who also enjoys "poring over those old books full of queer black characters".[86] Recording the haunting in his notebook, Maxwell muses, "it is almost past belief …

that such a thing could happen at the end of the nineteenth century, in these scientific rationalistic times that we think such a lot about".[87] According to Freeman, women only operate as "innocent dupes and/or *femmes fatales*" in black magic narratives, an argument borne out in his examples by male authors but less so in this female-authored twisted tale.[88] By concentrating on the role of scientifically-aware occult detective for her heroine, Galbraith refashions women's participation in nocturnal rituals without granting them full control over their own actions.

In the supernatural encounters in the blue room, women are unable to protect themselves from the sexually predatory incubus, who exercises a hypnotic power. Positioned in the "dreadful crease", they occupy a paralysed, sacrificial position, unable to tell whether they are dreaming. Miss Wood is discovered with "her little hands clenched in the coverlet on each side of her", whilst Edith's hands are shown "down at her sides, her fingers clutching at the quilt", as if crushed beneath an unassailable force.[89] Evoking a vampire tableau with "a man standing close in front of her", "his eyes sh[ining] like an animal's … in the dark",[90] Edith's reaction evokes hypnotism or "sleep paralysis":

> she had the strangest feeling that she was not herself but someone else, and that she was going to do something – something that must be done, though she was frightened to death all the time … "I felt my will-power failing; I was paralysed, as though I could make no effort to help myself."[91]

In a familiar scenario, the hypnotised figure experiences a loss of power and control, so that actions such as lighting a pastille from a secret box and succumbing to the demon, "that dreadful thing", appear inevitable.[92] "Fictional mesmeric or hypnotic scenes", argues Pozner, often show "the subject's body, mind and possessions [as] vulnerable to appropriation, … depriv [ing] the female subject of "ownership" of her thoughts, feelings, words and actions".[93] This dream-like failure of female will-power, being "not herself", also carries the sense of succumbing to the predatory patriarchal advances of the vampiric/animal-like demon with his shining eyes.

Yet the "bravado" of the university-educated occult detective with her knowledge of demonology is enough to outwit the demon. Significantly, Edith also needs the help of the loyal housekeeper narrator Mrs Marris with her fifty years' experience of deaths in the haunted room who stays up all night to protect the future wife of the Mertoun heir. Identifying the intruder as "a burglar on the premises" to be removed by the police, the housekeeper attests to the materiality of the manifestation, whereas Maxwell laughs at her ignorance.[94] After the haunting scene, the incubi is discussed in terms of esoteric knowledge; on hearing that the demon was in evening dress, Mr Maxwell cites sources which confirm that they often appeared "in the costume of the day," suggesting that "the

manifestation was objective, and presented no striking peculiarity in the way of clothing".[95] By returning to the room and locating the secret panel, Edith and Maxwell discover the missing page and piece together the lost story of Lady Barbara's sinful "meddling with sorcery".[96] Whilst daring to open her father's demonology collection is seen as "one woman's reckless folly", by the 1890s the brave "occult detective," armed with her greater knowledge, is able to break the spell of the Blue Room.[97] Ohri has argued that Galbraith finds "the gender roles of the male psychical researcher and the female occult investigator … inadequate for different reasons",[98] though heterosexual marriage is more of a solution to a threatening female occultism in this story than the hiding-place for male deception it becomes at the end of "In the Séance Room". Coupling female bravery with "pure-minded[ness]", Edith's husband-to-be strikes a more discordant note by referring to the "nasty story" of the past and the potentially tarnished "name of a dead woman" to be purified by his casting the papers and pastilles into the fire.[99] The strange ending, with the housekeeper's failure to remember the word "incubus" before it is explicitly added in a scholarly footnote seemingly in the voice of Mr Maxwell, also casts doubt on women's understanding of the occult, leaving ambiguous who has actually achieved the exorcism.

