

**‘Transportation is physical, communication is psychological’:  
Female Sexuality and Modes of Communication in Nineteenth-  
Century Transatlantic Literature**

**Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
Department of English  
University of Lancaster**

**September, 2014**

**Mohammed Hamdan, M.A.**

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**Abstract**

This thesis connects the discourses of transatlanticism, erotic communication, women and agency in the nineteenth century. It examines four modes of communication: mesmerism, spiritualism, telegraphism and epistolary correspondence, in relation to discourses of female sexuality and power in Anglo-American literature. The exploration of these modes from a feminist point of view will help re-evaluate the presence of women within nineteenth-century transatlantic communication systems and specifically the representation of female voices within public spaces. The Industrial Revolution and the increase of transportation between Britain and America enabled the emergence of various forms of psychic and written communication that constituted a solid background for gender subversion.

Women's active participation in mesmerism and spiritualism, which prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1830s and late 1840s, was a significant cultural subject that opened the door for unconventional reinterpretations of gender roles within clairvoyant systems of mediation. The description of women's performative acts during mesmeric and spiritualist practices in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), Florence Marryat's *There Is No Death* (1891) and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Three Spiritualist Novels* (1868; 1883; 1887) subverts the gendering of communication and discourse as masculine. Bodily acts of mesmerised women such as gazing and female mediums' acoustic contact with spirits through the sound effects of table-rapping violate the boundaries between domestic and social spheres and warrant their sexual autonomy.

Moving from supernatural to embodied forms of communication, the thesis explores the place of Anglo-American women within nineteenth-century written correspondence such as telegrams and letters, the circulation of which helps acknowledge female desire outside the domestic space and subverts patriarchal spatial structures. With reference to Henry James's *In the Cage* (1898), Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) and Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Purloined Letter' (1844), the thesis shows how women act as conduits of their sexual desire and become agents of knowledge exchange via working at telegraph offices or simply writing and posting private letters. In relation to this, the thesis also considers the association between epistolary adestation, desire, flames and textual purity in Dickens and Poe's fictions of fire. The thesis concludes that women's interactive presence in nineteenth-century communication systems continues to influence and develop twentieth- and twenty-first-century media for the empowerment of feminine sexual expression against opposing patriarchal voices.

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere

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**To my Parents**

## Introduction

### **‘Transportation is physical, communication is psychological’:<sup>1</sup> Female Sexuality and Modes of Communication in Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Literature**

Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth, and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition.

(David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1740)<sup>2</sup>

This thesis is a study of the relationship between communication and sexuality in nineteenth-century transatlantic literature. It explores four main modes of communication – mesmerism, spiritualism, telegraphism and epistolarity – with particular emphasis on female sexuality. Hume (1711-1776) asserts the centrality of communication in the exchange of human emotional states. ‘Love’ and ‘passions’, for example, are effectively revealed in the acts of communication that tie people with feelings and constitute a concrete house of desire. Hume’s observation of the emotional potential of communication is typified by the technological and social developments of the Industrial Revolution. The quick advances of the nineteenth century opened the door for women to interrogate social boundaries and demonstrate sexual liberation through communicative practices. This change, however, was not restricted to one part of the world; it covered a larger geographical scope across the Atlantic waters, and presented Britain and America as two growing nations in conversation. The thesis thus sheds light on the sexual and discursive exchange of information within a wider context of transatlanticism. Inspired by psychoanalysis, feminism and deconstructive theories, I add to the extensive field of Anglo-

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *The Theory of Transportation* (Baltimore: American Economics Association, 1894), p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3 vols, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 2. 294.



American comparative literary studies a thesis which specifically examines erotic communication in nineteenth-century transatlantic literature.<sup>3</sup>

Going further back in time, we see Plato's (427 BC – 347 BC) link between eroticism and the rhetoric of communication: Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus* (370 BC) is 'sick with passion for hearing speeches', he boldly tells Phaedrus.<sup>4</sup> One of these speeches redelivered by Phaedrus – originally delivered by Lysias, an actor in absentia – is on erotic love, and Socrates's passion for Lysias's knowledge of eroticism comes in close association with lust for the rhetoric of speeches, communication or the delivery of discourse. Even though Plato's *Phaedrus* implies homosexuality mediated through a powerful discourse of knowledge, it suggests that transmission itself is the rhetorical concern of the text and the body of Lysias's desire. Many centuries later, St. Augustine (354 AD – 430 AD) like his predecessor was fascinated by the intricacies of linguistic networks and transmission of the sign. His *De Magistro* ('The Teacher', 389 AD) thoroughly explores linguistic signs, meaning and dialogue. Yet it is in *On Greatness of the Soul* (388 AD), I believe, that Augustine presents an intellectual theory of communication that divides the word into sound and meaning; the former being connected to ears, bodies and thus desire while the latter to the mind and soul.<sup>5</sup> The representation of communication as dialectical between minds and bodies, its intricate structure and internal process are presented much later in the work of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Francis Bacon (1561-1626), whose

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will interchangeably be using England, Britain or Anglo- to refer to Britain itself as one geographical unit, in correspondence with North America as the other geographical unit.

<sup>4</sup> See 'Introduction', in Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), p. x.

<sup>5</sup> Gerard Watson, 'St. Augustine's Theory of Language', *The Maynooth Review / Revieú Mhá Nuad*, 6: 2 (1982), 4-20 (p. 13). On the framework of Augustine's theory on communication, see Peters, pp. 63-74. Peters refers to Paul A. Soukup's paper presented at the Speech Communication Association in Chicago, 'Thinking, Talking, and Trinitarian Theology: From Augustine to Aquinas on Communication', in which he argues that Augustine's belief in the passive, vessel-like function of the linguistic sign as a unit of communication makes him the originator of the term "medium", a concept that prevailed in late-Victorian spiritualist séances, p. 69.

theoretical premise of communication focuses on the dissemination of ‘stimuli’ between body and mind by all means of ‘animal spirits’.<sup>6</sup> Bacon’s theory represents a seventeenth-century tendency to immaterialise communication; to make acts of transmission function in harmony with laws of distance. The seventeenth century witnessed a shift towards the adoption of psychological communication of bodies at-a-distance, or the method by which far-off separated bodies correspond to each other through space.<sup>7</sup> John Locke (1632-1704) also helped transform the corporeal sense of ‘communication’ into a mental one to imply ‘the sharing of ideas between people’.<sup>8</sup> In the eighteenth century, communication thus reached a state of idealism in which words acted as ““conduits”” or ““pipes”” that clustered in service of communication as the ideal end of language.<sup>9</sup> With the dawn of the nineteenth century, however, the question of communication reached a critical apogee, especially at a time when mesmerism, spiritualism, telegraphism and even telephony were at high tide. Modern theoretical and fictional views, on the other hand, have also emphasised the spectral and veiled/failed structures of communication. Whilst Jacques Derrida links it to spectrality,<sup>10</sup> Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, T. S. Eliot show how communication becomes a blockage of interaction, a breakdown of language sometimes connected to sexual failure.

On the back of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, the Age of Invention, methods of communication developed; it is in this century that ““communication”” first took its

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<sup>6</sup> See Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 88-89.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Action at a distance’ was the common question of seventeenth-century natural philosophy; see Mary B. Hesse, *Forces and Fields: The Concept of Action at a Distance in the History of Physics* (London, New York: Nelson, 1961).

<sup>8</sup> John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 80. I am very grateful to Peters for his engaging historical and literary survey of the idea of communication.

<sup>9</sup> See Christopher Gauker, ‘The Lockean Theory of Communication’, *Noûs*, 26: 3 (1992), 303-324 (p. 304).

<sup>10</sup> On Derrida’s link between communication and spectrality, see Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

current shape', argues Peters.<sup>11</sup> Mesmerism, which was originally born in 1774 with Franz Anton Mesmer's (1734-1815) first mesmeric treatment of the blind young woman Maria-Theresa Von Paradise, soon manifested itself in the European and American scientific beliefs that human bodies can be governed by invisible forms of magnetism. Nineteenth-century British and American literatures exhibited a fascination with the notion of floating fluids that facilitate the communication of bodies through natural senses such as gazes or touching. Soon, this mode of communication became a vehicle for the social interrogation of gender issues, a fictional prototype drawing on female objectivity fantastically represented in the works of Anglo-American authors, particularly Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) and Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864). The advancement of mesmerism in the nineteenth-century on both sides of the Atlantic helped reshape transatlantic relationships between Britain and America, especially after the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) in which American colonies gained independence and were no longer run by the British authorities. Not long after mesmerism, spiritualism came into existence as another form of communication hugely based on Mesmer's and Emanuel Swedenborg's (1688-1772) theories of magnetic fluidity. Though it first appeared in America in 1848 at the hands of the sisters Kate and Margaret Fox, it quickly spread across the Atlantic into Europe. The communication with the dead, as spiritualism simply came to be defined, offered within transatlantic literary texts another opportunity for 'gender subversion'.<sup>12</sup> Whereas the British novelist and spiritualist Florence Marryat (1833-1899) toured America and attended spiritualist séances, American female writers such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844-1911) presented an outstanding spiritualist fiction that calls for sexual radicalism and social reform.

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<sup>11</sup> Peters, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> On various spiritualism-related topics, especially women's role in séances, see Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012).

Both authors and their spiritualist works, which will be examined in the second chapter, were assets to both Anglo-American developing relationships and gender emancipation.

It was not until the introduction of telegraphism that ‘transatlanticism’ took a different angle:<sup>13</sup> Anglo-American connections became wider with the laying of the first cable that intended to connect Europe with America.<sup>14</sup> The widespread nature of nineteenth-century communication networks meant the increase of sexual liberation and cultural openness, but also the danger of miscommunication and interception, a common theme we find in Henry James’s (1843-1916) *In the Cage* (1898) and *The Ambassadors* (1903), which will be tackled in the third chapter of this thesis. Intercepted communication is a distinct theme in nineteenth-century literature, and has been a challenge for Victorian writers and modern critics such as Derrida and Jacques Lacan whose commentary on Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809-1849) ‘The Purloined Letter’ (1844) constitutes a turning point in the theoretical reading of epistolary ‘adestination’ or non-delivery.<sup>15</sup> The final chapter splits into two mini-chapters; the first dealing with epistles, women’s sexuality and adestination, the second focuses on textual purity, death by fire and the annihilation of communication in some of Charles Dickens’s (1812-1870) and Poe’s literary texts.

This introduction explores communication and sexuality within nineteenth-century transatlantic literature in three main sections which focus on the key elements of the thesis’s

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<sup>13</sup> The term ‘transatlanticism’ has come into common use following the new increasing interest in Anglo-American historical and literary studies. See, for example, Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, eds., *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Menke argues that whilst the project of connecting America and Europe by ‘underwater’ telegraph cables was processed on paper, the on-land telegraphic communication ‘was already begun’, in Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Adestination’ and ‘destinerrance’ are two alternative terms used in Derrida’s *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) in connection with ‘the deconstruction of communication’, see John Protevi, ed., *A Dictionary in Continental Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 8; J. Hillis Miller, ‘Derrida’s Destinerrance’, *MLN*, 121: 4 (2006), 893-910.

title.<sup>16</sup> The introduction filters down to the level of the historical and literary representation of nineteenth-century Anglo-American ties, the textual manifestation of various sexual modes of communication in some British literary works set in parallel with their American counterparts and finally the theoretical framework that is employed throughout the chapters. I shall begin by looking into the ‘‘Transoceanic’ Relationships: Britain, America and Literary Textual Exchanges, 1830-1903’’, and will lay out a brief history of comparative literature and Anglo-American physical and literary correspondence from 1830 to 1903. The second section will throw light on ‘Modes of Sexual Communication in Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Literary Writing’’, and here I shall survey mesmerism, spiritualism, telegraphism and epistolarity and link them to female sexuality. I shall also position myself in distinction to previous research within the field of transatlanticism. Finally, I will consider the methodological/theoretical fabric of the entire thesis: the section will outline the major theories used throughout the whole thesis and show awareness of other theoretical contributions on nineteenth-century literature, followed by a brief introduction to the particular debate of each chapter.

### **‘Transoceanic’<sup>17</sup> Relationships: Britain, America and Literary Textual Exchanges, 1830-1903**

I am still haunted by visions of America, night and day.

(Charles Dickens, *Letters*, 1841)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Throughout the thesis, I use the term and discourse of sexuality to enable discussion of women’s desire; however, I sometimes use eroticism to emphasise the physical aspect of sexual contact within the text being analysed.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Transoceanic’ is a modern term that refers to transnational relations and implies the over-crossing of Atlantic waters. It is employed by some critics such as Véronique Bragard, *Transoceanic Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures* (Brussels: P.I.E Peter Lang, 2008), p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> In 1841, one year before Dickens embarked on his first journey to America, he wrote these words in a letter to his friend John Forster; in Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 12 vols, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 2. 380.

My ancestor left England in 1635. I return in 1853. I sometimes feel as if  
I myself had been absent these two hundred and eighteen years.

(Nathaniel Hawthorne, *English Notebooks*, 1854)<sup>19</sup>

‘We are all Atlanticists now’,<sup>20</sup> states David Armitage in his article on the Atlantic history and transatlantic relations, the study of which, according to Lawrence Buell, has recently become ‘like boom times’.<sup>21</sup> Transatlantic dialogues in the writings of various British and American writers such as Dickens and Hawthorne reveal a process of cultural and literary transformation beginning to take shape especially during the mid nineteenth-century, an era characterised by the increase and ease of travel across the Atlantic waters. Bridget Bennett, a distinguished scholar in the field of transatlanticism, argues that ‘to think transatlantically involves investigating the possibilities of travel in the nineteenth century’.<sup>22</sup> It is through travel writing that the Anglo-American ‘physical contact’ comes to light. Through the journeying of writers such as Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Mark Twain – to name but a few – in England, Americans sought a definition for their own national and literary identities. These writers’ speculations on ‘what it meant to be English’ was, on the other hand, aligned with their English counterparts’

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<sup>19</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, entry of October 9, 1854, in *The English Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Randall Stewart (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1941), p. 92. I am grateful to Benjamin Lease for this fantastic reference, in *Anglo-American Encounters: England and the Rise of American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> David Armitage, ‘Three Concepts of Atlantic History’, in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 11-31 (p. 11).

<sup>21</sup> See Lawrence Buell, ‘Rethinking Anglo-American Literary History’, *Clio*, 33: 1 (2003), 65-72 (p. 66). The phrase ‘boom times’ is originally taken from Richard Gravil, *Romantic Dialogue: Anglo-American Continuities, 1776-1862* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. xx.

<sup>22</sup> Bridget Bennett, ‘Crossing Over: Spiritualism and the Atlantic Divide’, in *Special Relationships: Anglo-American Affinities and Antagonisms 1854-1936*, eds., Janet Beer and Bridget Bennett (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 89-110 (p. 92). Other works on transatlantic travel writing include: Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Chris Rojek and James Urry, eds., *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997); Erik S. Schmeller, *Perceptions of Race and Nation in English and American Travel Writers, 1833-1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

speculation on what it meant to be American.<sup>23</sup> The two quotations above illustrate Dickens's and Hawthorne's strong propensities for crossing, discovery and spatial or geographical definition. Whilst the former toured in America twice in 1842 and 1868, the latter worked as the American consul in Liverpool in 1853 until he retired from this position in 1857. Both writers left rich notes on their experiences of the other land beyond the sea; Dickens criticised America in his first visit, calling it 'rural', 'rank', 'rough' and 'wild' in *American Notes* (1842), a book whose descriptive notes of American life and culture slam the door in the faces of American readers.<sup>24</sup> In Hawthorne's case, he not only published *The English Notebooks* but also wrote 'Our Old Home' (1863) in which he fantasised about his English heritage and genealogical line. These works, however, unfold a Hawthornian sense of alienation in the land of English forefathers: even though Hawthorne called Britain an 'Old Home', Henry James argues that Hawthorne was affected by an ambivalent feeling of outsidership or alienation that also characterised some of his works,<sup>25</sup> especially later ones that are set in Europe such as *The Marble Faun* (1860).

Transatlanticism entails a process of consistent communication and mutual dialogues. Referring to Hans Robert Jauss, a German philosopher whose work on reader-response theory and French literature was held influential in the past few decades, Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, whose research on transatlantic literary influence has been a great addition to the field, emphasise the suggestion that literature should be re-valued on the basis of "dialogue as well as

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<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Clark, *The American Idea of England, 1776-1840: Transatlantic Writing* (Burlington, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), p. 137, 147.

<sup>24</sup> Dickens, *American Notes* (1842; London: Penguin, 2000), p. 81. Dickens 'has no concern about Americans looking over his shoulders', argue Robin Peel and Daniel Maudlin 'Editor's Introduction', in *Transatlantic Traffic and (Mis)Translations*, eds., Peel and Maudlin (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013), pp. xix-1 (p. xxi).

<sup>25</sup> Henry James, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne' (1879), in *Henry James: The American Essays*, ed. Leon Edel (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 22-23.

process’’.<sup>26</sup> Literatures on both sides of the Atlantic, in other words, should stand in conversation with each other, and literary texts are thus to be examined comparatively. It is true that comparative or particularly Anglo-American literature has become an interesting field of study in the past few years, but the idea of physical and thus literary Atlantic over-crossing was already under way with the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492. This discovery was the beginning of a long practice of transatlantic ‘‘transculturation’’;<sup>27</sup> the etymology of which is given by Manning and Taylor:

The Latin *transeo*, *transpire*, meaning to go over, cross, pass over, give rise to *Translatio* which is not only the root term for translation but has a long pedigree to indicate a cultural transferring, handing over from one location to another.<sup>28</sup>

Transiting, transmitting, translating or transferring signifies an activity of geographical change and hence textual exchange. They unfold a meaning of instability, amalgamation and sharing. The shift in geographical perception of transatlantic terrains came into full recognition towards the end of the eighteenth century when the term ‘transatlantic’ was admitted into *The Oxford English Dictionary*, specifically in 1779.<sup>29</sup> Later definitions such as Noah Webster’s have simply focused on the notion of ‘lying or being beyond the Atlantic’;<sup>30</sup> hence wherever a person is, the ‘transatlantic’ signifies the other place that lies out of reach. Webster’s definition shows a growing awareness on both sides of the Atlantic of the implicit need to connect, regardless of the political tension that overshadowed Anglo-American relations particularly at the end of the

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, ‘Introduction: What Is Transatlantic Literary Studies?’, in *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*, ed. Manning and Taylor (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 1-17 (p. 7).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9. Emphasis is in original.

<sup>29</sup> Colleen Glenney Boggs, *Transnationalism and American Literature: Literary Translation 1773-1892* (New York, London: Routledge, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> See Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language; Exhibiting the Origin, Orthography, Pronunciation, and Definitions of Words* (New York: S. Converse, 1830), p. 850.



eighteenth century. Armitage also traces the first coinage and uses of ‘transatlantic’ to the American War of Independence, particularly between 1779 and 1781. Englishmen like Richard Watson and the historian Charles Henry Arnold were among the first to use it.<sup>31</sup> With the dawn of the nineteenth century, communication at all levels was prevalent in the Atlantic area, bringing with it new political, spatial and literary ways of reading into this movement. Robin Peel and Daniel Maudlin cite Hawthorne’s use of ‘transatlantic’ in his *English Notebooks* where he states that “‘this [English] church answered to my transatlantic fancies of England, better than anything I have yet seen’”.<sup>32</sup> The ‘transatlantic’ flourished towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and while it was used to describe social relationships as in the case of Dickens’s and Collins’s use of the term ‘transatlantic sisters’ to refer to their American travelling companions, the Yankee Gal and Mairy Anne,<sup>33</sup> it soon turned into a metaphor for being shipped across the Atlantic, or of the ship itself which T. S. Eliot describes as ‘transatlantic’ in his letter to Virginia Woolf in 1924: ‘I have been boiled in a hell-broth, and on Saturday journeyed to Liverpool to place my mother in her transatlantic’,<sup>34</sup> a word that Eliot uses as a synonym for the departing ship.

This fluid interaction over the Atlantic waters, which is implied in the constant ‘transatlantic’ correspondence between America and Britain, gave rise to what Paul Giles calls ‘comparativism’.<sup>35</sup> Armitage defines historical transatlanticism as ‘the history of the Atlantic world told through comparisons’.<sup>36</sup> Scholars benefit from this definition by developing literary

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<sup>31</sup> Armitage, ‘Three Concepts’, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Peel and Maudlin, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, p. xix.

<sup>33</sup> Dickens, Collins, *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2011), p. 109.

<sup>34</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘To Virginia Woolf 27 August 1924’, in *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, 5 vols, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 2. 483-484 (p. 483).

<sup>35</sup> Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formations of American Literature, 1730-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 191.

<sup>36</sup> Armitage, ‘Three Concepts’, p. 18.

comparativism which also results from the frenzy of nationalism that took over most of nineteenth-century Anglo-American writers. George Eliot, for example, thought that American literature is characterised by ‘certain defects of taste’.<sup>37</sup> Being accused of anti-nationalism, James on the other hand decided to write a novel ‘as local, as American, as possible, and as full of Boston: an attempt to show that I can write an American story’.<sup>38</sup> The national antagonisms on both sides of the Atlantic have recently led many critics to renegotiate the position of literary nationalistic writing. Comparativism has been emphasised as a comprehensive literary approach that covers a wider range of transatlantic texts. Critics such as Peter Hulme highlight the necessity of literary pairings and textual annexation, and he uses the term ‘congener’ to mean to bring together and read ‘transatlantically’ irrespective of the presence of factual or textual evidence.<sup>39</sup> Hulme’s suggestion of literary pairings is feasible, yet exaggerates in its dismissal of empirical or textual links between Anglo-American writers. These links, I believe, add flavour to the pleasure of textual reading and criticism.

Hulme’s enquiry is not the first to open up various discussions of the viability of transatlantic literary comparativism. Critics, in this regard, differ whether to read texts parallelistically or present them according to regional considerations. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), who coined the term *Weltliteratur* or ‘world literature’ in 1827, argued that comparative literature is far from idealism as it is confronted by nationalistic desires and the embrace of individualism. René Wellek and Austin Warren add their voices to Goethe in arguing that terms

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<sup>37</sup> George Eliot, ‘Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft’, *Leader*, 6 (1855), 988-989, reprinted in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). Also quoted in Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James: The Authoritative and Definitive Edition*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 19-20.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 93. See also Manning and Taylor, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

such as ‘comparative’ and ‘general’ impose restrictions on the text.<sup>40</sup> Whereas Jennifer Clark believes that mastering literary transatlanticism, which is ‘historically incomplete’, can pose problems over textual control due to its vastness,<sup>41</sup> J. H. Elliott asserts that even though transatlantic literary studies seem ‘stimulating’, it is ‘so difficult both to conceptualise and to write’.<sup>42</sup> This view contradicts other literary orientations addressed by F. O. Matthiessen, Harold Bloom, Robert Weisbuch and even J. Hillis Miller, all of whom embark on comparative studies of Anglo-American literary writing. These critics, however, situate American literature in opposition to its British counterpart, leading transatlantic comparisons thus into a territory of textual suppression and limitations. Matthiessen problematises the pure purposes of transatlantic literary studies by offering a fanatical reading of Anglo-American fiction.<sup>43</sup> Bloom, likewise, calls for a comparative reading that keeps American and British genres fairly at odds or ‘rigorously distinct’.<sup>44</sup> Weisbuch follows in the steps of Matthiessen by mooted a democratic reading of American writing that both aims at achieving national scholarly independence and emphasises the American need for literary autonomy.<sup>45</sup> Both Miller and Bloom employ the

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<sup>40</sup> René Wellek and Austin Warren, ‘General, Comparative, and National Literature’, in *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*, pp. 80-82 (p. 81).

<sup>41</sup> Clark, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> J. H. Elliott, ‘Afterward: Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation’, in *The British Atlantic World*, pp. 233-250 (p. 249).

<sup>43</sup> American writers, as shown by F. O. Matthiessen, are resistant to Old World affiliations and dismissive of literary heritages that developed on the other side of the Atlantic. Matthiessen, for instance, emphasises the angry overtones of Melville who replies to Sidney Smith’s ironic historical question: ‘Who reads an American book?’ by stating ‘that men not very much inferior to Shakespeare are this day being born on the banks of Ohio. And the day will come when you shall say, Who reads a book by an Englishman that is a modern?’, See Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 372. Smith’s question is cited in Lease, *Anglo-American Encounters*, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Buell, ‘American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon’, *American Literary History*, 4: 3 (1992), 411-442 (p. 412). Bloom’s theory discusses a number of celebrated poets who are able to produce original work in spite of pressures or anxieties of influence. See Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> Claybaugh finds in Weisbuch’s scholarship ‘a tendency to imitate and revise British writings that bears [sic] witness [...] to the literature’s felt belatedness’, in Claybaugh, ‘Toward a New Transatlanticism: Dickens in the United States’, *Victorian Studies*, 48: 3 (2006) 439-460 (p. 442). See also Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

dissenting terms ‘swerve’ and ‘swerving’ respectively in order to show how American writing unfolds – in its basic features – dominant paradigms of English, German and Latin romanticisms.<sup>46</sup> These critics have created an engaging study of transatlantic comparisons, but their scholarship is mostly characterised by the tension of an either-or binarism: if it does not express ‘the Americanness of American literature’ as F. R. Leavis calls it,<sup>47</sup> it must represent the Britishness of British literature.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said states that modern literary studies should dispose of national binaries and ‘move beyond insularity and provincialism’.<sup>48</sup> Julia Kristeva similarly calls for nations without nationalism: she supports a ‘transnational or international position situated at the crossing of boundaries’.<sup>49</sup> Taking Said’s and Kristeva’s discourses into consideration, I will offer a literary reading in which American and British texts cross regional boundaries and enter wider transatlantic terrains. I will use the comparative or transnational approach to examine British authors whose works shall be coupled with American ones to construct the bigger ‘transatlantic’ picture. Through the examination of Anglo-American literary correspondence, the concept of transatlanticism will be thoroughly perceived, but it is through the examination of various modes of sexual communication and the Anglo-American female body that the picture will fully emerge. The literary comparative approach shall reveal how these modes are similarly or differently treated in America and Britain and their eventual development into subjects of transatlantic literary correspondence. Such reading problematises two groups of

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<sup>46</sup> Miller sets English and American Romanticisms apart by rewriting the dictum ‘Like Father, unlike son’, in ‘English Romanticism, American Romanticism: What’s the Difference?’, in *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*, pp. 89-97 (p. 92). Bloom, *Anxiety*, Preface, p. xiii.

<sup>47</sup> F. R. Leavis, ‘The Americanness of American Literature’ (1952), in *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), pp. 138-151.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Nations without Nationalism*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 16.

transatlantic literary scholarship: the first such as Wellek and Warren's that calls for a dismissal of comparativism as imperfect, the other such as Matthiessen's that positions American literature as militantly antithetical to its British equivalent. These readings either discredit or misemploy 'transatlantic', which is an intriguing term that has opened up multiple possibilities for new literary re-readings of Anglo-American writing such as spiritualist séances, Atlantic epistolary and telegraphic communication. The misuse of 'transatlantic' could be detrimental to critical authenticity and progress; transatlanticism should provide critics with a greater opportunity for textual manoeuvre. The prevalence of transatlanticism in the nineteenth century brings into play what Kate Flint names 'oceanic' language<sup>50</sup> which results from 'transatlantic communications and transport' and becomes the primary source of 'intellectual activity'.<sup>51</sup> By looking into the itineraries of British writers in America and American writers in Britain, their textual correspondence and treatment of literary subjects at the time, one could develop engrossing studies of transatlantic nature.

Hawthorne's and Collins's transatlantic journeys to England and America, respectively, epitomise the growth of and fascination with transnational studies. More than two centuries after his ancestors' departure for America, Hawthorne returned to his country of origin to work as the American consul in England. His 'Our Old Home' and *English Notebooks* show great enthusiasm for places such as Warwick and Boston to which the American author made pilgrimage. Intrigued by the American landscape, life and culture, Wilkie Collins similarly followed in the steps of other British authors such as Dickens and Thackeray and toured in America for six months between 1873 and 1874 during which time he was in touch with the

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<sup>50</sup> Kate Flint, 'Transatlantic Currents', *American Literary History*, 21: 2 (2009), 324-334 (p. 325).

<sup>51</sup> Beer and Bennett, 'Introduction', in *Special Relationships*, p. 2.

American reading public.<sup>52</sup> Upon leaving America, Collins states: “I leave America with feelings of sincere gratitude and sincere respect”.<sup>53</sup> In their writings, both Hawthorne and Collins thus reveal a true sense of homeliness in one another’s countries. There is little or no evidence that both writers met in either England or America but through the examination of their literary treatment of mesmerism, which spread through Britain and America during the 1830s, one could easily conciliate both minds by creating a space for ‘the transatlantic imaginary’, to borrow Giles’s terminology.<sup>54</sup> In their novels, both authors deal with the dark aspect of mesmeric practices and female sexuality, thus establishing strong links between male mesmerists’ negative entrancing power and the dangers anchored on the female body. Considering mesmerism as a mode of erotic communication within a transatlantic context, it is my aim to reread nineteenth-century mesmeric practice as a form of female empowerment or subjectivity that is grounded in the use of discourses on the performative female gaze in the works of both writers.

The examination of nineteenth-century erotic forms of communication within the bigger transatlantic framework is beneficial as it allows for new interpretations of cross-cultural sexuality. The fluidity of transatlantic waters becomes a metaphor of the fluid nature of sexual expression in the works of Anglo-American writers. Daniel Hannah suggests that transatlantic fluidity challenges limitations imposed on sexuality and gender roles. Atlantic ‘routes’ but not ‘roots’, emphasises Paul Gilroy,<sup>55</sup> generate a constant mobility that blurs ‘the borderlines

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<sup>52</sup> See Susan R. Hanes, *Wilkie Collins’s American Tour: 1873-4* (London: Pickering and Chatto Publishers, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> William M. Clarke, *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins: The Intimate Victorian Life of the Father of the Detective Story* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 152.

<sup>54</sup> Giles, *Virtual Americas: Transnational Fictions and Transatlantic Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 19.

between genders and sexualities’.<sup>56</sup> Feminist readings of women’s movement or what Cheryl J. Fish terms “mobile subjectivity” have fallen behind studies of ‘male writers’.<sup>57</sup> In this thesis, I wish to fill the gaps by examining the writings of lesser known female authors in a separate chapter. My approach, however, differs from Beth Lueck, Brigitte Bailey and Lucinda Damon-Bach’s feminist study by comparatively reading two Anglo-American female authors – Marryat and Phelps – and their literary use of spiritualist séances and the spirit world as a way to communicate their desires. Spiritualism, which had supernatural overtones associated with the miraculous women who discovered it, violated nineteenth-century domestic and social structures. Marryat and Phelps established a spiritualist discourse within the nineteenth-century literary institution that changed the traditional perception of passivity in women into powerful mediumship through the mastery of acoustics. The relationship between spiritualist women, desire and spectral sound which Marryat implies in *There Is No Death* (1891) shows how transatlanticism or over-crossing offers apt grounds for gender subversion.

The impact of the developing transatlantic communication on women and sexual expression is a subject that pervades James’s *fin de siècle* fiction. James’s telegraphic literature in which he employs the rhetoric of love, betrayal, blackmail and sexual adventures prospered in late nineteenth-century writings such as Anthony Trollope’s story ‘The Telegraph Girl’. Crossing the Atlantic waters is a pervasive topic in James’s texts such as *The Ambassadors*, *The Sense of the Past* (1917) and ‘The Jolly Corner’ (1908), but it is by means of telegraphic communication and

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<sup>56</sup> Daniel Hannah, ‘Felicia Hemans, Herman Melville, and the Queer Atlantic’, in *Transatlantic Literary Exchanges 1790-1870: Gender, Race, and Nation*, eds. Kevin Hutchings and Julia M. Wright (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 61-77 (p. 61).

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Brigitte Bailey, ‘Introduction: Transatlantic Studies and American Women Writers’, in *Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Great Britain*, eds. Beth L. Lueck, Brigitte Bailey and Lucinda L. Damon-Bach (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), pp. xiii-3 (p. xiv, xv). See also Cheryl J. Fish, *Black and White Women’s Travel Narratives: Antebellum Explorations* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

the sexualised language of the cable that James brings Britain and America into full correspondence. With the laying of the first telegraph cable, which did not succeed until 1865,<sup>58</sup> communications accelerated between the two nations and the position of transatlantic women thus changed. The Atlantic waters and the fluid, accelerating nature of cable correspondence provided nineteenth-century cultures with what Sarah Pearsall calls ‘a multiplicity of voices’. Pearsall argues that this discursive ‘multiplicity’ weakens the voice of the Church, court or patriarchy.<sup>59</sup> Transnational telegraphy allowed for the emergence of multiple powerful femininities such as James’s telegraphist who subverts social norms in *In the Cage*.

Letters had circulated between the two sides of the Atlantic since the first journey to America; however, it is in the nineteenth century that epistolary and telegraphic communication gained particular significance. The prevalence of print culture and postal communication made possible the amalgamation of two distant literatures: the works of British writers like Robert Burns and Walter Scott were printed in America at a time when the works of American writers such as Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper continued to be printed in Britain.<sup>60</sup> The correspondence of Dickens and Poe, following the former’s visits to America, shows not only Poe’s ambition toward literary fame, but also a heated historical moment in the Anglo-American ‘Paper War’. Benjamin Lease examines the Dickens-Poe relationship and literary influence and suggests that Poe is fascinated by the ‘haunted and tormented regions of the mind’<sup>61</sup> that Dickens

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<sup>58</sup> Flint, ‘Transatlantic Currents’, p. 324.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah M. S Pearsall, ‘Gender’, in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, pp. 113-133 (p. 126). Sexuality is freely expressed in oceanic discourses due to mobility, fluidity or borderlessness. Robert K. Martin, for instance, suggests that through escaping the nation-state policing on land, Melville openly depicts homoerotic relations in the midst of the Atlantic, see Martin, ‘Herman Melville and Sexuality’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 186-202 (p. 200).

<sup>60</sup> Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning, ‘Introduction: British and American Genres’, in *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830*, eds. Bannet and Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1-10 (p. 2).

<sup>61</sup> Michael Allan, *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 84. Also quoted in Lease, p. 84.



psychologically portrays in ‘The Black Veil’ in *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and ‘A Madman’s MS.’ in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836).<sup>62</sup> The Dickens-Poe literary textual congruity reveals more curious elements about their representation of the epistle, destination and female desire. Their treatment of the female epistolary subject is given within a transatlantic context: Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’ (1844) is set in France, which adds another geographical intersection in transatlanticism, and Dickens’s *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) explores American Eden through the perspective of the British junior Martin Chuzzlewit. Their literary representations of the female body also suggest strong associations between women’s sexuality, death by fire and the annihilation of communication as the fifth chapter in the thesis shows.

This thesis, thus far, negotiates literary voices on both sides of the Atlantic; in bringing Anglo-American texts together I aim to create a new space within transatlantic studies. I seek to explore female sexuality and various modes of communication which dominated nineteenth-century British and American cultures. Some critics such as Pearsall and Brigitte Bailey have explored nineteenth-century gender issues within the context of transatlanticism. I, however, will specifically consider female sexuality in relation to prevalent forms of nineteenth-century communication. Transatlanticism will form what Derrida calls ‘a passé-partout’,<sup>63</sup> the bigger framework or background of the textual analysis of erotic communication in the pairings of Anglo-American authors. By comparing British and American authors in each chapter – except for the chapter which discusses James’s work only due to his multinational identification – I work towards a transatlantic narrative that repositions nineteenth-century women as new powerful agents of communication.

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<sup>62</sup> Lease, p. 3, 84.

<sup>63</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Paris: Galilee, 1986), also quoted in Bannet and Manning, p. 3.

**‘Letters are venerable; and the telephone valiant’:<sup>64</sup> Modes of Sexual Communication in Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Writing**

With the publication of *Jacob’s Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Virginia Woolf opens the door to a modern renegotiation and revolution of the early twentieth-century world of communication. She reveals a wide realm of instrumental language that mediates between internal and external worlds; through communication, modern individuals travel outside their inner psychological spaces and make themselves available to each other. In all of these novels, Woolf engages with different modes of communication: the aeroplane in *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, forms sky-letters that gradually subside into tiny threads of smoke. It is in *Jacob’s Room*, however, that Woolf expands communication and introduces a variety of its instruments which ‘include the writing of letters, the delivery of the post, telephone calls, calling cards, telegrams, radio’, etc.<sup>65</sup> The flurry of multiple vehicles of communication in Woolf’s modern text points to the preceding nineteenth century when communications on both sides of the Atlantic were already burgeoning. Take, for example, the reformation of the post in the transatlantic arena in which the British government’s policies led to the creation of the Uniform Penny Post in 1840 whilst the same postal system operated in America between 1847 and 1850. Likewise, the reappearance of mesmerism in both countries during the 1830s, and its subsequent transformation into spiritualistic practice in 1848 at the hands of the Fox sisters in New York, brought about fundamental changes in the absolute structure of communication. Both modes increased a nineteenth-century transatlantic interest in the possibility of transferring the human voice beyond the physical contours of the bodies of senders and receivers. This interest became real with the success of linking British and American voices across the ocean through electric

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Virginia Woolf, ‘Jacob’s Room’, in *The Selected Works of Virginia Woolf* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition Limited, 2005), pp. 7-125 (p. 68).

<sup>65</sup> Vara S. Neverow, ‘Virginia Woolf and City Aesthetics’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 88-104 (p. 94).

cables in 1865. Unremitting attempts at connecting voices in distant communication also resulted in the invention of telephony by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876. Psychic practice, experiments and terminology flourished in late nineteenth-century Anglo-American culture, too. According to *OED*, telepathy for instance came into use in 1882 when Frederic Myers, a philologist and a founder of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), introduced the concept at one of the Society's meetings. Telepathy, for Myers, covers all correspondence carried out at a distance without the use of natural communicating organs.<sup>66</sup> These nineteenth-century forms of communication functioned as the subject matter of later technological developments addressed in the works of Woolf and others such as Eliot and Beckett.<sup>67</sup>

Excluding telephony and telepathy, I shall survey the four modes of communication which this thesis later tackles in chapters on mesmerism, spiritualism, telegraphism and epistolary correspondence. I will present them in relation to female sexuality, power relations and gender dynamics, and thus show how the idea of communication or the simple act of 'speaking into the air', to borrow the title words of John Peters's book, crowns women as powerful and subversive. Women's subversion of nineteenth-century cultural norms transpires in the public power bestowed on them through the medium of communication. The participation of nineteenth-century transatlantic women in media production and various communicational activities problematised the spatialisation of gender; women are no longer represented as passive domestic figures; they become dominant and influential within public communication. Michel Foucault argues that the beginning of the nineteenth century put a high price on female sexuality which

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<sup>66</sup> See Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Massachusetts, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> One of these later developments is the radio, a device which was used in 1959 by the Swedish film producer Friedrich Jürgenson to record "phantom voices" using microphones, a radio receiver and tape recorders. Jürgenson's recordings simulate the nineteenth-century Anglo-American spiritualist practice of spirit communication. See David M. Rountree, *Paranormal Technology: Understanding the Science of Ghost Hunting* (Bloomington: iUniverse Books, 2010), p. 24.

was accordingly 'moved into the home'.<sup>68</sup> However, the rapid rise of communication and its association with desire caused a confusion of gender spaces: Victorian sexual desire, contrary to Foucault's initial views, thus moved out of the home, especially towards the end of the century.

The focus on these modes of communication stems from the fact that the thesis aims to cover a larger historical space that extends from the 1830s when mesmerism became widely practiced in Britain and America until 1903, the publication date of James's *The Ambassadors*. By including mesmerism and spiritualism instead of telephony and telepathy, for example, I seek to expand the span of physical and textual interaction on both sides of the Atlantic. However, it is also important to note that mesmerism and spiritualism evolved as material forms of communication wherein the human body functions as transmitter, as opposed to the considerably immaterialised version of correspondence offered by telephony and telepathy in the 1870s and 80s. As this thesis alternates between the material and immaterial, I choose two forms that explore the psychic, materialised body of communication. Telegraphy, however, offers an immaterialised example of communication in which electric wires and signals are used to exchange encoded messages between senders and receivers.

Though already a widespread means of communication, the improvement in the post office service in the mid-nineteenth century meant that women were given the chance to access the public sphere more freely. Postal reforms during Queen's Victoria's rule (1837-1901) and Andrew Jackson's presidency (1829-1837) were well under way, and this adds an interesting dimension to the study of women and epistolary correspondence. The acts of writing and posting were a major factor in the increase of literacy among female writers and readers. The nineteenth century was not only the birth-era of spiritualism, for example, but also the time that registered a

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<sup>68</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Allan Lane, 1979), 3. 3.

unique revolution of various types of communication. It is true that mesmerism, spiritualism, telegraphy and epistolarity had their origins in previous centuries, but it is in the nineteenth century that these forms had an impact on men and women of science and literature. The thesis aims to explore women and communication specifically in the nineteenth century because it is a period of change, revolution and experimentation, which was not limited to the scientific or technological but also influenced the social discourses of communication.

Before I begin the survey of the four forms of communication and the sexual politics thereof, it is important to briefly outline the etymological development of communication and theoretically show how desire within communication systems prompts and perpetuates women's agency. It is through the dissemination of desire and female participation in knowledge exchange by a means of telegrams, for example, that gender relations become significantly unstable or subverted. The female telegraphist in James's *In the Cage* holds the powerful key of knowledge of a late nineteenth-century sexual scandal that involves the fall of Mr Everard to the bottom of the social ladder. In *Speaking into the Air*, Peters probes the roots and early uses of communication in the English language:

“communication” is a word with a rich history. From the Latin *communicare*, meaning to impart, share, or make common, it entered the English language in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The key root is *mun-* (not *uni-*), related to such words as “munificent,” “community,” “meaning,” and *Gemeinschaft*.<sup>69</sup>

The early use and modern development of communication point to the evolution of this term to imply a ‘dialogic’<sup>70</sup> social process in which ‘individuality is transcended’.<sup>71</sup> Communication for

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<sup>69</sup> Peters, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Briankle G. Chang, *Deconstructing Communication: Representation, Subject, and Economics of Exchange* (Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 39.

Briankle Chang is a semiotic structure that follows the pattern of exchange and community (*Gemeinschaft*) interaction. Thus, communication is born out of a linguistic need to describe mutuality, sharing and participation. Biblically, ‘to be excommunicated is to be purged from the community’ and hence lose the collective advantage of partaking or sharing, continues Chang.<sup>72</sup> Based on these early definitions, Peters offers a bundle of the various senses of communication that all feed into the idea of impartation and dissemination. In a gradually developing nineteenth-century context, communication according to Peters referred to ‘connection or linkage’ as is represented in the mid nineteenth-century works of Anglo-American writers. The use of “‘steam communication’” as a vehicle for transport, Dickens’s involvement in early transatlantic telegraphic projects, the description of people’s correspondence and movement across the Atlantic and even the delineation of the interior structure of Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) – ‘the door [...] formed the customary communication between the house and the garden’<sup>73</sup> – all affirm the nineteenth-century semantics of communicative acts as transference and circulation. Communication towards the end of the nineteenth century also came to represent the relationship between the individual’s mental system and the external world. This might happen at the levels of *phono*-centricism (speaking), *grapho*-centricism (writing) or telepathy. While Leo Lowenthal presents communication as a form of sharing ‘inner experience’ that focuses on the communicators’ mental properties, Horton Cooley, a late nineteenth-century American sociologist (1864-1929), and later critics such as Raymond Williams, C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards go as far as suggesting a psychological structure of communication that

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<sup>72</sup> Chang, pp. x-xi.

<sup>73</sup> Peters, pp. 7-8.

emphasises an immaterialised ‘sharing of consciousness’,<sup>74</sup> thus avoiding the mediation of language.

The representation of communication as a psychological construct of exchange has aided a sexualised reading of it. Referring to the *OED*, Peters offers another meaning of communication: ‘coitus’.<sup>75</sup> The description of thought communication between individuals as a passionate intercourse – whether it is a physical, psychological or emotional form of reaching – has attracted attention to the erotic nature of communication. The analysis of Socrates’s speech-acts in *Phaedrus*, Peters states, shows that he Socrates envisages ‘Eros, not transmission, [... as] the chief principle of communication’.<sup>76</sup> It is, rather, the transmission of Eros either in informal secretive letters or electronic wires for instance that this thesis explores. The various modes of communication I will explore later can function as vehicles of desire, but the literary texts themselves in which these modes are represented also act as channels of sexuality, thus consolidating the liaison between ‘communication’ literature and eroticism. In his reading of Georges Bataille’s writings, Denis Hollier affirms that eroticism and the literature of communication are too congruous to move apart. In literary texts, communication stands as ‘the *principle of inadequacy*’: it denotes lack of sexual desire. The communicative act repeats itself in order to compensate for erotic inadequacy, but only to find itself again in a state of *inadequate* mediation. For Bataille, the increasing cataclysm of communication can be seen in “the theme

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<sup>74</sup> Leo Lowenthal, ‘Communication and Humanities’, in *The Human Dialogue: Perspectives on Communication*, ed. Floyd W. Matson and Ashley Montagu (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 336; Cooley, *The Theory of Transportation* (cited earlier); Raymond Williams, *Communications* (London: Penguin, 1962), p. 9; C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, 8<sup>th</sup> edn (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1952). Martin Heidegger shares with Lowenthal this interior, self-self and self-other definition of communication. Heidegger, however, believes that ‘communication is never anything like a transportation of experiences, such as opinions and wishes, from the interior of one subject into the interior of another’; communication or ‘Being-with’ is already shared in discourse, yet it is ‘unshared as something not grasped’, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 205.

<sup>75</sup> See Peters, p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

of reciprocal repulsion focused on sexual parts” which functions as mediation.<sup>77</sup> To offer a simpler reading, Bataille associates the acts of writing and reading with ‘erotic practice’:<sup>78</sup> writing erotic letters or reading sexually repulsive telegrams summarises the ‘erotic practice’ of communication-as-mediation. The presence of sexuality within systems of communication has not only evoked psychology as ‘the best science for studying communication’,<sup>79</sup> as argued by Peters, but also stressed the role of the female body, text and agency within these systems.

By giving a sexualised reading of four substantial modes of nineteenth-century communication, I aim to reposition women in communication studies and redefine agency based on gender performance as either acting bodies or speaking texts. Recent studies in the field of communication recognise the importance of women’s participation and gradual dominance in a world of wires and networks.<sup>80</sup> The old binaries imposed on philosophy by Western thought – ‘reason and emotion, public and private, nature and culture, subject and object, and mind and body’ – have assigned women inferior or marginal statuses. Since the Enlightenment and the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) which disparaged the equality of education of men and women, feminist debates have continued to eradicate this oppressive marginalisation of women. Kathryn Cirksena and Lisa Cuklanz emphasise that the classification of women as secondary has attracted less attention in cultural studies. The female body for example was ‘often’ perceived as a ‘sexual’ object which is ‘linguistically and symbolically constructed’ to fit

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<sup>77</sup> Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), p. 67.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>79</sup> Peters, p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> See for example, Barbara Bate and Anita Taylor, eds., *Women Communicating: Studies of Women’s Talk* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1988); Rosalind Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); Donna Allen and Ramona R. Rush, eds., *Communications at the Crossroads: The Gender Gap Connection* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1989); Nancy Wyatt and Sheryl Perlmutter Bowen, eds., *Transforming Visions: Feminist Critiques in Communication Studies* (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 1993). Journals that address the subject of women and communication started earlier with the publication of *Women’s Studies in Communication* in 1977 and *Women and Language* in 1976.



into the secondary order of patriarchal societies.<sup>81</sup> Through the creation of a feminist discourse in the field of communication, feminist scholars however interrogate power relations and rearrange traditional forms of language and knowledge. Cirksena and Cuklanz contend that

By focusing on women as significant agents in history, literature, and communication, feminist scholars in the humanities have discovered that such work entails a reformulation of traditional notions of knowledge, truth, value, and significance [... through zooming in] less public forms of communication such as diaries, letters, and gossip of ordinary women.<sup>82</sup>

The reading of women's non-traditional modes of communication allows for a restructuring of the symbolic order in which they are obligatorily inserted. Reading the letters of noncanonical female authors in the nineteenth century, for example, creates a feminine channel for communication that counteracts the masculine monopoly of discourse. The deconstruction of what Kaja Silverman calls "discursive interiority" (i.e., insertion into a preexisting symbolic order)' is one of the fundamental ways to female subjectivity.<sup>83</sup> By taking into consideration the female voice and performative body as the subjective other in literary texts, "discursive interiority" becomes a discourse of exteriority in which a feminine space of power is created. This exteriority does not suggest the exclusion of women from the symbolic order, but rather the formation of a counterbalance to masculine influence. To thus reformulate 'traditional notions of knowledge' and construct a feminist discourse within communication, one needs to situate the female text and body, which I carry out throughout my second chapter by looking into the works of less renowned female spiritualist authors – Marryat and Phelps, at the crux of a psychoanalytic deconstructive reading of nineteenth-century forms of communication. 'The text is the

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<sup>81</sup> Kathryn Cirksena and Lisa Cuklanz, 'Male Is to Female As \_\_\_\_ Is to \_\_\_\_: A Guided Tour of Five Feminist Frameworks for Communication Studies', in *Women Making Meaning: New Feminist Directions in Communication*, ed. Lana F. Rakow (Routledge: New York, London, 1992), pp. 18-45 (pp. 20, 34-5).

<sup>82</sup> Cirksena and Cuklanz, p. 39.

<sup>83</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 149.

authority’,<sup>84</sup> argues Gary Krug, through which Victorian women were able to push themselves ‘out of the texts defined by patriarchal poetics’, assert Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.<sup>85</sup> Nineteenth-century women were active in reshaping their social position and defining their place and authority within textual production, but the issue at hand is how women introduced this change at the level of *transmission*. This thesis examines how communicational activities lead to the liberation of corporeal or verbal expression and textual production. Communication provides women who seek empowerment ‘to struggle and defend their rights’ with an unconventional free space through which they question patriarchal hierarchies.<sup>86</sup>

The development of mesmerism as an Anglo-American mode of communication influenced literary thought in the nineteenth century, particularly in the 1830s. Peters refers to some significant literary figures across the European continent during the nineteenth century such as the French Guy de Maupassant, Honoré de Balzac, the German E. T. A. Hoffman, the French-born British George de Maurier and other American writers such as Poe and Hawthorne to show how mesmerism featured in the very structure of their fiction. In Maupassant’s ‘The Horla’ (1887) and du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894), male and female characters are mesmerised and directed against their will to perform the instructions of their possessors.<sup>87</sup> These writers’ interest in

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<sup>84</sup> Gary Krug, *Communication, Technology and Cultural Change* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 91.

<sup>86</sup> Pilar Riaño, ‘Women’s Participation in Communication: Elements for a Framework’, in *Women in Grassroots Communication: Furthering Social Change*, ed. Pilar Riaño (London: SAGE Publications, 1994), pp. 3-30 (p. 11). It is important to mention that women do not create their identities through communication; their identities precede communication which only functions as a mediator or what Derrida calls the ‘making pass’ of an identity, Derrida, ‘Semiology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva’, in *The Communication Theory Reader*, ed. Paul Copley (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 209-225 (p. 214). See also Cindy L. Griffin and Karma R. Chávez, ‘Introduction: Standing at the Intersections of Feminisms, Intersectionality, and Communication Studies’, in *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies*, ed. Karma R. Chávez and Cindy L. Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), pp. 1-35 (p. 16).

<sup>87</sup> See Peters, p. 89. On the literary influence of mesmerism, see Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne, eds., *Victorian Literary Mesmerism* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006), and Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

mesmerism arises from its affiliation with romantic imagery. That ‘mesmerism supplies romanticism with much of its imagery of love and possession’ is a unique literary subject that is typically employed in the description of anxious ‘sexual’ ties between ‘a male practitioner and a female patient’.<sup>88</sup> Mesmerism in this case functions as a form of mediation – a lewd male mesmerist in control of a vulnerable female subject. Peters cites Parley Parker Pratt (1807-1857), a nineteenth-century Mormon theologian, who believed that the phrase “‘in communication’” originated from mesmerism. The simple idea of mesmerism entails two persons being ‘*en rapport*’, and in the case of the mesmerising male and mesmerised female, it is a matter of finding the magnetic pole in the female’s body through which the male mesmerist “‘make[s] a pass’”, another expression that ‘migrated from mesmerism to romanticism and romance’.<sup>89</sup>

The techniques used by the male mesmerist to maintain authority over the female body are multifarious yet body-centred, ranging from touching to gazing – the latter operating ‘at a distance’.<sup>90</sup> Distance gazing and body control morally problematise the purposes of mesmeric treatments and, contrary to Don Browning who believed in the moral nature of the mesmeric process, mesmerism unleashed a set of sexual dangers.<sup>91</sup> Alison Winter argues that the representation of mesmerism as sexual threat emanates from the nineteenth-century belief that the female’s intellect is ‘unreliable’ and could easily be subdued by fancy.<sup>92</sup> Hawthorne, for example, objected to his wife’s mesmeric treatment: ‘And what delusion can be more lamentable

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<sup>88</sup> Peters, p. 91.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91. See also Parley Parker Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* [1855] (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), p. 106, and Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 152.

<sup>90</sup> Peters, p. 92.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 179. Conversely, Valerie Kossew Pichanick compared mesmeric treatments to ‘medieval exorcism’, implying the immoral occult nature of mesmerism, in *Harriet Martineau, The Woman and her Work 1802-76* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1980), p. 130.

<sup>92</sup> Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 214.

and mischievous, than to mistake the physical and material for the spiritual?'.<sup>93</sup> Whilst mesmerism brought with it fears of eroticism, it generated a discourse of feminine subjectivity and the female potential for subversion. The depiction of mesmerism as a mediator of masculine control is offset by the mesmerised women's countervailing gaze. The traditional manifestation of the gaze as a 'licence accorded to men to treat women on (and off) stage as sexual objects' is redeployed to demonstrate women's interior power for transgression.<sup>94</sup> Judith Butler states that a female "object" who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position' reveals moments of subjectivity and violation of the patriarchal symbolic order.<sup>95</sup> To look back is to create gender confusion of masculine definitions of power and participate in a bigger discourse of knowledge, mediated through mesmeric glances. The gaze, which 'alone dominates the entire field of possible knowledge',<sup>96</sup> affirms that women are capable, powerful participants in a complex discourse of communication.

Mesmerism was also called 'animal magnetism', a name which evolved from a belief that the cosmos is governed by fluids that travel from one person to another, hence the value of the gaze as a make-pass between contacting souls. The fluid invisibility of communication which appears in the concept 'animal magnetism', derived from 'Latin *animus* or spirit',<sup>97</sup> propelled the perusal of distant correspondence in the transatlantic scene and grew into another mode of communication: spiritualism. Peters defines spiritualism, which officially dates back to 1848, as 'the art of communication with the dead'. If mesmerism manifested close body-body contact

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<sup>93</sup> Letter from Hawthorne to his wife, October 18, 1841, now in the Huntington Library quoted in Taylor Stoehr, 'Hawthorne and Mesmerism', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 33: 1 (1969), 33-60 (p. 43).

<sup>94</sup> Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 96-97.

<sup>95</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999), (1990), pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>96</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), p. 206.

<sup>97</sup> Peters, p. 90.

between males and females, spiritualism revealed a phenomenology of body-spirit conversation concerned with the reception of remote or metaphysical messages.<sup>98</sup> That spiritualism started with the act of *hearing* noises by the Fox sisters – compared to mesmeric physical *seeing* – helped advance communication into another stage of spatial and temporal connection. To conduct a good séance, one has to be sensitive to subtle sounds and noises that spirits produce during correspondence. The stress on sensitivity in spiritualist circles meant that women dominated this field: the female body according to nineteenth-century beliefs is more receptive than the male's, thus more suited to operate within and preside over what Walter Ong calls the 'acoustic space'.<sup>99</sup> Female mediums emerged as acoustic subjects by being uniquely able to transform sound into a corporeal state of 'fluidity and transmissibility',<sup>100</sup> a process which entails the reproduction of spectral sounds such as table-rapping as tangible feminine voice.

Acoustic means of communication empowered women to change stereotypical gender constructions, and this according to Ann Braude stems from their position as passive, sensitive recipients in spirit communication.<sup>101</sup> Functioning as trumpets of their own voices, women were not only capable of speaking publicly but also materialising their sexual desires through what came to be known as spirit materialisation which became widely practised during the 1870s. Materialisation referred to the physical transformation of the spirit through material objects in the séance room, especially the subjective female medium's body. The manifestation of sound through matter acted as a supernatural sanctioning of female mediums to make a display of their

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<sup>98</sup> Peters, p. 94.

<sup>99</sup> Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Phenomena for Religious and Cultural History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 164.

<sup>100</sup> Steven Connor, 'The Machine in the Ghost: Spiritualism, Technology and the 'Direct Voice'', in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (London: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 203-226 (p. 209).

<sup>101</sup> See Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

flesh, and this allowed for a transgressive erotic expression within spiritualistic communication. Pleasurable acts – kissing and caressing – of ‘beautiful spirits’ such as Katie King during séances exemplify the subversive nature of this transformation. Alex Owen argues that such invisible-visible sexual acts worked as a stage of desire that substituted itself for the ‘harsh abstractions of death’,<sup>102</sup> a theme that prevailed in the writings of noncanonical female authors on both sides of the Atlantic, namely Marryat and Phelps.

Like mesmerism, spiritualism gave birth to new vocabulary within communication studies – ‘medium [and] channel’;<sup>103</sup> these terminologies are fundamentally derived from women’s involvement in the spiritualist tradition. In addition, both mesmerism and spiritualism similarly offer a sense of theatricality<sup>104</sup> which is equivalent to modern ‘mass communication’:<sup>105</sup> to influence the crowds or put them into trance. The need to reach and exert influence on far-off subjects and expand the space of communication urged nineteenth-century scientists to develop another mode of communication: telegraphism. Even though telegraphic projects started in the 1830s – long before spiritualism, it was later in the nineteenth century that telegraphism progressed noticeably at international, i.e. transatlantic levels. Both spiritualism and telegraphy, however, influenced and borrowed from each other: whereas spiritualists developed what they

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<sup>102</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (London: Virago, 1989), pp. 221-223.

<sup>103</sup> Peters, p. 100.

<sup>104</sup> Bridget Bennett raises the issue of spiritualist theatricality and cites Clarke Garrett’s argument that “spirit possession is a kind of theatre” that addresses the public mind using simple jargon. See Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 10. Quoted in Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>105</sup> Peters, p. 93.

termed “spiritual telegraph”,<sup>106</sup> telegraphists endorsed the idea of ethereal communication between the living and the dead through a system of distinct raps.

Telegraphy towards the end of the nineteenth century was a remarkable transformation in the history of communication, and this I believe is associated with the changing erotic nature and cultural dynamics of distant communication: the perilous disclosure of sensitive information, the diversification of gender relations, and sexual scandals such as the Cleveland Street Affair, 1889-1890. Dynamic social changes in the *fin de siècle* provided a space for women in telegraphic communication; female telegraphists not only occupied telegraph offices but also figured in late nineteenth-century fiction such as James’s *In the Cage*, Ella Cheever Thayer’s *Wired Love* (1879) and Lida A. Churchill’s *My Girls* (1882). The telegraph office functioned as a perfect place for ‘erotic interest [...] a place where romantic tête-à-tête would occur’.<sup>107</sup> The physical or wired encounter with ‘an unseen stranger’ would carry sexual overtones ‘by means of the electric telegraph, the technological wonder of the age’.<sup>108</sup> Women’s unprecedented participation in the electric communication industry opened the door for spatial changes – public and private – as female telegraphists were capable of working outside the domestic sphere, tracking public scandals by decoding private messages and engaging in romantic relationships themselves, a case which Lucy Graham in Trollope’s ‘The Telegraph Girl’ (1877) epitomises.

Telegraphic women crossed the boundaries between the private and the public, the normal and abnormal or the unspeakable and speaking. Communication by telegrams created and

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<sup>106</sup> Peters, p. 95. Spiritual telegraphy was a “real” (albeit invisible) technology’ and referred to a device that had a similar function to the electromagnetic telegraph. This device, however, solely existed in the afterlife and implied a widespread system of spiritual telecommunication, see Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 36.

<sup>107</sup> Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies 1859-1919* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 54.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas C. Jepsen, *My Sisters Telegraphic: Women in the Telegraph Office, 1846-1950* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 118.

accelerated a historical moment whereby discreet sexual affairs are no longer secretive. According to William Cohen, ‘sexual unspeakability generates linguistic cruxes that lavishly draw attention to themselves’,<sup>109</sup> a theme that also permeates the inner structure of epistolary exchanges in nineteenth-century Anglo-American writing culture. Different to the psychic or clairvoyant forms of communication, i.e. mesmerism and spiritualism, electric telegrams and letters share physical characteristics. Whilst the female ‘‘etheric’ body’ exists metaphysically or invisibly within the process of spiritualist and mesmeric disembodied transmission,<sup>110</sup> telegrams and letters stand as physical or written manifestations of that body and process.

Letters, which are the last mode of communication I explore throughout the thesis, ‘tie the body to the world’.<sup>111</sup> Peters suggests that the problem of communication is ‘an erotic one (relations between bodies)’,<sup>112</sup> and letters typify corporeal connection and misconnection. The physical, embodied quality of letters prompted a mid nineteenth-century anxiety about dead letters; indeed, epistolary embodiment created fear of loss or ‘adestination’,<sup>113</sup> a term that Derrida develops in his reading of Lacan’s reading of Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’. The first Dead Letter Office was opened in America in 1825; an office devoted to handling problems with postal addresses. Nineteenth-century terminologies of the Dead Letter Office such as ‘the morgue of the mails’ suggest the complications of miscommunication or specifically the possible ineptness of postal delivery.<sup>114</sup> Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers*, Melville’s ‘Bartleby’ (1853) and Poe’s ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’ (1833) emphasise this deep-seated worry about the dilemma of

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<sup>109</sup> William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 160.

<sup>110</sup> Sir Oliver Lodge (1851-1940), a British writer and physicist coined this term in *My Philosophy: Representing my Views on the Many Functions of the Ether of Space* (1933; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 222.

<sup>111</sup> Ellie Ragland, *Essays on the Pleasures of Death: From Freud to Lacan* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), p. 165.

<sup>112</sup> Peters, p. 168.

<sup>113</sup> See Derrida, ‘Envois’, in *The Post Card*, pp. 1-256.

<sup>114</sup> John Floherty, *Make Way for the Mail* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1939), p. 167.



non-arrival.<sup>115</sup> Dickens's and Poe's fictions, however, stress that the letter acquires a critical meaning in certain cases – when the letter tied to the world becomes rather tied to the female body, a world within the world.

Within a nineteenth-century context, the mail metaphorically represents the female body that encapsulates the possible dialectic of sexual enclosure or disclosure; it is a secret that verges on a possible display of itself through the act of *communication* – sending and receiving. The mail, argues Molly McGarry is 'an avenue of both secrecy and vulgar public display'.<sup>116</sup> The logic of the post manifests this frail boundary between private writing and vulgar public display thinking by functioning as a backward-forward passage between corresponding bodies. Within this logic, letters miss their *destin(y)*ation, senders and recipients are thrown into disorder and erotic disclosure becomes contingent. In other words, letters which go through the postal system are subject to disruption, mis-location or '*destinerrance*',<sup>117</sup> another term developed by Derrida to imply an awry communicative act that defers its own meaning and gets nowhere. Derrida, Foucault and Bataille agree that meaning within the economy of communication exchange is unbounded, amiss, susceptible and, to be more extreme, nonsense. Derrida's hopes for deliverance are next to nothing – 'Hermes cannot find his way out of the *abîme*';<sup>118</sup> Foucault calls the endlessness of meaning in 'The Order of Discourse' a great mythical European tradition,<sup>119</sup> and Bataille deconstructs the whole structure of communication, as he associates

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<sup>115</sup> Dickens, for instance, compares the heaps of dead letters to 'ghosts' carried in 'mail-coaches', in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1890), p. 558.

<sup>116</sup> Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 117.

<sup>117</sup> Chang, p. 187.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>119</sup> Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', trans. Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London, Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 48-78.

meaning with nonsensicality,<sup>120</sup> a meaning that is prior to *sens(c)e* – it does not concur with sense. The lawlessness of the letter's route proves nonsensicality and problematises the borderline between privacy and publicity, and this in return puts women's private epistolary writing at risk. Through epistolary adestination, the letter and the sexual meaning embodied within arguably disseminate or prevail. The act of dissemination, nevertheless, is a speech act that communicates women's epistolary agency within nineteenth-century postal spaces.

Communication gives women an autonomous 'voice' through writing and dissemination of the word/body.<sup>121</sup> Yet epistolary correspondence, generally speaking, becomes a dystopian reality provided that the letter reaches nowhere and thus turns to be nonsensical due to endless circulation or loss of truth; letters consequently terminate in fire. Burning letters or bodies, which is a form of adestination or death, signifies feminine subjectivity in nineteenth-century, transatlantic epistolary communication. The act of burning is a mode of transgression in which the female letter/body experiences physical transformation and changes into a spiritualised state of being: smoke. Fire is a consignor of epistles/bodies that 'misfire[.].';<sup>122</sup> it is an abstract power that endows women with agency: burning is an act of resistance. Milly Theale, in James's *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), is released 'from the letters of the world'.<sup>123</sup> By hurling Milly's letter 'into the flame', Merton Densher and Kate Croy release her spirit as they watch 'the paper burn'.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Hollier, p. 67.

<sup>121</sup> Chang, p. 189.

<sup>122</sup> Peters, p. 169.

<sup>123</sup> See Kristin Boyce, 'What Does James Show his Readers in *The Wings of the Dove*?', *The Henry James Review*, 35: 1 (2014), 1-11 (p. 6).

<sup>124</sup> James, *The Wings of the Dove* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2009), p. 412.

## Towards a Theoretical Framework

This study reconsiders the nineteenth-century modes of communication within a new context that both includes women and affirms their discursive and performative influence in cultural networks. Unlike previous research such as Susan Manning's, Bridget Bennett's and Paul Giles's, the thesis specifically looks into the role of nineteenth-century women within multiple *communication* systems by using a comparative approach that draws parallels between English and American literary texts. Each mode of communication is examined in an independent chapter in which I use various modern theories that help reposition women within social hierarchical structures and acknowledge their agency. The thesis makes use of Derrida's deconstructive views on communication as well as those by Lacan, Freud and also Bachelard's psychoanalytic readings of female sexuality in relation to dissemination. Feminist discourses such as Judith Butler's also feature throughout the thesis as integral to the discussion that women gain authority through their verbal and physical acts of correspondence.

In Deconstruction, for example, Derrida subjects his writing to the re-examination of the historical ordeal of feminine displacement or otherness namely, the woman question. In *Spurs*, he negotiates positions and decides that woman is 'an affirmative power', and thus 'woman will be my subject'.<sup>125</sup> Gayatri Spivak writes that 'Deconstruction is or affirms the other (woman)'. To go against the 'phallogentric law' that perceives women as 'mediating instrument[s] [...] passage[s]' has not only been Derrida's objective but also the concern of more recent post-structuralist feminists such as Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and Julia Kristeva, to name but a

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<sup>125</sup> Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 67, 36.

few.<sup>126</sup> Derrida's extensive project of spatial and temporal renegotiation of traditional binarisms such as presence (male) and absence (female) is worthy of constant consideration. Derrida opens 'Différance' with 'I will speak, therefore, of a letter'.<sup>127</sup> It does not matter whether that letter literally belongs to the body of 'Differe(a)n(ce)', because it also belongs to the body of a wom(a)n. In dealing with writing/letter/body, Derrida shows that the history of writing is dominated by the history of 'repression [...] which threatens presence' and is itself 'the mastering of absence'.<sup>128</sup> Within the system of writing, Derrida explores the realm of the *Envois*/post card which entails both writing and despatch or *dissemination*: 'Imagine the day [...] that we will be able to send sperm by post card'.<sup>129</sup> Dissemination is sexually intertwined with letters and women's acts of dispatch which I explore in two joint chapters on Dickens and Poe. With dissemination or the displacement of desire, Derrida '*affirms* the always already divided generation of meaning'.<sup>130</sup> A female's letter's resistance to fixed location/meaning gives voice to the other Eros (woman) in the process of linguistic production. A letter suffering 'a tragedy [...] of destination' leads to the circulation of female desire due to the possibility of erroneous delivery and thus public access.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, if a letter is charged with sexual meaning and is, therefore, held in secrecy, it remains an item of privacy (of no destination) and becomes liable to immediate 'burning': the letter 'remains self-evidently secret[ive], as if it were being invented at every step, and as if it were burning immediately':<sup>132</sup> 'Deconstruction is justice'.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman', in *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Nancy J. Holland (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 43-73 (p. 56, 60).

<sup>127</sup> Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 247.

<sup>129</sup> Derrida, *The Post Card*, p. 24.

<sup>130</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 268.

<sup>131</sup> Derrida, *The Post Card*, p. 23.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Derrida takes issue with Lacan's psychoanalytic reading of Poe's 'The Purloined Letter'. Lacan believes that letters are destined to/for arrival. It is Derrida's voice, however, that keeps echoing to remind us of the impossibility of arrival or perfect communication. Take *Of Hospitality*, for example, where Derrida poses a question: 'So what happens when a State intervenes not only for surveillance but to ban private communications?'<sup>134</sup> Integrity is lost and private spaces are intercepted or deconstructed. Despite Derrida's critique, psychoanalysis contributes to my reading of other texts such as Hawthorne's and Collins's fiction on mesmerised women. Lacan's and Freud's posited theories of the unconscious as, respectively, a linguistic structure and the psychic practice of 'language and transference'<sup>135</sup> help unravel the psychosexual relations between mesmerising men and mesmerised women, or between the female mediums' bodies and male sitters in spiritualist séances. These hypotheses not only manifest speech or bodily acts such as the gaze as a means of 'transference' or communication but also link these acts with the *topos* of desire. The mesmerised female's reverse gaze or the telegraphic encounter between senders and receivers is, simply put, an act of communication that reads as both sexual desire and resistance to masculine order. The development of psychoanalysis in the second half of the nineteenth century put an emphasis on the sexualised readings of male-female relationships, and it was not until a century later that psychoanalytic interpretations of the individual's relation to him/herself and the world as other became prevalent. French philosophy such as Sartre's reading of the 'slimy' as *en-soi* (being-in-itself)

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<sup>133</sup> Drucilla Cornell, 'Where Love Begins: Sexual Difference and the Limit of the Masculine Symbolic', in *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, ed. Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson and Emily Zakin (New York, London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 161-207 (p. 200).

<sup>134</sup> Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 49.

<sup>135</sup> Joël Dor, *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan: The Unconscious Structured Like a Language*, ed. Judith Feher-Gurewich and Susan Fairfield (New York: Other Press, LLC, 1998), p. 3, 2.

and *pour-soi* (being-for-itself)<sup>136</sup> and Bachelard's psychosexual associations between female bodies and fire have contributed to modern literary theory and provided another point of entry to textual analysis with which I engage throughout the thesis.

Feminists such as Kate Millet opposed Freud's theory and dismissed it as mercilessly patriarchal or traditionally 'phallogentric'.<sup>137</sup> Freudian psychoanalysis is condemned for shaping the 'feminine attitude' as dependent on paternal discourses.<sup>138</sup> The inclusion of feminism within the mastering psychoanalytic discourse of patriarchy labelled women as 'passive object[s]',<sup>139</sup> entrapped in the centre of paternal symbolic order. Yet to escape the contours of masculine discourses, major feminists like Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler embark on an intensive re-evaluation of biological or precultural definitions of gender. Whilst Grosz deplores the colonisation of the body by discursive regimes of medicine or biology,<sup>140</sup> Butler affirms that the 'gendered body is performative' as long as 'it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality'.<sup>141</sup> Both Grosz and Butler, thus, discharge the feminine discourse from the prison of biological representation of sexual difference. The returned gaze of mesmerised women and sensitive hearing in spiritualist females, for instance, which are focal in the symbolic struggle between both sexes, are performative acts upon which the construction of definitive meanings depends. Luce Irigaray subverts the masculine eye/I that gazes 'at something

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<sup>136</sup> Being, for Sartre, comprises both 'Being-in-itself' and 'Being-for-itself'. For further discussion, see Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London, New York: Routledge, 1943), p. 629.

<sup>137</sup> See Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), also quoted in Edith Kurzweil, *Freudians and Feminists* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 71-72.

<sup>138</sup> See Judith Van Herik, *Freud on Femininity and Faith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 108.

<sup>139</sup> Herik, p. 109.

<sup>140</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. x.

<sup>141</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 173.

that cannot appear to [it], of course. [Men] cannot perceive what it is'.<sup>142</sup> The female gaze problematises the masculine eye/I and shows the latter's inadequacy of coherence and understanding. The reverse gaze symbolises a crucial questioning of the moral order of social structure and the communication of knowledge/power.

Whilst Grosz, Butler and Irigaray theoretically re-examine Victorian discourses on female corporeality and subjectivity, other critics have also specifically reread non-canonical female authors in nineteenth-century transatlantic culture. Elaine Showalter states that a diversified field of Victorian women's writing is shot out of the canon of literary history due to the constant focus on the great works of the few privileged elite.<sup>143</sup> This encouraged me to think beyond the canon; therefore, I decided to explore Marryat and Phelps in an independent chapter on women, sexual desire, spiritualist mediums and sound or table-rapping. This reading gives voice to the less-known, silenced or *other* women whose sexual relations define 'power relations between classes and cultures as well as between genders and generations', as argued by Nancy Armstrong.<sup>144</sup> It is also important to recognise key projects on nineteenth-century sexuality and/or its relation to religion or what John Maynard phrases as 'God-and-sex-mad Victorian eccentrics'.<sup>145</sup> On a different level, the thesis's comparative nature is indebted to recent research on Victorians and literary theory. John Schad's *Victorians in Theory* (1999) pairs twentieth-century theorists with Victorian poets; Irigaray with Rossetti, Foucault with Arnold, to mention but two. Schad's work

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<sup>142</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian G. Gill (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 306.

<sup>143</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 7, also quoted in Nicola Diane Thompson, 'Responding to the Woman Questions: Rereading Noncanonical Victorian Women Novelists', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-24 (p. 2).

<sup>144</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire in Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 10. See also Anita Levy, *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race, and Gender, 1832-1898* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 11.

<sup>145</sup> John Maynard, *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 2. Another timely study of Victorian sexuality is Michael Mason's *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

is significant as it not only shapes our understanding of modern theory as a legacy of Victorianism, or modern theorists as reborn Victorians, but also develops an advanced logic of comparativism and intertextual reading. His engagement with the female erotic through continuous running between the worlds of Irigaray and Rossetti, for instance, helps in defining the space of desire: ‘the lowest room’, which is a place of subversion. The reference to Rossetti’s ‘our tongue grew sweeter in her mouth’ in ‘Enrica’ (1865)<sup>146</sup> opens up not only a comparative multinational reading (Rossetti-Irigaray-Enrica ... English-French-Italian), but also a whole discourse on erotic communication and multilingualism.

The thesis explores four major modes of communication in nineteenth-century transatlantic culture. These modes: mesmerism, spiritualism, telegraphism and epistolarity, will be examined in relation to female sexuality and the changing power relations in a world of developing communication. This world offers women the power of speaking and thus breaking the symbolic social order that disallows their verbal and spatial contribution within Anglo-American Victorian public places. Through communicative acts, women not only re-evaluate masculine definitions of desire but also step outside the domestic space and create an active network that obliterates sex differences and refutes their marginalisation. By the means of these four forms of communication; two of which are psychic, two written, women rise to power, become subversive and control their own discourse.

The first chapter probes mesmerism as a form of erotic mediation between controlling masculine figures and female subjects in Hawthorne’s and Collins’s works. The chapter shows how the art of mesmerism represents a turning point in gender struggle, in that the mesmerised

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<sup>146</sup> John Chad, *Victorians in Theory: From Derrida to Browning* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 8.



women's performative acts such as the counter-gaze subverts masculine control over the female body and include them in the equation of communication.

The second chapter looks into acoustic communication by establishing a link between female mediums, séance spirits and sound effects. By closely reading the works of lesser known female spiritualists and novelists, namely Marryat and Phelps, I argue that the transformation of sound from an invisible *effect* into a materialised form of desire, represented in the hysteric, acoustic female body, helps carry women's voices beyond the contours of the séance-room.

In the third chapter, I examine the interrelationship between erotic telegraphic communications and scandals in James's texts in association with Sartre's reading of slime. Through telegrams, the chapter contributes to the overall reading of female potential and women's climbing the ladder of social power by participating in the knowledge of scandals and themselves being the love object of telegraphic wires: their desire figuratively extends beyond the walls of telegraph offices.

Epistolary correspondence, which is the last mode of communication I investigate in the works of Dickens and Poe, splits into two shorter chapters; the first investigates the relationship between epistolary *adestination*, the circulation of sexual desire and women's subversion of spatial categorisations of privacy and publicity as well as male interceptors; the other considers death by fire, domestic transgression and female subjectivity. Whilst the first chapter focuses on displacement of the post, misaddressing or erroneous delivery as a public embodiment of female desire upon and during despatch, the second and last chapters focus on the sexualised meaning of nineteenth-century fireplaces, the textual representation of self-immolation or burning and the symbolic transformation of the female body from a letter to ember.

## Chapter One

“‘Am I awake? – Am I awake?’”:<sup>1</sup>

### Carnal Mesmerism and Bizarre Sexuality in Hawthorne and Collins

“Was it the mesmerism? Did you blame me for letting that woman exercise her power over you?”

Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Parasite* (1894)<sup>2</sup>

In Doyle’s *The Parasite*, Austin Gilroy, a young male physiologist, becomes controlled by a crippled ugly female mesmerist called Miss Penclosa. Throughout Doyle’s novella, Penclosa forces Gilroy to unconsciously fall in love with her although he is betrothed to Agatha. Despite the fact that Gilroy repels Penclosa, he is physically drawn to her, and is happy to do whatever it takes to please her such as throwing acid into Agatha’s beautiful face. Doyle’s narrative reveals the dark nature of mesmeric practice, especially when it transforms into a craving sexual desire by a jealous medium like Miss Penclosa. This is one literary example that features a female mesmerist in control of a man’s carnal desires, but what happens if women are the subject of mesmeric treatments? Mesmerism emerged in the eighteenth century as a masculine science practised by physicians ‘in positions of senior authority’.<sup>3</sup> The science later became troublesome as it grew into a nineteenth-century form of sexual mediation between controlling males and powerless females, a relationship epitomised in Hepzibah Pyncheon’s reiterated question “am I awake? – am I awake?”. In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Miss Pyncheon wakes up from a deep mesmeric trance she is put into after she departs from home

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Robert S. Levine (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 180. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as *HSG* followed by page number.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Parasite* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Willis, *Mesmerists, Monsters, and Machines: Science Fiction and the Culture of Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2006), p. 96.

with her brother Clifford, but finds herself faltering between consciousness and unconsciousness in the premises of her house; a place that manifests mesmeric diabolism as it is haunted by Matthew Maule's curse, Alice Pyncheon's ghost and a transfixing shop-bell. Mesmeric mediation supplied Hawthorne and other Anglo-American authors such as Wilkie Collins with good material to register sexual relations of males exercising their magnetic influence over female bodies through touching or *gazing*.<sup>4</sup> These practices flagged up moral debates in nineteenth-century transatlantic culture and posed significant questions over gender relations, power struggle and erotic magnetism within mesmeric communications.

This chapter examines mesmerism as a mode of carnal communication in two particular novels: Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* and Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868). Originally, mesmerism came into being as a medical approach to mental treatment, before it was turned into a tool of women's sexual objectification. Within the discourse of mesmerism, I however argue that women's position during mesmeric activities is not necessarily vulnerable or subordinate. Through their bodily acts, particularly gazing, women are capable of subverting the norm of medical or biological and thus discursive gender relations. Not only were mesmerised women able to challenge sexual definitions of subjectivity and objectivity, but some also practiced mesmerism themselves, thus putting an end to the patriarchal monopoly of scientific mesmerism. Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) exemplified the female potential for the possession and application of magnetic influence. After her magnetic treatment in 1844, Martineau became 'one of mesmerism's firmest supporters and in following years a magnetizer herself'.<sup>5</sup> The chapter also problematises the morality of mesmeric activities via the uncanny figure of the male

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<sup>4</sup> By the phrase Anglo-American authors, I refer to nineteenth-century literary men who crossed the Atlantic and whose writings were influential either in America or Britain.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor Stoehr, 'Hawthorne and Mesmerism', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 33: 1 (1969), 33-60 (p. 34).

mesmerist whose masculinity is sometimes defeated within the textual narrative. Hawthorne's Holgrave eventually becomes an amiable, domesticated mesmerist whilst Collins's Count Fosco in *The Woman in White* (1859), whose profession as vivisectionist incurs moral suspicions, ends up dead. Opponents of mesmerism, argues Maria Tatar, were long alarmed by the multiplicity of 'moral perils' awaiting 'attractive young women in mesmerist parlors'.<sup>6</sup> On both sides of the Atlantic, mesmerism was viewed as an 'unstable science' that employed female bodies as fetishistic objects to be scientifically examined, displayed and erotically gazed at.<sup>7</sup> Yet instability also emanates from the masculine use of mesmerism as a one-way forced mediation of desire, thus creating an imbalance of power, excluding mesmerised women from reciprocal correspondence and transferring them to 'unthinking machine[s], entirely at the mercy of the experimenter'.<sup>8</sup> In Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* and Collins's *The Moonstone*, however, we see an inversion of communication where the female object becomes the mesmerising subject, the one who *gazes* and controls.

Mesmerism is named after Franz Anton Mesmer, an eighteenth-century Austrian physician whose claims were based on the 'application of Newtonian philosophy to bodily health'.<sup>9</sup> He believed in an invisible magnetic force that governs the relationship between the human body and the surrounding natural atmosphere. Within the mesmeric process, patients were treated by changing 'the polar magnetic forces that were affecting the health of the physical body or, alternatively, influenc[ing] the mind of the patient and gain[ing] control of these magnetic forces

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<sup>6</sup> Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Sharrona Pearl, 'Dazed and Abused: Gender and Mesmerism in Wilkie Collins', in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, eds., Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne (Amsterdam, New York, NY: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 163-183 (p. 163).

<sup>8</sup> Willis, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 2.

more directly'.<sup>10</sup> Mesmerism could thus be defined as a non-verbal act in which the patient experiences a trance-like state by changing the flow of fluid energy or magnetic force within her/his body, hence called animal magnetism by Mesmer.<sup>11</sup> Non-verbal action could refer to gazing, stroking or even fascination, a practice that resembles modern-day Hindu Chakra or Yoga in which the patient's body and mind become peacefully harmonious due to the balancing of energy knots around the body. That mesmerism employs non-verbal fascination or the captivation of women's passion as a trancing technique raises questions over its integrity. The potential immorality of mesmerism emanates from the erotic exploitation of vulnerable female patients, but more importantly from the marginalisation of tranced women within the duality of communication. In nineteenth-century mesmeric practices, women are normally the objects of men's magnetic power and influence. They are vulnerable participants acting passively under the control of male mesmerist's expertise. The passive instrumentality of female participants became quickly associated with scandals; immobile female bodies were seen as easy prey for lascivious male mesmerists. Mesmer's early practices occurred in 1776 when he treated the young blind female pianist Maria-Theresa Von Paradis. Members of the Faculty of Medicine who attended the sessions accused Mesmer's method of being completely invalid,<sup>12</sup> thus infuriating Paradis's parents especially her father who demanded the immediate return of his daughter for fear of a bad reputation.

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<sup>10</sup> Willis, p. 47. See also Vincent Buranelli, *The Wizard from Vienna: Franz Anton Mesmer* (London: Peter Owen, 1976), p. 39. For further details about Mesmer and his scientific progress in Europe, see Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1-17.

<sup>11</sup> Animal Magnetism was the name given by Mesmer to a process in which unseen natural powers applied by animals could have an effect on patients' physical, therapeutic systems. Animal Magnetism is a theory of vital fluidity in which fluid matters that permeate the human body travel between different bodies, producing animal electricity during physical interaction. The transference of fluid from one body to the other results in the movement of motion from the active to passive body until the medium of motion becomes equal between the two bodies. This leads to bodily motion being equal, and equality becoming animal electricity.

<sup>12</sup> See Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 40.

On both sides of the Atlantic, not only did the populace become obsessed with the bizarre nature of mesmerism but literary men raced to represent this fashionable pseudoscience in their fiction. Alison Winter suggests that the place of mesmerism was ‘everywhere’, and it was virtually a profession of individuals of different ‘classes [ranging from] Samuel Wilberforce [to] Harriet Martineau, Wilkie Collins, Alfred Russel Wallace, and Charles Dickens, to name but a few’.<sup>13</sup> Dickens, for instance, befriended well-established mesmerists like Dr. Elliotson, attended mesmeric treatments at the latter’s request and practised it on close relatives, particularly his wife Catherine.<sup>14</sup> Lyn Pykett refers to Elliotson as a notable figure in the field of mesmerism and phrenology which together he considered ‘as ways of exploring the dim, dark regions of the mental world’,<sup>15</sup> thus giving Dickens a deep-seated curiosity about the nature of mesmeric activity.

In 1838, Dickens sent a letter to his collaborator George Cruikshank, a British caricaturist (1792-1878), telling him that ‘Elliotson has written to me to go and see some experiments on Okey at his house at 3 o’clock tomorrow afternoon’.<sup>16</sup> Dickens’s epistolary correspondence reveals his passion for mesmeric knowledge which is also reflected in his literary texts, especially his last unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*,<sup>17</sup> where psychic influence is associated with the disappearance of Edwin Drood, a fanciful incident that explores the state of being mesmerised. Dickens also had long friendships with other writers such as Collins who

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<sup>13</sup> Winter, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Mesmerism, argues Holly Furneaux, became widely prescribed ‘as a form of treatment for ailing family members’ from the 1840s until the end of the nineteenth century. See Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> Lyn Pykett, *Authors in Context: Wilkie Collins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 167.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 12 vols, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 461.

<sup>17</sup> See for example chapter XIX ‘Shadow on the Sun-dial’, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, intro. S. C. Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

shared the former's interest in the idea of 'one person [...] cast[ing] a spell on another'.<sup>18</sup> In Collins's exploration of magnetic effects on women, he shows how the spell-like power of male mesmerists can unleash multi-dimensional corporeal and mental denouements ranging from Rosanna Spearman's fierce passion in *The Moonstone* to Anne Catherick's and Laura Fairlie's madness in *The Woman in White*. Through his experience with patients and literary correspondence with Dickens,<sup>19</sup> Collins draws attention to gender relations, particularly the social and economic place of women within Victorian society. In *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*, Collins explores mesmerism's potential for sexual violence and socioeconomic instability. Miss Rachel Verinder in the former novel is sexually attracted to the moonstone, a fact that leads to her psychological disarray, subsequent domestic disruption and economic turbulence.

In his description of gender politics within the mesmeric discourse, Collins provokes serious concerns about sexual relations within the domestic sphere of the Victorian family. *The Moonstone*, for instance, develops an awareness of incestuous desire that is represented in the relationship between Rachel and her cousins, Franklin Blake and Godfrey Ablewhite, as both try to win her love by exercising magnetic influence over her body. Collins's allusion to mesmeric incest arguably points to an emerging nineteenth-century industry of pornography. The representation of mesmerism as a mode of body display and the reference to familial sexual encounters could be linked to the prominence of pornographic markets in the Victorian society. *The Power of Mesmerism* (1891) is a late nineteenth-century anonymous novel that exemplifies the emerging pornographic trend within Victorian fiction. Frank in the novel spends four years

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<sup>18</sup> Tatar, p. 191.

<sup>19</sup> Dickens and Collins spent some time at Mrs de la Rue's where the former practiced mesmerism on the landlady to cure her of hysteria, see Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of the Home* (London, 1988), p. 59.

learning mesmerism abroad, and when he comes back, he uses it to gratify his sexual desires within the circle of family members. Through extensive indulgence in an incestuous relationship with his sister Ethel, who becomes sexually involved against her will, the novel addresses the Victorian mind by showing how far mesmerism can generate sexual perversion and thus function as pornographic media:

The dear girl did exactly as requested, still in the same dreamy languid manner [...]  
 “Now, my darling,” said he, “remove your drawers.”  
 She did so, and he snatched them up and covered them with kisses.  
 “Now the chemise.”  
 That also was taken off with alacrity, and she was before him perfectly naked. Heaven! What a sight!<sup>20</sup>

The description of Frank’s and Ethel’s sexual pleasure expresses the dangerous misuse of mesmeric power and builds up to a stage where sexual excitement is tied with the pornographic communication of desire: ‘what a sight!’. Frank’s exclamation implies sexual apotheosis of the mesmeric encounter in which Ethel’s body is fully exposed to the naked eye, making it in other words a mesmerised object of pornography. The transformation of the nineteenth-century domesticated female body into a public object, however, violates moral regulations and social order. According to Elizabeth Gaskell, mesmerism constitutes a ‘breakdown in society’s mental fabric’.<sup>21</sup> Mesmerism does not only undermine women’s bodies as sexually advertisable but also, for Gaskell, disrupts their mental well-being, thus affecting the entire psychological system of nineteenth-century society.

Mesmerism in America, Tatar suggests, ‘enjoyed much the same notoriety that it had won in England and on the Continent’, but since mesmerism started in Europe, it was not primarily as

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<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, *The Power of Mesmerism: A Highly Erotic Narrative of Voluptuous Facts and Fancies* [1891] (Paris: Olympia Press, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Willis and Wynne, p. 3.



well received.<sup>22</sup> The arrival of Charles Poyen in America, the French scholar of animal magnetism whose theories were seen as works of witchcraft, was the first step towards the American recognition of mesmerism. America's long history with seventeenth-century witchcraft such as the Salem Witch Trials (1692-1693) in Massachusetts, which Hawthorne severely criticised in 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835) and *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), prompted the widespread dismissal of Poyen's theories as devilish. American early resistance to mesmerism can thus be associated with the pseudoscience's capacity to manipulate 'the nervous system and the brain'.<sup>23</sup> The theoretical debate on the validity of American mesmerism, however, was later challenged, transforming it into a practical science. In 1838, Robert Collyer described America as 'a place where [anyone] who has the impudence may leave the lapstone and become a physician'.<sup>24</sup> Collyer's statement suggests America's transformation into a place of free practice where mesmerism is freely conducted and even fictionalised. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Edgar Allen Poe 'were among the few American writers to extract some of the original meaning from the garbled mass of literature that had taken Mesmer's teaching as a point of departure'.<sup>25</sup> Melville's novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852), for instance, sheds light on mesmeric relations between Pierre and Isabel Banford; it is a novel that was badly received among American literary readership at the time due to its immoral/erotic representation of male-female relationships. Hawthorne, on the other hand, had a deep-seated resentment of mesmerism even though it provided him with the subject matter for his occult/scientific literary texts.<sup>26</sup> F. O. Matthiessen argues that Hawthorne was impressed by

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<sup>22</sup> Tatar, p. 192.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Poyen, *Progress of Animal Magnetism in New England* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, 1837), p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Collyer, *Lights and Shadows of American Life* (Boston: Brainard and Co., 1838), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Tatar, p. 196.

<sup>26</sup> Hawthorne's novels combine aspects of mesmeric science and supernatural or mystical presence. They, in other words, represent a negotiation between magical powers and contemporaneous scientific discourses.

mesmerism as an equivalent phenomenon to black art, magic or sorcery.<sup>27</sup> Robert Fuller argues that whilst Ralph Emerson recognised mesmerism as the omnipotent ‘royal road to spiritual utopia’, Hawthorne grew wary of its moral implications.<sup>28</sup> In a letter to his wife Sophia Peabody, dated October 1841, Hawthorne writes that ‘my spirit is moved to talk with thee to-day about these magnetic miracles, and to beseech thee to take no part in them’.<sup>29</sup> Henry James in ‘Professor Fargo’ (1874) manifests Hawthorne’s and Americans’ worry about the dark side of mesmeric control. Professor Fargo is a wicked magnetiser whose objective is to seduce Gifford’s daughter and prove his capability of controlling human love.<sup>30</sup> Like his American contemporaries, Edgar Allan Poe also perceived mesmerism as an ‘amoral force’.<sup>31</sup> Poe nonetheless employs magnetism to explore the realm that lies between the corporeal and spiritual, the physical and metaphysical which constitute the human entity. In ‘The Power of Words’, ‘The Facts in the Case of Mr Valdemar’ (1845) and ‘Mesmeric Revelations’ (1844), Poe explores the connection between ‘motions of the external world and their psychal impressions on individual consciousness’.<sup>32</sup> Through the mesmeric body, Poe investigates the true material and/or immaterial nature of God’s being.<sup>33</sup> The body in Poe’s stories is an entry point into the truth of the infinity of matter, the particled relationship between external divinity and internal human psychology.

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<sup>27</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whiteman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 205.

<sup>28</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Hawthorne, *Hawthorne: The Letters: 1813-1843, The Centenary*, 23 vols, eds. Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith and Norman Holmes Pearson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 15. 588.

<sup>30</sup> See ‘Professor Fargo’, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, III, ed. Leon Edel (London: Hart-Davis, 1964).

<sup>31</sup> Anthony Enns, ‘Mesmerism and the Electric Age: From Poe to Edison’, in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, pp. 61-83 (p. 65).

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Mills, *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts: Transition States in the American Renaissance* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

The female body in nineteenth-century transatlantic mesmerism literature is represented as ‘vulnerable’, easy to be ‘overthrow[n] by the mind’.<sup>34</sup> Mesmerised women’s bodies were used as constructs of material passivity, a quality that made them suitable for mesmeric laboratories. Passivity entails the absence of physical and mental interaction of female bodies and their reduction to mediums of masculine desires. However, by turning mesmerised women’s bodies into uncommunicative tools, they become the very space of communication between contesting masculine desires and female repression and resistance. Passivity in the male mesmerist’s ideology is challenged; in that it becomes the system by which patriarchal superiority is questioned and women’s desire and activity are negotiated. In seventeenth-century Puritan culture, American women, who were socially subordinate and passive, escape mesmerising patriarchal laws by indulging more in the erotic festivities of May Day, the ‘mass deflowerings of virgins in the branch-gathering expeditions’ which take place on the first day of summer.<sup>35</sup> In Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, the Puritan legacy of sexual fear and objectification haunts the relationship between Hawthorne’s mesmerist and his female subjects. Matthew Maule uses Alice Pyncheon’s body as a vehicle to accomplish his own ends which do not only relate to the ownership of the house of the seven gables but also to ‘uncanny’ desires,<sup>36</sup> to use Sigmund Freud’s term:

While she [Alice] lived, she was Maule’s slave, in a bondage more humiliating, a thousand-fold, than that which binds its chain around the body [...] He [Matthew] meant to humble Alice, not to kill her; – but he had taken a woman’s delicate soul into his rude grip, to play with; – and she was dead!  
(*HSG*, 149-50)

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<sup>34</sup> Winter, p. 214.