Conclusion

Borrowing from the crime narrative with its mysteries, clues and fake identities, Lettice Galbraith refashioned the Victorian ghost story to hold men accountable for their deception and violence, bringing vanished lower-class women back from the dead for revelation rather than consolation. The séance room and the art gallery admit the excluded woman who silently petitions for her lost story to be told, whilst the Blue Room contains the secret of the desperate woman who dared to summon a demon. In the stories "In the Séance Room" and "The Missing Model" the wronged woman, abandoned, mistreated and objectified, returns as a terrifying spirit, who manifests in public places to shame professional men. "The "new" occultism," according to Owen, "was itself a mode of experiencing the new,"[100] and by addressing women's responses to séances, hypnotism and magic, Galbraith was clearly exploring how modern women participated in occult experiences and practices. In acts of appropriation of magnetic power, or resistance to loss of control under hypnotism, the women of her ghost stories challenged male esoteric and scientific knowledge. In their representations of séance scenes, black magic and the collective experience of the ghostly in contemporary settings, Galbraith's ghost stories also anticipate new developments in the Edwardian supernatural.

Notes

1. Alistair G. Gunn, "Introduction," in *The Blue Room and other Tales: The Ghost Stories of Lettice Galbraith* ed. A.G. Gunn, (Wimbourne: Wimbourne Books, 2022), 5.
2. Lettice Galbraith, *The Blue Room and other Ghost Stories* ed. Richard Dalby (Wales: Sarob Press, 1999), x. Dalby writes that *New Ghost Stories* was published as a sixpenny paperback in 1893, running through three best-selling editions in a five-year-period. Melissa Edmundson provides limited biographical information in her recent anthology *Women's Weird 2*: *Strange Stories by Women, 1890–1937* (Bath: Handheld Press, 2020), xi.
3. See Edmundson, *Women's Weird 2,* which includes "The Blue Room" and Mike Ashley, *Queens of the Abyss* (London: British Library, 2020), which reprints "In the Séance Room".
4. Victoria Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction, 1860–1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019), 19.
5. Lizzie Harris McCormick, Jennifer Mitchell and Rebecca Soares, "Introduction," to *The Female Fantastic: Gendering the Supernatural in the 1890s and 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2019), xxiv.
6. Michael Cook, *Detective Fiction and the Ghost Story: The Haunted Text* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 8, 12.
7. Clare Clarke, *British Detective Fiction*, *1891-1901: The Successors to Sherlock Holmes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2020), 7. See also Ruth Heholt, *Catherine Crowe: Gender, Genre and Radical Politics* (London: Routledge, 2021), in which she considers the genre-bending of Catherine Crowe, author of *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), another popular nineteenth-century woman writer, whose fiction blends elements from crime fiction, domestic realism, the social problem novel, Gothic and sensation fiction.
8. Clarke, *British Detective Fiction*, 10.
9. Sarah Bisson, "The Ghost Story and Science," in *The Routledge Handbook to the Ghost Story* eds. Scott Brewster and Luke Thurston (London: Routledge, 2018), 43.
10. Edmundson, Introduction to *Women's Weird 2*, x. Mike Ashley suggests that "women writers continued to experiment and develop the weird tale from … its thriving Victorian heyday into the twentieth century". See Ashley, *Queens of the Abyss*, 7.
11. Edmundson, *Women's Weird 2*, xiv.
12. Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.
13. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 8.
14. Christine Ferguson, "Introduction", *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875–1947* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018), 1.
15. McCormick, Mitchell and Soares, "Introduction," to *The Female Fantastic*, xxix.
16. Henry Ridgely Evans, "Madame Blavatsky", *The Monist* 14:3 (1904), 387–408 (387). Evidence is apparent in the contemporary advertising columns of American newspapers boasting long lists of "clairvoyants, magic healers, magnetizers, palmists, astrologers, and spirit mediums".
17. Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking,* 2.
18. Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, 41.

19. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Ensouled Violin," in *Nightmare Tales* (1892; California: Aryan Theosophical Press, 1907), 135–138.
20. Ibid, 135–6, 138.
21. Evans, "Madame Blavatsky", 387.
22. Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 2–4.
23. Owen, *Darkened Room*, 6.
24. May Sinclair, "The Flaw in the Crystal," in *Uncanny Stories* ed. Paul March-Russell (Ware: Wordsworth Press, 2006), 60.
25. Ibid, 67.
26. Ibid, 67.
27. Tatiana Kontou, *Spiritualism and women's writing: from the fin de siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 7.
28. Kontou, *Spiritualism and women's writing*, 8.
29. Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*, 15.
30. Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, 9.
31. Owen, *Darkened Room*, 128.
32. Bisson, "The Ghost Story and Science," 43.
33. Galbraith, "In the Séance Room," in Louisa Baldwin and Lettice Galbraith, *The Shadow on the Blind and other Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2007), 189. All quotations from Galbraith's stories are taken from this edition.
34. Galbraith, "In the Séance Room," 191–193.
35. Ibid, 192.
36. Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall, "*Fin-de-Siècle* Gothic," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Victorian Gothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 217–33 (220).
37. Susan Pozner, "Whose Body? The "Willing" or "unwilling" mesmerized woman in late Victorian fiction", *Women's Writing*, 15:3 (2008), 412–435 (427–8).
38. Pozner, "Whose Body?" 429.
39. Galbraith, "In the Séance Room," 193–191.
40. Ibid, 194.
41. Ibid.
42. Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, 42.
43. Galbraith, "In the Séance Room," 196.
44. Ibid, 202.
45. Ibid, 196.
46. Ibid.
47. Indu Ohri, ""A Medium made of such uncommon stuff": The Female Occult Investigator in Victorian Women's *Fin-de-Siècle* Fiction", *Preternature* 8:2 (2019), 254–82 (271).
48. Ohri, "A Medium", 272–273.
49. McCormick, Mitchell and Soares, "Introduction," xxx.
50. Galbraith, "In the Séance Room," 199.
51. Ibid, 198.
52. Rebecca Munford, "Spectral Femininity," in *Women and the Gothic* eds. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 121.
53. Owen, *Darkened Room*, 27.
54. Edith Nesbit, "From the Dead," in *The Power of Darkness: Tales of Terror* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006), 200.

55. Galbraith, "In the Séance Room," 200.
56. Ibid, 197.
57. Clarke, *British Detective Fiction*, 10.
58. Melissa Edmundson, "Women writers and ghost stories," in *The Routledge Handbook to the Ghost Story*, 73.
59. Galbraith, "The Missing Model," 205.
60. Ibid, 206.
61. Owen, *Darkened Room*, 125;
62. Ibid, 208.
63. Margree, *British Short Supernatural Fiction*, 172.
64. Galbraith, "The Missing Model," 209.
65. Ibid, 207.
66. Ibid, 211, 209.
67. Galbraith, "A Ghost's Revenge," 233.
68. Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, 2.
69. Galbraith, "The Missing Model," 213.
70. Ibid, 213, 216.
71. Ibid, 217, 218.
72. Galbraith, "In the Séance Room," 200.
73. Ferguson, "Introduction," 5. Referring here specifically to the writing of Marie Corelli and novels such as *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886), she argues that the reception of some of these popular texts demonstrated a "low estimation of the occult's artistic value" (6).
74. Nick Freeman, "The Black Magic Bogeyman, 1908–1935," in Christine Ferguson and Andrew Radford (eds.) *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875–1947* (Routledge, 2018), 94–109 (94).
75. Freeman, "Black Magic Bogeyman," 95.
76. Annette Lapointe, Review of Melissa Edmundson (ed.), *Women's Weird 2: More Strange Stories by Women, 1891-1937*, *New York Journal of Books* (2021), https://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/womens-weird-2 [Accessed 21.6.21]
77. Michael Siefener and Matt Cardin, "Incubi and Succubi", *Horror Literature through History: An Encyclopaedia of the Stories that Speak to our Darkest Fears* ed. Matt Cardin (Denver: Greenwood, 2017), 465.
78. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 4.
79. Galbraith, "The Blue Room," 256.
80. Freeman, "Black Magic Bogeyman," 97.
81. Galbraith, "The Blue Room," 256.
82. Galbraith, "The Blue Room," 243.
83. Ibid.
84. Bisson, "The Ghost Story and Science," 43.
85. Galbraith, "The Blue Room," 245, 246.
86. Ibid, 253, 254, 245.
87. Ibid, 253.
88. Freeman, "Black Magic Bogeyman," 94.
89. Galbraith, "The Blue Room," 243, 250.
90. Ibid, 250.
91. Ibid, 252, 253.
92. Ibid, 254.
93. Pozner, "Whose Body?" 413.

94. Galbraith, "The Blue Room," 253.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid, 256.
97. Ibid, 254.
98. Ohri, "A Medium," 276.
99. Galbraith, "The Blue Room," 256.
100. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 9.

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