<sup>35</sup> Frederick C. Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne’s Psychological Themes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 20-21. Crews refers to Joseph Strutt’s *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* in which the latter explores the symbolism of leisure time activities in Old England, such as festivals including Christmas and May Day.

<sup>36</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (London, Vienna: The International Psychoanalytical Press, 1922), p. 57.

Frederick Crews calls Matthew's and Alice's relationship 'transparently sexual',<sup>37</sup> and this possibly applies to the whole history of social interaction between the Maules and Pyncheons. It is, however, the female body – Alice's body – which becomes the fuel of antagonism between the two families. Through Alice's body, which symbolises the enmity of Maules and Pyncheons over the piece of land on which the house of the seven gables is built, Hawthorne critiques the strict Puritanism of seventeenth-century American culture. Hawthorne deploys sorcerous mesmeric characters in the text such as Matthew Maule to counteract Puritan embargoes on free magical and erotic practices via the loose exercise of mesmerism later in the nineteenth century. Matthew's mesmeric act, however, draws attention to Hawthorne's feminist concerns about the sexual space of American women. Even though Matthew's mesmeric practice is meant to help discover the place of the document that proves the rightful ownership of the house of the seven gables, his objective turns into an *idée fixe* of Alice's carnality. It is not the lost document but Alice's body that grows in significance as it becomes the centre of mesmeric action. Her body is the lost document itself and the locus of desire. It is thus fair to say that Alice's body, instead of the document, constitutes a commensurate dimension of power that Hawthorne places in conversation with a patriarchal force. The reference to Maule's seduction of Alice (i.e. her soul is a thing 'to play with'), shows that the former is also sexually played with through the subjective presence of the other. Despite the fact that this erotic relationship leads to the annihilation of Alice's 'delicate soul', it is crucial to note that Matthew Maule also falls prey to his subject's seductive power. Power is arguably renegotiated and Alice's absent interaction or communication is hence offset by her involvement in the duality of mediation: whereas Matthew controls her soul, she possesses his desire and reveals his true sexual identity.

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<sup>37</sup> Crews, p. 180.

Within the complex relationship of mesmerist and mesmerised, Tatar argues that the latter becomes unconsciously involved in attraction and the mediation of erotic desire.<sup>38</sup> Alice, for example, is psychosexually drawn to her male mesmerist even though her attraction is based on humiliation. Tatar's reference to 'a subconscious attraction to the mesmerist'<sup>39</sup> implies a weakness on the part of the mesmerised female and her presumed exclusion from cultural psychic media: she does not act; she is acted upon. However, this implication does not necessarily suggest a total submission of the mesmerised female. She is capable of resisting the patriarchal definition of power relations within the discourse of mesmerism by simply *dying*: Alice 'was dead!'. Death is a profound resistance that makes the female body completely 'inaccessible' to mesmeric intervention.<sup>40</sup> Alice's death signifies the 'death of desire', to borrow Elisabeth Bronfen's phrase, and the subversion of mesmeric pleasure and masculine presence via 'death *as* femininity'.<sup>41</sup> With the annihilation of desire, a process that Jacques Lacan terms *jouissance*: 'sex or death',<sup>42</sup> mesmerised women do not only unveil masculine mesmeric mediations as selfish, exclusive and invalid, but also problematise patriarchal desires as unreal. Desire, according to Lacan, is 'unsatisfied and unsatisfiable'<sup>43</sup> because it chases what is imaginary or impossible, which can be located in mesmerised women, in Alice's dead body.

Through Alice's dead body, Hawthorne does not only draw attention to women's inferior positions within social communication in nineteenth-century America, but also flags up debates on incest and male-male relationships. During Alice's mesmerisation, her father Gervaise Pyncheon is seen in the room staring helplessly at his daughter's body falling under Matthew's

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<sup>38</sup> Tatar, p. 212.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>40</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, *Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 96.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>42</sup> Ellie Ragland, *Essays on the Pleasure of Death: From Freud to Lacan* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), p. 153.

<sup>43</sup> Bronfen, p. 96.

control. The scene is repulsive in terms of the father-daughter relationship; Gervaise is repeatedly exposed to Matthew's erotic mesmeric act over his daughter's body. Matthew's unending influence forces the father to plead for its termination; however, the former repeats his action to a point where Gervaise cannot escape the torment of voyeurism. Being constantly in sight of his daughter's body and thus unwillingly acting as the voyeur, Gervaise endures an incestuous anxiety facilitated by the excess of mesmeric mediation. Through this mediation, Hawthorne communicates the faultiness of Puritan sexuality in which 'ancestry is associated with incest'.<sup>44</sup> The complicated erotic triangle of father, daughter and Matthew shows the paradoxical system of sexual Puritanism: whilst displaying censorious moral beliefs, the Puritans are indeed sexually excessive and incestuous. The excess of mesmeric exposure ends in Alice's death followed by the destruction of Gervaise's masculine identity. Compared to Matthew, Gervaise becomes feminised, as he is reduced to a weak beseeching man, through whom Hawthorne criticises American masculinity and the hypocritical religious system.

Yet Gervaise's weakness in the presence of his daughter's visible sexualised body also discloses what Allan and Barbara Lefcowitz call 'mesmeric prostitution'.<sup>45</sup> The theatrical space occupied by Alice suggests an increase of public interest – symbolised by the Father Figure – in sexual commercialisation; an interest that echoes Collins's hint of incestuous relationships, the rise of the pornographic industry and mesmeric simulacra of women's bodies. Collins and Hawthorne employ theatrical images of the sexualised female body in a way that bespeaks the changing cultural representation of women who are mesmerically put on show. The industrial nature of the nineteenth century and the development of other media such as photography in

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<sup>44</sup> Crews, p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> Lefcowitz, Allan and Barbara Lefcowitz, 'Some Rents in the Veil: New Light on Priscilla and Zenobia in the Blithedale Romance', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 21: 3 (1966), 263-275 (p. 270).

1839 at the hands of the French photographer Louis Daguerre (1787-1851) – hence ‘Daguerreotype’<sup>46</sup> – facilitated the projection of the female body as an erotic item to view either in photos or behind glass windows, a subject I will further explore later in relation to Hawthorne’s Hepzibah and her shop-window and bell. The bodies of Hawthorne’s Alice or Collins’s Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White* are figured as seductive products in a commercial culture that was becoming increasingly fascinated with sexual communication through the public display of mesmerised bodies.

The bodies of Miss Rachel and her maid, the physically-deformed tragic character Rosanna Spearman, in *The Moonstone* are likewise represented as sexual objects of the mesmeric eye. Collins creates different magnetic centres functioning as photographic labyrinths through which women fight for self-definition: the moonstone, the Shivering Sand, amorous and violent male characters and even us readers. The novel can be seen as an enormous picture or early daguerreotype where the female body is *affected* by the surrounding magnetic poles and is thus subjected to others’ public viewing. Collins’s novel, generally speaking, describes the movement of a precious Indian mythical stone, called the moonstone, which was robbed from the Indian shrine of Vishnu the Preserver, and taken to England by John Herncastle. The stone was given to Rachel Verinder, Herncastle’s niece, as a birthday gift through Franklin Blake, who happens to be in England after a long journey in Europe. The novel ends in the death of Rosanna Spearman, the maid at Lady Verinder’s house, and the restoration of the moonstone by the three Indian Brahmins. The physical association between the magnetic moonstone on the one hand and Rachel’s sexual maturity – symbolised by her eighteenth birthday – and Rosanna’s death at the

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<sup>46</sup> Daguerreotypy prevailed in the nineteenth-century as a form of photography in which photographs were taken by ‘using silver-coated copper plate and mercury vapour’; see Maurice Waite, ed., *Oxford English Dictionary*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 175.

end of the novel on the other hand explains the position of Victorian women within the mesmeric social context. The journey from adulthood to decay (from Rachel to Rosanna, from sex to death, both embedded in Lacanian *jouissance* – ‘sex or death’) expresses social dispositions to either eroticise or consume the female body. The process by which two females represent the extremes of sexuality and death, also to be found in Hawthorne’s erotic veiled lady Priscilla and the dead Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), signifies the limits of cultural categorisations of women’s bodies within nineteenth-century discourses on mesmeric communication. Whilst Rachel and Priscilla are beautiful mesmeric subjects to display, others are the cataclysms of beauty and/or mesmeric evils, destined to die by natural magnetic forces: Rosanna dies in the Shivering Sands; Zenobia by water.

Whilst Hawthorne uses cryptic objects such as daguerreotypes (drawn by Holgrave), the shop-bell and veils in *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance* for mesmeric influence, Collins imparts much more magnetic force to the moonstone and the Shivering Sand, a place which, according to Rosanna, lays “‘a kind of spell on me’”.<sup>47</sup> The Shivering Sand is a microcosmic world that draws Rosanna’s body to its own centre, but it is also the heart of the narrative’s mesmerisation that entraps detectives,<sup>48</sup> Sergeant Cuff and Superintendent Seegrave (See Grave?), a man whose name is associated with the death-drive of the dark site. The magnetic power of the Shivering Sand emanates from its symbolic presence as a psychological nucleus which both attracts Rosanna’s body and consumes her: a source of detection that fulfils desire and causes death, a sort of *jouissance* (sex or death). The moonstone and the Shivering Sand are thus natural magnetic centres deriving their significance from the sexual influence they

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<sup>47</sup> William Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. Anthea Trodd (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press), p. 350. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the body of the text as *MS* followed by page number.

<sup>48</sup> Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins, Medicine and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 86.



leave on surrounding objects. The moonstone is especially associated with desire; an object that is given on the eve of Rachel's sexual maturity as a token of passion. The stone is chemically connected to Rachel's psychosexual system; it mediates between 'physic power and sexual energy', as suggested by Jenny Taylor.<sup>49</sup> Rachel is therefore mentally possessed by the stone, the disappearance of which becomes a climax point in the novel and the source of her subsequent unfathomable and unpredictable behaviour:

*'The diamond is gone!'*

'Are you out of your mind?' I asked her.

'Gone!' says Penelope. 'Gone, nobody knows how! Come up and see.'

She dragged me after her into our young lady's sitting-room, which opened into her bed-room. There, on the threshold of her bed-room door, stood Rachel, almost as white in the face as the white dressing-gown that clothed her. There also stood the two doors of the Indian cabinet, wide open'.  
(MS, 87)

The diamond's loss has a symbolic meaning here; it implies Rachel's psychological transformation from unsophistication to sexual experience. That the moonstone and its loss are metaphorically representative of Rachel's sexual desire and maturity corresponds to the virgin's psychological state on her first sexual intercourse. In 'The Taboo of Virginitly', Freud argues that 'when a virgin is deflowered, her blood is as a rule shed'; the sight of blood as a consequence causes psychological turbulence.<sup>50</sup> The act of loss of the actual diamond can be metaphorically equated to the loss of Rachel's virginity, or the hymen-as-diamond. In a Freudian context, phrases like '*gone!*' and 'wide open' in the quotation above communicate a symbolic language

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<sup>49</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of the Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 195. Taylor points out that Collins's minute description of the moonstone is influenced by Charles William King's *The Natural History, Ancient and Modern, of Precious Stones and Gems, and of the Precious Metals* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1867). On the stone's magnetic nature, King writes that the diamond is 'highly electric, attracting light objects when heated by friction; and alone amongst gems has the peculiarity of becoming phosphorescent in the dark, after long exposure to the sun's rays', p. 101.

<sup>50</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Taboo of Virginitly', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), XI. 196.

of defloration and fear of hymenal loss, hence Rachel's facial colour change: she stood 'as white in the face as the white dressing-gown that clothed her'. Whilst Albert Hutter associates the moonstone with 'women and sexuality (beauty, great value)',<sup>51</sup> Charles Rycroft believes that the central narrative of *The Moonstone* 'very obviously represents a sexual intercourse [... of] a quite special psychological significance'.<sup>52</sup> Yet centrality in Collins's narrative can also be located in the gradual transmissive development of Rachel's body. Following the disappearance of the moonstone, Rachel's body becomes the centre of mediation in the sense that masculine desire and other minor domestic relations revolve around it. Her body, not unlike the diamond, turns into the pivot of mesmeric communication, and this transpires in the close description of her bodily acts, instead of the diamond. It is true that the moonstone occupies a major space in this scene, but Rachel's symbolically deflowered body also acts as the surrogate diamond on which all other eyes are fixed, making it the core of mesmeric action. The narrative, for example, focuses on the emotional relationship between Rachel and her lover Blake, who is later held responsible for stealing the stone after being drugged by the local doctor, Mr. Candy, on the night of the robbery. Within the psychosexual discourse, Rachel develops 'hostility' towards the man to whom she loses her virginity.<sup>53</sup> The hymen or diamond is paradoxically an object of love and hate, its dispossession generates hatred, carnal anxiety and revengeful feelings. Mark Hennelly argues that the stone 'develop[s] and promote[s] love'.<sup>54</sup> This is true as Rachel's and

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<sup>51</sup> Albert D. Hutter, 'Dreams, Transformations, and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction', *Victorian Studies*, 19: 2 (1975), 181-209 (p. 200).

<sup>52</sup> Charles Rycroft, *Imagination and Reality* (New York: International Universities Press, INC., 1968), p. 116.

<sup>53</sup> Freud 'The Taboo of Virginity', p. 201.

<sup>54</sup> Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., 'Detecting Collins's Diamond: From Serpentine to Moonstone', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 39: 1 (1984), 25-47 (p. 32). *The Moonstone* is also called *The Serpent's Eye*, and Hennelly identifies the stone's evil with the serpentine idolatry or "serpent worship". He refers to Nuel Pharr Davis's *The Life of Wilkie Collins* in which Davis suggests that Collins first chose the title *The Serpent's Eye* for his novel. Collins scientifically incorporates the mythical narrative of the Fall by socially cursing Blake and Rachel after their attempt to gain knowledge of the moonstone, the forbidden fruit. They topple from a lofty position to a degrading earthly

Blake's mutual love is amended towards the end of the novel, yet the stone also signals a desire for communicational centrality. Through the moonstone and its *libidinal* representation,<sup>55</sup> Rachel builds a subjective identity within the late-Victorian family and affirms her presence as an autonomous woman who is in control of both domestic and narrative networks.

*The Moonstone*, argues Lyn Pykett, is a “‘message’ about the social, sexual and psychological organisation of the Victorian family’.<sup>56</sup> Does this message arrive? And how does Rachel mediate the reorganisation of nineteenth-century domestic spheres? The message arrives even though at the expense of diamond/hymen loss. As regards the rearrangement of women's position within patriarchal Victorian families, Rachel subverts mesmeric roles of gazing males and gazed-at females by playing the role of the gazer during the robbery of the stone. Rachel – in silence – sees Blake take the diamond: “‘suspect you! [...] *You villain, I saw you take the Diamond with my own eyes!*’” (*MS*, 382). Taking into account the sexual symbolism of the moonstone and the mesmeric setting of the bedroom, a place in which Blake is entranced, Rachel stands as the dominant Other to whom everything else is subjected including Blake. She is in panoramic control of the bedroom scene and the domestic landscape: she sees Blake ‘*with my own eyes*’.

Although eyes are the most vulnerable part of an individual, for it is through them that the communication of knowledge and desire takes place, they can also be performative symbols of power. Conventionally, we might assume that Rachel is the victim of a sexually violent scene, represented by the robbery of her diamond/hymen; however, she destabilises nineteenth-century

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place due to the sexual associations of the diamond: Blake is identified as an unconscious thief and Rachel becomes an injured virgin.

<sup>55</sup> *Libido* is “‘sexual energy’”, “‘hunger energy’” or the sex drive that emanates from an insatiable indulgence with a sexual object, which is contrary to Hoffman's suggestion of ‘satisfaction [...] by its investment in a sexual object’. Frederick J. Hoffman, *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* (Michigan: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> Lyn Pykett, ‘Introduction’, in *New Casebooks: Wilkie Collins*, ed. Pykett (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 20.

definitions of male gazers and female gazees by taking up the most powerful gaze in history, Medusa's gaze. Whilst Blake is unconscious of any presence in the bedroom, Rachel watches him without intervention, thus becoming a channel of power through whose eyes we are fed with knowledge. According to Hazel Barnes, the gorgonian severity of a female starrer is capable of complete subversion as it challenges other combating gazes.<sup>57</sup> Yet in Rachel's case, she does not even stare back because she is in control from the beginning. Her male adversary is unconscious: he is a man who looks but never sees, a man of sightless insight. Rachel's optical power arises from the fact that she, while silent, acts as a *speaking* screen that transmits to us the proceedings of Blake's acts. The scene, simply put, is communicated from a female perspective, compared to Blake's absent-mindedness. If we again compare feminine and masculine roles, here we find that Rachel is more actively communicational, the one who *performs*; her body, to use Judith Butler's words, is the medium by which gender is redefined:

The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body [...] to be an "internal" feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts.<sup>58</sup>

In staring at Blake's symbolic act of defloration, i.e. stealing the stone, Rachel avoids cultural objectification through what Butler calls 'stylization of the body'. She controls the law of perception which is a set of repetitive 'bodily acts' targeting Blake's body. She acts, performs or defines her femininity through repetitive gazing, thus subverting the masculine role as the gazer and the mesmerised female body as gazee. The mesmeric female body can no longer be read as

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<sup>57</sup> Hazel Barnes, 'The Look of the Gorgon', in *The Meddling Gods: Four Essays on Classical Themes* (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), pp. 1-50 (p. 7).

<sup>58</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999), p. xv.

‘a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related’.<sup>59</sup> The nineteenth-century female body for Butler often appears to be an unresisting ‘inert matter, signifying nothing or, more specifically, signifying a profane void, the fallen state’.<sup>60</sup> Rachel’s unfathomable behaviour after the robbery registers an internal difference that signifies, however, that she is not a void. On the contrary, her internal feminine identity is defined in relation to Blake’s instrumental presence; Blake is indeed the mute instrument that is necessary for Rachel’s self-definition.

Instead of being a passive object in the bedroom, Rachel takes on the role of male voyeurism: she moves from the status of the robbed to voyeuristic observer. Silent observation does not necessarily suggest passivity or acceptance of sexual intrusion; it is an effective bodily ‘stylization’ that is meant to ward off masculine presence and create interior subjectivity. Power is the gift of silent watching, a mysterious Foucauldian ‘power’ that ‘comes from everywhere’.<sup>61</sup> That silence endows the observing female with performative power beyond definition is true in Rachel’s case, as her gaze ‘remains an enigma’, to borrow Lorraine Gamman’s words,<sup>62</sup> a mesmeric silence that communicates unrestricted feminine agency. The everywhere power that comes to Rachel signifies a panoptic vision wherein she is the gazing master who gains voyeuristic pleasure, which is an inversion of nineteenth-century traditional mesmeric communicational roles. She becomes the tele-*operator* of the mesmeric practice, a position normally occupied by gazing masculine figures such as Count Fosco in *The Woman in White* and Professor Westervelt in *The Blithedale Romance*. Through knowledge, secrecy and silence,

<sup>59</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 3 vols, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), 1. 93.

<sup>62</sup> Lorraine Gamman, ‘Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze’, in *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, eds., Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (London: The Woman’s Press, 1988), pp. 8-26 (p. 12).

Rachel – traditionally the object of desire – transforms into a voyeuristic agent of indestructible consciousness. Her immunity to masculine penetration comes through the performative practice of the voyeuristic eye, the evil eye that averts masculine gazes and protects the self's consciousness: Rachel is awake and present; Blake is unconscious and absent. Whilst gazing, Rachel represents both the detached observing lover and the voyeur. The active watching allows for a space of double narrativity: we see Rachel the lover watching Blake take her diamond/hymen, but we simultaneously see her as a voyeur with no desire to intervene but acting like a stage director to whose absent active presence all actors bend.

The double position of nineteenth-century women as mesmerised and rebellious (Rachel is mesmerised by the moonstone, but acts as a controlling lover and voyeur) is also present in Hawthorne's delineation of power relations between male and female characters. The prevalence of mesmeric activity as a means to 'control women's bodies' and the female potential to challenge the power of male mesmerists is equally tackled within a transatlantic context.<sup>63</sup> The erotic subjugation of transatlantic women and their subversive performative roles during mesmerisation is a theme that is traded between Anglo-American writers. Whilst Collins shows both the social oppression brought upon Rosanna and Rachel in *The Moonstone* or Laura Fairlie, Anne Catherick and Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White* and their capability of transgressive action within mesmeric practices, Hawthorne draws upon the female Pyncheons Alice, Hepzibah and Phoebe in *The House of the Seven Gables* as defenceless vulnerable females whose bodily revolt takes many forms, especially counteractive gazing. The vulnerability of Hawthorne's mesmerised women is not suggestive of total submission, and the patriarchal thinking of female bodies as passive mediums is reversed by the fact that through mediumism,

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<sup>63</sup> Pearl, p. 163.

women's voices are heard. As John Monroe notes, 'mediumism could function as a way for the relatively powerless to make their voices heard',<sup>64</sup> and this is something that Anglo-American female spiritualists later in 1848 make clear through their active use of rapping as the echo of desire as we shall see in the next chapter. Hawthorne's mesmerised women Alice, Hepzibah and Phoebe are the ones whose voices are heard towards the end of the novel: after giving 'one farewell touch of spirit's joy [...] she [Alice] floated heavenward from the HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES' (*HSG*, 225). Their ascension to power comes through the de-objectification of their gazers' webs. Even though Phoebe appears objectified by Holgrave's gaze, as suggested by Nancy Armstrong, she 'still possesse[s] the subjective qualities of a good wife and mother'.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Hepzibah's flight with her brother Clifford from the haunted house – 'these two unwonted travellers sped onward like the wind' (*HSG*, 180) – signifies a break from a long-term mesmerisation, as Hepzibah exclaims 'I have never been awake before!' (*HSG*, 180).

*The House of the Seven Gables* portrays Hepzibah as a somnambulist who has been the object of the influential Maule's 'family eye' (*HSG*, 21) for a long period before she makes her flight with Clifford. Hepzibah's position within the commercialised context of the novel as she runs the cent-shop in her house gains a particular emphasis. Through Hepzibah and her place as a 'gray medium' (*HSG*, 84) set by the shop-window 'for the public eye' (*HSG*, 31), Hawthorne, like Collins, points to the emerging centrality of the female body as an object of desire in a changing transatlantic culture of commercialisation. The moonstone, an object of both sexual desire and economic value, similarly alerts us to the reductionist view of women as sexual objects within the social economy of nineteenth-century culture. However, in order to raise awareness of

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<sup>64</sup> John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (London: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 136.

<sup>65</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 75.

women's status as mesmeric erotic objects, Hawthorne not only portrays Hepzibah as an incarcerated unawakened woman, but also associates other material objects such as the old haunted house, the shop-bell and window with her personality. The mediums of *hearing* via shop-bell and *seeing* through the window produce Hepzibah's body as an *instrument* fallen amid a violent class struggle between the aristocratic Pyncheons and proletariat Maules. Hepzibah's space between two mesmeric worlds – the public eyes of Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, another vicious character hunting for the Pyncheon's lost land, and the interior resonant sound of the shop-bell symbolising the Maule's shrill magnetic voices – becomes the space of intermediary product caught in the crossfire of two clashing families and classes. The Maules' attempt to avenge the robbery of their land via mesmerism, which is seen in the carpenter Matthew's magnetism of the aristocratic Alice Pyncheon, results in a long history of class conflict that is carried on at the expense of Hepzibah's body.

The productivity of nineteenth-century women within domestic spaces embodies a patriarchal desire for domiciliary exploitation and social power, and based on this Christine Delphy draws the line between men as exploiters and women as exploited,<sup>66</sup> or men as mesmerising and women as mesmerised. Judge Pyncheon's entry into the shop and its association with the magnetic shop-bell imply a carnal subordination of Hepzibah, a woman who works at the cent-shop as a medium of capitalist power. Yet the actual fear transpires in the mesmeric sexual use of her body as a passive tool of masculine productivity, thus excluding her from the commercial dialogue between capitalist demand and proletariat display: Hepzibah is only to display ginger bread or be displayed herself. The phrase 'grey medium' signals an ugly aspect of Hepzibah's

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<sup>66</sup> See Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, trans. Diana Leonard (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), quoted in Stevi Jackson, 'Marxism and Feminism', in *Marxism and Social Science*, eds. Andrew Gamble, David Marsh and Tony Tant (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 11-35 (p. 17).



commodification, as it ties her sexuality with the cheap value of objects displayed on the window such as ginger bread. Hepzibah's valuelessness and passivity in the eyes of capitalists such as Judge Pyncheon are mediated through the hypnotic sound of the shop-bell,<sup>67</sup> which according to Angelic Rodgers implies 'a move to the commercial space'.<sup>68</sup> With the sound of every ring of the shop-bell coming from a distance, Hepzibah 'descend[s] into the sepulchral depths of her reminiscences' (*HSG*, 45) and economic future – both her past and future are structured to serve the capitalist agenda. Rodgers continues to argue that Hepzibah's mesmeric trance is mainly caused by commerce.<sup>69</sup> Tatar adds that the bell is 'a talisman to which [Hepzibah] owes "obedience"'.<sup>70</sup> Magnetic obedience to the rings of her shop-bell represents more than a commercial correspondence with the voices of customers; it is an invisible higher-being, an acoustic space signifying a mechanistic alienation of the female body within the patriarchal discourse of mesmerism and mesmeric control.

If the bell emphasises 'corruption, vulnerability and disembodiment' due to the traditional 'paradigmatic coupling of woman and body' within the patriarchal productive system,<sup>71</sup> then how does Hepzibah escape the commercial exaggeration and sexual violence of nineteenth-century American culture? Does this subversion escalate through the more attractive and younger character Phoebe, Hepzibah's cousin? That Hepzibah challenges mesmeric influences that target both her body and land or body-as-land is evident in her resistance to the penetration of the

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<sup>67</sup> Mesmerism is an old version of hypnosis and both similarly started as scientific approaches to explore the unconscious and treat the human mind. However, it is important to point out that there are slight differences between the two, in that mesmerism developed as a non-verbal science where communication between mesmerists and patients is merely corporeal. Hypnosis, on the other hand, is a modern branch of mesmerism in which verbal and non-verbal techniques can be exchanged between psychiatrists and patients.

<sup>68</sup> Angelic Rodgers, 'Jim Crows, Veiled Ladies and True Womanhood: Mesmerism in *The House of the Seven Gables*', in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, pp. 127-145 (p. 129).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>70</sup> Tatar, p. 215.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 67.

public eye: 'she could not bear to be observed in the gradual process, and chose rather to flash forth on the world's astonished gaze, at once' (*HSG*, 31). Despite the fact that Hawthorne characterises the magnetised Hepzibah as a somnambulist who wakes at intervals whenever the bell rings, which is also a metaphor for the mesmerist's finger snapping, she is capable of subversive action by standing in opposition to the public gaze. Whilst she gazes back like a 'flash' that suggests passion, free will and defiance, the public gaze is an 'astonished' and confused one. Hepzibah's choice to 'flash' back through the window functions as a mirror that refutes public objectification. With the window being the boundary between Hepzibah and others, one sees public astonishment as a reflection of social frustration and defeat. The glass of Hepzibah's shop-window, which is a manifestation of her fearless gazes, reflects back on social consciousness in an immediate flash – 'at once'. Hepzibah, as a result, overturns the public inscription of her body as a 'grey medium' whereby she is labelled as absent or unconscious, a fact she later proves by fleeing magnetic control with her brother Clifford whilst the public itself is still captivated by the shop-window and its mesmeric shadows of grey products.

Mesmeric threats do not only come from Hepzibah's social community and her cousin Judge Pyncheon, but also from her mysterious tenant Holgrave, who is a descendent of the original Matthew Maule. Holgrave's fear-provoking obscurity is acknowledged by Hepzibah's suspicion that he 'practiced animal-magnetism, and, if such things were in fashion now-a-days, should be apt to suspect him of studying the Black Art' (*HSG*, 62). Hawthorne portrays the daguerreotypist Holgrave as uncanny and keeping 'the strangest companions imaginable' (*HSG*, 62); moreover, he dominates Hepzibah's thinking and constantly makes her wonder:

Whether I ought not to send him away. But, with all his oddities, he is a quiet kind of a person, and has such a way of taking hold of one's mind,

that, without exactly liking him, (for I don't know enough of the young man,) I should be sorry to lose sight of him entirely. (HSG, 63)

Like Hawthorne's other mesmerists, for example Westervelt in *The Blithedale Romance*, Holgrave is depicted as sexually alluring with a diabolic power of 'taking hold of one's mind'. Tatar argues that Hawthorne's male mesmerists in *The House of the Seven Gables* are 'men of remarkable physical attractiveness'.<sup>72</sup> Whilst Hepzibah shows weakness on her part for being 'sorry to lose *sight* of him [Holgrave] entirely', Hawthorne employs another younger character Phoebe whose power parallels Holgrave's and whose aesthetic presence in the novel as a beautiful figure enables feminine authority that started with Hepzibah's defiance of the public gaze. Instead of being an object of the mesmeric gaze like Hepzibah, Phoebe harnesses Holgrave's magnetism to rebalance gender relations in the novel, thus changing mesmerism into a positive mode of communication that both regulates male desire and constructs female subjectivity. Holgrave 'fancied that he could *look through* Phoebe [... but he] was beguiled, by some silent charm of hers' (HSG, 129-30, my italics). In Phoebe's meetings with Holgrave, we are seemingly led to believe that the former will be objectified by the latter's deviant artistry and sexual magnetism. She however 'rebelled, as it were, against a certain magnetic element in the artist's nature, which he exercised towards her, possibly without being conscious of it' (HSG, 69). Lack of consciousness on Holgrave's part strips him of power, making him appear weak, subordinate and disorientated. Phoebe, not unconsciously, plays the role of male mesmerist through whose eyes we read Holgrave's personality. But being a rebellious character also enables Phoebe to transform Holgrave's dark magnetic art into a feminine textual aesthetic that

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<sup>72</sup> Tatar, p. 206.

symbolically brightens up the rest of the narrative: art is beauty, love and goodness, not an evil magnetism.

The magnetic, devilish influence of Holgrave in the text, as described by Harry Levin,<sup>73</sup> is demoralised and later incorporated with a feminine perspective over which Phoebe's textual aesthetics preside. To put it simply, Holgrave's magnetic power is steered into the construction of goodness and abolition of anti-egalitarianism and objectivism. Contrary to Alice in *The House of the Seven Gables* and Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance* whose confrontation with male mesmerists lead to their deaths, Phoebe is able to avert Holgrave's gazes and alter his motives at the end of the novel. Holgrave and Phoebe's subsequent love relationship reconciles class differences between the Maules and Pyncheons and ends their tragic feuds. On the other hand, the unrepentant Westervelt in *The Blithedale Romance* and Count Fosco in *The Woman in White* who exemplify the destructive power of mesmerism do not change, and whereas the first ends up as 'a lascivious humbug', to quote Taylor Stoehr's words,<sup>74</sup> the latter dies at the hands of an agent of the Secret Society in Paris. The final structure of *The House of the Seven Gables* conversely becomes based on love, forgiveness and the dismissal of sexual magnetism for the sake of social unity and economic equilibrium, as both Holgrave Maule and Phoebe Pyncheon own the historic house and revamp it within the institution of marriage.

It is true that the very physicality of the female body forms the basis for masculine control within mesmeric practices as seen in male magnetisers 'making passes over the body and manipulating the mind of a young and passive female', as suggested by Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne.<sup>75</sup> Collins's use of young pretty women and Hawthorne's exquisite description

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<sup>73</sup> See Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958).

<sup>74</sup> Stoehr, p. 47.

<sup>75</sup> Willis and Wynne, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, pp. 1-17 (p. 8).

of ‘fair-haired maidens’ reemphasise the female body as the main site of experimentation and control.<sup>76</sup> Yet the eye of the magnetiser, which is ‘the most common means of subjugating the will of the somnambulist’,<sup>77</sup> and the exchange of looks between gazers and gazees are the techniques by which female performativity is exerted and thus power relations are redefined. Collins in *The Moonstone* draws a comparison between two female characters, the authoritative Miss Rachel and her cousin, the overly-pious and fallaciously modest Christian Miss Drusilla Clack. In contrast to the earlier discussed scene where Rachel Verinder is the gazing operator of Franklin Blake’s unconscious act of robbery, Miss Clack epitomises the failure of voyeurism, lack of control and miscommunication which stem from over-piousness and Victorian rejection of vulgarity. At her house, Miss Clack invisibly watches Godfrey Ablewhite, Blake’s villainous rival whose plan is to marry Rachel and exploit her finances to pay off his debts, drawing Rachel towards him and physically manipulating her; an act that bespeaks the physical rituals of male magnetisers in action. Clack’s description of the final part of the conversation between Godfrey and Rachel is worth quoting at length:

He had another burst – a burst of unholy rapture this time. He drew her nearer and nearer to him till her face touched his; and then — No! I really cannot prevail upon myself to carry this shocking disclosure any further. Let me only say, that I tried to close my eyes before it happened, and that I was just one moment too late. I had calculated, you see, on her resisting, she submitted. To every right-feeling person of my own sex, volumes could say no more. (MS, 265)

Watching from behind a curtain in her drawing-room, a mesmeric and especially spiritualist scene that both resembles theatrical performances and employs stage props such as curtains, closets and audience arrangement in chair rows, Drusilla Clack reluctantly discloses an erotic

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<sup>76</sup> Tatar, p. 213.

<sup>77</sup> Stoehr, *Hawthorne’s Mad Scientists: Pseudoscience and Social Science in Nineteenth-Century Life and Letters* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978), p. 55.

episode that could brand Godfrey's and Rachel's social reputations as vulgar in a nineteenth-century Victorian culture. Similarly, Westervelt subjugates and appropriates Priscilla's veiled body into theatrical material in Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*. As Westervelt appeared 'upon the platform from a side-door – saluted the spectators, not with a salaam, but a bow – took his station at the desk',<sup>78</sup> one could see the increasing nineteenth-century deployment of the female body in both Britain and America as a laboratorial subject that is symbolically dissected in a theatrical setting. Collins's and Hawthorne's staging of the female body is a message about the precarious reductionism of women's biological sexuality to vulgar theatricality, as seen in Clack's sudden reaction 'No!'. Sexual parts of mesmerised women's bodies are chemically put into trance in order to be displayed as objects of public shows. Collins's drawing-rooms or Hawthorne's village-halls are places where masculine power is exercised over weak female bodies within a medico-sexual context, but they also represent a theatrical space where public entertainment, hence Hawthorne's emphasis on spectators, matters. The abundant presence of Collins's doctors such as Count Fosco in *The Woman in White* and Dr Candy in *The Moonstone* and Hawthorne's professors such as Westervelt in *The Blithedale Romance* and Roger Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* complicates the boundaries between medical and theatrical discourses and makes the former be in service of the latter.

At Fosco's laboratory for example, we are led to believe that the differences between Marian and Fosco's animals are next to nothing. Marian is a pet in Fosco's laboratory, a fact that her grotesque physical appearance supports: 'I am dark and ugly'.<sup>79</sup> She is then the least attractive

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<sup>78</sup> Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Richard H. Millington (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2011), p. 137. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as *BR* followed by page number.

<sup>79</sup> Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 27. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically as *WW* followed by page number.

amongst other women in *The Woman in White*, and her fascination with Fosco's psychic power and elaborate description of his pet animals highlight this laboratorial analogy between her and other pets. Marian's symbolic dissection is, nonetheless, a prerequisite for the mesmeric displays of Laura's and Anne's fair bodies. To make possible the staging of desire in the novel, Collins shows how 'ugly' women are used as scientific or laboratorial constructs for the production of sexual theatrical desire; in much the same way Hawthorne reveals how Chillingworth's attempt at the medical treatment of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* precedes her theatrical show on the scaffold.<sup>80</sup> Mesmeric treatment in both cases becomes a mode of communication in which the medical, ugly or laboratorial is manufactured for the display of the theatrically beautiful, ethereal or disembodied. Mesmerism can thus be seen as a process by which the old clinic mediates the modern cinematic. The transformation of immobile female bodies on patient benches into sublime, active, theatrical/cinematic objects on nineteenth-century stages offers spaces where women challenge what Butler calls the 'biology-is-destiny formulation'.<sup>81</sup> Victorian mesmeric halls or drawing-rooms are the very places which mark the movement of the female body from visual object to cinematic subject. The women we see on massive screens in present-day cinemas are, to an extent, a continuation of nineteenth-century mesmerised women's power to act and control the audience's *percipi* – law of perception. The biological depiction of the female body in Holgrave's mesmeric art transforms into an animated theatricality where the daguerreotype itself acts as a speaking space for women's unheard voices.

The use of clothes – whether drapery, veils or curtains – also manifests patriarchal desires to objectify mesmerised women within theatrical spaces. Whilst Hawthorne's Pricilla wears the veil that separates her from spectators, Collins's Clack uses the curtain to hide herself from the

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<sup>80</sup> See Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 9.

‘unholy rapture’ of Ablewhite and Rachel’s sexual encounter. That women become active on stage, a space that allows for self-expression via *gazing*, is however a performative advantage that validates their participation in nineteenth-century dialogues of body and mind, absence and presence. Despite the fact that veils and curtains stand as barriers between feminine subjectivity and the masculine world, they do not sustain the dichotomy between female gazers and masculine gazees: Pricilla in *The Blithedale Romance* ‘threw off the veil [... and] discovered that a thousand eyes were gazing at her’. Even though she is portrayed as ‘pale, tremulous, shrinking’ (*BR*, 149), she is powerful enough to drop the veil, gaze back and speak, hence materialising Butler’s dictum that ‘gender is performative’.<sup>82</sup> In the above quotation, Clack, however, fails to control the voyeuristic scene due to her dogmatic Christianity as I pointed out earlier. Whilst Rachel develops a double mesmeric network, i.e. voyeur and lover, Clack ‘tried to close [her] eyes before it happened’ (*MS*, 265). The former enjoys a panoramic voyeuristic view in which she, to use Jean-Paul Sartre’s discourse on the gaze, fixes ‘the people whom I see into objects [... and] in looking at them I measure my power’.<sup>83</sup> Sartre’s philosophy here places the looker’s eye in the centre of visual anxiety, meaning that the looker becomes objectified by fear and anxiety due to constant exposure to looking. Whilst looking through the keyhole, Sartre’s looker experiences the anxiety of others’ looks. The looker paradoxically seems to control what is watched, yet he/she suffers the fear of being watched by unseen others. In the case of Rachel, however, the gaze itself becomes a source of power as she stands inside the bedroom and is in control of the entire scene of robbery. Drusilla Clack’s act of looking from behind the curtain, on the contrary, exemplifies visual anxiety as her looks become reduced to constant hide-and-seek due to the fear of others’ gazes.

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<sup>82</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. xv.

<sup>83</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London, New York: Routledge, 1943), p. 266.



Being a member of a Christian family in which young women ‘were assumed to be without sexual feelings’, as argued by Rycroft,<sup>84</sup> Miss Clack does not communicate to us what Rachel or Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance* would if they had been in her place. Clack exemplifies infirmity in the traditional roles of mesmerised women and mesmerising men. The interruption in her discourse ‘— No!’ tantalises readers as she intensifies their curiosity by seeing much but telling little,<sup>85</sup> or closing her eyes and saying nothing: she does not possess Medusa’s gaze. On the contrary, she becomes conscious of her voyeuristic behaviour, thus experiencing the ‘shame’ that Sartre’s looker undergoes while gazing through the keyhole.<sup>86</sup> In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre gives an example of listening at or looking through a keyhole to explain this feeling of shame. The door and its keyhole stand as obstacles between the self and its feeling of shame, separating the looker from the eyes of others and thus the shame of being seen. The self, however, does not feel ashamed so long as it is its own nothingness or the sole presence in its space. The presence of others, to put it differently, makes possible the shame of being observed. The fact that Miss Clack’s mesmerised body, to exemplify, becomes entitled to feelings of shame is caused by the presence of others – Rachel and Ablewhite – in the space she occupies. Clack is aware of the possibility of others’ looking at her, and if we compare Sartre’s keyhole looker/listener and Clack reluctantly gazing through the curtain, we find that – contrary to Rachel’s subjective other in the robbery scene – Clack’s shame emanates from the fact that her ‘freedom escapes [her] in order to become a given object’, to use Sartre’s words.<sup>87</sup> Clack’s freedom transforms into an objectified state of fear and danger that she might be discovered. Her freedom escapes her and becomes an object of power given to those whom she watches – Rachel

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<sup>84</sup> Rycroft, p. 120.

<sup>85</sup> Hutter, p. 206.

<sup>86</sup> Sartre, p. 259.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

and Ablewhite. Whereas Rachel stands in her bedroom as the all-Seeing Eye constantly casting her gaze out over the Victorian domestic space, Clack's intermittent gazing is caused by her Christian devotion and moral principles. Within a mesmeric context, Clack fails to mediate power through reluctant gazing at the figure of Ablewhite; Rachel, however, controls the discourse of mesmeric communication by continually fixing her looks on Blake.

Collins and Hawthorne offer transatlantic models of femininity within the discourse of mesmerism; the first functioning as less powerful victims of mesmeric and medical practices such as Drusilla Clack in *The Moonstone*, Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick in *The Woman in White*, Hepzibah and Alice Pyncheon in *The House of the Seven Gables* and Priscilla in *The Blithedale Romance*. These female characters usually serve varying patriarchal agendas ranging from economic exploitation to sexual affairs. Yet they are not entirely subversive of their positions as they do not directly impose social change: their Victorian discourse is operated by what Kenneth Hendrickson calls the 'peculiar female morality [that] dominated European and American thought about women in the nineteenth century'.<sup>88</sup> Scientifically speaking, Henry Jones and John Stuart Mill writing in 1846 and 1869 respectively, called for the separation between scientific activities – such as vivisection – and female morality.<sup>89</sup> The fact that scientific mesmerism, for example, could be used by men to manipulate female patients physically and emotionally necessitated the separation between women and scientific practice which was generally deemed masculine. Jones's and Mill's separationist views were based on nineteenth-century dominant dichotomisation of spheres; whereas scientific 'public' spheres belonged to

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<sup>88</sup> Kenneth E. Hendrickson III, *Making Saints: Religion and the Public Image of the British Army, 1809-1885* (Cranbury, NJ.: Associated University Presses, 1998), p. 162.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Jones's apprehensions about mesmeric 'dirt [being] rubbed off on the ladies' shows how female morality constitutes a primary concern in the nineteenth century, in Jones, *Mesmerism Examined and Repudiated* (New York, 1846), p. 11. See also John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, 1869). On Vivisection and female morality, see Anne DeWitt, *Moral Authority, Men of Science, and the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

male mesmerists or vivisectionists, women belonged ‘in the private’ suggesting the impossibility of their participation in public scientific debates.<sup>90</sup> Anglo-American women’s involvement in scientific discourses and the use of mesmerism as a medium for the dissemination of desire generates a patriarchal fear of disruption of spatial gender roles, i.e. private becomes public and vice versa. The redefinition of mesmeric spaces as feminine also depends on bodily performativity, meaning that men’s thinking of mesmerised women as tools of their scientific and sexual desires is refuted by the simple act of counter gazing, showing that these women’s bodies are not unconscious. Whilst passive women can become active and masculinised, active men may become passive and feminised.

Mesmerism can arguably be regarded as an ambitious movement towards the feminisation of transatlantic culture, and this stems from the fact that mesmeric practices provide an atmosphere for gender subversion. Patriarchal thinking of the female body as biological or precultural within mesmeric activities is subverted by women’s performative acts which are in themselves linguistic transgressions. The ability of the entranced female body to act and resist bodily control through gazing, for example, inverts communicational/linguistic roles: women become active agents; men subordinate. The second model of femininity, which is represented by Phoebe and Zenobia in Hawthorne’s novels and Rachel and Marian in Collins’s, shows how transgressive women problematise ‘inside/outside boundaries that testified to the acquisition of more cultural power’ by one social group or gender than the other.<sup>91</sup> This model of femininity is pivotal to the structure of Collins’s and Hawthorne’s novels, because it is tied with social change via the breaking of spatial repression, i.e. women can possess *public* scientific voices. Whilst women in

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<sup>90</sup> DeWitt, p. 128.

<sup>91</sup> John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 81.

the first model are stable and humdrum, women in the second model are the subversive ones on whose shoulders lay the responsibility of textual and cultural reformulation. Through the performative bodies of Phoebe, Zenobia, Rachel and Marian, Hawthorne and Collins suggest that femininity and masculinity can be exchanged based on the performative use of the body. Some of Collins's and Hawthorne's men are represented as vulnerable and effeminate; women however can occupy masculinised spaces within the nineteenth-century discourse of mesmerism.

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave is a passionate man whose sole purpose is not to repossess his family's property as his grandfather Matthew Maule did, but to make Phoebe fall in love with him. Holgrave's meek personality is set in opposition to his grandfather's evil character; he can easily be coaxed by Phoebe's eyes and we are meant to sympathise with him. Arne Axelsson notes that Hawthorne's artist is somebody who provokes pity more than hatred or fear.<sup>92</sup> As shown before, instead of subjecting Phoebe to his willpower, Holgrave succumbs to the former's magnetic gazes and feminine charm. 'Sexual magnetism' which supplies Hawthorne's novels with 'an erotic dimension missing from his scientific tales' can be exerted by fair women on male figures,<sup>93</sup> making Holgrave in this case an emasculated artist according to nineteenth-century definitions of relentless masculinity.

Holgrave's early appearance in the novel is diabolical as he is suspected 'of studying the Black Art' (*HSG*, 62). Neal Doubleday argues that Holgrave's 'art is esoteric and nearly magical [since] he is allied to the Gothic devotee of mysterious arts'.<sup>94</sup> His name 'Holgrave' (Hol meaning holy/holey and grave symbolising death) suggests dark metaphysical art that lies within

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<sup>92</sup> Arne Axelsson, *The Links in the Chain: Isolation and Independence in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Fictional Characters* (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1974), also quoted in Kumiko Mukai, *Hawthorne's Visual Artists and the Pursuit of a Transatlantic Aesthetics* (Bern, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 26.

<sup>93</sup> Tatar, p. 206.

<sup>94</sup> Neal Frank Doubleday, *Hawthorne's Early Tales: A Critical Study* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), p. 57.

the domain of esotericism, as it links death the holy (what lies beyond) and holey (lying in a hole in a graveyard). Holgrave's esotericism, in other words, is associated with a mystical world beyond his world; he is a man who seems to be in constant communication with the Spirit, animal spirit or the mesmeric etheric world through art. Holgrave the esotericist speaks strangely; his language is magnetic, undecipherable but known to a few, and this esoteric fact is manifested in the social company with which he is associated: 'men with long beards, and dressed in linen blouses, and other such new-fangled and ill-fitting garments' (*HSG*, 62). The eerie description of Holgrave at the beginning endows him with Faustian power as he pursues 'the flitting mystery beyond the verge of his ethereal domain [...] with a material grasp', art or knowledge.<sup>95</sup> Hawthorne's emphasis on the dark interior and esoteric ambitions of his artists or mesmerists makes them the uncanny superiors of the text. Crews suggests that the 'Hawthornian artist is trapped in erotic vicariousness',<sup>96</sup> yet the artist becomes the site of entrapment himself as he overshadows the movement of other characters and is ready to subject them to his own desires. In *The Blithedale Romance*, Miles Coverdale the narrator reminds us of a 'very hungry painter [who] had wrought these subjects of still life, heightening his imagination with his appetite' (*BR*, 121). The link here between art and hunger or imagination and appetite in the painter's figure affirms his position as a trap of sexual desire; he represents the vicarious element of 'appetite' and lust via artistic 'imagination'. Through his magnetic influence, the painter or mesmerist becomes the centre of others' imagination and appetite: the sexual trap for women. Whilst Hepzibah could not lose sight of Holgrave, Phoebe felt drawn to him. Hepzibah's sexual magnetism implies imagination and vicarious pleasure whilst Phoebe's actual romance with Holgrave towards the end represents appetite and the fulfilment of desire.

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<sup>95</sup> Millicent Bell, *Hawthorne's View of the Artist* (New York: State University of New York, 1962), p. 41. Bell quotes from Hawthorne's 'The Artist of the Beautiful' (London: Acheron Press, 2012), p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Crews, p. 166.

Despite the uncanny presence of Holgrave as an esoteric mesmerist, it is through him that Hawthorne destroys inflexible and imperious masculinity like Judge Pyncheon's by giving us a counter-image of nineteenth-century power; a power that does not enslave and exploit, but cherishes love and reunion. Paul Gilmore refers to Leland Person's assertion of Holgrave's incorporation of both masculinity and femininity: 'Hawthorne casts Holgrave squarely between these radically opposed, but equally unsatisfactory, models of masculinity – in a position to synthesize both extremes within his own personality into a masculinity that incorporates the feminine'.<sup>97</sup> By models of masculinity, Person points to the 'Puritanic-looking personage' (*HSG*, 26) of the old Colonel Pyncheon representing stern ruthless masculinity, and 'the imbecile, branded, half-torpid Clifford' (*HSG*, 155) representing lamblike and forbearing masculinity. By situating Holgrave in the middle of two extreme versions of masculinity; the first is excessively violent, the second struggling to feel like 'man again' (*HSG*, 118), Hawthorne creates a type of normative manhood that suits nineteenth-century definitions and middle-class ideals.<sup>98</sup> Charles Swann argues that Holgrave refuses to harm 'his hypnotized auditress', leading to his advancement 'further up the moral ladder than his ancestors'.<sup>99</sup> The moderate use of mesmerism by Holgrave distinguishes him from the overly-sexual Matthew Maule who uses magnetism to exploit Alice and gives him a better moral status, whilst simultaneously setting him apart from Clifford, who according to Hawthorne is endowed with 'a woman's trait' of 'affection and sympathy for flowers' (*HSG*, 105). Colonel Pyncheon, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, Matthew Maule and Clifford Pyncheon's masculinities are destroyed and remoulded for the production of a better

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<sup>97</sup> Leland S. Person Jr., *Aesthetic Headaches: Women and a Masculine Poetics in Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 95-96, quoted in Paul Gilmore, *The Genuine Article: Race, Mass Culture, and American Literary Manhood* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 227.

<sup>98</sup> See Gilmore's footnote, p. 228.

<sup>99</sup> Charles Swann, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tradition and Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 110.

masculinity in which we see Holgrave moving away from villainy to heroism, from sexual mesmerism to true love and marriage.

In *The Moonstone* likewise, Collins's reformation of masculinity takes place through the medical figure of Ezra Jennings who is an outcast with a mysterious past and scientific knowledge. Jennings works as an assistant for Dr Candy, and being scientifically-minded gives him authority within his social circle even though his physical appearance – he is tall and thin with a wrinkled face and white-and-black hair – causes his rejection from the community. Collins's and Hawthorne's doctors and artists are presented with aberrant features: Holgrave is associated with gloominess, death and the suspicious use of Black Art; Ezra Jennings is accused of murder, and dies of excessive use of opium. It is, however, through Holgrave's and Jennings's aberrance that both authors envisage a new form of masculinity that subjects science and art to inner goodness. Holgrave helps free Clifford from Judge Jaffrey's mesmeric influence; Jennings, whose biblical name Ezra means 'help',<sup>100</sup> turns out to be a great assistance to Blake; in that he frees him of all accusations of robbery and reunites him with Rachel, his beloved.

Collins introduces Jennings in the novel as a hybrid character of mixed race, a fact noted in the sharp difference of his hair and facial colours. Yet what is more intriguing about Jennings's identity is his 'sexual hybridity' itself,<sup>101</sup> a subject that Collins carries further to blur gender boundaries in nineteenth-century Victorian culture. Jennings states that 'physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitution – and I am one of them' (*MS*, 381). The incorporation of masculinity and femininity in Jennings facilitates Collins's innovation of normative cultural values in which masculine extremes are re-examined, re-evaluated and

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<sup>100</sup> Pearl, p. 165.

<sup>101</sup> See Tamar Heller, 'Masterpiece Theatre and Ezra Jennings's Hair: Some Reflections on Where We've Been and Where We're Going in Collins Studies', in *The Sensational Wilkie Collins: Reality's Dark Light*, ed. Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp. 361-371 (p. 364).

moderated. That Collins includes an effeminate foreign figure in the final plot of his narrative to destabilise gender norms in his nineteenth-century society is a valid assumption. Jennings is an *assistant* doctor even though he has all the knowledge needed to become a socially recognised one. He therefore occupies a ‘liminal position in English society’, as suggested by Pykett, due to his ‘foreignness and racial otherness’.<sup>102</sup> Jennings’s liminality reflects, though, on the diminution in power of other male figures such as Blake and Ablewhite. Blake goes through a repetitive stage of psychological and emotional *repression* because of the mesmeric moonstone until he is reunited with Rachel via Jennings’s scientific experiment. Ablewhite on the other hand is killed by the Indians, and it is through the masterwork of Jennings that Ablewhite’s plot is discovered and his position as an opportunist villain is finally defined. It can thus be argued that the space occupied by Jennings in which masculinity and femininity are interfused is a space where gender roles are reorganised and feminine voices are thus heard. After the loss of the moonstone and Jennings’s discovery of the plot, Rachel’s voice becomes more controlling; her textual presence more powerful.

Functioning as mirrors of each other, Jennings and Rachel are described as figures sharing a ‘friendless and lonely life’ (*MS*, 478). Rachel’s similarity to Jennings – the latter being a medical figure proving to have public influence – shows that nineteenth-century feminine voices could possess scientific discourses outside the domestic sphere. Pearl categorises Jennings as feminine and argues that he attains some ‘feminised position occupied by women elsewhere in the text’ because he is turned powerless by his haunting past.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, Tamar Heller suggests

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<sup>102</sup> Pykett, *Authors in Context*, p. 127.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.



that Jennings is masculine due to his occupation as a detective and man of science.<sup>104</sup> However, the scene where Jennings meets Blake before he dies confirms the former's effeminate, stoical personality which is caused by his tragic suffering as a suspicious runaway and possible murderer. Jennings's words to Blake: 'I have seen a little sunshine – [and] I have had a happy life' (*MS*, 479) implies a history of repression and stoicism that Jennings unpacked in the habit of diary-writing, a practice that nineteenth-century English and American women took up in their domestic spheres. Jennings's statement reveals a 'happy' movement from vocal suppression and imperialist otherness – due to his *other* race – to scientific power and mastery. Rachel's movement likewise from sexual suppression of male characters such as Blake and Ablewhite, a mesmeric suppression also symbolised by the moonstone, to social and economic freedom especially after her mother's death, highlights women's self-governance and possession of public scientific voices. By assigning much power to Jennings before his death, Collins rebalances feminine and masculine spaces of power in the novel. It is true that the success of Jennings's scientific experiment brings Blake and Rachel together physically, but it also reveals to us Jennings's and Rachel's psychological similarity. Jennings states that Rachel 'met me in the hall, and expressed herself as greatly struck by the vast improvement in Science, since the time when she was a girl at school' (*MS*, 480). Rachel's positive response to Jennings suggests that she owns a voice within the terrain of scientific experimentation, especially after the latter's death. Following the death of Dr Candy and Jennings, men of medicine in the novel, Rachel's voice becomes the last we hear taking into account her subsequent adoption of science and dismissal of the moonstone as evil magnetism and superstition. Science therefore evolves as the social and

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<sup>104</sup> Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 128.

emotional medium bridging the gap between feminine and masculine centres and reuniting Rachel and Blake.

The confusion that Hawthorne and Collins create at the heart of gender relations in nineteenth-century transatlantic inner spaces not only generates effeminate men but also constructs masculine women who are, according to Judith Halberstam, “historical fixture[s]”, figures who have questioned gender systems for a long time.<sup>105</sup> This confusion of gender norms, seen in Zenobia’s mannish behaviour in *The Blithedale Romance* and Marian Halcombe’s physical masculine presence in *The Woman in White*, produces a set of reactions within nineteenth-century societies ranging from sympathy, uncertainty to rejection or even expulsion. Butler states that ‘for a “man” performing femininity or for a “woman” performing masculinity [...] there is an attachment to and a loss and refusal of the figure of femininity by the man, or the figure of masculinity by the woman’.<sup>106</sup> Butler goes on to argue that gender norms usually dictate that individuals of different sexes *embody* ‘certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond’.<sup>107</sup> But what does physical and hence performative inversion of genders in nineteenth-century culture signify: Zenobia was ‘a little deficient in softness and delicacy’ (*BR*, 13) and Marian was a bearded lady? Zenobia’s hand was ‘larger than most women would like to have’ (*BR*, 13) whilst Marian ‘had a large, firm masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes’ (*WW*, 25). Hawthorne’s and Collins’s physical descriptions of masculine women create a new gender identity that refuses to embody the nineteenth-century heterosexual paradigm, in which women

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<sup>105</sup> See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 45, quoted in Lillian Craton, *The Victorian Freak Show: The Significance of Disability and Physical Differences in 19th-Century Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2009), p. 125.

<sup>106</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993), p. 235.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-32.

are feminine and men are masculine. Men are given physical and psychological feminine traits as I noted before, adding more confusion to gender systems. In *The Woman in White*, for example, Mr Fairlie's feet are described as 'effeminately small [and] clad in buff-coloured silk stockings, and little womanish bronze-leather slippers' (*WW*, 32). Mr Moodie in *The Blithedale Romance* 'always seemed to be hiding himself' and never growing 'to be more of a man' (*BR*, 123-24).

In order to defy the carnal and textual control of male mesmerists, Collins and Hawthorne design odd bodies that challenge sexual mentalities within the nineteenth-century social fabric. Zenobia's and Marian's unfeminine or odd bodies violate what Butler calls heterosexual idealism, and the fact that both women subvert the magnetic law of erotic communication – man gazing through a female's body – calls into question nineteenth-century masculine perceptions of the male as the ideal mesmerist. Hawthorne communicates a horrifying image of Westervelt from whom 'the maiden, with her lover's kiss still burning on her lips, would turn' (*BR*, 136). Critics regard this description of Westervelt as aggressively diabolical and overtly sexual.<sup>108</sup> Few critics, however, focus on Zenobia's masculine influence in the novel, which belittles Westervelt's mesmeric power, especially after her death in the river. The representation of Priscilla's body as 'unrobust'<sup>109</sup> and controllable not only gives Westervelt the chance to exert his magnetic influence but also proves Zenobia's symbolic capability of mesmeric operation over Priscilla's soul, thus balancing Westervelt's scientific faculties. In contrast to Priscilla, Zenobia's love rival for Hollingsworth, featuring as a 'spiritual being' and veiled plaything,<sup>110</sup> Zenobia is active, mobile and mesmerical: the latter would place the former "before me, where I may look

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<sup>108</sup> Whilst Daniel Hoffman argues that Westervelt possesses 'a shifty portmanteau of identities', John Caldwell Stubbs suggests that the wizard's power is 'sexual', making Priscilla discharge 'a certain musk of sexuality'. Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 215; Stubbs, *The Pursuit of Form: A Study of Hawthorne and the Romance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), p. 129.

<sup>109</sup> Richard H. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 50.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

at you, and get my inspiration out of your eyes. They are very deep and dreamy, tonight!” (BR, 75). Samuel Coale cites this scene as an example of Zenobia’s masculinity, arguing that her trance-like influence, noted in her gazing into Priscilla’s eyes, emphasises her presence ‘*much in the manner of a mesmerist at the height of his powers*’.<sup>111</sup> Zenobia’s description of Priscilla’s eyes as ‘deep and dreamy’ shows that she, like male mesmerists, both uses the medium of eyes for psychological subjugation and picks her chances carefully when her subject is most vulnerable, when her eyes are ‘very deep and dreamy’. Zenobia’s somnambulist power transgresses gender roles by also fashioning female-female correspondence within mesmeric master-slave relationships. The exclusion of masculine presence in women’s mesmeric communication, a fact which Zenobia’s death and subversion of male figures illustrate, allows Zenobia to develop a discursive authority and sexual individuality beyond male hegemony.

Like Zenobia, Marian’s strangely masculine body literally defaces nineteenth-century idealisation of the female body as domestic and beautiful. Lillian Craton argues that the masculine woman unleashes a cultural concern where ‘enforcement of female domesticity and beauty norms simply masked the reality that women come in all types’.<sup>112</sup> Marian is described in the novel as having ‘a moustache’, and this physical fact defies nineteenth-century gender expectations, which is shown in Walter Hartright’s shocked response ‘The lady is ugly!’ (WW, 25). Zenobia and Marian, whose bodies and social responsibilities are different from Priscilla’s and Laura Fairlie’s, constitute the beginnings of what Elaine Showalter terms ‘a crisis in masculinity and [...] sexual anarchy’.<sup>113</sup> Laura’s fragile sexuality and Priscilla’s representation as

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<sup>111</sup> Samuel Chase Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), p. 111.

<sup>112</sup> Craton, p. 123.

<sup>113</sup> Elaine Showalter, ‘Introduction: The Rise of Gender’, in *Speaking of Gender*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York, London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-16 (p. 9).

‘a flower which [others] had done with’ (*BR*, 88) do not pose a direct threat to patriarchal structures. Zenobia and Marian on the other hand do not conform to sexual normalities, hence their resistance to mesmeric control. Showalter’s reference to ‘sexual anarchy’ is grounded in Marian’s symbolic hermaphroditism. Philip O’Neill argues that characters in *The Woman in White* are sometimes immune to sexual identification; they are neither ‘essentially masculine’ nor ‘uniquely feminine’.<sup>114</sup> Marian’s body is a case of excessive sexuality that Collins employs to counteract the masculine colonisation of women’s bodies and voices.

Marian’s sexual and textual overactivity subverts Count Fosco’s and Sir Percival Glyde’s plans to exploit Laura’s inheritance. The fact that Fosco is foreign, vastly ‘knowledge[able] of chemistry’ and ‘experience[d] of the more subtle resources which medical and magnetic science have placed at the disposal of mankind’, enables him to problematise Victorian moral and economic values. However, through Marian’s masculine body, which Craton praises as ‘positive and feminist’,<sup>115</sup> Fosco’s plans are discovered and refuted. Like Rachel in *The Moonstone*, Marian is a gazer and eavesdropper whose venture to ‘flatly deny his [Percival’s] good looks’ (*WW*, 172) and eavesdrop ‘at the window’ (*WW*, 293), beyond which evil plots are conducted, makes other characters the passive objects of her knowledge. Collins chooses to make Marian’s voice the last heard in the novel – ‘let Marian end our story’ (*WW*, 584) – thus giving her authoritative centrality and presenting her as essential to the relationship between Hartright and Laura.

Even though mesmerism was invented by a male and developed later as a masculine science, nineteenth-century transatlantic women were able to adapt it to their own good. Betsey van

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<sup>114</sup> Philip O’Neill, *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property and Propriety* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1988), p. 115.

<sup>115</sup> Craton, p. 124.

Schlun writes that Collins uses clairvoyance, which is another name for mesmeric mediation, as a 'valuable alternative to other forms of news media',<sup>116</sup> thus allowing his female characters to utilise it subversively. Women on both sides of the Atlantic employed this medium to disseminate their sexual desires and liberate their voices, as seen in Collins's and Hawthorne's novels. The fact that mesmeric practices required passive mediums, mostly women, does not suggest negativity on the part of female participants. The subject of the next chapter, Spiritualism, developed as another psychic movement in 1848 in which passivity was the key to power and media control. Tatar argues that in the twentieth century, mesmerism lost its glamour and received 'the deathblow'.<sup>117</sup> However, part of the decline of mesmerism, even in the nineteenth century, is associated with the rise of other modes of communication which women found more liberating and accessible. The outbreak of spiritualist séances after the Fox Sisters, Margaret and Kate, discovered an acoustic medium – via rapping – to conjure and contact the spirits of the dead meant that women could express their opinions, desires and preferences more freely and publicly.

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<sup>116</sup> Betsey van Schlun, *Science and Imagination: Mesmerism, Media and the Mind in Nineteenth-Century English and American Literature* (Berlin: Galda + Wilchverlag, 2007), p. 244.

<sup>117</sup> Tatar, p. 232.

## Chapter Two

### ‘A low, hissing sound came close to my ear [...] The very idea was a terror’:<sup>1</sup> Sex, Spirits and Invisible Communications

So perfect were what we should call below the telephonic arrangement of the community [...] I am not familiar with the system by which this was effected. It involved a high advance in the study of acoustics.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Beyond the Gates* (1883)<sup>2</sup>

Spirit returns.

Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit* (1987)<sup>3</sup>

Ghosts know no borders: they ‘have the power to violate boundaries with ease’, as Marlene Tromp suggests, to transgress spaces of insideness/outsideness and to breach the borders between past and present.<sup>4</sup> This is a departure from the late-Victorian newspaper editor W. T. Stead’s suggestion that spirits in the séance room are aware of the borderland between life and death and Roger Luckhurst’s argument that ‘ghosts haunt borders’.<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Phelps’s link between ‘telephonic arrangement’ and the spiritual world suggests that spirits are invisible powers of immediacy and permanence that cross material barriers, come back from nowhere to haunt us and act as ethereal signals within nineteenth-century spiritualist networks. Phelps

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<sup>1</sup> Florence Marryat, *There Is No Death* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2004), p. 65. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as *TD* followed by page number.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Beyond the Gates*, in *Three Spiritualist Novels* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 212. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as *BG* followed by page number. Phelps’s other spiritualist novels will also be parenthetically cited in the text as *GA*, *The Gates Ajar* and *GB*, *The Gates Between*.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Marlene Tromp, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> See W. T. Stead, ed., *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index*, vol. 1 (London: Borderland Office, 1893); Roger Luckhurst, ‘Something Tremendous, Something Elemental’: On the Ghostly Origins of Psychoanalysis’, in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, eds. Peter Buse and Andrew Scott (London: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 50-72 (p. 52).

represents nineteenth-century communications between the alive and dead as systematic and ‘perfect’, claiming that spiritualist channels are always open and unconstrained by physical borderlines. She implies that ghosts are entities of borderlessness that ‘transcend time, place, and history’ and constantly return to haunt the innermost structure of human communication.<sup>6</sup> Speaking within a modern context, Julian Wolfreys suggests that we are always accompanied by ghosts, ‘perhaps now more than [we] have ever been before’.<sup>7</sup> A ghost, phantom, spirit or ‘*revenant*’, as Jacques Derrida names it, is that entity which outlaws the law of the binary: binaries of life/death, presence/absence, present/past or material/immaterial are broken.<sup>8</sup> Ghosts are thus neither alive nor dead, ‘neither corporeal objects nor stern absences’.<sup>9</sup> Above all, they return because they possess social relevance, as Keith Thomas puts it.<sup>10</sup> And what more relevance could there be than the ‘disruption of sex and gender roles’,<sup>11</sup> and the empowerment of vulnerable women within a stringent social system and oppressive patriarchy that offer nothing but silence?

This chapter examines the link between spirits, female sexuality and acoustic communication in the Spiritualist works of the female authors Florence Marryat and Elizabeth Phelps. In reading sound as an integral element of nineteenth-century séances, which are usually dark rooms where participants sit in a circle holding hands to produce magnetic effects that facilitate the contact of

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<sup>6</sup> Tromp, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the chapter, I will be using various terminologies for spirits such as ghosts, phantoms, apparitions or revenants interchangeably.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, ‘Introduction: A Future for Haunting’, in *Ghosts*, pp. 1-23 (p. 11). See also Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4. Derrida coins the term ‘*revenant*’ to refer to a thing that comes back, that keeps returning.

<sup>10</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 606. Though Thomas suggests that ghosts are socially relevant within the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, his argument still holds valid for the late-nineteenth century when social relevance was rooted in the emergence of women’s movements and other social groups.

<sup>11</sup> Tromp, p. 4.



the dead, I explore the intricate rapport between sexual desire, female agency and invisible spirits. During séances, female mediums sometimes produce a fluid called “ectoplasm”, a substance that is produced by their bodies and supplies the spirit with the energy needed for a perfect materialisation that would facilitate the contact with the other world.<sup>12</sup> I look into how sound permeates this process by changing from a psychic effect into a material object that embodies desire, specifically female desire within late-Victorian spectral networks. Sound is the nodal point where eroticism and communication meet, producing what Ruth Brandon calls ‘teleplasm’,<sup>13</sup> another spiritualistic coinage signifying the materialised relationship between female mediums’ sexuality and spirits’ acoustic acts such as table-rapping. Steven Connor’s substantial study of acoustic production and its effects during séances links sound to the medium’s transmissive ‘sonorous body’.<sup>14</sup> Whilst Connor addresses acoustic spiritualism as a ‘cultural phenomenology’, I offer a spectral, psychosexual and feminist reading of it. This shall enhance an understanding of the occult nature of spiritualist phenomena and how spiritualism, like telegraphism, manifested the relationship between eroticism, technological networking and women’s authority.

The chapter also addresses the spiritualistic phenomenon of materialisation, which is the stage when spirits transform from invisible ether into full-form objects or human bodies. This transformation is usually facilitated by the presence of the female medium whose body constitutes a conduit for the spirit (technologically equivalent to the sound wave) and the ensuing materialisation. I hence re-read the medium’s body and materialisation in connection with

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<sup>12</sup> Tromp, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 163. ‘Ectoplasm’ was first coined by Charles Richet, ‘a distinguished French physiologist’ and winner of Nobel Prize, Brandon, p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Connor, ‘The Machine in the Ghost: Spiritualism, Technology and the ‘Direct Voice’’, in *Ghosts*, pp. 203-226 (p. 211). I am indebted to Connor for his intriguing research on the Spiritualist tradition and the technology of sound.

acoustic production, feminine agency and acts of sexual desire within the domestic space. Materialisation happens in a small Victorian ‘domestic’ space called the séance room where the corporeal and spiritual, or sitters and spirits, are united ‘in a form of public sex’.<sup>15</sup> The séance room functions as an extension of the female medium’s body; it is a body housing the female body. However, it is also a private place that invites publicity: the séance room, as an acoustic space, is transgressive because it violates the boundaries between women and their sexual practices within the domestic sphere and the external masculine world. Speaking of the seductive behaviour of spirits, E. W. Fornell argues that spiritualistic acts in dark séance rooms entail a private-public display of desire in the form of whispering, embracing, caressing and audible kissing.<sup>16</sup> Fornell mentions that some flirtatious acts take the form of sexually hysteric transmission between spirits and female participants. The examination of sound, materialisation and the medium’s body requires the consideration of hysteria as a powerful mode of physical trancing. Helen Nicholson states that to be hysteric is to be as high in power as a churchman.<sup>17</sup> Hysteria is ‘epicentr[ic]’<sup>18</sup> in the nineteenth century and ‘in reality a form of protest’, a view held by Jane M. Ussher.<sup>19</sup> The chapter selectively employs the nineteenth-century clinical, psychic discourse on hysteria alongside trance mediumship in order to show how sound turns into a corporeal form within the hysteric female body. Whereas hysteria is erotically convulsive in

<sup>15</sup> Molly McGarry, ‘Spectral Sexualities: Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism, Moral Panics, and the Making of U.S. Obscenity Law’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 12: 1 (2000), 8-30 (p. 18).

<sup>16</sup> E. W. Fornell, *The Unhappy Medium: Spiritualism and the Life of Margaret Fox* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 145, also cited in McGarry, *Ghosts of Future Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> Helen Nicholson, ‘Women, Madness and Spiritualism: Introduction to the Writings of Louisa Lowe’, *Women, Madness and Spiritualism: Georgina Weldon and Louisa Lowe*, 2 vols, ed. Roy Porter, Helen Nicholson and Bridget Bennett (London: Routledge, 2003), 1. 139-157 (p. 143).

<sup>18</sup> Roy Porter, ‘The Body and The Mind, the Doctor and the Patient: Negotiating Hysteria’, in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. Sander L. Gilman et al (Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 225-85 (pp. 226-27). I am grateful to Greta Depledge’s recent research on hysteria and some of Florence Marryat’s fiction, see ‘Conflicting Interpretations of Gender: Hysteria, Masculinity, and Marriage in Florence Marryat’s *Nelly Brooke*, *Critical Survey*, 23: 1 (2011), 42-57 (p. 44).

<sup>19</sup> Jane M. Ussher, *Women’s Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (New York & London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 76.

Marryat's fictional and autobiographical narratives, it takes the form of silence and spirituality in Phelps's writing.

Marryat (1833-1899) and Phelps (1844-1911) were less known than other contemporary writers on both sides of the Atlantic studied in this thesis such as Dickens, Collins, Hawthorne and James. Marryat, a British author and actress, playwright, editor and daughter of Captain Marryat, was a keen and unorthodox supporter of spiritualism. She married at the age of sixteen to the soldier T. Ross Church, with whom she parented eight children whilst living in India for almost a decade during the 1860s. Divorcing Church in 1879 and marrying Captain Francis Lean in the same year were unconventional steps that earned Marryat her family's umbrage. Her second marriage brought her closer to spiritualist circles that enabled her freedom outside the domestic space of the Victorian home. Some spiritualists believed in absolute liberty that is based on free love – in some cases outside the institution of marriage, as in the case of the American Victoria Woodhull. In America, Woodhull supported a utopian spiritual love that is free of 'social ills' and governed by no 'legal or religious authority'.<sup>20</sup> In America, Phelps's marriage to Herbert Dickinson Ward was also a failure due to the latter's total financial dependence on Phelps. He was, indeed, irresponsible enough to not care to 'return home until three days after [Phelps's] funeral'.<sup>21</sup> Phelps adopted a spiritualistic conviction based on material pleasure and the rejection of traditional conjugality. Her model of spiritualism, however, differs from Marryat's with respect to faith: Phelps's spiritualistic practice furthers her 'Christian faith',<sup>22</sup> whereas Marryat's is more secular and sensual. Miss Phelps was surrounded by father-

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<sup>20</sup> Cathy Gutierrez, 'Sex in the City of God: Free Love and the American Millennium', *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 15: 2 (2005), 187-208 (p. 187).

<sup>21</sup> Lori Duin Kelly, *The Life and Works of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Victorian Feminist Writer* (Troy, New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 17-18.

<sup>22</sup> Roxanne Harde, "'God or Something Like That": Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's Christian Spiritualism', *Women's Writing*, 15: 3 (2008), 348-370 (p. 350).

figures of strict religious education: whilst her father, Austin Phelps, was ‘Professor of Rhetoric and Homiletics, assuming the Presidency of the Seminary in 1870’, Moses Stuart, her grandfather, was ‘Professor of Sacred Literature’. Spiritualism was an outlet for Phelps that helped her escape the ‘repression and frustration’ of father-figures.<sup>23</sup> My choice of Marryat and Phelps is based on the fact that they are lesser known female authors who managed to defy strict social circumstances and patriarchal indoctrinating discourses via spiritualist practices.<sup>24</sup> Marryat’s *There Is No Death* (1891) and other novels particularly *The Dead Man’s Message* and *The Spirit World* (1894) and Phelps’s three spiritualist novels *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *Beyond the Gates* (1883) and *The Gates Between* (1887) challenge patriarchy by either emphasising intimacy between spirits and women through sound and materialisation or bridging the gap between women, desire and the representation of heaven.

The relationship between nineteenth-century women and spectres within spiritualist séances is a distinctive aspect of communication that characterises female sexuality and social freedom in a time when such discourse was publicly frowned upon. Spirits defy repression and arguably return as an expression of women’s suppressed sexual desires. Whilst Adam Phillips suggests that it is eroticism or desire that comes back in the form of the supernatural,<sup>25</sup> Patricia White argues that haunting and ghosts are linked more to women,<sup>26</sup> to female sexual desire. The active presence of spirits and emphasis on spectral sounds within private spaces in relation to female

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<sup>23</sup> Barton Levi St. Armand, ‘Paradise Deferred: The Image of Heaven in the Work of Emily Dickinson and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’, *American Quarterly*, 29: 1 (1977), 55-78 (p. 55).

<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Joseph A. Good for his examination of Marryat’s and Phelps’s spiritualist fiction in his thesis, although my chapter here aims to extend the philosophical discussion of these works within the field of communication and female sexuality, see ‘The Dark Circle: Spiritualism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction’ (unpublished doctoral thesis: University of South Florida, 2012) <<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>> [accessed 15 April 2013].

<sup>25</sup> Adam Phillips, *Terrors and Experts* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 19, also cited in Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 118.

<sup>26</sup> Patricia White, ‘Female Spectator, Lesbian Specter: *The Haunting*’, in *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 142-172 (pp. 144-45), quoted in Tromp, p. 3.

sexuality evolved as a mode of communication that reached its apogee during the second half of the nineteenth century after the advent of spiritualism. For Marryat, ‘a low hissing sound’ powerfully stands as a spectral, communicational representative of her passion for public freedom and sexual liberty. Through sound, she speaks the unspeakable because it incurs no moral harm or social awkwardness; it is the physical-spiritual form of ‘the Holy Ghost [or ...] *femina genetrix*’, to borrow the last concept of Judith Wilt’s division of ideal Christianity.<sup>27</sup> Holy motherhood, *genetrix*, which I equate with sound, is the feminine voice through which Marryat challenges the strict patriarchal ban on sexual expression. Sound, in this case, symbolises erotic pleasure, or what one might call a spiritualist indulgence in sensual pleasures even though nineteenth-century domestic spaces are sites of constant surveillance. Phelps describes the experience and space given to women via far-reaching ‘telephonic arrangement[s]’ in the spirit world as ‘perfect’ (*BG*, 212), which is symbolic of the liberty of expression that escapes possession or even Phelps’s and her protagonist Mary Cabot’s understanding. There is a complicated acoustic system functioning as a spectral channel of women’s voice and a forum of communication that undermines the sexual politics of late-Victorian patriarchy.

Alex Owen examines the spiritualist phenomenon by offering a historical, socio-cultural reading of the movement in America and Europe. Owen approaches spiritualism from a gendered point of view, showing how spiritualism is tied to female sexuality and the ‘potential, not always consciously realised, for subversion’,<sup>28</sup> which makes her book analogous to my research. Other critics like Janet Oppenheim and Tromp also provide a social, historical and literary history of spiritualism and explain how it is received within Christian institutions. Whilst Oppenheim looks

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<sup>27</sup> Judith Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot, & Lawrence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (London: Virago, 1989), p. 4.

into various aspects of spiritualism such as female mediums, the séance and particularly the debate of religiosity and scientificity, Tromp probes spiritualism as a movement of sexual, medical and colonial subversion. Oppenheim, for example, discusses how spiritualism brings about the enmity of orthodox Christianity since it developed as “almost a new religion”.<sup>29</sup> Tromp, whose research comes the closest in spirit to mine, provides a more recent study of spiritualism as a highly sexualised movement: ‘spiritualism was sexy’, she states.<sup>30</sup> Tatiana Kontou also presents significant research on the development of women’s writing as a result of the influence of Victorian spiritualism on gender and the emergence of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. Kontou highlights the “density” of discourses that present women as the matriarchies of spiritualist language. Kontou’s research focuses on the investigation of powerful women such as female mediums and how their performative activity, thus agency, during séances bears them into the realm of authorship.<sup>31</sup> McGarry, likewise, reshapes our understanding of nineteenth-century America by shedding light on gender, sexuality, medical culture and ethnicity during the upsurge of spiritualism. Through spiritualism, McGarry states that we get closer to understanding ‘the fears surrounding obscenity, gender, and sexuality’.<sup>32</sup> Female séance sitters are exceptions to the ordinary angels of the house as they violate social and spatial boundaries and enact sexual desire within the private spaces of Victorian homes, thus

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<sup>29</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> Tromp, p. 21. For a detailed discussion of erotic, imperial discourses on spiritualism, see Tromp, pp. 75-97. Paul Bauer gives a powerful imperial, multi-religious narrative in which the great Arab prophet Mohammed appears in a séance and communicates ‘information about the oil crisis in Abadan and the love affairs of the Shah of Persia’. Mohammed disappears when asked “‘Nen unden nabba?’” by a Persian attendant. Regardless of how accurately erotic the love affairs of the Shah were, such séances were still subject to informative insufficiency and faultiness of cross-cultural translation, I believe. Yet this séance is an interesting account of the oriental extension of spiritualism and the resultant dilemma of translation. Quoted in Bauer, *Christianity or Superstition: An Objective Survey of Mascots, Horoscopes, Fortune-Telling and Talisman Worship in the Light of the Christian Faith* (London, Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1963), p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> Tatiana Kontou, *Spiritualism and Women’s Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> McGarry, *Ghosts of Future Past*, p. 95.

turning spiritualism into a mode of communication of sexual desire, social authority and egalitarianism.

Spiritualism started in 1848 when the Fox sisters claimed to have heard spectral echoes of their physical contact with wooden surfaces, leading to the development of rapping such as table-rapping as a form of spirit communication. Katherine and Margaret Fox, who were respectively twelve and thirteen years old living in Hydesville New York, ‘discovered that they could ‘talk’ to the unseen source of disturbances by establishing a simple code involving a specific number of raps in response to their verbal questions’.<sup>33</sup> Leonard Zusne and Warren H. Jones simply define spiritualism as ‘the belief in communication with the dead through a living intermediary, the medium’, a position that the Fox sisters fulfil as correspondents or what Zusne and Jones call ““channeler[s]”” between life and the other world.<sup>34</sup> Communication with the spirits of the dead usually takes place in a dark séance room functioning as a ““contact zone”” where everything tends to become possible.<sup>35</sup> Sitters not only hear spirits playing music but also see phenomena of levitation in which furniture becomes subject to magnetic influences of mediumship and paranormal intervention. Brandon argues that the use of furniture by a means of rapping and ‘disembodied noise’ as a form of mediation enveloped the Fox sisters in a mist of colossal amazement.<sup>36</sup> Yet the raps were not only primitive channels of spirit communication but also the beginning of nineteenth-century spiritualism that spread on both sides of the Atlantic, especially during the 1860s. Following the year 1848, the new movement was immediately shipped off to

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<sup>33</sup> Owen, p. 18. There is some controversy surrounding the ages of the Fox sisters, see Lis J. Warwood, ‘The Fox Sisters: Riddle of the Records’, in *Psypioneer*, 4: 9 (2008), 186-196 (p. 187) <<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.9September08..pdf>> [accessed 11 September 2014].

<sup>34</sup> Leonard Zusne and Warren H. Jones, *Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Magical Thinking*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1989), p. 210, 222.

<sup>35</sup> Bridget Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Brandon, p. 2.

England, opening up thereupon the practice of what Jill Galvan calls ‘transatlantic séanc[ing]’,<sup>37</sup> a process by which spirit rappings communicate information across the Atlantic. Marryat, for instance, received a letter from ‘a stranger across the Atlantic’ containing a drawn ‘picture of [her] position and surroundings in 1889’ (*TD*, 184). American spiritualists such as Mrs Hyden and Mrs Roberts were among those who strengthened ‘close ties between spiritualists in both countries’ through travelling and advertising in England.<sup>38</sup> Marryat herself decided to go to America in 1884, so that ‘I could add my American notes to them [English experiences]’ (*TD*, 207).

The communication of sexual desire via spectral and material sounds seems to be an exception within the space of the séance room. The phenomenon of furniture levitation, sometimes carried out by means of accordions or pipes, implies familial and social instability in nineteenth-century Anglo-American structures and gender systems. Furniture within the domestic sphere is associated with gender order and sexual fixity; however, levitation violates these patriarchal systems by creating anarchy. Even though table levitation seemed an interesting subject to explore, it only earned the ridicule and rejection of major literary figures. Alfred Tennyson, Anthony Trollope, Dickens and Hawthorne all objected to the vulgarity and inauthenticity of this method of spirit communication.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the only case of levitation

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<sup>37</sup> Jill Galvan, ‘The Victorian Post-human: Transmission, Information and the Séances’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), pp. 79-97 (p. 79).

<sup>38</sup> Owen, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Tennyson, for instance, refused his brother Frederick’s belief in table-rapping as a communicating medium, stating that “‘God and the ghosts of men would choose something other than mere table-legs through which to speak to the heart of man’”. See Robert Bernard Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* (New York: Clarendon, 1980), p. 563. I am thankful for Daniel Cottom’s brilliant analysis of the power and symbolism of tables and spirit communication, in ‘On the Dignity of Tables’, *Critical Study*, 14: 4 (1988), 765-783 (p. 767).



examined by Thomas Huxley ‘was as gross an imposter as ever came under my notice’.<sup>40</sup> This, however, does not suggest that spiritualism was for others solely an experience of deception and vulgarity. Many distinguished persons took part in séances and were thoroughly interested in scientific spiritualism, including Queen Victoria, Prime Minister Gladstone, John Ruskin, Christina Rossetti and Arthur Conan Doyle.<sup>41</sup> The latter, being a remarkable advocate of spiritualism, writes: ‘No woman [shall] mourn her lost beauty, and no man his lost strength or weakening brain [...] a perfect body awaits us’.<sup>42</sup> The fact that Doyle lost his father and wife, Louise, in 1893 made him very passionate about spiritualism.<sup>43</sup> Phelps also believed that spiritualism is the best medium of connecting the physical and metaphysical or psychical worlds, as both are made of the same ‘legal fiber’.<sup>44</sup> The association with science through the technological ‘fiber’ was appealing to Phelps who, unlike Marryat, believed in science as complementary to spectrality. For Phelps, scientific telepathy exemplifies a perfect complement to spectral communication: the worlds of science and spirit could function together as one.

Spiritualism quickly transformed into a dominant occult mode of communication intrinsically tied to other Victorian technological or scientific networks such as mesmerism, telegraphism, telephony, telepathy and even letters.<sup>45</sup> Phelps asks: ‘Is the boldest conjecture of telepathy more

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<sup>40</sup> T. H. Huxley, *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*, 2 vols, ed. Leonard Huxley (London: Macmillan, 1900), 1. 240, quoted in Brandon, p. 250. See also Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 366.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, pp. 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> See Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Vital Message* (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 35, quoted in Christine Ferguson, ‘Eugenics and the Afterlife: Lombroso, Doyle, and the Spiritualist Purification of the Race’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 12: 1 (2007), 64-85 (p. 77).

<sup>43</sup> Jeffery and Valerie Meyers, eds., *The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Reader: From Sherlock Holmes to Spiritualism* (New York: Copper Square Press, 2002), p. xxiv.

<sup>44</sup> Phelps, ‘The Great Psychical Opportunity’, *The North American Review*, 141: 346 (1885), 251-266 (p. 254).

<sup>45</sup> Telepathy was first coined by Frederic W. H. Myers, the founder of the SPR (Society for Psychical Research) in 1882. The term refers to the communication of information from an individual to another without the use of bodies or sensory channels. Telepathic correspondence, which became an advanced structure of spiritualism, carries within it the basic structure of telephony, telegraphy, spectrality and the whole principle on which communication becomes based in later centuries.

stupendous than the telephone was twelve years ago?'.<sup>46</sup> Telepathy, which was indebted to spiritualist techniques or principles, particularly disembodied transmission, developed later as “unmediated communication”.<sup>47</sup> During the 1870s, Spiritualism expanded even more rapidly and was practised on a daily basis. Spiritualist practices not only affected ‘the lives of men of letters’ but also the public mind.<sup>48</sup> Like telegraphy and telephony, spiritualism is subject to ‘misinterpretation, ambiguity [...] fraud’ or even interception,<sup>49</sup> a common theme that permeates Henry James’s telegraphic novella *In the Cage* (1898). It is true that the possibility of intercepting spectral communication might make the spiritualist science seem vulnerable and even fraudulent, but equally the subtle spiritualist acoustic structure of human-spectral contact has an impact on gender relations and power struggle within late-Victorian Anglo-American societies. Spiritualist women are associated with sexual overactivity and transgression, making spiritualism an era of ‘apocalyptic feminism’.<sup>50</sup> Late-nineteenth-century women became agents of acoustic communication at the very heart of domestic places where silence and repression of sexual desires were characteristic of male-female relations.

In a visit to her sister Cecil, Marryat narrates that

The very first night some one walked up and down the room, groaning and sighing close to my ears, and he, she, or it especially annoyed me by continually touching the new stiff counterpane with a “scrooping” sound that set my teeth on edge, and sent my heart up into my mouth [...] its

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<sup>46</sup> Phelps, p. 265.

<sup>47</sup> Thurschwell, p. 130

<sup>48</sup> Russell M. and Clare R. Goldfarb, *Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century Letters* (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1978), p. 139. Harold Anson explores how information is circulated between the spirit control, medium and the séance attendant within a modern technological discourse, *The Truth about Spiritualism* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1941), pp. 29-30.

<sup>49</sup> Cottom, p. 770.

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets and William Veeder, *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America 1837-1883*, 3 vols, *The Woman Questions: Defining Voice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 1. xv. Cited in Rebecca Styler, *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 10.

proximity inspired me with a horror and repugnance which I have seldom  
felt under similar circumstances. (TD, 47)

This early experience of Marryat in *There Is No Death*, which is a ‘case of spirit materialization’,<sup>51</sup> borders on a terrifying, seductive interaction with spirits via acoustic materialisation. John Milton’s reference to Lucifer’s temptation of Eve with an ‘impulse of vocal air’ that penetrates her ears best typifies the acoustic act that symbolises spectral materialisation and embodies female desire.<sup>52</sup> Eve powerfully represents the female body’s receptivity to sound, an advantage in nineteenth-century female mediums that allows them to transform sound/spirit into an object of desire. McGarry states that to materialise is to restore ‘a spirit to flesh, blood, & bones, as in life’.<sup>53</sup> This materialisation is manifested through Marryat’s sensory system in which hearing ‘a “scrooping” sound’ makes her teeth chatter and heart leap ‘up into [her] mouth’.<sup>54</sup> ‘Scrooping’ is not a sexual sound in itself, but in terms of this thesis’s overarching subject of female sexuality and communication, I read it as a spectral medium of sexual desire. Marryat’s novel employs a variety of sounds within the spiritualist discourse such as ‘scrooping’, ‘whispering’ or ‘hissing’ which can be associated with the female body and the ultimate transgressive act: the Fall and Eve’s acoustic sexual transgression. The production and description of spectral sounds in Marryat’s case are also acts of transgression and a form of desire materialisation within the domestic sphere. The materialised spirit or sound that reaches

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<sup>51</sup> Kontou, ‘The Case of Florence Marryat: Custodian of the Spirit World/Popular Novelist’, in *The Ashgate Companion*, pp. 221-231 (p. 227). Whereas Kontou refers to Marryat’s book as a collection of personal spiritualist experiences, Georgina O’Brien Hill does call it a novel in her article “‘Above the Breath of Suspicion’: Florence Marryat and the Shadow of the Fraudulent Trance Medium”, *Women’s Writing*, 15: 3 (2008), 333-347. In this chapter, I will treat Marryat’s autobiographical writing as a novel, too.

<sup>52</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (New York, London: Norton, 2005), lx. 530; ‘Into the heart of Eve his words made way [...] the voice much marvelling’, 550-51, p. 437.

<sup>53</sup> McGarry, *Ghosts of Future Past*, p. 103.

<sup>54</sup> According to *OED*, ‘scrooping’ signifies ‘a strident, grating, or scraping sound; to grate, creak, squeak’. See ‘scrooping, *adj.*’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [accessed 12 September 2014].

everywhere demolishes all sexual boundaries separating the two genders – patriarchal boundaries that compromise women’s freedom of sexual expression. Even though the spirit’s ‘scrooping’ sound engenders ‘repugnance’, it communicates a strange yet daring world of desire. McGarry argues that the process of materialisation in itself entails a dissolubility of borders between the familiar and unfamiliar or ‘between the domestic spirit circle and the public world of strangers’.<sup>55</sup> Through the use and repetition of different sounds and their materialistic effects in her writing, Marryat creates an acoustic technology of sexuality that welcomes new subjective representations of feminine language. If language fails representation, sound evolves as the body of signification by turning into a “‘language machine’”.<sup>56</sup> Even though Gina Bloom uses this term within an early modern context, it is feasible to argue that the nineteenth-century female medium’s acoustic body functions as a ‘language machine’ too. Its mechanical or non-verbal manifestation of desire within the domestic space is a linguistic technology that challenges masculine authority and emphasises feminine self-presence.

During the 1870s, spirit materialisation reached its highest apogee, bringing with it excessive levels of sexual radicalism and social defiance. McGarry holds that within the process of spiritualist materialisation sound was replaced by ‘vision’ and ‘the spirit became flesh’.<sup>57</sup> Even though the 1870s was a phase of spirit materialisation in which photography and ghosts’ images also had an impact on the cultural phenomenology of simulacra that peaked with the later onset of modernity, I believe that the power of the auditory or acoustic effect carries within itself the body of vision or matter. Marryat and Phelps employ sound to communicate their voices and

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<sup>55</sup> McGarry, *Ghosts of Future Past*, p. 114.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 4. Bloom borrows the term from Jeffrey Masten, Peter Stallybrass and Nancy Vickers, *Language Machines: Technologies of Literary and Cultural Production* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> McGarry, ‘Spectral Sexualities’, p. 14. The first physical materialisation in the U.S. took place at a séance mediated by Underhill Fish in 1860. See Brandon, *The Spiritualists* (New York: Knopf, 1983), p. 98.

embody their desire. Materialised spirits, which are arguably embodied sound, could mediate scenes of ‘sexual displays’.<sup>58</sup> Whilst Marryat’s novels overemphasise the presence of spectral bodies through materialisation and visionary acoustics, Phelps contents herself with the unseen, ‘unfamiliar, home-like sound [that] is pleasant in the silent house’ (*GA*, 27). Throughout *The Gates Ajar*, in which Mary Cabot loses her brother Roy in the American Civil War, the spirit of the departed Roy does not physically show. It is, however, felt through hearing ‘pleasant’ sounds that mediate between Phelps and her dead brother, thus functioning as sites of familial reunion and social reconstruction. With the outbreak of the Civil War in America (1861-1865), more than half a million Americans were killed, and mourners sought physical ways to console themselves such as spirit materialisation. In Phelps’s novel, Lisa Long argues that Mary ‘focuses on the sights and sounds that surround her only contact with Roy’s body’.<sup>59</sup> The tendency to materialise spirits/sounds constituted a threat to religious authority, as it dismissed orthodox thoughts of death and the afterlife. In Phelps’s work, death becomes materialised yet ‘joyous’ because the return of the spirit creates a sense of autonomy of belief that contradicts the orthodox vision of death as an ultimate awful separation.<sup>60</sup>

Marryat and Phelps deploy different radical materialisation techniques within the acoustic space of their spiritualist experiences or narratives. The former becomes involved in séances where the sensory system is used for spectral interaction and sexual gratification, whereas the latter focuses on the production of sound as expressive of ‘the passion of Heaven’ (*BG*, 228), as symbolic of women’s passion for breaking corporeal laws. Marryat’s relationship with the

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<sup>58</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, ‘Science and the Seance: Transgressions of Gender and Genre in Late Victorian London’, *Representations*, 22 (1988), 3-29 (p. 9).

<sup>59</sup> Lisa Long, “‘The Corporeity of Heaven’: Rehabilitating the Civil War Body in the *Gates Ajar*”, *American Literature*, 69: 4, 781-811 (p. 786).

<sup>60</sup> W. D. King, “‘Shadow of a Mesmeriser’: The Female Body on the “Dark” Stage’, *Theatre Journal*, 49: 2 (1997), 189-206 (p. 190).

materialised spirit world is horizontal whereas Phelps's is vertical: the former does not seek or interact with spirit beyond the earthly space. In Marryat's fiction, spectral-human interaction usually happens in the séance room, and is applicable to corporeal human laws. Phelps, on the other hand, goes beyond the corporeal world into a magic-like, heavenly space where spirits enjoy freedom of choice and action. Phelps keeps a conservative distance from spirit materialisation, in that she does not involve her characters in audacious sexual or flirtatious action. Marryat is, conversely, 'perhaps the only sitter who claimed to have both seen and touched the naked body of spirit'.<sup>61</sup> In a séance led by Florence Cook, one of the remarkable mediums who was notorious for being the guide of the flirtatious spirit Katie King, Marryat was called

into the back room, and, dropping her [Katie's] garment, stood perfectly naked before me. "Now," she said "you can see that I am a woman." [...] I was to strike a light as soon as she gave three knocks, as Florrie would be hysterical on awaking, and need my assistance, she then knelt down and kissed me, and I saw she was still naked. (TD, 142)

Kontou argues that spirits can be 'playful, bawdy, violent or socially transgressive'<sup>62</sup> being tied to no space or social codes. Despite the fact that Owen suggests 'the innocence of the encounter' in this scene,<sup>63</sup> it is important to argue that this communication between Marryat and the spirit Katie might be sexual but more significantly critical of gender roles and annulling of patriarchal logic within the séance space. To engage in various acts of kissing, nakedness and knocking on the part of both sitters and spirits is to reverse the hierarchies of power mostly favourable to men. As this chapter explores the acoustic potential of spiritualism for gender subversion, it is

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<sup>61</sup> Owen, p. 227.

<sup>62</sup> Kontou, *Spiritualism and Women's Writing*, p. 187.

<sup>63</sup> Owen, p. 228.

necessary to focus on Marryat and Katie's physical and linguistic interaction as it combines spectral sexuality with sound effects. The incident shows knocking to be an essential part of communication between the medium, spirit and séance-sitters. The three knocks figuratively function as physical wires that transmit women's physical sensations or erotic feelings within the private space of the Victorian home. The capability of knocking to link between three bodies also manifests the séance room as a corporeal world of communication where bodies are subject to the penetration of voices, sounds, noises or knocks. J. Hillis Miller states that bodies are 'pierced through and through, at every moment, by an enormous cacophony of invisible electro-magnetic waves resonating at many frequencies'.<sup>64</sup> Within a spiritualist context, the connection between female bodies, sounds and spirits challenges patriarchal laws that govern domestic spaces: whereas silence is a feminine virtue in the domestic space within nineteenth-century Anglo-American discourses, spectral sound via table-rapping gives voice to the silenced and communicates unbound agency for self-expression. The fact that the séance space can function as a bubble of cacophony signifies women's acquisition of free action, as sound which metaphorically represents feminine voices becomes dissociated from masculine rational discourses. By knocking, which symbolises a direct physical interaction with the spirit's body, Marryat does not only prove the possibility of intercourse between the living and dead but also the female potential of subverting domestic laws that subject women to strict moral lives: knocking is a departure from codes of silence and privacy.

The materialisation of spirits and the entire phenomenon of spiritualist séances are 'intolerable' (GA, 125) to Mary Cabot's Aunt Winifred Forceythe in *The Gates Ajar*. Materialisation and séances are unnecessary mediums of contact between the living and dead.

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<sup>64</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *The Medium is the Maker: Browning, Freud, Derrida and the New Telepathic Ecotechnologies* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), p. 9.

Both the protagonist Miss Cabot and Aunt Winifred lost members of their families during the American civil war: the former her soldier brother Roy, the latter her husband John. During their meeting, Winifred advises Mary to accept this loss as ephemeral, yet her counsel is not given by means of séances and direct communication with naked or flirtatious spirits like Marryat and Katie's correspondence. According to Winifred, the reality of material pleasure is present in the next world. By accepting her aunt's council, Phelps creates a balance between erotic spiritualism and mild Christian values and rational science. Instead of full-form materialisation in which the spirit's whole body becomes apparent to the participants, Phelps employs spirit- or self-materialisation in the afterlife and draws comparisons between heavenly impressions and worldly sensations. When human beings depart to heaven, they carry the same earthly desires and senses that may grow or become heightened in the other world. *The Gates Ajar*, for example, engages in subtle philosophies on the physical nature of the afterlife and borrows, though implicitly, from Swedenborg's beliefs about spiritual matter.<sup>65</sup> A person, in Swedenborgian terminology, moves to the next stage of existence with 'a similar body, a similar face, similar speech, and similar senses'.<sup>66</sup> The fact that human beings might develop in the afterlife also implies their departure to a place that is celestial yet sexual. It is a place where marriage and sexual intercourse are abundant and free; Swedenborg believed in the persistence of matter and normality of sexual acts in the afterlife. Even though Winifred and Mary reject séances and extreme Swedenborgianism, references to this spiritualist practice can be noted in *The Gates Ajar*. Women in this text become sometimes involved in one-to-one séances which take the form

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<sup>65</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish spiritualist, established a distinct science based on the coexistence of immortality and mortality and the possibility of travelling to non-material landscapes or 'geo-psychic places' after death. See Dr Jacqueline Jones-Hunt, *Séances with God: God through the Ages* (Avoch: J. Jones-Hunt, 2002), p. 39.

<sup>66</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Delight of Wisdom Relating to Conjugal Love* (London, 1981), pp. 37-44. Cited in B. J. Gibbons, *Spirituality and the Occult: From the Renaissance to the Modern Age* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 83-84.



of speaking to the dead through seeing, touching or hearing. Materialisation for Phelps, however, takes place in the other world; its development ‘is sometimes best trained by [earthly] repression’, (GA, 90). Phelps’s silence that is representative of women’s repression on earth is rewarded by a better life of materialised pleasure in heaven.<sup>67</sup> In her spiritualist novels, Phelps describes the heavenly life of the departed using a terminology that alternates between the spiritual and material or dream and reality, even though spiritual experiences are mostly narrated from an afterlife perspective. Once a person is dead, we see him/her from beyond the gates, to use Phelps’s Christian-spiritualist discourse. After death, spirits can return to the earthly world on errands, but unlike Marryat’s spirits, they do not materialise in full form. Nonetheless, messages from the spirit world which might take the form of knocking are present in the text. Phoebe, Mary’s servant in the novel, ‘knocked’ (GA, 135) and voices are consequently heard: Roy’s or John’s. The novel ends in Winifred’s speaking to her husband’s spirit: “‘John’”, she said, – “‘why John!’” (GA, 137).

The end of *The Gates Ajar* is sentimental and sensational, and the gates of Phelps’s heaven are no longer ajar as they become wide open for women’s sexual expression in the afterlife. Phelps’s next spiritualist novel *Beyond the Gates*, whose protagonist is also the young unmarried Mary, describes a place of endless pleasure. Mary exclaims: ‘Now I found this more energetic than the bodily sensations I had known’, (BG, 157). Whilst on earth, Mary is not aware of the sexual and material nature of the human body, but when she goes beyond the gates, she becomes sexually and linguistically eloquent. Even though sexual pleasure is a troubling subject for Phelps’s religiously controlled characters on earth, it does not prevent her from exploring female eroticism at high levels as she does in the sentimental novel *The Silent Partner* (1871).

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<sup>67</sup> Whilst at home, the protagonist Mary Cabot is repeatedly visited by the Calvinist church deacon Quirk; however, she finds no sympathy and relief from him after Roy’s death, thus losing faith until Winifred’s arrival.

Sentimentality is transgressive in this novel as it both audaciously displays female desire and presents sexuality as a matter of ‘choice’ rather than a mere inheritance or cultural imposition.<sup>68</sup> Characters like Jim, the mill worker, and Nynee Mell, the female worker, are involved in sexual acts through physical touching.<sup>69</sup> Sip, another female mill worker, states: “I don’t see why I couldn’t have had *that*, leastways, she cried between her hands. ‘I haven’t ever had much else. I don’t see why *that* should go too’”.<sup>70</sup> *That* refers to Sip’s sexual pleasure. The pronoun implicitly speaks for the rights of female workers to display their desire and move into a stage that is sexually free of masculine exploitation and suppression.

Although Phelps gives her female characters such as Sip the chance to express sexual impulses in life, she gives ultimate social and bodily power to Mary who enjoys a heavenly existence with no restrictions in *Beyond the Gates*. This novel explores the adventures of Mary, who ‘had been ill for several weeks with what they called brain fever’ (*BG*, 141), and the movement of her spirit into ethereal spheres after her death. Her sexual life and matrimonial future change after the ‘physical transcendence’ of her body.<sup>71</sup> She travels to heavenly places where laws governing the human body are materially similar yet spiritually different to their earthly counterparts. Mary becomes passionate, but her passion partly comes from the fact that she is unmarried; her meeting with a male spirit from a previous love relationship on earth puts the question of ‘spiritual affinity’ and free love to the fore.<sup>72</sup> In heaven, Mary is born into a new experience in which she becomes exposed to visual and acoustic life, creating what John Kucich

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<sup>68</sup> Bauer, p. 59.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>70</sup> Phelps, *The Silent Partner* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1983), p. 287. Emphasis is in original.

<sup>71</sup> Bauer, p. 68.

<sup>72</sup> Tromp, p. 30.

calls “‘visionary realism’”,<sup>73</sup> a new form of spiritualist realism that parallels Victorian social realism. The realistic visionary experience Mary enjoys in heaven endows her with the choice of partnership upon arrival. Her dream-like departure from life takes the shape of hysteric passion that is symbolic of sexual frustration. She is an unmarried girl who is delivered into heaven via sickness:

“Father, I begin to be perplexed. I have heard of these hallucinations, of course, and read the authenticated stories, but I never supposed I could be a subject of such illusions. It must be because I have been so sick.”

(*BG*, 155)

Nineteenth-century American culture stressed marital life and familial stability, a fact that led to Mary’s – being unmarried and thus incompatible with social expectations – sense of loneliness and frustration.<sup>74</sup> Sickness or ‘hallucinations’, however, deliver Mary into a subjective feminine role: she moves from being inactive and sick within her domestic sphere to becoming free and dynamic in heaven where she moves ‘at will’ and experiences multiple ‘sensations of pleasure’ (*BG*, 159). Heaven functions as an agent of mobility and representative of powerful femininity where space and voice are bound to no restrictions. The transformation of sickness into health and material delight in the afterlife turns heaven into what Kucich calls ‘an *object petit a*, a fantasized lost object’; its possession gives women power beyond measure and unity beyond social fragmentation. Heaven for the unwed Mary becomes a sexual fantasy or ‘wish fulfilment’, to use Freud’s term.<sup>75</sup> The wish to erotically escape earthly or patriarchal codes can also be manifested by the immaculate form of hearing. Even though the female body passes into

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<sup>73</sup> John J. Kucich, *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2004). Kucich coins “visionary realism” to signify a realistic ‘device that applies the techniques of social realism to spiritual visions’, p. 75.

<sup>74</sup> The most perfect role played by women according to mid-nineteenth-century American culture is marriage and motherhood. See Tiffany K. Wayne, *Women’s Roles in Nineteenth-Century America* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), pp. 1-25.

<sup>75</sup> Kucich, p. 75.

‘visionary’ experiences or what Constance Classen calls the heavenly ‘culture of the eye’,<sup>76</sup> it is important to note that the acoustic system forms a powerful network between women, desire, power and defiance within the discourse of spiritualism. Hearing cannot only be associated with passion and sexual pleasure but also the subversion of ‘moral order’ and masculine discourses of rationalism.<sup>77</sup>

The traditional classifications of senses into masculine and feminine (men are associated with reason and high, pure senses like hearing and sight; women with low, sensuous ones like smell, taste and touch) are refuted by Mary’s spirit:

All Heaven seemed heavenly. I heard distant merry voices and music.  
Listening closely, I found that the Wedding March that had stirred so  
many human heart-beats was perfectly performed somewhere across the  
water, and that the wind bore the sounds towards me. (BG, 228)

Mary negates the traditional classification of senses on the basis of gender. Classen argues that hearing is no longer a ‘weighty’ discourse of masculinity within a spiritualist context.<sup>78</sup> Mary acts as an acoustic subject that not only narrates heavenly experiences via hearing but also symbolically turns sound into a cacophony of material desire that challenges imposed gendered classifications of senses. The sounds of spiritual weddings and ‘heart-beats’ develop into acoustic knowledge represented in Mary’s mental growth and awareness that defy cultural expectations of unmarried women on earth. By hearing ‘distant’ voices, Mary becomes the spiritual embodiment of desire, free action and acoustic subversion.

Historians refer to Pythia in ancient Greece as the Oracle of Delphi or the female medium who ‘received the initial communication or inspiration’: after going into a trance, God ‘spoke

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<sup>76</sup> Constance Classen, *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

through her in the first person'.<sup>79</sup> Pythia's place within the Greek society as the embodiment of God's voice is an early example of female mediumship and an affirmation of feminine corporeal agency. The nineteenth-century phenomenon of women becoming conduits for spirits and the inherent link between the medium's body and sound/voice has its origin in the myth of the Oracle of Delphi: indeed, Bloom's description of women emerging as 'acoustic subjects' is pertinent in this context.<sup>80</sup> In nineteenth-century séances, women's sensitivity was regarded a prerequisite for spirit communication. The reception of sounds and noises from the other world was tied with passivity that became a feminine 'normative' ideal.<sup>81</sup> Luckhurst holds that men were seen as 'active and katabolic', women as 'passive and anabolic'.<sup>82</sup> Luckhurst's argument does not necessarily suggest women's vulnerability; it is rather a powerful position that is rarely attainable by male spiritualists. Marryat establishes an acoustic discourse of power by linking the medium's receptive body with spectral voices speaking through it. In Marryat's *My Sister the Actress* (1881), Betha Selwyn discloses to a friend that 'she and I make a fine noise together'.<sup>83</sup> 'She' in this context refers to Euripides's Medea, the female ghost that Marryat represents in her novel. With the mythological figure of Medea, Betha is able to enact her role on the theatrical space of the séance and entrance the audience of her spiritualist performance by producing a noise as 'fine' as the latter's. Noise here is symbolic of Medea's violent, revengeful actions; it is thus the source of Betha's internal power and self-representation, too. Making a 'fine noise' with

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<sup>79</sup> See Amy Lehman, *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists and Mesmerists in Performance* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2009), p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Bloom, p. 18. Although Bloom speaks within an early modern context, her argument is significant to the chapter's overarching discussion.

<sup>81</sup> Helen Sword, 'Necrobibliography: Books in the Spirit World', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 60: 1 (1999), 85-113 (p. 90), also quoted in Sarah Willburn, 'The Savage Magnet: Racialization of the Occult Body in Late Victorian Fiction', *Women's Writings*, 15: 3 (2008), 436-453 (p. 437).

<sup>82</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 215, 218. Luckhurst applies the biological terms 'katabolic' and 'anabolic' meaning active and passive respectively to show the gender differentiation that dominated Victorian social life, namely the unequal education of boys and girls.

<sup>83</sup> Marryat, *My Sister the Actress*, 3 vols (London: F. W. White and Co., 1881), 1. 248.

Medea powerfully undermines the boundaries separating between women and sexual and social authority.

Sound functions as an uncanny or ghostly presence that arguably returns to the female body as a ‘foreign body’.<sup>84</sup> Freud defines the uncanny or *unheimlich* as the ‘old and long familiar [which] ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light’.<sup>85</sup> Even though the return of sound and spirit to the space of the séance-room is homely, they resist familiarisation by being defiant of domestic laws and social structures. Marryat’s spiritualist experiences, especially those narrated in *There Is No Death*, manifest this relationship between sound, spirit and unhomeliness by emphasising the disruptive or subversive nature of women’s bodies, table-rapping and spirit materialisation during séances. During the mediumship of Miss Rosina Showers, a notorious medium in England ‘who was followed by voices in the air, which held conversations with her’ (*TD*, 108), Marryat – being invited to assist at one of the séances – narrates how the séance-room became full of

Materialized creatures, who were determined to let us know they were not to be trifled with. Our hands were slapped, our hair pulled down, and our clothes nearly torn off our backs [...] at the same time we heard the sound as of a multitude of large birds or bats swooping about the room. The fluttering of wings was incessant and we could hear them “scrooping” up and down the walls. (*TD*, 113-14)

Marryat and Showers become situated in the middle of ‘an oral-aural’ world where they stand face to face with their spectral interlocutors. The space described by Marryat is an ‘acoustic

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<sup>84</sup> Nicolas Abraham, ‘Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud’s Metapsychology’, in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 171-76 (p. 175).

<sup>85</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), XVII. 220, 225.

space' that situates hearers 'in the middle of [social] actuality'.<sup>86</sup> Even though the scene narrated by Marryat might carry implications of sexual violence, which are recognised through the act of seeing 'clothes nearly torn off our backs', it is via hearing and materialised sounds that both women's subversive power is actualised. The transgressive aspect of spectral sounds and noises comes through women's act of hearing which gives Marryat and Showers what Bloom calls 'communicative agency' that enables them to express their desire and overlook patriarchal voices.<sup>87</sup> The 'incessant' sound in the séance-room communicates a hysteric condition, which is 'a condition of unsavoury sexual and expressive connotations', as suggested by Owen.<sup>88</sup> Foucault also calls this condition hysterical and unmanageable: this movement of sound and 'that disorder of the spirits' result in the 'chaotic movement' of the hysteric body communicating 'messages that cannot be verbalized'.<sup>89</sup> The description of Marryat's and Showers's bodies as hysterical does not perpetuate the traditional medical discourse which regards hysteria as 'a shameful, "effeminate" disorder'.<sup>90</sup> It challenges nineteenth-century social and spatial hierarchies by positioning women at the centre of defiant, domestic action. Foucault argues that "the nerve which, in the organ of hearing, becomes sensitive to the vibrations of sonorous bodies, differs no whit in nature from those which serve the grosser sensations such as touch, taste, and odor".<sup>91</sup> By categorising hearing and the ear as low or 'gross', Foucault problematises the traditional gendering of hearing. It should be noted that hearing represents a feminist spiritualist mechanism

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<sup>86</sup> Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Phenomena for Religious and Cultural History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp., 28, 164.

<sup>87</sup> Bloom, p. 8.

<sup>88</sup> Owen, p. 139. Elaine Showalter argues that hysteria can no longer be regarded as a biological or medical characteristic of the female body; it is a protest against social prejudices and construction of the female body as 'hysterical' or sick, a resistant act also noted in the departure of the sick Mary, Phelps's protagonist in *Beyond the Gates*, towards heaven. See Showalter, 'Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender', in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 286-345.

<sup>89</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), p. 147.

<sup>90</sup> Showalter, 'Hysteria', p. 289.

<sup>91</sup> Foucault, p. 151.

of social subversion. Marryat's and Rosina's hysterical, acoustic bodies are enactments of gender criticism and bodily roles within nineteenth-century domestic and public spaces.

Marryat's *There Is No Death* can be viewed as a collection of corporeal acoustic experiences that figuratively operate as materialised desires defying social order. Kontou argues that the acoustic body communicating through spirits is a mechanism of dictation, 'a typist [...] from beyond the grave' that allows for the uncontrolled influx of subversive sound into the interior structure of spiritualist mediation.<sup>92</sup> During séances, the medium's body is normally sensitive and 'overanxious', becoming easily 'attuned to the slightest vibrations'.<sup>93</sup> These vibrations, which embody the spectral sound that travels through the air and is received into the medium's body, have the power to violate the corporeal and discursive presence of oppressive patriarchal figures. After the death of Professor Aldwyn, a man of science and figure of patriarchal oppression in Marryat's *The Dead Man's Message*, Mrs Aldwyn and daughter Madeline go to see a female medium called Mrs Blewitt to communicate with the spirit of the dead husband/father. During the séance, they become overwhelmed by the sudden convulsions of the medium's body: Mrs Blewitt 'closed her eyes, and, in another moment, her head fell forward on her bosom, and she was asleep [...] and then she began to moan and gasp, as if speaking were a terrible effort to her'.<sup>94</sup> In spite of her role as 'a passive instrument', Mrs Blewitt possesses what Galvan calls 'fine nerves' which change into an acoustic wave of emotional and social action.<sup>95</sup> By closing her eyes and letting her head fall, Blewitt is acoustically pierced through by a spectral

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<sup>92</sup> Kontou, *Spiritualism and Women's Writing*, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Sandor Ferenczi, 'Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child', trans. Jeffrey Masson and Marianne Loring, in *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*, ed. Jeffrey Masson (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1984), p. 140. See also Thurschwell, p. 147.

<sup>94</sup> Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message: An Occult Romance*, ed. Greta Depledge (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2009), pp. 85-86. Subsequent references will be parenthetically given in the text as *DDM* followed by page number

<sup>95</sup> Galvan, *The Unsympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies 1859-1919* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 30.



aural force that transforms into physical vibrations. The importance of these vibrations stems from the fact that they work as a barrier between living female characters and masculine voices in the other world. They are dismissive of patriarchal authority: Professor Aldwyn, who ‘repressed’ his wife’s and daughter’s ‘affection’ on earth (*DDM*, 68), is unable to communicate through the medium’s body. His communicative incapacity signifies a failure of masculine discourse within the space of heaven or spirit land.

The materialisation of sound or desire in nineteenth-century séances can take many forms, but for the purpose of this chapter I shall focus on table-rapping: ‘Give me the table – all the rest, all the other effects, come afterwards’,<sup>96</sup> says Mrs Jordan in Henry James’s *In the Cage* (1898). For Mrs Jordan, as for other Victorian mediums, tables are important materials that transfer the person involved into the realm of powerful presence. Tables and table-rapping emerge as a unique, influential and moral ideology in nineteenth-century spiritualist séances. What is it to produce sound or mediate through wood? It is to symbolically turn wood into flesh and blood or employ the language of wood to communicate women’s sexual desire and subversive voices. Derrida defines the table as a “‘non-sensuous sensuous’ [thing], sensuously supersensible’.<sup>97</sup> According to Derrida, women and tables are sensitive and ‘sensuous’ beings that mediate defiance via rapping or verbal correspondence with spirits. Sarah Willburn argues that tables are ‘feminine’, or emerge as acoustic feminine subjects: ‘women and wood both found themselves in the subjunctive’.<sup>98</sup> Willburn links spectrality, femininity and tables by stating that ‘tables become girls; girls become ghosts’.<sup>99</sup> In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud argues that tables ‘stand for

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<sup>96</sup> Henry James, *In the Cage* (London: Hesperus Press, 2002), p. 24.

<sup>97</sup> Derrida, *Spectres*, p. 155.

<sup>98</sup> Sarah A. Willburn *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 100, 94.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

women [...] ‘Wood’ seems, for its linguistic connections, to stand in general for female ‘material’.<sup>100</sup> In nineteenth-century séances, tables are not thus ordinary pieces of furniture as one might think; they can function as animate objects, conduits of sexual desire and feminine subversive voices. Karl Marx goes so far to suggest that tables form ‘crotchets’ – or crotches? – in their heads.<sup>101</sup> Marx perhaps implicates the erotic aspect of tableology (or table ideology). In her letters, Elizabeth Browning portrays a spiritualist image of wood that best unravels its link to passion: ‘the panting and shivering of that dead dumb wood, the human emotion conveyed through it – by what? Had to me a greater significance than the St. Peter’s of this Rome’.<sup>102</sup>

Marryat and Phelps develop the rhetoric of rapping as a mode of gender subversion. However, whilst Marryat employs tables and the language of wood within domestic séances, Phelps constructs feminine defiance in celestial spaces by using immaterialised forms of mediation. When the spirit of Mary in Phelps’s *Beyond the Gates* returns to her earthly home after death, she finds things different specifically that she exists in a non-acoustic relationship to things. She finds herself ‘able to pass the medium of this resisting matter, and to enter and depart according to my will’ (*BG*, 181). Mary’s free mobility discards female mediumship and the spiritualist tradition as an unnecessary liaison between earthly life and the other world. She exists in no relationship to matter/wood, in that she passes unnoticed through ‘this resisting matter’. But how does Phelps situate her female protagonists or make them stand out in the middle of earthly cacophonies? Phelps departs from earthly materialisms based on interactions between

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<sup>100</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (London: George Allan & Unwin, 1954), p. 355.

<sup>101</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Dutton, 1974), 1. 44. For more feedback on the moral significance or symbolic meaning of tables and Victorian objects, see Charles Bray, *Illusion and Delusion; Or, Modern Pantheism versus Spiritualism* (London: Thomas Scott, 1873); Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 2 vols, ed. Frederic G. Kenyon (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1897), 2.158.

séance-sitters, spirits and tables-rapping. She represents human-spectral channels of communication as spiritual, emotional, not wooden. Whilst on earth, the spirit Mary realises that material sounds produced by motions die away or become suppressed:

I went up and opened the familiar door. I had begun to learn that neither sound nor sight followed my motions now, so that I was not surprised at attracting no attention from the lonely occupant of the room. (BG, 177)

The expression of female desire on earth changes into another form of corporeal pleasure in heaven that is represented as a place flooding with ‘music’ and open to ‘*marriage[s]*’, but not those ‘imperfect ties that pass under the name, on earth’, as Mary suggests (BG, 212, 200). Mediation in Mary’s case is meditational or dream-like: at the end of the novel, Mary wakes up from a shocking, death-like experience to discover that her spiritual journey has been ‘thirty hours of stupor’, a mere dream (BG, 231-32). Whereas communication with the other world in Marryat’s fiction is physical, Phelps takes up the psychical mode of spiritual mediation and self-representation. Kate Mattacks suggests that ‘dreams or meditation’ are Phelps’s chosen modes of contact with the spirit world.<sup>103</sup> Through sleep, dreams or trances, which stand as forms of death or physical transcendence, Mary is transported into a state of sensuous presence in which her sensory system and material pleasures operate in harmony. The ability to enjoy a free material existence in heaven through dreaming allows Mary to escape forms of patriarchal repression, domestic confinement and celibacy. Even though she is a young, unmarried girl suffering from ‘typhoid’ with which she is accused of infecting other prisoners (BG, 143), Mary mediates her escape through dream or death which is a ‘morbid nervous condition’, according to Phelps.<sup>104</sup> Like Marryat, Phelps highlights the power of female morbidity or hysteria that engenders and is

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<sup>103</sup> Kate Mattacks, ‘Beyond these Voices: M. E. Brandon and the Ghost of Sensationalism’, *Women’s Writing*, 15: 3 (2008), 320-332 (p. 326).

<sup>104</sup> Phelps, ‘The Great Psychical Opportunity’, p. 257.

engendered by ‘sexual passion’ and that constitutes an access to authoritative representation.<sup>105</sup> Heaven is Phelps’s space for ideal marriages, a place that ‘very much elevates and celebrates earthly sex’ in eighteenth-century spiritualist discourses perpetuated by Swedenborg and William Blake;<sup>106</sup> Marryat’s séance-room, however, represents the principal and radical domestic space for the interaction of women and spectres.

Nineteenth-century patriarchy endeavours to make the female body ‘aetherialised and invisible’;<sup>107</sup> matriarchy, however, defies invisibility via the employment of acoustic communication within transgressive places such as Marryat’s séance-room and Phelps’s heaven. The representation of the séance-room and heaven as radical acoustic spaces enhances the association of women and spirit communication with visibility and sexual autonomy. Marryat’s séance-room functions as an interior nineteenth-century location that transforms into a visible space of acoustic fluidity through constant interaction between the dead and living. It is a place that turns all forms of fixity, especially fixed patriarchal authority, into a fluidity that is symbolic of gender anarchy. Spectral noise metaphorically penetrates the firm walls of séance-rooms, transforming all solidities within, particularly traditional masculine discourses of reason into a fluid language that resists the patriarchal links between women and concealment. Furniture in the séance-room, namely tables and their solid structure, defies domestic and social order by being connected with noise and the spiritualist phenomenon of levitation. Tables can be symbols of stable marital relationships and social hierarchies. Yet by being used as mediums of spiritual

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<sup>105</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 132.

<sup>106</sup> John Maynard, *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 33.

<sup>107</sup> Porter, ‘Bodies of Thought: Thoughts about the Body in Eighteenth-Century England’, in *Interpretation and Cultural History*, eds. Joan H. Pittock and Andrew Wear (Basingstoke, London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 82-108 (p. 91), also cited in Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions, 1830-1872* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 63.

contact via rapping or levitation, they subvert nineteenth-century interior structures and problematise gender fixity. The séance room can thus consist of solid items that signify instability or changeability: via table-rapping and the sense of hearing, women create a kind of dissonance between the fixed and fluid. The medium's body, for instance, challenges its fixed domestic and social role by becoming spiritual, fluid or uncontrolled via rapping. Mackenzie Bartlett argues that 'séance' originally comes from the French *seoir*, meaning 'to sit', which implies a kind of passivity on the part of the sitters' and medium.<sup>108</sup> Sitting negates the masculine definition of female passivity as it transforms into not only the sexual activity taking place among séance-sitters such as kissing and caressing but also the autonomous rhetoric that communicates female mastery.<sup>109</sup> The incessant movements of spirits that produce various acoustic effects turn the medium's inaction into active physical presence and linguistic dominance.

Acoustic fluidity thus transforms the enclosed séance-room into a symbolically vast space where women's communicative acts with spectres carry visionary experiences or materialisations that also subvert social boundaries. 'Full-form materialisation' of spirits, as Tromp notes, was at high tide during the 1870s and 80s.<sup>110</sup> The shift from acoustic to visionary perception is tied with the changing nature of women's representation within nineteenth-century Anglo-American societies and the developing industry of communication. During the 1880s, for example, women gained more freedom to voice their desires openly and this arguably became linked with the development of visual forms of contact such as photography. The possibility of being involved in

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<sup>108</sup> Mackenzie Bartlett, 'Mirth as Medium: Spectacles of Laughter in the Victorian Séance Room', in *The Ashgate Research Companion*, pp. 267-285 (p. 273).

<sup>109</sup> Owen argues that séance-rooms functioned as stages of sexual 'desire', p. 222. Kontou also suggests that scandals took place during séances in which acts that were considered socially immoral and revolting became 'normalised', see *Spiritualism and Women's Writing*, p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> Tromp, p. 12.

correspondence with fully materialised spirits that might also be photographed during séances gave women more social power via visual perception. It should, however, be noted that the emphasis on vision instead of sound does not necessarily undermine acoustics as a major spiritualist technique. Marryat's séances with visible spirits in *There Is No Death* shows how full-form spirit materialisations develop as a result of acoustic effects. The séance-room itself is described by Didier Anzieu as a cataclysmic "sonorous envelope":<sup>111</sup> apparitional visions and materialisations in the séance-room can, then, be seen as matter projected through sound. Being invited by Mr. Henry Dunphy to attend 'a private *séance*' by the medium Florence Cook, Marryat describes how

The double drawing-rooms were divided by velvet curtains, behind which Miss Cook was seated in an arm-chair, the curtains being pinned together half-way up, leaving a large aperture in the shape of a V. Being a complete stranger to Miss Cook, I was surprised to hear the voice of her control that *I* should stand by the curtains and hold the lower parts together whilst the forms appeared above [...] The first face that showed itself was that of a man unknown to me. (TD, 75)

Marryat's description here consolidates the connection between spectral sound or 'voice' and materialisation. Through the mediumship of Miss Cook, the spirit's voice and the physical image of an 'unknown' man merge together – the man being a symbolic visual manifestation of the spirit's voice: the man's presence is an audiovisual effect. Connor believes that the séance space is controlled by what he calls a 'bath of sound'; nonetheless, this space makes possible the merging of sound with other senses such as seeing, 'touch, odour and taste'.<sup>112</sup> The spirit

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<sup>111</sup> Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 157-73. See also Connor, p. 208.

<sup>112</sup> Connor, p. 208.

control's voice is thus an acoustic effect that generates spectral shapes,<sup>113</sup> a 'man unknown to me'. The fact that Marryat describes a strange male spirit in a domestic space also highlights the relationship between spectral acoustics and the erotic dimension of séances. The strange male spirit sexualises the acts of hearing and seeing, thus creating gender disorder by obliterating the boundaries between women's private spaces and the masculine social world. Miss Cook's voice is familiar and hospitable to Marryat's hearing; however, her voice is overtaken by her spirit control that reveals to Marryat the face of an 'unknown' man, an incident that problematises familiarity and reinforces the erotic aspect of the encounter, taking into account the sexual activities that might happen between spirits and participants. The 'unknown' man's face appears from 'a large aperture in the shape of a V'. Marryat's choice of the shape 'V' is perhaps literal, but for my reading here it can be symbolically associated with voice (hearing), vision (seeing) and the womb. The aperture is represented as the birthplace of 'unknown' male spectres, a productive space where women interact with male spirits freely. The fact that spirits during séances embody and speak through the female medium, as seen in Cook and her control's communication, makes the séance-room and the medium's body stand as symbolic birthplaces of spectres and subversion. Marryat's aperture functions as an acoustic space in which she defies domestic order by communicating with spirits that emerge as what Alexander Melville Bell calls "visible speech".<sup>114</sup> Sounds such as rapping and knocking or spirit voices are 'apports' that transform into corporeal objects which subvert silence and absence.<sup>115</sup> The space of the aperture shows how spectral verbal acts confer on women the ability to vocalise their authority and sexual

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<sup>113</sup> The 'control' is a spirit 'acting as a go-between and passing on messages from others in the spirit world to living friends or relatives'. See Georgina Byrne, *Modern Spiritualism and the Church of England, 1850-1939* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), p. 21.

<sup>114</sup> Connor, p. 212.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

desires outspokenly. Yet how does the aperture bridge the gap between private and public spaces via the communication of desire?

The aperture problematises nineteenth-century public spaces that are normally denied to women; it symbolises the door into not only the spirit world but also the world of men. The ‘unknown’ man’s face in the previous quotation links between the spirit world and the séance-room; the man’s voice operates as a passage between spaces of interiority and exteriority, too. Despite the fact that the séance-room is a limited space within the Victorian home, Marryat’s description of the happenings and interactions with spirits during séances transgresses spatial limits and claustrophobia. Through the open space of the aperture and its symbolic presence as a productive birthplace of sound and vision, female spiritualists stand in the centre of a panoramic scene that allows them to speak beyond the séance-room walls. The aperture could stand for the possibility of emancipation, spatial mobility, spirit travelling and erotic interaction, and gender chaos. Taking into consideration Derrida’s definition of ghosts as alive-dead, i.e. as entities of borderlessness, the séance-room challenges the dichotomy between the private and the public. Spirits act as channels transmitting women’s desires to the external world and causing disruption to sexual differences, gender roles and spatial limits. Marryat’s ‘aperture’ opens extra spaces beyond Victorian domesticity; whilst Phelps’s anti-séance with its heavenly experiences also subverts any simple distinction between the private and the public.

Phelps in *The Gates Ajar* expresses her intolerance of late-Victorian spiritualist traditions such as séances and spirit communication via wood. She, nevertheless, implicitly incorporates this tradition in her early spiritualist fiction. In ‘The Day of my Death’, a short story published in Phelps’s collection of short stories *Men, Women and Ghosts* (1869), Fred narrates many bizarre occurrences at his home where he lives with his wife Alison and their temporarily visiting



relative Gertrude Fellows who turns out to be peculiarly spiritualistic. Fred is a hard-line non-believer in spiritualism, which is ‘a system of refined jugglery’, as he calls it.<sup>116</sup> During Gertrude’s visit, Fred and Alison are ill at ease due to the perpetual noises and disturbances coming especially from surrounding furniture. Throughout the narrative, Fred becomes interested in knowing the source of these disturbances and begins seeking mediums and séances to answer his questions and doubts about spirit communication. The story later focuses on Fred’s death as foretold by mediums he visits in New York, Boston and Philadelphia. Despite the fact that Fred’s death ““on the second of May, at one o’clock in the afternoon”” (DD, 89) turns out to be unreal, it is interesting how Fred, fundamentally anti-spiritualistic, becomes involved in spirit communications by means of furniture language. One night, Fred, being frustrated with the mysterious source of the invisible noises, investigates:

matters a little more thoroughly, I asked my wife to stand upon the inside of the doorway while I kept watch upon the outside. We took our position, and I closed the door between us. Instantly, a series of furious blows struck the door; the sound was such as would be made by a stick of oaken wood. The solid door quivered under it.

“It’s on your side!” said I.

“No, it’s on yours!” said she.

(DD, 75)

Whilst Fred rejects the spiritualist tradition in its entirety, Gertrude and Alison engage in spirit communication throughout the story, an engagement that would eventually contribute to the reconstruction of gender roles. Despite the fact that Phelps mocks spiritualist phenomena such as communication by ‘unseen hammers, fists, logs, and knuckles’ through the male rejectionist Fred (DD, 77), she endows Gertrude and Alison with the power of occult subjectivity. Unlike Fred who dies before the narrative comes to an end, both women become centralised in the story as

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<sup>116</sup> Phelps, ‘The Day of my Death’, in *Men, Women and Ghosts* (Andover: Haunted Library, 1869), pp. 69-95 (p. 71). All subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as DD followed by page number.

the occult bodies in communion with spirits. Gertrude and Alison reshape spatial gender definitions not only by becoming the pivot of textual and social spaces but also by turning Fred into a sequestered object within the larger domestic space. Phelps's narrative, despite being dismissive of the séance tradition, resembles Marryat's in the sense that both shed light on feminine transgression of domestication. Phelps challenges traditional thinking of femininity as interior and masculinity as exterior: Fred stands 'upon the outside' whereas Alison stands 'upon the inside'. Fred's instructions to his wife regarding positions confirm the patriarchal tendency to define outer spaces as public and masculine and inner ones as private and feminine, thus invoking the Victorian image of the Angel in the house. The fact that Fred 'closed the door between' himself and his wife also expresses the patriarchal perpetuation of spatial divisions based on masculinity and femininity. Yet the representation of spectral sounds and thus acoustic fluidity as an invisible force that makes 'the solid door' shake imperceptibly problematises this spatial gender separation. The door stands as a physical barrier between husband and wife and a marker of spatial differences and traditionally defined roles. However, the unknown source of the spectral sound causes confusion on both sides of the door, creating a counter definition of patriarchal space. The 'furious blows' symbolically turn the door into an immaterial object, hence causing the collapse of barriers and the unity of feminine and masculine spaces.

Alison's inner space, like Marryat's aperture, brings about the breakdown of limited spatiality and gives rise to the powerful image of the public woman. Lucy Bland suggests that publicity for women such as prostitutes, actresses and female *flâneurs* whose social presence threatens patriarchal spatial domination was regarded as 'shocking' in the nineteenth century.<sup>117</sup> The fear of publicity could be applied to Fred's spatial relationship to his wife: he shouts "it's on your

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<sup>117</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London, New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001), p. 118.

side!”, but she shouts back “No, it’s on yours!”, refuting her position as interior. The ‘series of furious blows’ produced by spirits function as an occult effect that enable Alison to answer back, to disrupt the masculine order and ‘cross urban, class and sexual boundaries’.<sup>118</sup> Alison’s reaction “No, it’s on your side!” subverts categorisations of place as feminine or masculine, private or public: women can be as public as men. Diana Basham, however, holds that the public for women constitutes a challenge to ‘notions of masculinity itself’.<sup>119</sup> Phelps also draws on the discourse of incarceration and hysteria of women to further her criticism of gendered classification of space: Fred believes that Alison’s contact with the spiritualist Gertrude “‘hath made thee mad’” (DD, 76), and he consequently tries to imprison her by stressing the need to ‘investigate matters a little more thoroughly’. Fred’s logic becomes subverted by the inversion of spatiality as he becomes the inside *per se* and he is accordingly incarcerated in an inverted public space. Fred becomes the object of spiritualist prophecies and his consequent death strips him of public power as he loses social and textual influence. Alison occupies an inside-outside or unified space: she represents the centre of Phelps’s text. Despite the narrative’s dwelling on the day of Fred’s death, it emphasises Alison’s struggle for spatial unity and achievement of public dominance.

If Alison and Gertrude achieve spatial unity and thus gender equilibrium, Mary in *Beyond the Gates* attains a universal feminine space by accessing heaven via meditation or hysteric dreaming. When she passes to heaven, she spatially experiences a different life; she moves from a ‘typhoid’ darkened room to a celestial building which

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<sup>118</sup> Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 118.

<sup>119</sup> Diana Basham, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: MacMillan, 1992), p. 158, also quoted in Hester Burton, *Barbara Bodichon, 1827-1891* (John Murray, 1949), pp. 44-47.

was circular in form; it was indeed a perfect globe, in whose centre, without touching anywhere the superficies, we were seated. Air without light entered freely, I know not how, and fanned our faces perpetually. Distant music appealed to the ear, without engaging it. Pleasures, which we could receive or dismiss at will, wandered by, and were assimilated by those extra senses which I have no means of describing. (BG, 215)

Speaking within a nineteenth-century medical discourse, Mary is a working-class girl who is socially associated with being the potential source of disease and danger. In the story, she is condemned by the governor to confinement for fear of affecting other prisoners with ‘typhoid’. Lorna Duffin differentiates between middle-class and working-class women in relation to medical theory by arguing that the former were viewed as ‘sick’ the latter as ‘sickening’. Duffin states that the working-class woman was seen ‘a potential health hazard, harbouring germs of cholera, typhoid or venereal disease’.<sup>120</sup> Standing as a symbol of invalidity within her American society, Mary faces physical and psychological isolation; the possibility of retaining freedom, however, comes through the deconstruction of domestic and medical restrictions. By becoming a spirit, unlike Marryat’s séance-sitters or Phelps’s Gertrude and Alison in ‘The Day of my Death’, Mary is given an unlimited spiritual space that could not be attained on earth. Yet her bodily transformation from sickness to health refutes the patriarchally imposed definition of female disease and treatment. In heaven, good spirits do not get sick and are the same, a fact which obliterates gender differences and medical hierarchies in celestial spaces.

Mary’s freedom begins with a dream-like death that metaphorically leads her beyond the gates into an infinite land, ‘a perfect globe’ where everyone exists as an independent spiritual agent. Mary’s description of heaven in the previous quotation shows how she is reborn into a

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<sup>120</sup> Lorna Duffin, ‘The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid’, in *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, ed. Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 26-57 (p. 30).

world of pleasure and limitless experience of sexual freedom. Her symbolic death increases her sexual awareness, opens up spaces of feminine desire and defies patriarchal medical/spatial impositions on the female body. Armand maintains that death in itself is a forceful experience that ‘entails the loss of physical virginity as well as spiritual naiveté’.<sup>121</sup> In the afterlife, sexual acts are purely personal and this allows Mary and other female spirits to enjoy what Tromp calls ‘spiritual affinity’ in which spirits choose partners freely.<sup>122</sup> Phelps’s choice of expressions such as ‘freely’, ‘distant’ and ‘extra’ illustrates how Mary’s new space is unbound, and how she positions the female body at the centre of heaven which is also portrayed as the centre of the universe in Phelps’s writing. It is true that women in séances become prominent as ‘*speaking* rather than *being*’ participants, as Judith Walkowitz argues,<sup>123</sup> but heavenly states assert their places as free agents or beings. Phelps employs spiritualist discourse not only as a space where women become capable of free sexual expression – bearing in mind Mary’s status in the novel as unmarried – but also as a secular utopia where social, moral and spiritual relations emphasise egalitarianism and what Geoffrey Nelson calls liberalism.<sup>124</sup> Phelps, like Marryat, problematises the Christian patriarchal discourse that sets boundaries between men and women. By making the female body the centre of the spirit world, both writers revolutionise the representation of women within the traditional theology.

The ghosts of Marryat’s and Phelps’s women function as a ‘door through which we enter the Other reality’, to employ the words of Manuel Aguirre.<sup>125</sup> This figurative language of wood and door opening communicates an immaculate subversion of male authority: the masculine ‘I’ loses

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<sup>121</sup> Armand, p. 70.

<sup>122</sup> Tromp, p. 30.

<sup>123</sup> Walkowitz, p. 9.

<sup>124</sup> Geoffrey K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 139.

<sup>125</sup> Manuel Aguirre, ‘On Victorian Horror’, in *Gothic Horror: A Reader’s Guide from Poe to King and Beyond*, ed. Clive Bloom (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), pp. 199-232 (p. 208). See also Tromp, p. 2.

significance within the acoustic act of spirit communication. In heavenly and séance spaces, hierarchy stops functioning as authoritative voices are no longer in control whereas feminine voices appear to subvert all sexual, class and religious systems. Through acoustic power which transpires in Marryat's *The Dead Man's Message* and Phelps's *The Gates Between* as subversive, spiritualism challenges male scientific voices as they embody a claustrophobic identity and lose their influence. In these two novels, both authors create scientific or medical men who have no or little zeal for and devotion to spiritualist practices. Whilst alive, these masculine figures dedicate their time and thinking to worldly pleasures that keep them shut from familial affection and conjugal duties. Professor Aldwyn in Marryat's novel is a man who likes 'no flowers, nor dainty little tables, nor signs of feminine occupation [being] scattered about' (*DDM*, 3). The physician Esmerald Thorne in Phelps's novel, likewise, engages in a severe argument with his wife Helen over their sick baby: 'It is very unpleasant to me that you make such a fuss over him. If you had married a greengrocer it might have been pardonable'.<sup>126</sup> All of a sudden and during scientific discussions or medical treatments, both men ironically die: Aldwyn slips away after rebuking his wife for her objections to his unremitting carelessness, cruelty and anti-sociality – except for his regular scientific discussions with Mr. Bunster and Mr. Robson, and Thorne similarly dies on a medical expedition after quarrelling with his wife over domestic care.

Death in both novels is the beginning of change not only for women but also men who become self-effacing and subservient to the laws of the spirit world. Masculine authority, which is traditionally represented as the all-powerful 'I', shifts from centrality to marginality. Joel Kovel argues that the 'I' is a personal centre that blocks all ontological spaces.<sup>127</sup> Patriarchy

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<sup>126</sup> Phelps, *The Gates Between*, in *Three Spiritualist Novels*, pp. 231-339 (p. 256).

<sup>127</sup> Joel Kovel, *The Radical Spirit: Essays on Psychoanalysis and Society* (London: Free Association Books, 1988), p. 299.

utilises the centralised space of the ‘I’, thus monopolising discourse and obliterating all natural, objective or ontological feminine spaces. This patriarchal centrality confers on women the statuses of the ‘less human’ and the sexually inferior. Yet to die, or to become a spirit signifies that all these definitions and classifications cease functioning; they turn out to be a dead discourse within the spaces of the séance-room and heaven. All entities in the spiritual world are other or even the other Other: the centralised masculine ‘I’ is inapplicable as it denotes a conventional discourse, according to Nicholas Royle.<sup>128</sup> Miller disparages patriarchy by complicating the ‘I’ reference: in German, ‘*mein*’ means ‘mine’ and ‘*meinen*’ signifies ‘mean’; thus ‘when I say “mine” I can mean anybody’s’.<sup>129</sup> The exploitation of ‘I’ as a sole identity of patriarchy and reference to its power regime is annihilated, since in spectral communications the patriarchal ‘I’ discourse stands next to nothing. The language of heaven subverts the ‘I’ that is based on the idea of patriarchal repression. The pronoun ‘we’ is sometimes used alongside ‘I’; whereas ‘we’ refers to the collective voice of spirits regardless of gender ‘I’ could refer to anyone. When Mr. Aldwyn’s spirit realises that he cannot materialise or be visible to the desired addressee, Aldwyn’s spirit-guide, John Forest, declares that ““*something* cannot come out of *nothing*, my friend. You have no light to spare from your spiritual body”” (*DMM*, 123). In Marryat’s novel, Aldwyn’s attempts to be something, to transform into an acoustic effect or visible light are no different to Thorne’s repetitive acts of escapism in Phelps’s text, but ‘obstruction there was, alas! [...] I, the dead man fleeing to my living wife, was beaten back’ (*GB*, 284). The natural sense of earthly communication also disappears, as ‘no one came within hearing my [Thorne’s] voice; the noise soon ceased, and my efforts at freedom with it’ (*GB*, 269). To men of science and medicine, death is a shocking, unpleasant experience that reduces

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<sup>128</sup> Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 69.

<sup>129</sup> Miller, p. 54.

them to the status of the other, the unwanted other. Once they enter the other world and become spirits, they experience restriction. Kovel argues that a spirit is ‘not to be reduced to other’ because it is ‘a presence *within* the world’.<sup>130</sup> The presence of Aldwyn and Thorne is however denied: Aldwyn is ‘*nothing*’ whereas Thorne is ‘beaten back’. Both men’s communication with the earthly world is cut, and they become unable to contact their wives until they succumb to the laws of the spiritualised nature of the next world.

Unlike female spirits, men in Marryat’s and Phelps’s texts are incapable of action, yet to be able to communicate after death or during séances is to dispose of masculine thinking and become effeminate. To be entitled to spiritual power, D. D. Home the notorious Scottish medium (1833-1886), for example, had to effeminise his behaviour by being passive or receptive to various acoustic effects of spirits.<sup>131</sup> With William Crookes, who also worked with the medium Florence Cook, Home played the accordion under the table, an act that became part of his spiritualist rituals. The accordion, which was a commonly used instrument at séances, was reported to have played musical sounds via the mediation of spirits. The association between Home and the production of sound within the interior space of the séance-room, which earned him criticism and hatred, could be viewed as effeminate due to the nineteenth-century patriarchal construction of women as domestic. Home was excoriated in Robert Browning’s famous poem ‘Mr. Sludge, “The Medium”’ (1864) for his unmanly behaviour or for acting as an effeminate tool for spirit communication. Leo Tolstoi describes him as ‘short man, with hips like a woman’s, knock-kneed, very pale, handsome, with beautiful shining eyes, and long hair’.<sup>132</sup> By

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<sup>130</sup> Kovel, p. 329, 326.

<sup>131</sup> For more information on Home, his reputation and spiritualist séances or psychic performances, see Peter Lamont, *The First Psychic: The Peculiar Mystery of a Notorious Victorian Wizard* (London: Little, Brown Book Group Limited, 2005).

<sup>132</sup> Leo Tolstoi, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1970), p. 660, quoted in Russell M. and Clare Goldfarb, p. 149. For further details on Browning and Home’s relationship,



playing the accordion, Home arguably showed unrestrained passion during his communication with spirits, a passion that is also reported in Marryat's physical interaction with the spirit Charlie: 'I put my finger in the mouth, and felt all round it carefully. The interior was moist and smooth like the mouth of any mortal'.<sup>133</sup> In heaven, Phelps reverses the definition or gender categorisation of sickness by describing Dr. Thorne as someone who 'had begun to be as nervous as a woman; and, I might add, as unreasonable as a sick one' (*GB*, 265). Within the space of the spirit world, the new gender pattern dictates that effeminacy is power and the way to heaven. Marryat's and Phelps's spiritualist fiction, accordingly, shows how the relationship between women, spirits and acoustic receptivity engenders female emancipation. Through sound, the female body emerges as socially radical and symbolic of powerful transmission, a network of desire.

For Kovel, spirit and desire emerge as duplicates; desire is 'the necessary conduit for spirit' and vice versa.<sup>134</sup> Aldwyn and Thorne, unlike Marryat's female spirits and Phelps's Mary, emotionally fail to manifest desire: their expression or communication of desire to their wives is trapped by their lack of desire, as they become silenced and powerless. Aldwyn's body freezes in the spot where he dies, and when he lies on the chair motionless, he discerns he is victimised by his own mutinous body: 'how very strange and uncertain his limbs felt!' (*DDM*, 25). Thorne could not reach his wife to apologise for his wrongdoings, for his body is 'beaten back'. Realising his physical incapability, Thorne tries to use 'the private telegraph which stood by Brake's desk, mute and mysterious' (*GB*, 268) during his captivation in Brake's office. Even though Thorne manages to send an electric signal, none reply and his message becomes dead

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see Miller's *The Medium Is the Maker* and *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 81-157.

<sup>133</sup> Marryat, *The Spirit World* (London: F. W. White, 1894), p. 277. See Connor, pp. 220-21.

<sup>134</sup> Kovel, p. 331.

since it is emptied of desire or passion, a subject that is explored in the next chapter on telegraphism and female desire. Dr Thorne's use of the telegraph affirms that spiritualist discourse prefigures how new communication technologies such as the telegraph 'catalyzed the long-standing fantasy of communication as the spiritual exchange of thought'.<sup>135</sup> The representation of Thorne as 'the voice-from-beyond-the grave', to use Paul de Man's phrase,<sup>136</sup> and his attempts at telegraphic correspondence emphasise the functional homogeneity of spirits and telegraphs. Thorne, however, is shut from the sensory world of hearing, seeing, speaking and even writing: Thorne as well as Aldwyn becomes 'mute' like the telegraph on Brake's desk.

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<sup>135</sup> See Joshua Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric: Mass Media and the Drama of Secrecy in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), p. 63.

<sup>136</sup> Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 75-77. See also Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Massachusetts, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 103.

## Chapter Three

### **‘Boudoirs in the telegrams’?: Language of the Cable and Electric Scandals in Henry James**

“It was a telegram that began it, of course,” she answered.

“Telegram?”

She looked up at him in quite a frightened way — little as there was to be frightened at in a quiet fellow like him in this sad time of his life — and said,

“Yes: some telegram — I think — when you were in trouble?”.

Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean* (1881)<sup>1</sup>

Little by little she felt him take it up, take it down, as if they had been on a satin sofa in a boudoir. She had never seen a boudoir, but there had been lots of boudoirs in the telegrams.

Henry James, *In the Cage* (1898)<sup>2</sup>

Whilst Thomas Hardy employs encoded telegrams as sites of dramatic tension in the plot of *A Laodicean*, Henry James emphasises their erotic dimension by depicting telegrams as enclosed spaces of desire, or as ‘boudoirs’ that metaphorically carry the female telegraphist in *In the Cage* to a world of sexual imagination and emancipation. The utilisation of telegraphic correspondence for discreet sexual encounters, a theme that runs throughout James’s novel, leads to the redefinition of power relations and gender roles. The telegraphist decodes the aristocratic Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen’s telegrams and assumes a powerful social position through her knowledge of their secret sensual meetings which are considered scandalous within a late-Victorian context. George Somerset, in Hardy’s novel, is surprised how telegrams have the potential to manipulate desire, invert truth and make him appear as a careless decadent. William

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean*, ed. Jane Gatewood (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> Henry James, *In the Cage* (London: Hesperus, 2002), p. 61. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as *C* followed by page number.

Dare, the son of the aristocratic Captain De Stancy who represents a dream of medieval nobility to Paula Power, fakes a telegram to ruin Somerset's reputation in the eyes of Power, who stands as an object of Dare's and Somerset's masculine desires. Somerset's questioning of Charlotte De Stancy – "telegrams?" – is a recognition of the development and use of telegraphy as a sensitive form of communication that interrelates with the sexual politics, or in Somerset's case male jealousy, of late-Victorian Anglo-American cultures. On the other hand, Maxwell Geismar in 1963 wrote that 'liaisons' in James's work are alarming as they expose repression and 'sexual fantasies' of young single ladies such as the telegraphist who dreams of 'boudoirs'. Though Geismar states that 'liaisons' are devoid of physical contact or 'satisfactions',<sup>3</sup> I argue that the corporeal representation of telegraphic 'liaisons' can be seen in the short, encoded signs of telegrams, or in Everard's linguistic boudoirs. Sexual desire becomes apparent via the physical aspect of language, or the metaphorical tongues of telegrams bespeaking desire.

This chapter examines telegraphy, sexual desire and female agency in relation to the subject of scandals and Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of 'the slimy' in James's *In the Cage* (1898) and *The Ambassadors* (1903). Sartre asks: 'what mode of being is symbolized by the slimy?' to which he names an 'aberrant' fluid quality of existence that is 'the homogeneity and the imitation of liquidity'.<sup>4</sup> I apply Sartre's definition of the 'slimy' in connection with the scandalous use of telegraphy as a mode of gender interaction. My use of Sartre's definition, however, explains how 'slimy' problematises the masculine use of telegraphy and validates women's redefinition of power relations via their position as telegraph office workers. I argue that the status of female

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<sup>3</sup> Maxwell Geismar, *Henry James and the Jacobites* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), p. 202. Cited in Mark Goble, 'Wired Love: Pleasure at a Distance in Henry James and Others', *ELH*, 74: 2 (2007), 397-427 (pp. 401-02).

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London, New York: Routledge, 1943), p. 607.

telegraphic workers within the space of public communication not only endows them with social authority that is based on knowledge but also manifests the association between slime as a figurative product of electric scandals and cultural appropriation of telegraphy for the facilitation of sexual contact. James's female telegraphist becomes powerful as she possesses knowledge by decoding the scandal of Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen whose telegraphic correspondence symbolises the transformation of the cable language into a 'slimy' substance that is metaphorically produced by the telegraph machine. Lewis Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors*, on the other hand, fails in his telegraphic mission; he represents miscommunication between America and Britain and the female potential to control the discourse of communication, as Strether's ambassadorial failure instigates the despatch of women to France in order to persuade Mrs Newsome's son, Chad, to leave for America and run his mother's business.

The chapter also discusses spaces of insideness and outsideness, unconsciousness and social consciousness in relation to telegraphic erotic communication. James's recurring reference to boats, ships and hotels in *The Ambassadors* highlights the binarisms of interiority and exteriority and links places of correspondence to scandal, thus manifesting the connection between telegraphic discourse, the symbolic production of slime and social context. The French woman, enchantress and beloved of Chad Newsome, Madame de Vionnet 'had pulled [Strether] into her boat [...] They were in it together this moment as they hadn't yet been, and he hadn't at present uttered the least of the words of alarm or remonstrance that had died on his lips at the hotel'.<sup>5</sup> The presence of 'hotel' and 'boat' in Strether's world of communication stresses the borderline between privacy and publicity (or here-ness and there-ness) in a way that draws attention to the link between eroticism, telegraphic correspondence and slime. The chapter finally looks into

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<sup>5</sup> Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, ed. Christopher Butler (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 283. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as A followed by page number.

telegrams as linguistic sites that manifest the sexual rhetoric of communication through the process of dispatch. I scrutinise this notion by associating the telegraph machine with the human body. Whilst the telegraph machine in *In the Cage* functions as a performative body speaking from behind the counter in the Telegraph-Office at Cocker's, Strether in *The Ambassadors*, becomes 'a human telegraph' as described by Ellen Wayland-Smith;<sup>6</sup> he is somebody who not only sends and receives telegrams but also bodily records them.

The fact that James stands as an international literary figure makes him the sole author in this chapter; his Anglo-American double identity labels him as neither British nor American but a transatlantic writer whose fiction, in terms of place and theme, develops an international fictional taste. Leon Edel argues that James's 'trans-Atlantic roots' were conferred on him by unique circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Eliot also states that not only do English readers find James difficult because of his Americanness but also American readers experience this difficulty due to his European mentality: 'I do not know whether he is possible to other readers at all'.<sup>8</sup> James's works also display a worldwide range of literary subjects: *In the Cage* and *The Ambassadors* incorporate nineteenth-century themes, namely the embodiment of sexual desire and women's public space within the world of transatlantic communication. These two novels are charged with telegraphic correspondence in which sexual meanings embody female desire and authority.

Nineteenth-century electric telegraphy, which is the form of correspondence mostly employed in James's electromantic fiction, refers to a process in which telegraphs used 'codes that referred to the written alphabet' despite the fact they 'replaced physical marks on paper with fugitive

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen Wayland-Smith, "'Conductors and Revealers": Henry James's Electric Messengers in *The Ambassadors*', *The Henry James Review*, 32: 2 (2011), 118-139 (p. 124).

<sup>7</sup> Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Master 1901-1916* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1972), p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'A Prediction', in *Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Leon Edel (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 55-57 (p. 55).

pulses of current from afar, on-off rhythms distinct from any particular way of writing them down'.<sup>9</sup> Telegraphy dates back as far as 1646 when Strada, a Jesuit priest, brought into play thoughts of preliminary telegraphs made out of 'two magnetic needles, attached to dials, bearing a circle of letters'. In 1774, however, the practical application of telegraphy became slightly more sophisticated as it included the use of wires. The French philosopher, George Louise Lesage, created complicated equipment that consisted of twenty-four wires, corresponding to the number of letters in the French alphabet at the time.<sup>10</sup> It was not, though, until 1838 that the first electric telegraph was put in operation when Professor Wheatstone started a European project that regarded London and Birmingham as the distant points between which 'the actual transmission of despatches' was constructed. On the other side of the world, telegraphy was introduced later in 1844 when the first telegraphic line was built to connect Washington and Baltimore.<sup>11</sup> The following years witnessed a growing interest in the development of telegraphism as a new national and transnational system of communication. McKenzie Wark argues that telegraphy is 'the real communications revolution';<sup>12</sup> it is a grand form of correspondence that connects not only cities but also continents. In 1850, Charles Walker suggested that undersea wires could bring England 'within "ear-shot"' of Europe and "'speaking distance"' of America.<sup>13</sup> The '*chronotop[ic]*' telegraph and its potential to bring minds and bodies together through the annihilation of space also became a primary concern for fiction

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> George B. Prescott, *History, Theory, and Practice of the Electric Telegraph* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), pp. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> McKenzie Wark, 'Telegram from Nowhere', in *Mutations*, ed. Rem Koolhaas, Stefano Boeri, Sanford Kwinter, Nadia Tazi and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Barcelona: Actar, 2000), pp. 30-39, also cited in Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Walker, *Electric Telegraphic Manipulation: Being the Theory and Plain Instructions in the Art of Transmitting Signals to Distant Places, As Practised in England, Through the Combined Agency of Electricity and Magnetism* (London: George Knight and Sons, 1850), p. 106.

writers.<sup>14</sup> In *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), *Bleak House* (1853) and *Book of Memoranda* (1855-65), Dickens celebrates the idea of electric ‘connexion’ via distant messaging. In *Book of Memoranda*, he writes:

The story [opens] by bringing two strongly contrasted places and strongly contrasted sets of people, into the connexion necessary for the story, by means of an electric message. Describe the message – be the message – flashing along through space – over the earth, and under the sea.<sup>15</sup>

The passage discloses Dickens’s concern about the connection of people and places using incorporeal methods such as ‘electric message[s]’. Phrases like ‘over the earth, and under the sea’ bespeak the author’s awareness of and desire for an earnest enactment of telegraphic projects. Dickens’s ideas attested to ongoing efforts to put telegraphic cables across the Atlantic sea into action, thus connecting Britain with North America.<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Marvin suggests that welding the two gulfs together creates a high possibility of bringing together people and human feelings and making “‘possible its manifestation in a common, universal, simultaneous heart throb’”.<sup>17</sup> Charles Briggs also argues that enmities and ‘old prejudices’ between the two worlds, America and Britain, terminate with the invention of an apparatus that facilitates and speeds the ‘exchange of thought’.<sup>18</sup> Dickens’s criticism of the New World in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) emanates from his disappointment at the lack of Anglo-American information channels. When young Martin travels to America, he ends up with his friend Mark Tapley stranded in a place

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<sup>14</sup> M. M. Bakhtin’s term implies that the telegraphic power is able to reduce time and space and ‘temporal[ly] and spatial[ly]’ connect individuals. He thus invents the term ‘*chronotope*’ to manifest this fact in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84. Pamela Thurschwell endorses Bakhtin’s suggestion in *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Dickens, *Charles Dickens’ Book of Memoranda: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile of the Notebook Begun in January 1855*, ed. Fred Kaplan (New York: New York Public Library, 1981), p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Menke, ‘Telegraphic Realism: Henry James’s *In the Cage*’, *PMLA*, 115: 5 (2000), 975-990 (p. 977).

<sup>17</sup> Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 199.

<sup>18</sup> Charles F. Briggs and Augustus Maverick, *The Story of the Telegraph, and a History of the Great Atlantic Cable* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1858), p. 22.



called Eden where communication with the outside world is subject to chance. James is similarly aware of the need for international telegraphic and even telepathic correspondence. James became thwarted ‘by the idea that Americans in England would need to have a great many things explained to them’,<sup>19</sup> which is best manifested in Strether’s mission in *The Ambassadors*. Telegraphic correspondence is not only a channel of communication but also a ‘social practice’<sup>20</sup> that creates a difference in the way social relations and class distinctions are conducted,<sup>21</sup> a subject which *In the Cage* also critically touches upon.

Richard Menke argues that the technology of electric communication frees the dissemination of information from ‘the constraints of physical movement’.<sup>22</sup> The replacement of ‘physical marks on paper with fugitive pulses of current from afar’ is a big step towards the immaterial internationalisation of communication.<sup>23</sup> The last few decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a widespread curiosity about working towards the rapid institutionalisation of ‘cable telegraphy’ and the improvement of disembodied, distant correspondence. The excessive interest in the subject of physically unmediated communication led James to compare himself in his autobiography to a godly messenger: ‘I again feel myself borne very much as if suddenly acting as a messenger of the gods’.<sup>24</sup> Kate Thomas states that James ‘was hugely fond of postal and telegraphic correspondence, and he displayed particular pleasure in availing himself of

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<sup>19</sup> Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady: An Authoritative Text, Henry James and the Novel, Reviews and Criticism*, ed. Robert D. Bamberg (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1975), p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> Menke, ‘Telegraphic Realism’, p. 976.

<sup>21</sup> I am grateful to Peggy McCormack for her reference to John Carlos Rowe’s discussion of James and telegraphy. See McCormack, ‘Introduction’, in *Questioning the Master: Gender and Sexuality in Henry James’s Writings*, ed. McCormack (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), pp. 11-37 (p. 21).

<sup>22</sup> Menke, “‘Framed and Wired’: Teaching “In the Cage” at the Intersection of Literature and Media’, *The Henry James Review*, 25: 1 (2004), 33-43 (p. 34).

<sup>23</sup> Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Henry James, *Henry James: Autobiography*, ed. Frederick W. Dupee (New York: Criterion Books, 1956), p. 577.

postscripts, marginalia, cryptic, palimpsest, and emendation'.<sup>25</sup> James makes use of this new, fast technology in his electromance fiction by bringing about new ways of exploring the erotics of late-Victorian communication. *In the Cage*, for instance, functions as a telegraphic register of secret mediation, sexual desire, social relations and women's rebellion. James's novella employs telegraphy not only to expose the scandal of upper-class correspondents and problematise transatlantic socioeconomic hierarchies but also to make the reader aware of the erotic feelings of telegraphic female workers and their powerful position as women of public knowledge. Disembodied communication for James is an important feature of electromance as it becomes tied with sexual repression, the feminine space of writing and decoding and the changeability of gender roles and social power. Telegraphy implies women's transformation from a mid-nineteenth-century oppressive culture in which forms of contact such as letters are embodied into more autonomous landscapes of linguistic and erotic speech.

Electric telegraphy, since its early beginnings and use and like other forms of public and private correspondence such as psychic and epistolary communication, has been tied to sexuality, power structures via knowledge and blackmail, and scandal. The secretive or coded nature of electric telegraphic communication incorporates eroticism and the high possibility of scandal, interception and blackmail within the construction of communication. Telegraphy, therefore, constitutes a threat to the Victorian moral codes governing sexual relations and gender expectations. The telegraphic discourse is transgressive and is capable of subverting the laws of Victorian sexuality that was 'moved into the home', to borrow Michel Foucault's phrase,<sup>26</sup> during the mid-nineteenth century. The idea of disembodied voices contacting through the wire

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<sup>25</sup> Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 218.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 1. 3.

was socio-economically advantageous for both genders, in terms of diminishing time and space and bringing people together. Yet telegraphic disembodied communication also brought with it what I call wire fetishism and sexual desire as seen in Everard and Bradeen's case. The non-physical 'immediate pleasure' of secretly contacting bodies is a telegraphic principle that explains the workings of electric/erotic telegraphy.<sup>27</sup> The telegraphist girl in *In the Cage* soon ceases

to be astonished [by] the brazen women, as she called them, of the higher and the lower fashion, whose squanderings and graspings, whose struggles and secrets and love affairs and lies, she tracked and stored up against them till she had [...] a sense of having their silly guilty secrets in her pockets. (C, 18)

Here, the corporeal, sexual nature of customers' communication is revealed by an unnamed female telegraphist, a poor young lady working in one of the poorest areas in the London metropolis at a Telegraph-Office called Cocker's. The fact that the telegraphist is unnamed also adds emphasis to the clandestine characters of erotic correspondence within the discourse of telegraphism. The reference to 'secrets' and 'secrecy' during the telegraphist's acts of tracking exchanges of passion between customers signifies the transformation of her telegraph office into an electromance network of 'silly' guilt and secrecy. The discrepancy between what she stores up and the reader's curiosity to know pinpoints the erotic pleasure in James's text. The method, by which the telegraphist delves into other women's 'intercourse stories and meanings' (C, 20), also affirms her textual, intermediary position as an agent of electric destination. "Bodiless

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<sup>27</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 136.

sexuality””, as Claudia Springer calls it,<sup>28</sup> between communicators leads to a rhetoric of distance within the telegraphic process of secret, scandalous mediations.

The emergence of telegraphism as a fashionable mode of long-distance communication, used by upper-class figures such as Everard and Bradeen, can be connected with the rapidity of contact and the changing technology of sexual expression during the *fin de siècle*. Passion becomes compressed into telegrams that reach their destinations faster than letters and contain the shortest amount of encoded words, a fact that is associated with the high economic value of linguistic exchange. Captain Everard is an upper-class gentleman whose ‘correspondence cost him weekly pounds and pounds, and he might be in and out five times a day’ (C, 14). Even though sending telegrams is expensive, Everard spends a considerable amount of his finance on the use of this advanced technology that offers the easy exchange of discreet sexual intimacy. In his ‘techno-romance’,<sup>29</sup> or what I term electromance novels, James liaises between economy, erotic discourse and telegraphic communication yet encodes extreme versions of explicit sensuality to an extent that have led some critics to consider the author’s own sexuality. Referring to James’s autobiography and childhood, Wendy Graham suggests that James’s sexuality is confused and his writing reveals no definite homosexual inclinations or other ‘sexual preference[s]’.<sup>30</sup> In his analysis of *The Ambassadors*, Frederick C. Crews depicts Lambert Strether, the senior ambassador of the novel, as ‘descendant of the Puritans’,<sup>31</sup> implying the latter’s cultural conservatism. Crews’s description of Strether suggests reluctance on the part of James to reveal the sexual interests of his male character. Although Strether, like Chad, is offered

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<sup>28</sup> Goble, p. 403.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Goble, ‘Wired Love: Pleasure at a Distance in Henry James and Others’, *ELH*, 74: 2 (2007), 397-427 (p. 399). I use the term electromance to refer explicitly to the electric aspect of erotic telegraphic communication; ‘techno-romance’ has the potential to apply to sexuality within a wider range of technologies.

<sup>30</sup> Wendy Graham, *Henry James’s Thwarted Love* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 1

<sup>31</sup> Frederick C. Crews, *The Tragedy of Manners: Moral Drama in the Later Novels of Henry James* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1971), p. 39.

the chance to experience lust in Europe with Maria Gostrey, an American woman who has lived in Paris for years, he declines her marriage proposal and returns to America.

Electric distance is metaphorically constructive of erotic desire: distances, senders and receivers become caught in ‘a web of poly-sexual connections, rather than keeping them on the straight and narrow’.<sup>32</sup> The texts that travel between the bodies of senders and receivers are suggestive of links between sexual desire and distance. That fact that encoded, electric telegrams can cross distances rapidly without the possibility of being intercepted manifests the relationship between the act of despatch to a distance and the easy communication of lust. James shows interest in the expression of desire through coded language and the intricacy of telegraphic communication, an interest that may also point to his own sexuality. In the first chapter of her book, Graham expresses the perpetuation of James’s sexual uncertainty by labelling him as effeminate at times, and homosexual at others. Referring to James’s contact with the sculptor Hendrik Anderson, Richard Ellmann in ‘Henry James Among the Aesthetes’ concludes that both men’s relationship is “‘an affair, or an approximation of an affair’”. Graham, moreover, refers to Vernon Lee’s short story ‘Lady Tal’ (1891) in which the latter ridicules James for being a man lacking in ‘sexual passion’.<sup>33</sup> Despite her interesting and original exploration of James’s sexuality, I argue that Graham goes too far in problematising James’s masculine desires. It is true that James might be sexually vague, but a man who spends his whole life in singlehood or no sexual orientation is not essentially ‘queer’. In *The Princess of Casamassima* (1886), James portrays poor Hyacinth as a man who chooses ‘never [to] marry at all – to that his mind was

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<sup>32</sup> Crews, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> See Richard Ellmann, ‘Henry James Among the Aesthetes’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 69 (1983), 209-228 (p. 228). See also Graham, p. 11, 23.

absolutely made up'.<sup>34</sup> Hyacinth appreciates the princess's beauty and revolutionary sense, but is never engaged in vulgar physical passion. Marriage distorts aestheticism in James's fiction and brings about the death of independence and personal autonomy, which are exquisite artistic topics in Jamesian literary world. Unmarried characters and masculine death, however, aesthetically abound in his late fiction, especially when these characters are no longer capable of coping with the complexities of communication and the sexual politics of modernity. James diverges from other well-known writers such as Edgar Allen Poe in displaying the death of a male body as the most tragic topic in fiction. Hyacinth in *The Princess of Casamassima* (1886), Master Miles in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and Lord Bradeen in *In the Cage* are impeccable examples of male corpses in James's novels. James's interest in the aestheticism of tragic masculine death does not necessarily confirm that he was homosexual. Even though Graham's claims sound logical, they become excessive on the basis that Jamesian characters in other novels get married and lead a purely heterosexual life.

Telegraphy, in my opinion, cannot be used as a method to understand James's sexual orientation. On the contrary, his erotic predilections are overtaken by what John Carlos Rowe terms as the 'economical style of the telegram'.<sup>35</sup> Telegraphy in itself constitutes a borderline between self-expression and public knowledge: a telegraph user can easily conceal his/her intentions within unfathomable codes and thus deny others any public access to personal correspondence. Telegraphic language is also precise and this is partly governed by the sender's and receiver's shared fear of presupposed knowledge or possible interception. The condensed economy of the telegram is in fact the economy of 'desire and fear'.<sup>36</sup> Such economic use of

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<sup>34</sup> Henry James, *The Princess of Casamassima* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> John Carlos Rowe, *The Other Henry James* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 159.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, p. 223.

language that involves ‘count[ing single] words as numberless as the sands of the sea’ (C, 3) is representative of heterosexual relationships in James’s texts. Hugh Stevens, however, argues that *In the Cage* is more likely to ridicule ‘the “heterosexual register”’ than to defend it.<sup>37</sup> I rather suggest that the employment of telegraphy in the service of heterosexual scandalous communications makes the tale more culturally typical of late-Victorian gender relations and symbolically obscure to explicit expression of homosexuality. In order to construct his identity as a heterosexual writer, James sometimes employs not only metaphorical but also mathematical language to silence his readers’ possible interpretations of homosexual affiliations: “‘Seven, nine, four –’ ‘Nine, six, one’” (C, 94). These numbers appear in one of Everard’s and Bradeen’s telegrams, and even though we know that both are involved in a scandalous telegraphic relationship, these numbers are perplexing or reveal indefinite sexual references as they are open to many possible meanings. Allusions are also made to Lord Rye’s and Mr Drake’s relationship towards the end of the narrative; however, once we begin to believe that both men might be involved in acts of homosexuality, Mrs Jordan, another female widow character working as a florist at Lord Rye’s house, says no more of the Rye-Drake relationship: she comes to ‘a conscious pause’ (C, 106).

Alongside Geismar’s criticism of James’s literary representation of sexual orientation, other critics such as Roger Gard and F. M. Colby also impugn James’s real and fictional sexual worlds. Gard refers to a British reviewer of *The Wings of the Dove* who accuses James’s characters of sexual abstinence: they are ‘abstractions of abstractions, shadows of shadows’, writes the British reviewer.<sup>38</sup> Colby, in like manner, speaks of James’s characters’ passions as

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<sup>37</sup> Hugh Stevens, ‘Queer Henry *In the Cage*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 120-139 (p. 133).

<sup>38</sup> Roger Gard, ed., *Henry James: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1968), p. 322.

cold and novels as lands ‘where the vices have no bodies and the passions have no blood, where nobody sins [...] To be a sinner, even in the books you need some carnal attributes – lungs, liver, tastes, at least a pair of legs’.<sup>39</sup> It is hard to see James’s characters in erotically awkward situations, and this idea results from the extensive presence of telegraphic communication in James’s late novels which both obscure and disembodied scenes of vulgarity. Colby’s reading of James’s texts is straightforward and though his argument is technically valid, he ignores the fact that the need of what he calls a bare ‘pair of legs’ in James’s late fiction is unnecessary as long as sexual arousal is incorporated within the idea of distant communication and the acts of writing and sending telegrams. The display of flesh or corporeal exhibitionism which James sees as vulgar is replaced by the passion of transmission. Cryptic linguistic signs occupy a principal space in James’s telegraphic fiction, thus attracting readers to what lies beyond the word: the word itself becomes unclear, fleshly and sexually provoking. What actually constitutes the meaning of desire is the uncertainty of codes or the enigma of the telegraphic words that travel between bodies and create a passion for knowing what correspondence they envelope.

During the 1900s, ‘postal exchanges and digressive sexual relations’ were central to cultural imagination, argues Thomas.<sup>40</sup> ‘Bodies and messages’ arguably created an erotic experience that functioned as telegraphic commensuration that increased more with technological velocity.<sup>41</sup> Laura Otis argues that ‘we are all telegraphers’ now, in that electric wires and telegraphic operations are no different to the way human nerves work.<sup>42</sup> Bodies and messages within the

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<sup>39</sup> F. M. Colby, ‘The Queerness of Henry James’, in *Henry James: The Critical Heritage*, p. 337, also cited in Goble, p. 402.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> Laura Otis, *Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science and Politics* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins UP, 1999), p. 226.



discourse of telegraphy overlap ‘into a broader communicational system’.<sup>43</sup> The association between the human body and the telegraph machine was originally recognised in the heyday of telegraphic industry. In his 1859 book, George Wilson opens the discussion by stating that ‘man has been defined as a laughing, a cooking, a naked animal, but never, so far as I know, as a Telegraphic one’.<sup>44</sup> Dated on the fifteenth of March 1859, Elizabeth Gaskell interestingly corresponds with Herbert Grey, a young writer who asks the former’s advice on fiction writing: ‘You are an Electric telegraph something or other’.<sup>45</sup> Gaskell’s metaphorical description of the young writer as ‘electric telegraph’ points to a dominant discourse in late-nineteenth-century culture in which telegraphs and human bodies were regarded as systematically comparable. Edward Byrn asserts the notion that human bodies are analogous to the telegraph machine, an invention that ‘so closely resembles man himself in his dual quality of body and soul’.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, other critics distinguish between human bodies and information technology in the world of telegraphy. Shawn Rosenheim claims that with the upsurge of telegraphy the machine ‘inflected’ the notion that bodies and telegraphs are incommensurable because telegraphy quickly changed the traditional thinking about ‘linguistic representation’ and physical transportation.<sup>47</sup> Rosenheim believes that electric messaging destroyed the embodied relationship between telegrams and persons within a late-Victorian context.

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<sup>43</sup> David F. Bell, *Real Time: Accelerating Narrative from Balzac to Zola* (Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 83, also cited in Thomas, p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> George Wilson, *The Progress of the Telegraph: Being the Introductory Lecture on Technology for 1858-9* (Cambridge: MacMillan, 1858), p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 541.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Wright Byrn, *The Progress of Invention in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: Munn & Company, 1900), p. 15. See also Menke’s *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> Shawn Rosenheim, *The Cryptographic Imagination: Secret Writing from Edgar Poe to the Internet* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 93. I am also grateful to Rowe for this invaluable reference in *The Other Henry James*, p. 171.

In contrast to Rosenheim's suggestion, bodies and information systems can emerge together as close or relational. Eric Savoy's reference to 'the Cleveland Street Affair', which took place nine years before the publication of *In the Cage*, offers the best exemplification of this technological relation.<sup>48</sup> In 1889, a male homosexual brothel was found in Cleveland Street in London where most of the male prostitutes worked as messenger boys for the telegraph office. The prominence of the telegraph office in a wide-ranging scandal in which highly reputable figures such as Prince Albert Victor, the Prince of Wales, were involved throws light on the interrelationship between communication, sexuality and scandals. Yet the connection between prostitution and the use of telegraphy as a sexual medium explains how telegraphic communication acts as a dynamic body bespeaking excessive erotic desires. Likewise, the telegraphist in James's novella is a metaphorical duplicate of the telegraph machine behind the counter. Her meeting with Everard at dusk outside her cage where she asks him "to buy me off. Come, therefore: buy me!" affirms the affiliation of telegraphism, bodies and sexual mediation (C, 11). The telegraphist's imperative not only underpins the body as principally representative of telegraph machines and production but also points to the possibility of that body becoming a traded, blackmailable desire within late-Victorian communication systems. "Buy me!" could also suggest a blackmail of the desire for knowledge. Alexander Welsh argues that agents who are neither related to senders or receivers and who 'guard their secrets' usually more 'by the electric telegraph than by the post' hold the key to secrecy, knowledge, communication and hence desire.<sup>49</sup> Buying 'me' signifies a new pattern of desire not of the body but of the

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<sup>48</sup> Eric Savoy, "'in the Cage" and the Queer Effects of Gay History', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 28: 3 (1995), 284-307 (p. 289). Between 1889 and 1890, the Cleveland scandal, as noted by Jeffrey Weeks and Savoy, had a serious impact on the social and political life of the late-nineteenth century because upper-class corrupt figures were also involved in male prostitution with the working-class clients, most of whom worked as telegraph messenger boys.

<sup>49</sup> Alexander Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 58. See also Thurschwell, p. 97.

knowledge of secret communication in an age of advanced technology. Mark Seltzer believes that the understanding of social realism within technology implies that one has to diminish the self into a conveyable ‘desire’, the desire to know.<sup>50</sup> That the telegraphist would do anything for her male customer – ‘I’d do anything for you’ – does not only implicate a submissive sexual desire on her part but also a powerful desire to know more, to ‘buy’ knowledge of Everard and Bradeen’s aristocratic relationship (C, 61).

James’s female telegraphist would do anything in order to be part of the power plot of scandalous telegrams she traces between Captain Everard and Lady Bradeen – ‘(... To put him [Everard] in her debt) by means of sending or receiving information’ is what the telegraphist seeks.<sup>51</sup> Like the telegraphist who becomes absorbed in an intricate world of codes, signs and sexual meanings, Strether Lambert shifts from an ambassadorial position in pursuit of Chad Newsome to an agent in quest of knowledge and desire. Strether is given a mission by Mrs Newsome, his fiancée, to go to France to rescue her son Chad Newsome from the clutches of a supposedly wicked woman called Madame de Vionnet. Whilst in England, Strether meets Maria Gostrey, an American woman quite familiar with Parisian lifestyle, during which time the former’s view of the world begins gradually to change. Strether’s deviation from his mission increases after his meeting with Chad, Mme de Vionnet, Miss Barrace and other liberal characters who are happy to accept Parisian cultural ideals. In Paris, Strether is not only eventually attracted to Mme de Vionnet but also shocked when he discovers Chad and Vionnet’s love affair by the waters of the French countryside. Being culturally displaced in Europe after his unconventional sexual encounters, Strether decides to go back to America even though he was

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<sup>50</sup> Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 196. Cited also in Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> Thurschwell, p. 98.

boldly proposed to by Miss Gostrey. Not unlike the telegraphist, Miss Gostrey declares there is “nothing, you know, I wouldn’t do for you” (A, 438). For Strether, Miss Gostrey does not only figure in the novel as Strether’s friend or personal advisor but is also associated with distraction; Julie Rivkin writes that Gostrey represents a power of deviation whose name stands for an ambassadorial “going astray”.<sup>52</sup> Robert Pippin also argues that Strether’s name, likewise, reflects a double-conscious personality of difference and indifference; his ‘yearning to “stray”’ while remaining ‘tied to his “tether”’.<sup>53</sup> Even though Strether is conscious of his traditional American culture, he unconsciously becomes subsumed under the sexual liberalism of Parisian life. The double-consciousness implied in naming shows how Strether is entrapped in a world that falters between unorthodox desire in Paris and communicational errands beginning in America. Strether’s mission terminates in a network of social attractions, with Marie Vionnet, with Maria Gostrey: he is ‘a part of the affair’.<sup>54</sup> His connection to Marie and Maria, whose names are traditionally denotative of virginity and purity, displays Strether and the communicational system he stands for as carnal. The deep-seated association of these women with Strether’s mission shows how his world of communication becomes reduced to the pursuit of sexual desire. Tether is not only a word that signifies the fastening of Strether’s desire but also a word that could refer to unbound sexual action within the context of modern communication, devices and connection.<sup>55</sup> Tether bears the meaning of restriction despite being ironically connected to the possibility of non-fixity. The representation of Strether as a *roaming* human

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<sup>52</sup> Julie Rivkin, ‘The Logic of Delegation in *The Ambassadors*’, in *Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 135-154 (p. 148).

<sup>53</sup> Robert B. Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 152.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Tether, *n.*’, in *Oxford English Language Online*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [accessed 26 April 2013]. ‘Tether’ means using ‘(a smartphone)’ in modern language communication in order to ‘connect a computer or other device to the Internet’; <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/tether?q=tether> [accessed 22 April 2013].

telegraph violates the consistency of his telegraphic correspondence during his mission as he becomes an ambassador of his own desires.

In *The Ambassadors* and *In the Cage*, what James calls vulgarity could refer to physical intimacy, extensive sensory interaction such as seeing as manifested in Strether's discovery of Chad and Vionnet's scandal and the use of telegraphic wires for discreet communication. Physical attraction and secret meetings via telegraphy in both texts are connected to the vulgar, the slimy or the general discourse of liquidity. Desire is represented as an object that figuratively leaks, and this representation comes as a result of the presence of liquids or sliminess within the world of telegraphic correspondence. Whilst the telegraphist's office is surrounded by unpleasant smells and liquids flowing out from the near market, Strether's revelation of Chad and Vionnet's sexual affair towards the end takes place near the French river whose water becomes symbolic of scandal according to nineteenth-century cultural views of American characters such as Strether and Mrs Newsome. Still, how do all these slimy scandals become interrelated to the telegraphic world as portrayed by James? Slimy here refers to the way in which telegrams incorporate sexual encounters and are metaphorically produced in the form of liquidity via electric machines. Prescott believed in the fluid nature of electricity, in which particles of the same nature attract themselves whereas those that are different from each other repel themselves.<sup>56</sup> Bodies, during the act of communication, function as fluid subjects that become sexually attracted to each other. They are not only mechanic in the sense of telegraphic production but also dynamic; they are symbolic of projection or expulsion. The telegraph machine in *In the Cage* can also be viewed as a dynamic or biological body that sends electric messages yet metaphorically expels or projects what constitutes the ontological core of telegraphic communication, which is carnal desire, filth

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<sup>56</sup> Prescott, p. 11.

or sliminess. Speaking within a modern discourse, Marion Radovan argues that people become reduced to ‘consumers’ who feel ‘like an earthworm, somehow stupid and dirty’, or slimy.<sup>57</sup> The cage of the telegraphist occupies

The duskiest corner of a shop, pervaded not by a little, in winter, by the poison of perpetual gas, and at all times by the presence of hams, cheese, dried fish, soap, varnish, paraffin, and other solids and fluids that she came to know perfectly by their smells. (C, 3)

This dusky post-office is a microcosmic place that mirrors the fluidity of the surrounding world. It becomes characteristic of external spaces, of the neighbouring market that issues ‘solids and fluids’ into the office’s very interiority. Being surrounded by floating materials that flow in and out of it, the telegraphist’s cage can be viewed as a slimy place. The consideration of the telegraphist’s cage as *slimy* can arguably be explained on the basis of the fluid nature of telegraphic communication and the representation of the cage as a place that not only smells of fluids that swarm into its interior structure but also flows with information bespeaking sexual desire. The liquid-like movement of smells of ‘solids and fluids’ inside and outside the telegraphist’s ‘corner’ is figurative of the communication of sexuality via the language of the cable. Yet the interrelation between fluids and the telegraph office symbolically extends beyond the simple meaning of actual sliminess: the slimy within the space of the telegraph office becomes representative of morality, value or quality. Sartre argues that the ‘slimy’ hosts a compound of ‘*human* and *moral* characteristics which can easily be reduced to relations of being’.<sup>58</sup> Sartre continues to state that the disgust of the slimy emanates from ‘the combination of

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<sup>57</sup> Mario Radovan, *Waiting for Hermes: Reflections on Information Technology and Society* (Rijeka, Croatia: Digital Point Tiskara, 2007), p. 152.

<sup>58</sup> Sartre, p. 604.

this physical quality with certain moral qualities'.<sup>59</sup> Thus, what matters in this context is not the smells and fluids in themselves but the symbolic or moral meaning they carry within the discourse of erotic correspondence. Scandalous communication, which could stand as a metaphor of the slimy or what Sartre calls 'a symbol of a whole class of human feelings and attitudes',<sup>60</sup> becomes the centre of morality within the text and the general context of late-Victorian erotic encounters via telegraphy.

The smells of 'hams, cheese' and 'dried fish' thus attain a moral significance within James's delineation of telegraphic networks and sexual desire of aristocratic and working-class men and women. Smells and liquids create an identity that could be described as slimy for the cage and its internal system. Situated in one of the dirtiest corners in London, the cage, argues Peggy McCormack, stands as a 'vaginal, womblike, maternal' place; the cage is originally derived from the Latin '*cavea*, meaning "hollow or enclosed space"'.<sup>61</sup> McCormack equates the cage or *cavea* to the womblike space and this comparison attests to my argument that Cocker's functions as a fluid centre of sexual communication. The reference to the cage as slimy does not, however, confer on the female telegraphist a negative quality: the association between *cavea* and sliminess becomes critical of patriarchy and aristocratic values. McCormack's reference to the cage as womblike does not necessarily perpetuate the nineteenth-century connection between fluidity and the female body; fluidity also refers to the process by which patriarchal figures such as Captain Everard and Strether turn into fluid objects via the extensive use of telegraphy. The cage's connection to the female's body, on the other hand, signifies the transformation of gender roles at the dawn of the twentieth century. Even though Nicola Nixon defines Cocker's as 'a

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<sup>59</sup> Sartre, p. 605.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 604.

<sup>61</sup> McCormack, p. 96.

socially-imposed cage',<sup>62</sup> it becomes a space where the female telegraphist controls fluids by knowing them 'perfectly by their smells', a habit that is also figurative of her control of the fluid sexuality of the patriarchal body. Having a female telegraphist behind the bars of the telegraph office is a form of empowerment within public spaces that are usually denied to her. Cocker's is a place that becomes representative of the telegraphist's desire for knowledge and subsequent control of erotic, social discourses.

The cage is a site of verbal/electric intercourse for upper-class clients such as Everard and Bradeen; however, it is also a site of rebirth for the telegraphist as it offers a new trajectory of interaction with the outside world. In order to know and even participate in the encoded world of telegraphic erotic correspondence, James's heroine 'bodily leap[s] – clear the top of the cage and alight[s] on her interlocutress [Lady Bradeen]' (C, 48). Her passion for knowledge and the subversion of class and gender norms inspires the telegraphist to leap outside her place and escape what Jennifer Wicke calls the 'prison house of language' and its symbolic representation as a slimy space of patriarchal and aristocratic *libido*.<sup>63</sup> When the telegraphist leaves the cage for the first time, she finds herself with Captain Everard in the street during which time she goes into a world of imagination where codes are not scandals but romance, aristocracy and flowers. Nonetheless, the telegraphist soon finds herself back in the cage whose figurative sliminess is related to the base desire of upper-class customers. Sartre links the slimy and the base within human interaction, stating that 'we must apprehend baseness already in sliminess and sliminess in certain baseness':<sup>64</sup> both feed into, and are defined in relation to each other. Scandals at the end of *In the Cage* derive their symbolic sliminess or immoral quality from the base image of

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<sup>62</sup> Nicola Nixon, 'The Reading Gaol of Henry James's "In the Cage"', *ELH*, 66: 1 (1999), 179-201 (p. 182).

<sup>63</sup> Jennifer Wicke, 'Henry James's Second Wave', *The Henry James Review*, 10: 2 (1989), 146-151 (p. 151).

<sup>64</sup> Sartre, p. 605.



electric/physical contact, or from the telegraphist's being 'pounced upon for some lurid connection with a scandal' (C, 93). The cage is the place where the telegraphist keeps her customers' 'little games and secrets and vices' (C, 28), its wires and cables represent her nerves and the possibility of becoming scandalous, as she becomes incorporated into the system of sending and receiving. Sartre suggests that nerves and blood reveal our inner selves, 'secret[s] and vital liquidity'.<sup>65</sup> Sartre's connection between 'nerves' and 'liquidity' may not only refer to the traditional perception of the maternal body but could also be taken to suggest the fluid, slimy nature of telegraphy mediated by the telegraphist's mechanic body – a body that is also suggestive of nerves as well as liquidity within the process of customer service and decoding. The description of the cage as a place where customers thrust telegrams 'through the gap left in the high lattice, across the encumbered shelf', an act that makes the telegraphist's 'forearm ache[...] with *rubbing*' (C, 3, my emphasis) evinces Sartre's argument for 'vital liquidity'. Telegraphic messaging at Cocker's is governed by the principle of 'back-and-forth exchange' of information,<sup>66</sup> and is thus symbolic of the erotic act of handling telegrams. The 'back-and-forth' movement of telegrams can be considered as phallic that also bespeaks the fluid movement of slime during telegraphic contact. If the cage is a vaginal space in which customers essentially thrust their desires, the process of thrusting becomes subversive of patriarchal values by being metonymic of sexual/electric intercourse as slimy or base.

The telegraphist is enraged at 'those [... who] show me with as good a conscience as if I had no more feeling than a letter-box' (C, 64). Her frustration is caused by being a mechanical tool of

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<sup>65</sup> Sartre, p. 601. Sartre believes in the power of the slimy, or what he calls the 'in-itself' and 'for-itself', and explains its relationship to the outside world. Once we interact with the slimy, it absorbs us along with the entirety of meaning in the world. It invades our space and transforms bodies into the larger body of liquidity. The telegraphist is submerged in a cage of sexual desire, and Strether is likewise drawn into or drowned in a Parisian world that is characteristic of excessive eroticism.

<sup>66</sup> Allucquère Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), p. 10.

sexual communication which unconsciously makes her a part of Cocker's slime. Being a mere 'letter-box' or an agent that is always exposed to '*rubbing*' might signify inaction at first consideration. Rubbing is an act that implies 'sexualized drudgery' or passive physical contact with costumers,<sup>67</sup> with the office counter or, metaphorically, with the surface of Everard's body. The telegraphist, it seems, is in part represented as an inactive office worker whose body, for example, symbolically parodies the fluidity of coin change she has to take from or give to customers and the floating noise of the "sounder" (C, 3). Her cage, according to Wicke, is a 'black hole of modern social life', a place where desire, pleasure and 'dollars and cents' are meshed together.<sup>68</sup> Everard's weekly payments of pounds and pounds for discreet sexual encounters can be regarded as fluid in the language of money but also slimy within the discourse of lust or passion. The movement of money into the 'black hole' is also a sexualised movement of encoded verbal and physical desire, in the sense that the money is paid towards the fulfilment of erotic pleasure. However, the telegraphist throughout the novel transforms into a centre of authority that comes to her through the grasp of scandalous communication which defines power in James's fiction, as suggested by Mark Seltzer.<sup>69</sup> It is true that the telegraphist's position indicates a metaphorical presence of liquidity that is typified in the flow of customers, coin change, telegrams or sexual signs, yet it is also a position that subverts the Victorian association between the female body and liquidity; the patriarchal use of telegraphy becomes what Julia Kristeva in her definition of abjection calls a 'vortex of repulsion'.<sup>70</sup> Fluidity or liquidity *per se* becomes subversive of the patriarchal projection of this quality on the female body: Everard's

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<sup>67</sup> Thurschwell, p. 91.

<sup>68</sup> Wicke, p. 150.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Seltzer, *Henry James & the Art of Power* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 14-15.

<sup>70</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 1. Cited in Jean Graybeal, *Language and the "Feminine" in Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 26.

and Strether's involvement in scandalous telegraphic plots or acts could be termed as fluid or liquid and attain the metaphoric quality of sliminess too.

Sharon Hartman Strom refers to the 'greater variability' theory and also discusses Leta Stetter Hollingworth, a female New York teacher who obtained her PhD at Columbia in 1911, in order to show how the female body is traditionally labelled as fluid. The theory of 'greater variability' suggests that men's mental abilities are higher than women's and thus it is best that men are given significant occupations at work such as telegraph offices. This patriarchal reasoning stems from the idea that the female body is characterised by fluidity due to biological functions such as birth, lactation or menstruation and is hence seen as less efficient than the more enclosed male body. Hollingworth similarly claimed that women's work capabilities are limited because of 'menstruation'.<sup>71</sup> These discourses imply that the female body during menstruation, for instance, might symbolically impose the threat of the slimy upon the world of mechanic communication. Based on this, the masculine perception of the female body at work is not only associated with physical fluidity but can also be related to the fluidity of secrets or, in the telegraphist's case, the revelation of discreet information regarding Everard's telegraphic encounters with Bradeen which are themselves symbolic of the slimy not the female telegraphist's acts. Being suspicious of the telegraphist's plans to intercept Everard's correspondence with Bradeen, Mr Buckton, the telegraph office manager, inquires of the telegraphist "And what game is that, miss?" (C, 94). Buckton's question affirms the patriarchal fear of the female potential for manipulating customers' secrets, bringing about the fluidity of male secrets and thus emerging as powerful agents of communication. On his last visit to Cocker's, Captain Everard asks the telegraphist

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<sup>71</sup> Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 114.

about a telegram containing confidential information that was sent ‘so long ago’ to Bradeen.

Being aware of the telegram that she herself intercepted, the telegraphist in return

Dashed at the sounder, almost pushing, in her violence, the counter-clerk off the stool [asking Everard] ‘She didn’t come?’ she panted.

‘Oh yes, she came, but there has been some mistake. We want a telegram.’

‘A telegram?’

‘One that was sent from here ever so long ago. There was something in it that has to be recovered’.

(C, 88-89)

Tom Standage argues that telegraphic communication, especially if it contains erotic signs, becomes ‘highly sensitive’ provided it falls ‘into the hands of the enemy’.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, Ellis Hanson refers to the telephone, which developed as a newer version of the telegraph, as a ‘site of sexual panic’ and links the idea of queerness of telephonic conversations to what Kristeva calls “‘the erotic use of speech’”.<sup>73</sup> Everard’s concern in this context, which is seen in his impatient inquiry about the telegram, emphasises the danger of interception, of the telegram becoming a site of erotic anxiety and possibly blackmail: ‘there was something in it that has to be recovered’. Un-recovery of the telegram perhaps incurs the risk of revelation, degradation and deconstruction of the political, social and moral hierarchies for which Everard stands. Everard’s consistent return to retrieve his telegram confirms a systematic lack of immunity to interception and even identity exchange frauds. Menke argues that telegraphy was liable to ‘various kinds of hacking’, which became a consistent concern for customers in telegraph offices.<sup>74</sup> That private communication within telegraph offices is subject to disclosure at the hands of telegraphists is

<sup>72</sup> Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century’s Online Pioneers* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), p. 145.

<sup>73</sup> Ellis Hanson, ‘The Telephone and Its Queerness’, in *Cruising the Performative: Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality*, ed. Sue-Ellen, Phillip Bret and Susan Leigh Foster (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 34-59 (p. 34, 36).

<sup>74</sup> Menke, “‘Framed and Wired’: Teaching “‘In the Cage’” at the Intersection of Literature and Media’, *The Henry James Review*, 25: 1 (2004), 33-43 (p. 35).

obvious in the multiplicity of addresses and names that Everard and Bradeen choose for their telegrams. Bradeen, for example, sometimes employs the names Cissy and Mary in her correspondence with Everard so as to avoid interception. However, the telegraphist manages to decode their messages, especially this telegram which also reiterates the symbolism of Cocker's as a slimy space of patriarchal desire. By decoding his sexual codes to Bradeen, the telegraphist challenges the idea of the feminine as fluid. It is rather the masculine body that is metaphorically subject to fluidity and thus sliminess by being involved in a continual network of scandals.

James's description of the telegraphist's social background could also imply this symbolic connection between telegrams, sexual desire and the slimy. The telegraphist comes from a poor, working-class family; her mother smells of whisky and her fiancé, Mr Mudge, is a grocer who is described as ugly and unromantic, which is also implied in his name *Mudge* signifying muddiness or soiling. A whisky-smelling mother and Mudge add to the general discourse of the slimy via the symbolic negative production of smells either of whisky or market vegetables and meat. The telegraphist's father, on the other hand, is unknown and this suggests adultery and familial incohesion: the telegraphist the product of a family in crisis. In 'The Circuit', Jacques Lacan states that sons are made to 'reproduce the discourse of [the] other [...] of my father'.<sup>75</sup> The telegraphist, in this case, is entrapped in a position where she not only reproduces familial failures but also represents society as illusory and problematic: she reproduces the discourse of the other, father, mother and fiancé. An unknown father and alcoholic mother originate a discourse of social dirt and repulsion that reflects on the process by which the telegraphist works at Cocker's. The telegraphist's social background figuratively feed into the description and use of telegraphy as a fluid medium of erotic scandals. By being not so much 'the angel in the house

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Thurschwell, p. 92.

[as] the angel in the office’,<sup>76</sup> where telegraphic relations become affected by low domestic life, James’s protagonist is pulled into Everard and Bradeen’s electric romance, thus showing how telegraphic communication transforms into a product of individual desires and ultimately social imperfection. The telegraphist’s social or familial circle could stand for the symbolic quality of the slimy being connected to smells, moral degeneracy or low economic expectations, a representation that reflects on the telegraphist’s personality and functionality. The telegraphist, as a result, attains the symbolic quality of the slimy not only within her family circle but also her relations inside the cage. Sartre argues that we are possessed by the slimy; it is in us: ‘the slimy is *myself*’,<sup>77</sup> is messages, the customers and the telegraphist whose economic, social and emotional states become incorporated into her customer relationships. Her fiancé, the ‘oleaginous – too oleaginous’ Mudge (C, 32) also signify a slimy, base quality as expressed in his name, description, job and lifestyle. James’s description of Mudge as ‘oleaginous’ reflects on the telegraphist’s personality and relations, as she becomes involved in Everard and Bradeen’s scandal as I mentioned earlier. Instead of accepting the reality of her social condition, of Mudge being ‘too oleaginous’, the telegraphist intercepts Everard’s telegrams as she pins her hopes on blackmailing him into love and romance, an act that would procure her a place within the aristocracy. According to *OED*, ‘oleaginous’ means ‘oily, fatty, greasy’,<sup>78</sup> a quality that also characterises the telegraphist’s real world of romance. Jennifer Emery-Peck argues that the telegraphist’s relationship with Mudge is ‘emotional’.<sup>79</sup> Despite the fact that Mudge financially caters for the telegraphist and her family, he symbolises a reality that is devoid of passion or romance: it is, metaphorically, the marriage of grocery and the telegraph office.

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<sup>76</sup> Thurschwell, p. 94.

<sup>77</sup> Sartre, pp. 608-09.

<sup>78</sup> See ‘Oleaginous, *adj.*’, *OED* online (2000) <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [accessed 7 October 2014].

<sup>79</sup> Jennifer Sorensen Emery-Peck, “‘As She Called It’: Henry James Makes Freed with a Female Telegraphist”, *The Henry James Review*, 31: 3 (2010), 288-296 (p. 293).

*The Ambassadors* highlights the American Chad's and French Mme de Vionnet's scandalous relationship via the ambassador, Strether, who also becomes a part of the sexualised language of the cable. Pippin holds that adultery is the dominant relationship in the text that is permeated with 'moral inversions' that deceive Strether and disrupt his mission in Europe.<sup>80</sup> Even though Strether's mission is disrupted, he is spatially free or mobile. Unlike the telegraphist who is mostly portrayed as encaged within the space of Cocker's, Strether acts outside the bars of telegraph offices, a fact that James implies in his description of the fast growth of 'the Atlantic cable [that] now alone could race with it' and Strether's physical movement across the Atlantic (A, 100). Furthermore, Strether himself plays the role of a transatlantic, wandering human telegraph in the novel. Unlike the telegraphist again, Strether's mobility accounts for his functionality as a recording machine that mediates scandals and telegrams between America and Europe. Within the discourse of telegraphy and distance, Menke argues that electric information is no longer materialised, and thus 'lose[s] it body'.<sup>81</sup> The repetitive reference to 'the dry thin air' that reaches Strether from afar (A, 117) affirms Menke's notion of the immateriality of transmission. Air is emphasised as a disembodied medium of telegraphic contact through which electric waves travel and signals are transferred, received and even felt. The reference to Strether's sensory system in relation to air affirms this association between air and the communication of scandals via electric telegraphy. When Maria Gostrey, for instance, proposes to Strether and asks him to treat her house 'as a haven of rest', no words expressing desire were spoken, 'as if things unuttered were in the air' (A, 433). Air here functions as a medium of sexual desire that words cannot communicate. Strether's name is even suggestive of this fact as it combines the syllables Str- and ether; the last syllable *ether* in the *OED* is a cosmological tiny

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<sup>80</sup> Pippin, p. 150.

<sup>81</sup> Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 164.

substance or ‘respirable fluid’ that fills ‘all space beyond the sphere of the moon’,<sup>82</sup> and hence appears Strether’s connection with fluidity too.

Strether acts as a fleshly embodiment of the telegraph machine in James’s novel. Menke connects the mode by which information is transmitted to the functions of human body parts. According to Menke, ‘the storage and transmission of information still depended on eyes, ears, heads, hands, and feet’,<sup>83</sup> even the nose that is metaphorically linked to the sensory system of scandal detection via smelling. *The Ambassadors* and *In the Cage* exemplify the centrality of the eye as a medium of physical correspondence that resembles the way electrical information travels through telegraph wires from senders to receivers. Strether’s eye contact with female characters, especially Mme de Vionnet and Maria Gostrey, replaces language as communication becomes governed by ‘unspeakability’. William Cohen argues that unuttered sexual desire generates a type of language that ‘lavishly’ attracts its own body and the bodies of its interlocutors without the need for linguistic mediation.<sup>84</sup> Miss Gostrey’s verbal invitation to Strether to treat her place ‘as a haven of rest’ turns into a state of speechlessness or what Strether calls ‘a haunt of ancient peace’ as both ‘fronted each other across the table, as if things unuttered were in the air’ (A, 433). Without the use of language as a medium of sexual attraction, Gostrey becomes physically drawn to her interlocutor, Strether, by means of looks (eyes) and smells (air). The unspeakable becomes the centre of sexual signification that not only permeates Strether’s actions and ambassadorial mission but also signifies the interrelation between the expression of desire and places that feature as aerial/telegraphic spaces above all: the balcony.

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<sup>82</sup>See the definition of ‘ether, n.’ in *OED* online (2000) <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [accessed 26 April 2013]. STR in modern communication language means a ‘synchronous transmitter receiver’, online at <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/STR?q=str>> [accessed 26 April 2013].

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 165.

<sup>84</sup> William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 160.



The balcony in the novel is a protruding space where both aerial signals are received and processed and what Gostrey calls 'rest', hence sexual desire. It stands out as an internal-external place that bespeaks insideness (desire) and invites outsideness (aerial signals). The balcony, 'in which one would have had to be an ogre not to recognise the perfect place for easy aftertastes' (A, 80), is a liminal and therefore transgressive place as it is pertinent to Strether's sensory system of hearing and symbolic of plot disclosure. Whilst the balcony becomes prominent as a place of luxury, relaxation, social chatting or what James calls 'easy aftertastes' that includes drinking and smoking, it could symbolically stand out as a telegraphic space of desire and scandal detection. On the balcony or the signal tower as it appears to function, Strether realises that this is the place where 'he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of which he could positively hear. It was in the outside air as well as within; it was in the long watch, from the balcony' (A, 354-55). The balcony thus represents a sensitive place where others' sounds could be easily detected. Walter Ong holds that sound is uniquely interior: it links the outside world and 'interiority', because it functions as a sensitive tool that detects external bodies and the sounds or words they produce.<sup>85</sup> Strether's ability to become more immersed in the scandalous plots of Parisian society is mediated by what Sharon Cameron calls the 'electronic signals in relation to an aerial'.<sup>86</sup> Hearing, which is symbolic of telegraphic communication, bodies and places such as the balcony thus become interrelated. Strether's physical presence on the balcony metaphorically becomes a technological process or action that communicates others' impulses, fears, desires and thoughts. Strether's balcony and the female telegraphist's "sunder" at Cocker's are similarly inanimate objects that can be seen in biologically functional terms. James's description of the balcony as a place where 'an affair of the senses' (A, 354) might take

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<sup>85</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 71, also cited in Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, p. 206.

<sup>86</sup> Sharon Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 82.

place affirms its relation to the human body that operates like a piece of technology,<sup>87</sup> as typified in Strether's mission.

Whereas the balcony represents a material-immaterial piece of technology, the sounder in *In the Cage* operates as a mechanical voice that produces and reproduces the symbolic slimy, or the matter of scandalous communication. The manifestation of telegraphic machines as what Friedrich Kittler calls 'all eyes', 'ears' and mouths explains the metaphor of the telegraph as a fluid, human body.<sup>88</sup> Wayland-Smith praises the power of electric telegraphy in *The Ambassadors* to connect Paris with Woollett in America and 'underscores the fact that James's characters *themselves* function as so many sensitive perceiving/receiving devices'.<sup>89</sup> The novel opens with Strether's telegram asking for a room "only if not noisy" and a young telegraphist 'in the glass cage' (A, 1-2), just like the female telegraphist in *In the Cage*. Still, electrical machinery in James's text, contrary to Wayland-Smith's suggestion, does not 'underscore' the functionality of Strether's body as a literal and figurative embodiment of long-distance communication. The Chad-Vionnet scandal is revealed not only through telegrams but also seeing and hearing, which have been present throughout the text as telegraphic tools of detecting discreet sexual meetings.

Yet how is slime symbolically connected with the flow of telegraphic communication and, more importantly, sexual mediation in *The Ambassadors*? Throughout the text, James offers the fluid or deliquescent imagery of male-female contact within the context of corporeal cables. Strether's relationship with Mrs Newsome, to begin with, affirms beyond doubt all associations between sexual desire, scandals and telegraph cables. In one of his conversations with

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<sup>87</sup> See Menke, "Framed and Wired", p. 40.

<sup>88</sup> Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 363.

<sup>89</sup> Wayland-Smith, p. 124.

Waymarsh, Strether's old friend who has unsatisfactorily been living in Europe for a long time, the latter inquires about Mrs Newsome's private cables when the former replies that he

‘Know[s] nothing about Mrs Newsome's cables.’

Their eyes met on it with some intensity – during the few seconds of which something happened quite out of proportion to the time. It happened that Strether, looking thus at his friend, didn't take his answer for truth – and that something more again occurred in consequence of *that*. Yes – Waymarsh just *did* know about Mrs Newsome's cables.

(A, 341)

The reference to Mrs Newsome's cables within the context of communication throws light on her physical relationship with Strether. Whilst other minor characters tend to refer to different forms of communication such as letters, Strether speaks more of ‘cables’, a term that could symbolise physical intimacy, bearing in mind Strether's and Newsome's relationship as fiancé and fiancée. Mrs Newsome's cables can thus stand for erotic desire. Waymarsh's denial of any knowledge of Newsome's cables, at intervals during which Strether's *looks* – acting as telegraphic eyes – imply that Waymarsh ‘*did* know about Mrs Newsome's cables’, increases the reader's suspicion in regard to sexual relationships. Was Waymarsh telegraphically connected to Mrs Newsome or were his economic, thus sexual, motives tied to hers as she appears in the text to be a wealthy widow? This question opens another inquiry about the nature of Strether's current relationship with her; yet all of these questions feature in the novel as sexual secrets within fleshly cables. James even employs a telegraphic or encoded language that entraps readers between the possibilities of guessing and knowing. Through telegraphic hints or bodily acts, however, we become able to picture an approximation of reality, of Newsome's past and both men's relationship with her based on Strether's doubts of Waymarsh's response.

Strether and Newsome's communication in itself intensifies fears of scandals. F. W. Dupee suggests that Strether moves to a city that is 'united in a conspiracy of pleasure [...] that lurks behind that high window observed from the street, or in those animated streets observed from a balcony'.<sup>90</sup> Paris is depicted as a city of erotic pleasure, a place where 'an affair of the senses', to re-quote James, is very possible. Based on the traditional American thinking of Europe, especially Paris, as a place where sexual desire is practised freely, a fact that is proved in Newsome's despatch of Strether to bring Chad back, the former presupposes that Strether is no better than her son Chad, and is going to fall an easy prey to the clutches of Parisian women. Strether's prolonged stay in Paris, Dupee holds, implies his involvement 'with a woman, and the involvement must be sordid and the woman vulgar'.<sup>91</sup> Dupee continues to argue that Strether and Newsome's intimacy does not thus make their relationship 'interesting [and] precious'.<sup>92</sup> It rather makes it subject to suspension in terms of distant thought-reading or what I tend to call wire-doubt. The act of sending information from abroad via electric wires can also carry with it the suspicion of the receiver. According to Newsome, Strether misuses telegraphy by not only misleading her about Chad's sexual affairs but also employing telegrams to mediate his own sexual desires, leading to informational doubt within nineteenth-century technology or the rise of telegraphy as a possible source of mistrust or miscommunication. The cable, therefore, carries a double meaning; it is a technological medium that either facilitates Strether's correspondence with America or incorporates power plots, electric sexual flirtation, scandals and doubt, as seen in Strether's suspicion of Waymarsh's (erotic?) knowledge of Mrs Newsome.

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<sup>90</sup> Dupee, *Henry James* (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 247.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

Newsome, on the other hand, is a wealthy widow who also takes part in the scandal of communication by standing for what Derrida calls the ‘originary’ of supplementation. Derrida believes that supplementation or delegation exists outside the ‘originary’ or ‘immediate presence’.<sup>93</sup> The supplementary is that secondary thing which serves as a support for something original, preliminary or natural. Within the discourse of ambassadorship, Mrs Newsome is the ‘originary’ whereas Strether is the supplementary that represents/supplements the former’s symbolic presence in Paris. Strether, however, violates the laws of supplementation or delegation by resisting the telegraphic chains of ambassadorship imposed by Newsome; he becomes a self-delegation that negates delegation. Being originally Mrs Newsome’s ambassador, Strether becomes a delegate of his own self/desire whilst in Paris, thus disrupting the relationship between originality and supplementarity. He subverts the logic of delegation by becoming an originary himself, a new Strether who is allured by the lights of Paris and Mme de Vionnet, ‘the temptress-mother’.<sup>94</sup> Also, by creating a new principal ‘originary’, Strether problematises the presence of Newsome via mirroring her thoughts, paradoxical Woollett culture and most importantly her ‘cables’ and sexuality. The fact that the symbolic presence of Newsome is supplemented by Strether suggests that this presence itself cannot exist as a whole, perfect unit, or is incapable of representing itself, hence comes supplementation. Mrs Newsome’s foreign representation subverts this unity and communicates a scandal that comprises money and sexual desire via telegraphy. Strether’s supplementation and challenge of the ‘originary’ are mediated through encoded, telegraphic language that also resists delegation by being ambiguous to Newsome and even to the reader: they never state the message or truth plainly. Strether’s

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<sup>93</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1976), p. 157. I am grateful to Julie Rivkin for her interesting discussion of Strether’s ambassadorial logic in relation to Derrida’s grammatological theory, a framework that serves my analysis of telegraphic writing, desire and representation.

<sup>94</sup> Edel, *Henry James: The Master*, p. 78.

telegraphic discourse is thus characterised by the deferral or ambiguity of the sign, a fact that overshadows the purpose of the mission and creates wire-doubt. Despite the fact that encoded telegraphic communication causes ambiguity and hence deferral of truth, Strether's telegrams, as evinced later in the novel, indicate that Newsome is a wealthy widow running a flourishing American business. The encoded telegrams, moreover, imply that she dictates and controls Strether's acts and that she uses him as a financial/sexual instrument. In a conversation with Chad, Strether informs the former that "I've had a cable [...] from your mother" (A, 224); Maria Gostrey, in a different conversation with Strether, maintains: "you mean of course a lot of money" (A, 49); lastly, Strether's conversation with his friend, Waymarsh, casts doubt on both men's relationship with Mrs Newsome, the 'originary'. These examples problematise Newsome's representation in the text: through telegrams, which act as the supplement of Strether's supplementarity, we infer that Strether's connection with Newsome is not emotional; it is perhaps rather based on the economic exchanges of telegraphic signs, wealth and physical desire. Strether arguably supplements a corrupt telegraphic capitalist system that exchanges money for sex and vice versa.

Strether's position as the telegraphic supplement of Newsome's speech/message unravels the association between sexual scandals, slime and communication. The symbolic presence of water or river within Chad and Vionnet's scandal insinuates the link between telegraphic production and sliminess as figurative of sexual desire. During his presence in the countryside, Strether sees Chad and Mme de Vionnet in the same boat:

In midstream, still went a little wild – which seemed natural, however, while Chad turned round, half springing up; and his good friend, after blankness and wonder, began gaily to wave her parasol. Chad dropped afresh to his paddles and the boat headed round, amazement and pleasantry filling the air meanwhile [...] Our friend went down to the

water under this odd impression as of violence averted – the violence of their having ‘cut’ him, out there in the eye of nature, on the assumption that he wouldn’t know it [...] everything found itself sponged over by the mere miracle of the encounter. (A, 390)

Here, Strether’s ‘encounter’ of Chad and Vionnet’s love affair instigates emotions of ‘violence’, oddness and ‘wonder’. Janice Carlisle argues that encounter ‘carries with it a sense of danger and risk, a recognition that a meeting might have high stakes’.<sup>95</sup> Encounter, continues Carlisle, implies a perceptual ‘confrontation’ that could be mediated through ‘seeing, smelling, hearing, and touching’. This definition reasserts the association between the human sensory system and its telegraphic functionality, which is embodied in Strether’s mission. Carlisle, however, relates the definition of encounter as sensory to ‘cultural values’,<sup>96</sup> and in this case the moral value of Chad and Vionnet’s love affair. Being culturally naive in Paris where relations might not be what they seem, Strether’s encounter constitutes a primal act of hearing and seeing; his encounter is symbolic of sudden sexual rebirth, psychological shock and transformation and transition across cultures. Kaja Silverman argues that Strether’s act of preliminary seeing gives him access to ‘a primal scene [...] much like the child who “watches” his or her parents having coitus’ for the first time.<sup>97</sup> The encounter thus creates feelings of agitation in Strether who now realises the embedded meaning of the early reference to Chad’s affair as a ‘virtuous’ attachment (A, 419). ‘Virtuous’, according to *OED*, could refer to chastity or sexual abstinence;<sup>98</sup> yet the adjective negates itself as the meaning becomes abstruse by the innuendo of ‘attachment’: to be in a virtuous attachment in Paris, one has to be vicious. Strether becomes involved in the ambiguity of ‘virtuous attachment’, as his encounter creates a kind of struggle for knowledge and power.

<sup>95</sup> Janice Carlisle, *Common Scents: Comparative Encounters in High-Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>97</sup> Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), p. 163.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Virtuous, *adj.*’, *OED* online (2000) <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> [accessed 8 October 2014].

Laurence Holland argues that the ‘boat’ scene here expresses Strether’s imaginative engagement in the affair.<sup>99</sup> His subsequent act of going ‘down to the water’ typifies Strether’s involvement in both a power plot and the sexual imagination: here, water unconventionally symbolises a site of the slimy that is metaphoric of the erotic encounter. The ‘boat’ and water signify a scandalous scene that brings into play the relationship between water, its singular symbolism of sexual scandal (the slimy) and Strether’s encounter, which functions as a telegraphic mediation considering the link between the sensory body and telegraphy, which becomes the presiding image in the novel.

Sartre argues that ‘the slimy offers a horrible image; it is horrible in itself for a consciousness to *become slimy*’.<sup>100</sup> The association between Strether’s telegraphic encounter and the erotic scene gives water a symbolic meaning beyond convention. Water transforms into an unfamiliar object in Strether’s consciousness, an object that becomes interrelated with the horrible ‘*slimy*’. The fact that Strether is symbolically ‘sponged over’ by the encounter of the boat, a scene which could be described as fluid, signifies the fear of what Sartre calls ‘the absorption of the For-itself by the In-itself’: the possibility that a person’s consciousness might dissolve into sliminess.<sup>101</sup> Going down to water, which is a counter-action of the telegraphic act of seeing, implies the psychological absorption of Strether, the *for-itself*, or the part in the world into the fluid space of Chad and Vionnet’s sexual affair, into water, the *in-itself*, or the whole. Sartre draws a picture of slime as a ‘soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking’ which draws its beholder into ‘the bottom of a precipice’.<sup>102</sup> Strether’s sexual attraction to water as the site of desire thus affirms

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<sup>99</sup> See Laurence B. Holland, *The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 245-60.

<sup>100</sup> Sartre, p. 610.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 610.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 609.



the analogy between the telegraphic operation of his sensory system and the ‘moist’, ‘sucking’ nature of the slimy; his telegraphic body is absorbed by water, boat or the figuratively slimy spectacle of the scandal. Sartre’s description of this nature as ‘feminine’, however, excludes patriarchal presence from the scandalous scene. Sartre’s reference to the slimy as ‘feminine’ perpetuates the perception of the female body as ‘fluid’, ‘sucking’, deadly and thus negative. I would, then, suggest a reconstruction of this view based on the fact that the scandalous scene physically telegraphed by Strether also bespeaks the presence of Chad, a male body which is also connected with ‘fluid’, ‘moist’ and ‘sucking’ desire. In this scene, water itself exceptionally stands for sexual desire and thus the slimy, regardless of gender; Sartre’s reference to the slimy as ‘moist’, ‘sucking’ and fluid could be attached to the male as well as the female body.

Gaston Bachelard does not, though, assign a specific gender to slime; he generally suggests that water could exceptionally be ‘mucus’,<sup>103</sup> a suggestion that also implies the connection between liquidity as impure or viscous and sexual scandal within the space of the beholder’s unconscious. Despite being a traditional symbol of purity, Bachelard argues that ‘water can be accused of all possible misdeeds’.<sup>104</sup> James’s choice of expressions denotes this association between sexual interaction and the negativity of the slimy and reveals Strether’s struggle to set himself free of communication or the telegraphic encounter as viscous. Strether is ‘sponged over’ by the erotic spectacle and soon ends up clearing ‘the pretext of disgust’ or ‘the possibility of disgust’ by plunging into ‘the water’ (A, 387).

Despite the negative symbolic links between sexual scandals and the ‘*slimy*’ within the context of telegraphic communication, Strether and, more importantly, the telegraphist represent

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<sup>103</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983), p. 119.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

a discourse that equates knowledge with power. The telegraphist's linguistic mediation between aristocratic customers at Cocker's is a powerful discourse that figuratively 'penetrate[s]' (C, 23) and violates the boundaries separating private and public spheres. Rowe celebrates this power as inaugurating social, economic and political transformation of the position of working-class women.<sup>105</sup> Rowe's assertion of 'textual combinations [as] the new source of value' points to the emergence of the telegraphist as an authoritative agent of communication.<sup>106</sup> The telegraphist's ability to decipher erotic texts in Everard and Bradeen's telegrams affirms her textual value as the locus of semiotics, a position that grants her the power to determine and manipulate linguistic signs within the language of the cable. The telegraphist's physical entrapment at Cocker's might give the initial impression that she is silent and inactive. The manifestation of her body as mechanical and silenced is, however, subverted by her capability to act, intercept private correspondence, control telegraphic semiotics and challenge gender chains. The telegraphist's clerical body assumes what Judith Butler calls the discursive body that determines identity and refuses social, biological classifications.<sup>107</sup> She can be seen on equal terms with her male colleagues, as she destabilises hierarchical structures via mastering 'the medium of telegraphy',<sup>108</sup> thus beating Everard and Bradeen at their own linguistic game.

In comparison with her fiancé, Mr Mudge, the telegraphist's clerical position affirms her discourse as powerful and influential. Rowe argues that 'selling tomatoes or telegrams is one' and the same for Mudge, a man who lacks discursive power.<sup>109</sup> From a linguistic point of view, he is inferior to her, and represents the very opposite of the world that she tried to establish with

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<sup>105</sup> Quoted in McCormack, 'Introduction', in *Questioning the Master*, p. 21.

<sup>106</sup> Rowe, 'Working at Gender: *In the Cage*', in *Questioning the Master*, pp. 84-104 (p. 88).

<sup>107</sup> Judith Butler, 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 324-341 (p. 337).

<sup>108</sup> Emery-Peck, p. 295.

<sup>109</sup> Rowe, *The Other Henry James*, p. 171.

Everard through language, interception and a possible love affair. At the end of James's novella, the telegraphist's utopian world, however, terminates with her returning to Mudge, who represents the social and economic reality of working-class men and women; she "was now at the bottom of the little flight of steps [...] with a certain thickness of fog [...] Then 'Goodbye!' came out of the fog" (C, 111). The fact that this final scene can be seen as tragi-comic stems from the notion that the telegraphist's aristocratic dreams have led nowhere, a departure that comically reminds the telegraphist of her class within society and tragically imparts dissociation and nostalgia to her upper-class aspirations. McCormack laments this nostalgic discourse that leaves the telegraphist at the bottom of social 'flight of steps', which is represented by fog that separates her from utopia.<sup>110</sup> McCormack, however, overlooks the fact that the telegraphist's centrality within encoded communication and her control of the possibility of blackmail literally give her discursive authority. In her meeting with Everard, who tries 'to take her hand' (C, 66) or symbolically drag her into his aristocratic house of language, she felt vulnerable. Yet what really matters is her possession of the "pleasure of knowing. I know, I know, I know!" (C, 65).

The telegraphist's knowledge is thus the centre of power to which all other social relations become reduced; it is the knowledge that determines textual value and the subjective mastery of linguistic signs within encoded telegrams. The process of dealing with enormous quantities of words in a dingy telegraph-office disparages the telegraphist's clerical and social positions, but it is out of these words, signs or 'language of quantification (and the quantification of language)', as Thurschwell calls it,<sup>111</sup> that the powerful image of the telegraphist appears. James refers to the socio-economic positions of other women in both novels: Mrs Jordan in *In the Cage* is a working-class woman who appears to be employed by the aristocratic Lord Rye as a 'florist';

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<sup>110</sup> McCormack, 'Introduction', p. 22.

<sup>111</sup> Thurschwell, p. 99.

Miss Barrace in *The Ambassadors* is also a woman who “only take[s] flowers [...] Innocent flowers” (A, 190). The economy of flowers is, however, subject to the changeability of value, both in market, text or text-as-market. Unlike words, flowers symbolise impermanence and the deconstruction of the romantic, dream-like ideal. Whilst Mrs Jordan’s aristocratic or ‘floral’ dreams end up with her engagement to Mr Drake, a servant to Lord Rye (C, 21), Miss Barrace is no longer sent any ‘innocent flowers’ due to Waymarsh’s departure to America. What indeed attains permanence is the encoded language of telegrams, or what Tony Tanner calls the ‘cryptic hints [...] or] random dislocated shreds of significance’ which are essential to the telegraphist’s understanding of her society,<sup>112</sup> without the necessity of the society’s understanding of her. Radovan and Harold Innis argue that the general improvement of technology hinders people’s understanding of each other.<sup>113</sup> The fact that female telegraphists can impose misunderstanding problematises the traditional definition of ‘phallogocentrism’,<sup>114</sup> as the linguistic sign becomes located outside the central discourse of patriarchy.

Misunderstanding suggests that knowledge moves from conventional masculine paradigms to female telegraphists who are capable of establishing their own discourse within the context of telegraphic semiotics. Butler displays two models in which gender can be identified: primary and secondary. Primary identifications produce unified gender binarisms such as man/woman or masculine/feminine; however, the latter subverts this logic by offering an alternative narrative to social hierarchies of sexual differences. This alternative, continues Butler, results in a deconstruction of gender that is based on internalised, bodily configurations of sex and thus the

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<sup>112</sup> Tony Tanner, *The Reign of Wonder: Naivety and Reality in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 312.

<sup>113</sup> Radovan, p. 152; Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 28.

<sup>114</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993), p. 48.

possibility of transformative gender roles via the ‘discursive emergence of “feminine men” or “masculine women”’.<sup>115</sup> The decryption of telegraphic codes is a performative act that affirms the non-essentialism of gendered categorisations and thus the telegraphist’s self-identification as predominant. Margery Davies considers the telegraphist’s act of interception an immoral deed, arguing that female office employees transform into public ““mannish”” workers.<sup>116</sup> However, the telegraphist subverts this description by obliterating biological and gendered references to workers as masculine/‘mannish’ or feminine/womanish. Through being unnamed and occupying a mechanical position within the office space, the telegraphist problematises gender as a label or reference. The mechanical nature of telegraphic communication undermines distinctions of sex and gender, giving voice to whoever possesses knowledge and maintains influence over signification, without the necessity of gender identification.

Regardless of the public perception of female telegraphists as ““mannish””, women emerge as performative agents and ‘superior communicators’<sup>117</sup> because they are ‘no longer excluded from knowledge’.<sup>118</sup> Their presence within the outside space, which is ‘the site where discourse meets its limits’, as defined by Butler,<sup>119</sup> affirms how the principal discourse of communication shifts more towards women who, in the telegraphic sense, tend to own the future: Deborah Cameron believes that “the future is female”.<sup>120</sup> Within the context of telegraphy, women occupy a pivotal position which indicates their emerging, unconventional representation of what Foucault

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<sup>115</sup> Butler, ‘Gender Trouble’, in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, p. 331.

<sup>116</sup> Margery W. Davies, *Woman’s Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), pp. 81-85.

<sup>117</sup> Deborah Cameron, *On Language and Sexual Politics* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 64, 138. Cameron argues that Butler’s treatment of women as performative agents does not reduce them to ‘automata’ but transforms them into ‘conscious agents’. This forms a valid point for discussion especially if we take into account the telegraphist’s position at the ‘sounder’. Even though performance symbolically makes her a mechanical duplicate or echo of the ‘sounder’, the telegraphist’s consciousness emphasises the corporeal aspect of feminine discourse that problematises the reduction of women to the state of mechanised workers.

<sup>118</sup> Kittler, p. 350.

<sup>119</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 53.

<sup>120</sup> Cameron, p. 136.

calls ‘Censorship’ within communication or mediation between other marginal participants.<sup>121</sup> The symbolic presence of Mrs Newsome in *The Ambassadors*, for example, illustrates how censorship, which Foucault accounts for as the traditional repression of women’s sexual act and speech, shifts meaning or escapes its patriarchal design. Censorship, in its orthodox sense, suggests the denial of expression which also transforms into an internal psychological process that bans different kinds of freedom, especially women’s sexuality. Mrs Newsome, however, reverses the long-established concept of censorship by being the centre of ambassadorship or the site that linguistically dictates Strether’s telegraphic mission. Even though she is implicated in the scandal of her son, Chad, she subjugates Strether at the level of language. She symbolises a textual censorial power that regulates Strether’s linguistic practice abroad through her constant telegraphic communication. Strether ‘had a quick blurred view of daily cables, questions, answers, signals’ (A, 341), and his blurred sense is caused by the amount of textual or communicational dictation and ambassadorial censorship of the matriarchal discourse represented by Mrs Newsome. The multiplicity of her ‘cables [and] questions’ imply a warning against Strether’s procrastination and possible sexual indulgence in Paris despite the fact that the latter procrastinates, goes astray and is allured by Parisian culture.

That Mrs Newsome’s cables dictate and censor Strether’s communications overshadows the possibility of a bilateral relationship that is based on money-sex exchanges: whilst Newsome is a wealthy widow for Strether, he represents a sexual object for her. Yet the use of Strether as Newsome’s ‘mouthpiece’ labels him as a feminine medium, another fact which challenges the classical associations of women-as-matter and men-as-form.<sup>122</sup> Newsome’s telegrams that cross

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<sup>121</sup> Foucault, p. 17.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 28. I am grateful to Butler for this useful remark in *Bodies that Matter*, p. 31.

the Atlantic reduce Strether's linguistic role and turn him into a marginal part 'of the plan of which I was the mouthpiece' (A, 234). Christopher Keep praises Strether for his 'intense epistemophilia' that he gains in Paris through his gradual self-development by means of exposure to liberal European cultures, use of telegraphy and the discovery of scandals.<sup>123</sup> However, his physical and textual presence as a 'mouthpiece' implies his association with the production of matter, the flow of information or the communication of scandals and thus symbolic slime. Strether's position challenges the classical association between men and form by acting as the male figure responsible for the vocalisation of the matter of communication. Strether functions as Mrs Newsome's conduit carrying telegraphic pieces of information across the Atlantic. His place as a telegraphic ambassador, in addition, subverts the exclusion of women from the world of metaphysics and their possible connection with form, a discourse that is traditionally denied to femininity due to the old perception of women as materially unbounded or fluid and in need of the masculine form to contain them. The fact that Strether is under Newsome's technological censorship turns the latter herself into a form within which the former becomes contained. The binarism of form/matter could equally be applied to women and men: both could be 'a forming matter and mattering form'.<sup>124</sup> This creates a need for the redefinition of symbolic classifications of masculinity as form and femininity as matter, a redefinition that is encoded in Strether's name itself. The *Ether* in the second syllable of Str-ether suggests the containment or embodiment of material particles or air that is necessary for the transmission of knowledge.

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<sup>123</sup> Christopher Keep, 'Technology and Information: Accelerating Developments', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, eds. Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 137-155 (p. 146).

<sup>124</sup> See Erin Manning, 'Tango, Touch, and Moving Multiplicities', in *Identity and Global Politics: Empirical and Theoretical Elaborations*, eds. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn (London: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 191-205

To know is to master the art of interlocution within the expanding ‘technological regime of communications’, to borrow Derrida’s phrase.<sup>125</sup> Knowledge is thus key to power in the modern sense of information exchange, a subject that James explores in most of his other novels; *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). These novels emphasise the fact that knowledge, or the ‘desire to know’, is the vehicle to ‘power’, as suggested by Seltzer,<sup>126</sup> that escapes the contours of mediation between senders and receivers such as Everard and Bradeen or Chad and Mme de Vionnet. Knowledge rather becomes located within the boundaries of feminine discourses that the female telegraphist and Strether represent; the first by decoding Everard and Bradeen’s erotic telegrams, the second by being the ‘mouthpiece’ of Mrs Newsome through whose constant communication he unravels Chad and Vionnet’s sexual affair. Within the textual space of telegrams, both semiotic power and sexual desire, accordingly, become located in knowledge. James, however, presents another form of written communication where sexuality and social authority are embodied somewhere else, in epistolary *adestination*. Letters or epistles that do not reach their destination could constitute the body of desire and represent the semiotics of knowledge. Indeed, James suggests that an ‘unopened’ letter draws ‘a sudden queer power to intensify the reach of its author’ (A, 307). In epistolary correspondence, delivery, the letter’s itinerary and ‘reach[ing]’ define eroticism and power within both text and society, a subject that the next chapter explores in Charles Dickens’s and Edgar Allan Poe’s fiction in relation to female sexuality.

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<sup>125</sup> Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 103.

<sup>126</sup> Seltzer, p. 77.



## Chapter Four

### **‘On Errands of Life, these Letters Speed to Death’:<sup>1</sup> Erotic Destination and the Female Epistle in Dickens and Poe**

The letter was not nice, but full of charge,  
Of dear import, and the neglecting it  
May do much danger. Friar John, *go hence*.

(Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1597)<sup>2</sup>

If *it* [letter] be “in sufferance,” *they* shall endure the pain.

(Jacques Lacan, ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’, 1956)<sup>3</sup>

‘What remains of a signifier when it has no more signification?’, asks Jacques Lacan.<sup>4</sup> The basis of this chapter stems from the same question as I consider what remains of a signifier if it *never achieves* signification. The meaning enveloped within letters loses significance in the face of erroneous delivery, which makes the fulfilled destination of the letter the epistemological core of epistolary communication. The contents of a letter, in other words, are relatively insignificant as its fully recognised meaning is dependent upon its destination. Though Friar Laurence’s letter was of ‘dear import’, ‘full of charge’ or ‘in sufferance’, its failure to be delivered occludes its contents, rendering them worthless and making destination – or unachieved destination – the centre of meaning. Thomas Hardy’s Tess slips a confessional letter under the door to her lover, Angel, but the letter slides unnoticed ‘beneath the carpet as well as beneath the door’,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in ‘Bartleby’, Herman Melville, *Billy Bud & Other Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1998), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2008), V. 2. 18-20. Emphasis on ‘go hence’ is mine.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida & Psychoanalytic Reading*, ed. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 28-55 (p. 44).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles: A Pure Woman* (London: Collector’s Library, 2003), p. 298.

eventually remaining undelivered and unread: a dead letter. The letter's failed destination or 'adestination', to borrow Jacques Derrida's term,<sup>6</sup> ultimately obviates Tess's looked-for pardon from Angel and redirects the novel's narrative towards its tragic end. Tragedy, in such cases, becomes the consequence of a delayed letter: just as Romeo drinks the poison and Juliet stabs herself so Tess is hanged. *Bartleby's Dead-Letter-Office* is also a tragic place full of heaps of undelivered letters that bespeak the misery of those who die as victims of distance: 'these letters speed to death'.<sup>7</sup> It is not the material or semantic body of the letter that matters, but the real, imaginative or 'aesthetic distance', as Linda Kauffman calls it,<sup>8</sup> that determines both meaning and narrative – prior to, during and after despatch.

This chapter addresses three major subjects within the context of nineteenth-century female sexuality and epistolary communication. Starting with a discussion of how postal delivery and sexual desire are interconnected in both Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) and Poe's 'The Purloined Letter' (1844), I examine how adestination, or displacement of the post, threatens the letter's moral integrity and embodies its sexual meaning. Upon despatch, the letter becomes emptied of its meaning and its real signification is torn between the possibilities of arrival at a destination or non-arrival in adestination. The chapter then explores the potential of these postal possibilities – destination and adestination – in redefining private clandestine spaces and public social ones. Once delivered, the letter leaves the purely private realm and becomes a site of tension between private property and public claim. The latter, through masculine interception, brings private letters into the public space of sexual display. I believe, however, that even though

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<sup>6</sup> The words 'adestination' and 'destinerrance' appear in a number of Derrida's works. See, for example, "Envois", in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 1-256, also quoted in J. Hillis Miller, *For Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), pp. 28-29.

<sup>7</sup> Melville, 'Bartleby', p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fiction* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 46.

interception is an immoral break in the laws of delivery or destination, it warrants women's expression of desire in public spheres. If Minister D did not purloin the Queen's letter, we would know nothing about her undisclosed desires. The chapter finally investigates how masculinities like those of the intercepting Minister D and Mr. Pecksniff are deconstructed through a destination. Both fail to be models of admirable Victorian gentlemen. Mr Pecksniff in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and Minister D in 'The Purloined Letter' violate one-way epistolary communication and stand as interceptors and even blackmailers. Whilst the former eventually turns into a 'squalid letter-writing man',<sup>9</sup> the latter dwindles further in social power and becomes the frivolous Devil-Man in the House.

My major interest in the Dickens-Poe literary accord, however, stems from the intriguing short-lived actual correspondence of both writers. The most recent of published work is Tara Moore's contribution to *Edgar Allan Poe in Context* (2013) in which she essentially argues that before the real-life Dickens-Poe meeting in March 1842, Poe was 'well versed' in Dickens's early literary works while the latter had read nothing of Poe's writing.<sup>10</sup> Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) was reviewed by Poe as part of his work as a literary critic at *Graham Magazine*. The young critic was able to foresee the end in Dickens's novel before the print of all instalments took place<sup>11</sup> but was critically disappointed in the novel's violations of the maxims of anticipation and reality. J. Matthews argues that Dickens's Gothic plot is 'held out' long enough for Poe to unravel.<sup>12</sup> Poe's discovery of the plot perplexed Dickens, who 'is said to have

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 832. All subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as *MC* followed by page number.

<sup>10</sup> Tara Moore, 'Charles Dickens', in *Edgar Allan Poe in Context*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 279-288 (p. 283).

<sup>11</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, 'Poe', *The Sewanee Review*, 54 (1946), 175-205 (p. 192).

<sup>12</sup> J. Brander Matthews, 'Poe and the Detective Story', in *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism Since 1829*, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966), pp. 82-95 (p. 85).

exclaimed ‘the man must be the devil’.<sup>13</sup> Critics have adequately explored Dickens’s and Poe’s personal relationships. This chapter mainly focuses on the literary correspondence between *Martin Chuzzlewit* and ‘The Purloined Letter’ within the terrains of epistolary displacement and sexual desire. Therefore, I will not further the biographical exploration of both authors’ relationships.

In the world of written communication, the letter stands as a sensual being that communicates its writer’s desire. Various critics highlight the place of the letter in the process of writing as the site of both rhetoric and the erotic. Kate Thomas calls letters ‘the quotidian version of the poetic body-in-text’.<sup>14</sup> Whilst Clare Brant argues that letters ‘generate a phantasmatical erotic body, a kind of prosthetic compensation for an absent lover’,<sup>15</sup> Julia Epstein holds that letters interconnect the body’s topography with their ‘textual tapestries’.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to these critics, I look into destination as the disseminating body of desire in male-female epistolary communication. The physicality of a letter’s destination is symbolically synonymous with the absent-present corporeal communication between lovers who are far apart, yet who can reach each other and communicate their passions in letters that are ‘kissed, embraced, mooned over,

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<sup>13</sup> J. R. Hammond, *An Edgar Allan Poe Companion: A Guide to the Short Stories, Romances and Essays* (London, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1981), p. 93. See also Gerald G. Grubb, ‘The Personal and Literary Relationships of Dickens and Poe. Part Two: “English Notes” and “The Poets of America”’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 5 (1950) 101-120; Fernando Galvan, ‘Poe Versus Dickens’, in *A Decent into Edgar Allan Poe and his Works: The Bicentennial*, ed. Beatriz González Moreno and Margarita Rigal Aragón (New York: Peter Lang, 2010). Other critics argue that Dickens influenced Poe’s writing: *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and the raven named Grip in *Barnaby Rudge* had an impact on Poe’s ‘The Man of the Crowd’ and ‘The Raven’, see Edgar Allan Poe, *The Annotated Poe*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013) and Fernando Galvan, ‘Plagiarism in Poe: Revising the Poe-Dickens Relationship’, *Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 10 (2009), 11-24.

<sup>14</sup> Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> Julia Epstein, ‘Fanny’s Fanny: Epistolary, Eroticism, and Transsexual Text’, in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (London: Pinter Publishers, 1989), pp. 135-154 (p. 138).

communed with, treasured – as if they were stand-ins for the absent lover’.<sup>17</sup> The association between letters and lovers’ sexual emotions implies the fragility of the process of postal dissemination, as letters are subject to detours within the contingent law of the post office. Misaddressed letters by women acquire a unique meaning because they can act as duplicates of the female body; in terms of illicit or sexual correspondence, the sealed letter is an enclosed site representing the virginal female body. Luce Irigaray goes as far as describing a woman’s *physic* as an ‘envelope’.<sup>18</sup> The epistolary communication of desire draws its power not from the female writer but from the possibility of erroneous or non-delivery of the ‘envelope’ body, creating a displacement of desire.

In nineteenth-century ‘correspondence culture’,<sup>19</sup> the letter might fall into what Derrida calls ‘destinerrance’, a word that denotes both “‘destiny” and “wandering””, or the wandering of destiny.<sup>20</sup> Women’s private postal communication is a delicate practice that is contingent on the spatial wandering of desire/the letter. Distance and destination determine the sexual economy of postal exchanges, as desire becomes located not in the letter itself but in its movement. Distance becomes the principal rhetoric of epistolary pleasure as it entails the erotics of waiting, arrival/non-arrival and mail exchange. The well-documented Cleveland Street Scandal in 1889 affirmed the affinity between postal destination and erotics. The Cleveland Scandal, which

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<sup>17</sup> Perry, p. 101. In his research on physical correspondence, Charles Horton Cooley in the late nineteenth century states that ‘transportation is physical, communication is psychical’, thus showing the psychological (hence sexual) nature of contact, in *The Theory of Transportation* (Baltimore: American Economics Association, 1894), p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘Sexual Difference’, in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 118-133 (p. 122). On the relationship between female bodies and letters, see also Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York, N. Y.: AMS Press, 1980), Ellie Ragland, *Essays on the Pleasures of Death: From Freud to Lacan* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 144-182, Laura Fasick, *Vessels of Meaning: Women’s Bodies, Gender Norms, and Class Bias from Richardson to Lawrence* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1997) and Eve Travor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Laura Rotunno explores the relationship between postal reform in mid-nineteenth century and political agency, in the sense that letters encouraged lower and middle classes to read and write. See Rotunno, *Postal Plots in British Fiction, 1840-1898: Readdressing Correspondence in Victorian Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, p. 28.

labelled the postal system as indecent and lecherous due to the homosexual acts of telegraphic messenger boys,<sup>21</sup> exemplifies the manner in which ‘texts and persons’ merge together as the body of destination.<sup>22</sup> The despatched messenger boys, who stand as agents of distance, work as if they are themselves letters/telegrams on display, erotically provoking ‘horror at dissemination’, to borrow John Peters’ words.<sup>23</sup> Is it thus rational to state that destination is the *physic* of the text itself? Consider the labyrinthine erotic destinations of Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’: the letter is never at rest, and it entangles its major possessors – the Queen, Minister D and the French detective Dupin – in a vortex of destinations until it is finally found and returned to its original owner. Whether the letter is politically or sexually scandalous is worthless compared to the actual semantic substance of the epistle: the adestination of the Queen’s letter.

Adestination displaces women’s epistolary desire. Once a woman’s letter leaves the original space of writing it enters into a wider context where it becomes easily affected by an intricate process of postal delivery. The possibility of a woman’s adestined letter falling into the hands of strangers means that her interior space, writing and body/desires are trespassed. Martin and Mary’s private correspondence in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, for instance, is intercepted by Mr Seth Pecksniff and their postal desire accordingly becomes diverted, violated and displaced. Displacement problematises private correspondence, yet it brings to light the frailty of patriarchal structures represented by Mr Pecksniff. It is true that adestination increases the possibility of public access to women’s personal epistolary territories, but it also violates

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Moon, *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 171.

patriarchal boundaries as it calls into question their intrusion into feminised spaces. In a displaced letter, Ruth Perry argues that private emotions transform into a virginal confession that ‘invites violation’.<sup>24</sup> Given the enveloped letter’s symbolic resemblance to a woman’s body, as described by Irigaray, the acts of opening and reading are acts of violation and displacement of that body. The letter loses its physical integrity or unity by being multiply read by others such as Mr Pecksniff. The violation of the body of a disclosed letter can be caused by the uncertainty of postal delivery. The contingency of destination forms a fundamental part of the meaning of a letter; neither time nor place could ensure the intactness of the epistle’s structure and certainty of arrival. Displacement follows no rules, thus the achievement of epistolary meaning depends upon the arrival of the letter unopened. Displacement starts upon despatch; once a letter is despatched, it enters a realm of possible destinations: arrival or non-arrival. Nonetheless, both possibilities embody desire. Within a destination, desire is subject to proliferation as the letter no longer guarantees the confidentiality of its contents once it is despatched, and this blurs the boundaries between private and public spheres. It thus follows that a certain destination maps out desire, the itinerary itself being the text mapped ‘on the body of a woman’.<sup>25</sup> In his criticism of Lacan’s reading of Poe’s text, Derrida argues that ‘a letter can always not arrive at its destination’;<sup>26</sup> more salient, however, is the fact that all characters in the story ‘are subjected to the movement [*itinerary/destination*] of the signifier’. The ‘hole’, as Derrida calls it, the castrated ‘phallus’ or signifier is the pivotal destination around which all subjects rotate.<sup>27</sup> The Queen’s hole and Mary’s body-in-text are the paramount sites of epistolary signification. Destinations in both Dickens’s novel and Poe’s story are erotic cataclysms as they reveal to us how the female body

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<sup>24</sup> Perry, pp. 68-70.

<sup>25</sup> Derrida, ‘The Purveyor of Truth’, trans. Alan Bass, in *The Purloined Poe*, pp. 173-213 (p. 187).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

(or epistle-upon-delivery) transforms into disseminated sexual signs. The destination of the Queen's epistle in 'The Purloined Letter' turns out to be metonymic of the circulation of her body and desires, particularly as the entire Parisian police become involved in intensive searches for it. Letters arriving to Mary from her lover Martin in America similarly symbolise the former's bodily circulation across the Atlantic: Martin writes letters that express his passions to Mary and metaphorically carry her body before they are detoured by Pecksniff's repetitive act of epistolary violation.

Poe's text links the Queen's moral probity to Minister D's crafty act of rewriting the address on the back of the letter that is left 'dangling by a dirty ribbon, from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantle-piece'.<sup>28</sup> This act shows that signification in 'The Purloined Letter' does not lie in what the letter contains as much as in what itinerary the document follows before it returns whence it came – prior to a destination. The letter was able to produce grand effects in the story 'without anyone's ever bothering to worry about what it *meant*', argues Lacan.<sup>29</sup> Meaning resides in its changing location and the chaotic multiplicity of destinations that derive their importance from the symbolic resemblance to the Queen's agitated presence. Upon discovery of the letter's movement, the Queen's nerves metaphorically move in parallel with the letter's different destinations. Taking into account the figurative harmony between Queen's nerves, her sexual fear or desire (considering the letter's erotic implications) and the epistle's movement, erroneous destinations logically govern the movement or the psychological state of the Queen's body. In the boudoir and before the letter first a-destines or goes astray, the Queen's

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<sup>28</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Purloined Letter', in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), pp. 598-613 (p. 610). All subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as PL followed by page number.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Johnson, 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida', *Yale French Studies*, 55/56, *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (1977), 457-505 (p. 464).



nerves or physical state is at rest. At the beginning of the story, the Prefect G, the Parisian police detective to whom the case of the stolen letter is entrusted, indicates that ‘the royal *boudoir*’ (PL, 600, emphasis in original) is the first or primary location where the document is purloined. The *boudoir* is the Queen’s private place of correspondence and one which communicates the rhetoric of keeping, locking or protection against sexual violation. The Queen’s ‘*boudoir*’ suggests a double meaning of crucial safeguarding and horror at a destination. It is a place that offers a sense of comfort and protection, but provokes unease by constantly being under threat of intrusion. It is in the *boudoir* that the Queen enjoys writing at will before her privacy is broken by the entrance of the Minister who is quick to discover where the Queen’s weakness resides: in a written letter whose address is left naked to his cunning sight.

The change of the *boudoir* from a private to public place indicates the transformation of the letter’s position from destination – the Queen being the possessor – to a destination with the Minister violating the route of the letter and holding it ‘in sufferance’. There is important signification in the letter that we do not know, but what is it? Or does it really matter what it is? The horrifying a destination reveals all. If the letter is lost or disclosed, ‘the honor of a personage of most exalted station’ will be brought into question, says the Prefect G (PL, 599). That is all Dupin and the narrator hear from the Prefect, but through both double addressing and logical deduction, meaning is inferred. The change of addresses which is carried out by the Minister and which Dupin finds to be exquisitely done affirms this effective connection between female sexuality and the epistle’s a destination that serves to determine the Queen’s sexual/moral reputation. In order to trick the police, Minister D readdresses the letter and places it in a way that shows the address ‘uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed’ (PL, 600). The new address or destination envelopes and embodies the content, appearing to control the law of

despatch, the letter's content and hence the disseminated Queen's body. Imagine 'an immense female body, stretch[ed] out across the Minister's office when Dupin enters', says Lacan, portraying the Queen's letter as a naked female body on the Minister's desk. What is hidden or inside is never shown, and even though the letter is turned inside out like Irigaray's 'envelope'-body, or like 'a garment' that Dupin 'undress[es]',<sup>30</sup> the back of the letter's body where the address extends in space is the supreme presiding image. Towards the end of the narrative, however, Dupin finds that the letter 'had been turned as a glove, inside out, redirected and resealed' (PL, 611). The state of the found letter parodies its state upon being purloined; the address is still written 'in a diminutive female hand' (PL, 610). At first glance, we are fed up with the belief that the act of turning inside-out, which is an act of violent opening, reading and epistolary deflowering, is the moral genesis of the incident. Yet what is central to this episode is the resealing and readdressing of the letter, an act that indicates again that the address dictates the politics of eroticism within private correspondence.

*Martin Chuzzlewit* likewise makes manifest the relationship between postal destination and corporeality by representing the former as an escape from social surveillance and a form of free sexual expression. Letters give voice or agency to bodies that physically fail to reach one another by creating a proxy for embodied passion. Letters, in other words, function as symbolic surrogate messengers of bodies that are incapable of corporeal contact. Knowing that his beloved Mary is still in London with his grandfather and that he cannot physically communicate with her, young Martin enters the scene of writing. Mark Tapley, Martin's close friend, anxiously

snatched some writing materials from the mantleshelf; set Martin's chair before them; forced him down into it; dipped a pen into the ink; and put it

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<sup>30</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar', p. 48.

in his hand [...] The letter being duly signed, sealed, and delivered, was handed to Mark Tapley. (MC, 233-34)

Fearing to lose the last chance to contact her before travelling to America with Mr Tapley, young Martin quickly writes a letter that he himself and Mr Tapley, the agent of destination, later deliver to Mary secretly. Whilst with Mary, Martin ‘paused to take from his pocket the letter he had written overnight’ (MC, 238). Even though Martin could have given the letter undisclosed and departed, he stays and reads it loud to Mary, making himself an agent of double presence: both body and text. Supposing himself already on board the ship to America, Martin recreates a moment of corporeal presence through textuality and the ‘writing materials’ of paper and ‘ink’. The disembodied Martin becomes embodied, the absent becomes present through despatching his letter to Mary as a self-text. The meeting is a passionate one, and its intimacy arises from Martin’s absent-present action of delivering a letter that, to borrow Esther Milne’s words, ‘allows for the corporeal emergence or visibility of the ‘incorporeal body’’.<sup>31</sup> The representation of Martin’s body as absent or ‘incorporeal’ – being now in America – is reconsidered by the surplus of emotional desire he includes in his letter that summons him into a spectacle of passionate coupling. It is ‘absence’, Cynthia Lowenthal argues, that generates all letter writing.<sup>32</sup> In order to be present yet avoid the Victorian system of constant monitoring, Martin produces a letter of visibility that would symbolically link him and Mary in a temporal and spatial presence, in both Britain and America. This visibility, however, is much indebted to ‘delivery’, which is ‘a generic feature of epistolary communication’, as suggested by Milne.<sup>33</sup> The overwhelming feeling of loss on the part of both lovers is, to quote Milne again, an ‘effect of epistolary

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<sup>31</sup> Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* (New York, London: Routledge, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Cynthia Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth Century Familiar Letter* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 24. I am grateful for Milne’s intriguing analysis of the relationship between absence and letter-writing, pp. 50-55.

<sup>33</sup> Milne, p. 58.

exchange’,<sup>34</sup> and passion thus becomes located in ‘the act of transmission’ which is the essential meaning of communication, according to Niklas Luhmann.<sup>35</sup> Through delivery that embodies his absence from the transatlantic network of passionate correspondence, Martin communicates his physical image to Mary’s imagination. Delivery, holds Peters, is ‘the language of mailing’: it is all about carriages or ‘miscarriages’,<sup>36</sup> sexual excitement or emotional defeat, destination or adestination. If Martin did not deliver the letter, he could never be centralised in the act of embodied communication. To deliver, reach or *destine* is to be remembered and sexually present.

Despite the fact that delivery is an essential facet of epistolary communication, it is problematic as it imposes on the sexual privacy of epistles a disturbing contingency. To deliver a letter, in other words, is to be vulnerable to public access, to erroneous destination. Delivery, as I suggested before, is dependent on chance, and to repeat Derrida’s words, ‘a letter can always not arrive at its destination’. This exposure to chance causes turmoil within the borderlines of publicity and privacy: both leak into each other. The Queen’s letter in Poe’s story is turned inside-out by the Minister, confusing the readers’ categorical sense of private and public. Destination, which is synonymous with privacy and spatial unity, merges into adestination: the Minister readdresses and reseals the letter, and we are confused as to which is which or where is where. The disorder is finally resolved when Dupin explains the state in which he finds the ‘solitary’ dangling letter:

[It] was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle – as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless, had been altered or stayed in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D ——— cipher, the minister, himself. (PL, 610)

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<sup>34</sup> Milne, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz, Jr. and Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 139, also quoted in Milne, p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> Peters, p. 174.

The state of the letter implies not only the Minister's cunning plan to conceal its identity but also the sexual harm that has been done to its untouched body prior to robbery. Its removal from the private chambers of the royal palace to the Minister's office of public affairs causes much soiling, crumpling and tearing to its structure: it is in the aftermath of erroneous delivery that the letter's body suffers a severe miscarriage. The fact that the stolen epistle is 'soiled and crumpled' can figuratively be read as the public image of the Queen's displayed body, considering that her letter ends up in the Minister's public office. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hester Prynne is another nineteenth-century female body that is sullied as a result of a destination or male intervention: she is symbolic of the defiled letter/body on the scaffold. The Queen's purloined letter, like Hester's body before the crowds, dangles in full view. Dupin believes that the French police have been blind to the letter's destination at the time of their extensive searches, and even readers become beguiled by the traditional method of detection.

Dupin is the one to detect the letter's movement from the private to the public, but what does this movement signify? The detour or adestination – from private to public – does not only imply that the letter is 'in [geographical] sufferance' but also communicates 'a message from the oppressed';<sup>37</sup> the letter's return is, therefore, 'the return of the repressed'.<sup>38</sup> Mary Favret argues that the letter opens a space for delving into the interior of the feminine self.<sup>39</sup> Without the Minister's act of interception, we would never be able to explore the Queen's repressed royal desires. The Queen's letter, signifying her interior body parts which Marie Bonaparte and Derrida psychoanalytically term 'the missing maternal penis' and 'place of castration' and which the Minister himself fails to conceal, becomes a sexualised epicentre of the public or advertised

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<sup>37</sup> Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 10

<sup>38</sup> Lacan, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Favret, p. 10.

body.<sup>40</sup> This publicity results from a destination through which we are able to see the letter between what Derrida calls ‘the “legs” of the fireplace’ that transforms into a panoramic scene for public viewers namely, Dupin and Minister D.<sup>41</sup> Before the letter goes back to its original place, palace or ‘hole’, it has to go through this ‘proper course, circular destination’, Derrida states.<sup>42</sup> The circular, O-like course of the letter, which resembles a global theatre where everyone sees the text/body, brings about the interlapping of private pre-destination and public adestination, resulting in a circulated desire via the text’s movement. Intercepted female letters travel in a circle through which they arguably turn into quasi-theatrical objects of sexual display before they return to the private spheres where they started. Destination and adestination rotate around each other in a circular shape: both are one and the same, and in their movement, private and public spaces merge into one, becoming a solitary O-like space that communicates the Queen’s desire without restrictions.

Lacan, Derrida, Barbara Johnson and Irene Harvey become involved in a lengthy debate criticism of the letter’s sexual symbolism and destination. The reading and rereading of Poe’s text mirror the atrocious events in the tragedy of Thyestes and Atreus, which is Dupin’s implicit message of revenge to the Minister who once ‘did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humouredly, that I should remember’ (PL, 612). This overriding critical approach violates the real significance of the epistle, which is the itinerary itself. Instead, I explore the association between public and private spaces that can be enabled by the repetitive intersections of destinations during the stolen letter’s journey. The act of finding the letter on the mantelpiece in the Minister’s chamber asserts the uniformity of different possibilities of delivery. Various

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<sup>40</sup> Marie Bonaparte, ‘Selections from the Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation’, in *The Purloined Poe*, pp. 101-33 (p. 130); Derrida, ‘Purveyor’, p. 183.

<sup>41</sup> Derrida, ‘Purveyor’, p. 184.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

possible destinations follow each other in circles in order to affirm the letter's feminine place as the 'hole' or the 'card-rack of pasteboard' that dangles beneath the middle of the mantelpiece. Taking into account the fact that letters are normally feminine gendered,<sup>43</sup> the misaddressed letter in Dickens's and Poe's texts always resumes its original course and returns to its starting point: feminine space. The erroneous delivery of letters helps bring to light female desire. Mary and Martin's passionate correspondence and the Queen's unknown desires in her purloined letter reveal that a destination opens up zones for women's communication of desire to the world that lies beyond their private boudoirs or drawing-rooms.

Poe's text almost enacts Derrida's wordplay 'destinerrance', proving that private and public spaces coalesce into one unified space of destination. In Dickens's text too, pre-destination (equivalent to privacy) and a destination (equivalent to publicity) feed into each other. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the narrator fantastically describes Bailey's successor, Tamaroo, who works at Todgers's as the post agent. Tamaroo is

a perfect Tomb for messages and small parcels; and when despatched to the Post-office with letters, had been frequently seen endeavouring to insinuate them into casual chinks in private doors, under the delusion that any door with a hole in it would answer the purpose. (MC, 506)

Tamaroo's postal job is expressive of the uncertainty of destination following the supposition that 'any door with a hole in it would answer the purpose'. Being despatched to specific destinations, Tamaroo violates the law of unified, systematic delivery by a-destining letters 'into casual chinks in private doors'. The private doors are not, however, private as they embody the possibility of erroneous destination: private doors are indeed public. What is interior is exterior, the private pre-destined becomes publically adestined and vice versa. Again, destination and

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<sup>43</sup> See Favret, p. 12.

adestination function in harmony, and like the Queen's letter that is turned inside-out like a garment, the interior of these doors is exposed to the outside. The ironic description of Tamaroo as a 'Tomb' for messages assures us once more of adestination: where messages are meant to be highly confidential, they deceive the postal law and become excessively unclassified. This oscillation between private and public scenes of delivery allows for the dissemination of desire in letters that Tamaroo slides smoothly and slowly into the 'hole'. The 'hole' is a fundamental word in this text because it functions as a connection between the worlds of privacy and publicity or possibilities of destination and adestination. Like the 'hole' which Derrida deploys in his psychosexual analysis of Poe's text, the 'hole' in Dickens's is the epicentre of the narrative. If the Queen's 'hole' is the permanent original place of the letter around which all destinations revolve, the 'hole' in Tamaroo's postal job is also the focal point through which the microcosmic world of private writing and the macrocosmic world of public knowledge become confluent. By functioning as a point of intersection of destination and adestination, the 'hole' emerges as a theatrical space where desire is acted via epistolary correspondence. Thrusting mail via door holes can be seen, symbolically, as an erotic act that stages desire, bearing in mind the public nature of postal delivery. The communication of the post, in other words, creates a sexual meaning where the postman, the agent of destination and desire, theatrically encroaches upon private spaces and delivers his letters from the outside. But how does this reflect on the communication of female desire in *Martin Chuzzlewit*? In answer to this, I will provide two episodes in the novel that show how the overlapping of private destination and public adestination leads to the transmission of women's desire.



Letters, argues Favret, are items of immaculate secrecy, considering that they signify ‘interior spaces and female vulnerability, especially sexual vulnerability’.<sup>44</sup> *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a novel that idealises secrecy in letters which Carol Mackay describes as totemic that become cataclysmic if violated.<sup>45</sup> Privacy or secrecy is tied to the moral meaning of the epistle which becomes ‘evil in the gloomy moral philosophy of the novel’, and must thus remain unrevealed.<sup>46</sup> Because women’s epistolary correspondence could be charged with ‘ardour and seduction’,<sup>47</sup> which is the case with female letters in Dickens’s and Poe’s texts, letters in *Martin Chuzzlewit* are usually safeguarded against any form of public access or interception. Privacy is, however, fragile and according to Tamaroo’s casual method of epistolary dissemination, letters betray their own clandestine destiny and become public. The boundaries between private and public spaces cannot be defined, and they reveal to us an unmanageable flow of sexual desire that defies the law of postality and paradoxically leaps out through the letter’s private body. Towards the end of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Mr Jinkins delivers to Mr Pecksniff’s arrogant daughter Miss Charity a letter sent by Mr Augustus Moddle, the man with whom she flirts, falls in love and arranges a colossal wedding. She ‘opened it: glanced at it; uttered a piercing shriek; threw it down upon the ground: and fainted away’ (MC, 828). The letter entails Moddle’s decision to abandon Charity who mistakes the former’s feelings and ever since becomes emotionally attached to him. The letter’s content which causes Charity to faint after being turned down by her supposed husband-to-be is,

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<sup>44</sup> Favret, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Carol Hanbery Mackay, ‘The Letter-Writer and the Text in *Martin Chuzzlewit*’, *Studies in English Literature*, 26 (1986), 737-758 (p. 743).

<sup>46</sup> Matei Calinescu, ‘Secrecy in Fiction: Textual and Intertextual Secrets in Hawthorne and Updike’, *Politics Today*, 15 (1994), 443-465 (p. 452).

<sup>47</sup> Kym Michelle Brindle, ‘Epistolary Encounters: Diary and Letter Pastiche in Neo-Victorian Fiction’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Lancaster University, 2010), p. 8. Some critics have raised the subject of secrecy in their analysis of the literary structure of the novel and associated it with women’s powerful subversion. See, for example, Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolary: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), pp. 50-60; Peter Alldridge, “‘Attempted Murder of the Soul’: Blackmail, Privacy and Secrets”, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 13 (1993), 368-387 (p. 368); and Frank Kermode, ‘Secrets and Narrative Sequence’, *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980), 83-101 (pp. 87-88).

though, secondary to the act of opening and public reading, i.e. a destination. The crowds at the wedding ‘picked it up; and crowding round, and looking over one another’s shoulders, read, in the words and dashes following, this communication’ (*MC*, 828). At the wedding, the letter moves from private hands to public crowds who ‘thought as little of Miss Pecksniff, while they greedily perused this letter’ (*MC*, 831). Being set in the middle of an audience of greedy readers, the letter features as the centre of a global stage where Charity’s frustrated sexuality is on display. Mackay argues that, by presenting letters as ‘complex symbol[s] of decayed potential and frustrated passion’, Dickens turns the screw of sexual symbolism once more.<sup>48</sup> Charity’s sexually frustrated body, her name, by the way, signifies an asexual love, receives another blow of frustration by lying on the floor unheeded by the reading crowds. The crowd overlook Miss Charity’s fainting body, preferring the surrogate body/letter which tells of sexual frustration. Here erroneous delivery, which violates the course of the letter, emerges as the *main* text in comparison to Charity’s body – the *minor* text. Charity’s epistolary experience indicates that erroneous movement from private to public embodies the communication of sexual desire. Sexual frustration is revealed through the eyes of public readers or agents of a destination, making the letter look as if it were originally addressed to this cynical audience, through whom Dickens deconstructs the public image of the Pecksniff family.

In another significant episode, young Martin and Mary develop letter-writing as a mode of correspondence across the Atlantic to avoid the risk of access to personal communication. As readers, we do not get close enough to read their private letters – except for the one he reads aloud to Mary – as we do with Charity’s letter, which eventually transpires to be addressed to both ‘the individual named and the larger audience that will overhear’, to employ the words of

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<sup>48</sup> Mackay, p. 741.

William Levitan in his introduction on epistolary desire in the love letters of Abelard and Heloise.<sup>49</sup> The doubleness of destination in Dickens's text – the addressee and the wider audience – does not only prove the characters' failure to conform to unified dissemination, bearing in mind their passion for secrecy, but also proves the nonconformity of the letter itself to the postal laws. Peggy Kamuf suggests that the letter, like a female's body, paves its own 'passage out of the cloister'.<sup>50</sup> Martin asserts his demands to Mary that his letter remains highly inscrutable by reiterating his wish to her to 'take it out [...] and make the full stop at 'secrecy'' (MC, 241). In later correspondence, Martin stresses the necessity of keeping his desire for the physically absent Mary out of the reach of interceptors who are very likely to violate private codes and use epistles for their own benefits. Even though Martin does not expose in his loudly read letter an immense erotic desire for Mary as he turns to be a man of utter secrecy, his postal communication with her misses its own destin[y]ation. At the end of the novel, all characters are aware of Martin's relationship with Mary, and the former's letters – especially through interception/destination by Mr Pecksniff – logically lose private signification as the lovers' romance becomes a public matter. Their passion becomes centralised within a wider public theatrical space that transforms their postal communication into what Kamuf calls the 'erotic scene' of letter-writing.<sup>51</sup> The derailment of Martin's and Mary's love letters via the public body proves to be the most important message of the 'erotic scene': the knowledge of desire. Their

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<sup>49</sup> William Levitan, 'Introduction', in Abelard and Heloise, *The Letters and Other Writings*, trans. William Levitan (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), pp. xi-xxxvi (p. xxii). In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Peter Abelard, a great French philosopher and theologian, starts an affair with Héloïse d'Argenteuil, a French lady who is both passionate for knowledge and remarkably learned in classical letters. Their life, affair, later secretive marriage and communication become reduced to clandestine letters that Héloïse sends from the convent, the place where she is sent to be kept away from her ruthless uncle Fulbert, who eventually manages to terminate Abelard-Héloïse romance by deploying some men to attack and castrate Abelard in his own chambers. I refer to this story as an epistolary parallel to Martin and Mary's correspondence; however where the former couple ends in a romantic failure, the latter prospers in sexual union and perpetual happiness.

<sup>50</sup> Peggy Kamuf, *Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Heloise* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

desires, being ‘the reality of the [epistolary] unconscious’,<sup>52</sup> are communicated to the external world through the misaddressing of passion. Both lovers are, however, sexually united at the end of the novel, and their passion is no longer clandestine. Misaddressing or adestination in Martin and Mary’s correspondence becomes a power for social change as Mary moves from a cloistered maid attending to old Martin Chuzzlewit to a public figure associated with love, passion and free sexual expression. Towards the end of the novel, Mary is transformed from epistolary silence into corporeal presence as she freely declares her love to Martin, thus dominating the discourse of passion and choice instead of being controlled by patriarchal voices such as Seth Pecksniff’s. Adestination – Pecksniff’s interception of Martin’s letters – does not only elucidate the erotic discourse of undelivered epistles but, more importantly, acknowledges women’s freedom and undermines patriarchal spatial and social authority.

Interception permeates the central narrative of Poe’s and Dickens’s texts: without the interceptive acts of Minister D and Mr. Pecksniff, letters and their sexual rhetoric would never leave the secluded space of the writer. The fact that epistolary eroticism travels from private spheres to public arenas goes hand in hand with interception or what I term the suspension of destination. Derrida argues that a letter is a ‘secret without measure’ provided it has no postal destination;<sup>53</sup> if despatched, it belongs nowhere and suffers the violation of its own postal mismeasurement. A letter lost in measurement simply errs and reveals its female author’s desire, but it also problematises male figures who form an integral part of mismeasurement or deviation of the letter’s course. The impact of interception or the miscalculation of destination on male interceptors in Dickens’s and Poe’s texts is the final question this chapter answers. ‘The Purloined Letter’ and *Martin Chuzzlewit* negotiate the fourth party in the equation of sender-

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<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 67.

<sup>53</sup> Derrida, *Post Card*, p. 48.

message-receiver namely the interceptors; and they do this by showing how interception is a form of adestation that discloses desire and more importantly how the public gentlemanly images of Minister D and Mr Pecksniff are violated by interception: Minister D and Pecksniff are rhetorically and erotically emasculated.

René Girard introduces the concept of ‘triangulation of desire’ that implies interception in which three characters or ends are involved in the epistolary process of writing, reading, sending and receiving.<sup>54</sup> It is ‘a three-way love interest’, as Perry calls it. This triangulation, continues Perry, becomes standardised since letters exchanged between ‘lovers and confidants are always being forged, *intercepted*, or even just read, legitimately by a third person’.<sup>55</sup> In secretive letter-writing, there is always a space for the intruding outsider reader because letters themselves, according to Favret, are structurally ‘fluid, spontaneous and unregulated’.<sup>56</sup> Letters, regardless of their private nature, are inextricably associated with outer spaces; one might say that they act as diabolic invitations to external intervention. Consider for instance the scene where the Queen’s letter in Poe’s text was purloined whilst everyone is attending the royal chambers:

At this juncture enters the Minister D ——. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognizes the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret [...] At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act. (PL, 600)

What is really at stake here is the fact that the Queen sees the thief and witnesses the act of purloining but is incapable of action. This incapability imposes on the letter’s original destination another destination, which is the Hotel where the Minister stays. This incapability also calls into

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<sup>54</sup> See Chapter one in René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), also quoted in Perry, p. 162.

<sup>55</sup> Perry, p. 162. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>56</sup> Favret, p. 24.

question whether the letter was actually purloined or merely taken, supposing that the letter's body unwillingly welcomes interception or 'invites violation', to reuse Perry's words.<sup>57</sup> Thus far, it is not only the Minister's 'lynx eye' that violates the letter's privacy but also the object of desire itself, in that the letter that lies on the table like a naked body jeopardises its own secrecy. The Queen – like the Minister – sees, but her gaze is that of a guilty man in a court who becomes 'aware of it [post] as death sentence', to borrow Derrida's metaphor.<sup>58</sup> Such a description of the letter's disappearance is enacted to ensure that its destin[y]ation is deliberately erroneous, and that interception is integral to its semantic deliberateness. Favret believes that the letter's movement is 'open to dispute, double-crossing itself at every turn'.<sup>59</sup> This double-crossing of itineraries and the confusion of destination and adestination can be read in the Minister's interruptive personality. The man has 'lynx eyes' which communicate his interceptive powers to be exceptional: he 'observes', 'fathoms' and interrupts the epistolary *discourse*. He is, moreover, enigmatic; his name always appears as D and sometimes followed by a long dash. Like the letter A in *The Scarlet Letter*, the letter D is open to interpretations. It could refer to anything, but in this context it specifically points to the act of intercepting or purloining. D might signify Death, Devil, Desire, Deviation or Derrida's 'Destinerrance'. Mr Pecksniff also manifests this connection between interception and personality since his name suggests an unwelcome intrusion.

Pecksniff stands in the novel as an obstacle between Martin and Mary; he intercepts most of their letters despite all precautions taken for privacy. Tom Pinch, to whom some letters are given for delivery, cries out:

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<sup>57</sup> Perry, p. 68.

<sup>58</sup> Derrida, *Post Card*, p. 29.

<sup>59</sup> Favret, p. 43.

No letters have ever reached me, except that one from New York. But don't be uneasy on that account, for it's very likely they have gone away to some far-off place, where the posts are neither regular nor frequent.

(*MC*, 487)

Tom tries to pacify Mary's worries about the diverted letters sent by Martin from abroad by referring to possible inadequacies in the transatlantic postal system: 'some far-off place, where the posts are neither regular nor frequent'. This bold reference to America and the irregularity of its post adds to the thematics of interception in the novel. After Martin leaves for America, he settles down in a place called Eden though nothing is Edenic there except for the place's name. Postal deliveries in Eden are completely subject to chance; arrival and non-arrival mean nothing. Through his ironic description of Eden, Dickens criticises the inefficiency of postal communication on both sides of the world and calls for a better system that warrants safe correspondence that must particularly be guarded against interceptive acts.

The irony of American Eden and its failed postal system concurs with the erroneous delivery of the English mail, as seen in the interception of Martin's letters by Mr Pecksniff, who harasses Mary with his increasing insistence on his passion for her. Through interception, we come close to understanding Pecksniff's real character. He is a man of sexual hypocrisy, which is 'one of the professed beliefs of Victorians on sexual morality', according to Michael Mason.<sup>60</sup> To be sexually moral, Pecksniff has to be a hypocrite, a paradoxical fact that also brings to mind the notion that Pecksniff's hypocrisy is a consequence of nineteenth-century 'sexual repression'.<sup>61</sup> Pecksniff's repression and thus hypocrisy stem from an uncontrollable jealousy that festers with his knowledge of Martin's and Mary's emotional bond. He is somebody who symbolically

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 40.

<sup>61</sup> Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 2.

manifests the sexual envy of ‘a male-oriented Victorian culture’.<sup>62</sup> To win Mary’s heart, he – replicating Martin’s method of correspondence – approaches her as a man of letters or a poet. The tendency to play the role of letter-writer or man of words turns into an obsession of intercepting males in Dickens and Poe. In ‘The Purloined Letter’, Dupin calls Minister D a ‘poet’ (PL, 607). Dickens’s and Poe’s poets are incapable of creation and would intercept words and claim them as their own, an act which lies outside their masculine sphere. Privacy, argues Daniel Solove, contextually ‘depends upon the social importance of the practice of which it is part’.<sup>63</sup> Martin and Mary’s emotional correspondence is socially and textually important as it is tied to the final part of the narrative, the discovery of which will hazard their future life. Their letters must be retrieved from the hands of a man who stands as the antithesis of clandestinity or insiderness. His name ‘Pecksniff’ is a combination of Peck and Sniff as if to suggest he is somebody who pecks like a magpie and sniffs like a dog searching for tracks, or epistolary courses. His name thus implies an inclination to violate the letter’s body and occupy the other’s space of writing, creativity or poetry. In interrupting the letter’s course, Pecksniff becomes labelled as an interceptor who, like a magpie, cannot ‘keep [his] beak out of it’, as the proverb goes. Having involved himself in a two-way love plot, Pecksniff ends up socially degraded, and his gentlemanly image is eventually ruined, as he is humiliated and denied access to the Chuzzlewit family. Mary’s secret meetings with Martin, on the other hand, enhance her chances to climb the social ladder and problematise nineteenth-century social epistolary conventions. By giving agency to women’s epistolary voices, Dickens and Poe implicitly deconstruct the masculinity of such as Pecksniff and Minister D. Leland Person argues that Minister D’s

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<sup>62</sup> Samuel Slipp, M. D., *The Freudian Mystique: Freud, Women, and Feminism* (New York, London: New York University Press, 1993), p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel J. Solove, ‘Conceptualising Privacy’, *California Law Review*, 90 (2002), 1088-1154 (p. 1093).



interceptive act earns him nothing but the deconstruction of his gentlemanliness.<sup>64</sup> This widely leads to the reconfiguration of gender roles; for whereas these men become ungentlemanly, Mary and the Queen move into outer spaces. Natalie McKnight states that Dickens's women – here Mary – no longer stand as perfect examples of 'the Angel in the House'.<sup>65</sup> They are replaced by lingering men in the chamber.

It is true that at some point in both texts, Pecksniff and Minister D manage to control postal destination by manipulating the journey of the letter and those waiting 'in sufferance', but they also become caught up in their own creation of 'destinerrance'. Both characters, to put it differently, change through the narrative as they become objects of its vortical reality. Their acts of a-destining letters and holding them in sufferance reshape nineteenth-century gender norms. Being politically and socially active males, they ideally transform into domestic characters, a position normally taken by nineteenth-century Anglo-American women. But Pecksniff and Minister D go even lower than being angels in the house by becoming frivolously unproductive. Whereas Minister D becomes obsessed with protecting the purloined letter from re-purloining, Pecksniff is pushed into internal spaces and turns into a domestic dawdler who is always busy with writing insignificant letters. Both men accordingly typify the image of incapable castrated males due to their acts of interception.

Dupin describes the Minister's state of affairs when he pays him a visit shortly after he intercepts the letter: Dupin found him 'at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of *ennui*' (PL, 610, emphasis in original). The Minister, argues Lacan, is obsessed with possession for the sake of possession; he is not a man who would

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<sup>64</sup> Leland Person, 'Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions', in *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 129-167 (p. 152).

<sup>65</sup> Natalie McKnight, 'Dickens and Gender', in *A Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. David Paroissien (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 186-199 (p. 196).

use the letter for subversive political agendas – he only procrastinates and yawns. Lacan goes on to argue that the Minister's idle state goes into fits of 'femininity' that manifests itself regularly in his notably inactive presence in nineteenth-century political public spaces. Through the 'act of concealing', the Minister willingly moves into domestic feminine spaces.<sup>66</sup> We do not see the Minister outside the Hotel even though he should textually represent the public voice of the Parisian government, for he is always lounging and cares about nothing but the concealment of the Queen's epistle. Whilst at the Minister's place, Dupin communicates the feeling that the Minister's private chambers are themselves reflective of the latter's essentially feminine qualities. Whereas Poe builds a feminised image of the Minister, Dupin deconstructs his external public identity. According to David Leverenz, Poe 'constructs, then deconstructs' the lives of American gentlemen through the transgression of 'the great social divide between public displays of mastery and an inwardness felt as alien to oneself'.<sup>67</sup> The oscillation between interiority and exteriority in the postal system causes the retraction of masculine power. Person, on the other hand, argues that Poe rarely grants his female characters the subjective power of speech, action or resistance, choosing instead to emphasise masculine dominance.<sup>68</sup> Person's argument, however, seems problematic as it ignores the fact that regardless of women's poor contribution to the plot's speech acts, they are subjective in the action of their inaction. The power of the silenced unrevealed words in the Queen's letter, the rebellious returning spirits of Ligeia and Morella, or the overreaching voice from beyond the grave symbolised by Berenice's teeth in 'Berenice' (1835) imply that textual reformulation and gender reconfiguration are

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<sup>66</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar', p. 44.

<sup>67</sup> David Leverenz, 'Poe and Gentry Virginia', in *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 210-36 (p. 212), also quoted in Person, p. 152.

<sup>68</sup> Person, p. 137.

indebted to female characters' silent linguistic subversion.<sup>69</sup> Women's decentred acts become the epicentre of the narrative and cause social and sexual change. On the other hand, Person argues that ideals of American gentlemen are problematised in Poe's 'anxious, even angry' writing.<sup>70</sup> Simply put, in playing the Queen's role at home, the Minister becomes symbolically representative of emasculated nineteenth-century gentlemanliness. In other words, he features in the text as a politician who is no longer able to perform his masculine influence outside the feminine space of the fireplace where the letter is left hanging.

Pecksniff, likewise, never enjoys a respectable status after the discovery of his cunning plans by all characters, especially Old Martin. Pecksniff, unaware of everyone's knowledge of his ungentlemanly behaviour, tries to plot against Old Martin and control his wealth. Towards the end of the novel, however, we see Old Martin humiliating Mr Pecksniff: 'but he had not seen how the hand clasped and clutched the stick within its grasp', Old Martin 'rose up, and struck him down upon the ground' (*MC*, 799). The subsequent image shows Pecksniff, the ungentlemanly gentleman, scolded, beaten and thrown out of the familial circle. He is reduced to an emasculated figure begging for sympathy; every beating he receives from Old Martin represents a step down the social ladder. Dickens challenges and reconstructs the Victorian conceptions of gender relations and power, as generally suggested by Lyn Pykett,<sup>71</sup> by deconstructing Pecksniff's moral status as a hypocrite and dawdling man of letters and raising

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<sup>69</sup> Many critics compare Berenice's teeth to luxated castrating '*vagina dentata*'; the return of her teeth from the grave is a speech-act – considering their association with the mouth or vagina – that problematises the narrator's masculinity. See Joel Porte, *The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James* (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 83; David Halliburton, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), p. 202; and Liliane Weissberg, "In Search of Truth and Beauty: Allegory in 'Berenice' and 'The Domain of Arnheim'", in *Poe and His Times: The Artist and His Milieu*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society, 1990), pp. 66-75 (p. 69).

<sup>70</sup> Person, p. 151.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Lyn Pykett, *Charles Dickens* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), and Marianne Camus, *Gender and Madness in the Novels of Charles Dickens* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

Mary to a lofty position within her public circle. In possessing letters to which he has no claim and concealing them for immoral erotic plans, an act that mirrors the Minister's interceptive agendas, Pecksniff becomes feminised in his own acts. Even though we see him in the daylight more than Minister D, Pecksniff becomes internally and socially incarcerated, a man who conducts his business behind closed doors, turning into an object of unproductive seclusion. Like Minister D, Pecksniff loses subjectivity at the end by becoming an invalid character, a person who performs and produces nothing. The changing states of Minister D and Pecksniff do not only arise from being a fourth part of epistolary communication but also from their subsequent acts of epistolary deferral. To derail a letter's course and hold it is 'in sufferance' by deferring the revelation of meaning for economic, social or political gains means that both Pecksniff and the Minister become associated with negative qualities of indolence and valuelessness within the socioeconomic systems of nineteenth-century transatlantic culture.

Provided a letter reaches its destination, to go against Derrida's suggestion that a letter can always miss its course, communication is said to be complete and the deferral of meaning is no longer an issue at hand. But what happens if a letter misses its right course? Dickens and Poe open up new and different possibilities of a destination. In relation to female sexuality, burning letters/bodies stands as a transgressive act of subversion against nineteenth-century spatial constraints. Death by fire – either of letters or female bodies-as-letters – is emblematic of corporeal and textual purity in some of Dickens's and Poe's texts which explore women's protest against cultural and sexual suppression. This challenge to objectification, which I explore in the next chapter, takes the form of corporeal/textual purification via fire and the act of self-immolation. Burning female bodies or private letters results in the transformation of nineteenth-

century women into subjective agents; they emerge as ethereal, sexually metamorphosed subversive women.

## Chapter Five

### **‘Walworth. Burn this [letter] as soon as read’:<sup>1</sup> Letters/Bodies Ablaze; Correspondence Suspended in Dickens and Poe’s Fictions of Fire**

I saw her running at me, shrieking with a whirl of fire blazing all about her, and soaring at least as many feet above her head as she was high.

(Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 1861, 380)

Fire is dematerialized; it loses its reality; it becomes pure spirit.

(Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 1938)<sup>2</sup>

Fire is a site of physical and textual transformation, capable of burning and purifying. Upon burning, fire causes the change of its subjects’ material and discursive states of being. The association between fire and female bodies or secretive letters that communicate uncontrollable passion is representative of that change and is a subtle discourse I begin to unravel within the nineteenth-century context. This chapter examines the relationship between death by fire, domestic sexual transgression and female subjectivity in the works of Dickens and Poe. The chapter investigates burning female bodies and post self-immolation as emblematic of the dead end of communication or the death of discourse and the transformation of women into ethereal subjects and textually pure agents – a concept I unpack shortly. Emmanuel Levinas’s argument that the feminine is ‘a *being* that descends/withdraws from the light’,<sup>3</sup> which is the essence of fire, is problematic. It is through fire and light that female desire and agency are born into recognition, and to contemplate or die by fire is to invoke all sexual imagery of bodies or texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 395. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as *GE* followed by page number.

<sup>2</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan C. M. Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 88.

Death by fire emerges through wild rage and as a protest against cultural evils and sexual repression. Nineteenth-century women's defiance of patriarchal structures is, at times, given in the form of anti-structural fire and the unruly metaphors of burning bodies or epistles-as-bodies. Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) typifies the deconstructive power of fire and its connection with passionate women by burning Rochester's house to the ground, proving that fire is figuratively a dangerous madwoman in the Victorian domestic sphere. Bachelard argues that 'the objective phenomenon of inner rage' lies in the phenomenal power of fire.<sup>4</sup> That the presence of flames in nineteenth-century literary texts takes on radical sexual overtones is a social fact in the history of gender relations. Bachelard suggests that fire evolves as 'a *social reality* [rather] than a *natural reality*',<sup>5</sup> and death by fire becomes a sign of sexual subversion, social rebellion and textual purgation.

This chapter examines two major points within the existing relationship between nineteenth-century women's subversive acts and fire. Firstly, I argue that the thematic association of fire and women's sexual transgression problematises the traditional thinking of Victorian domestic spaces such as the fireplace or hearth as emblems of stable social structure. The fireplace or hearth symbolises the phoenix of female desire; its omnipresence in Dickens's and Poe's fiction as a space of sexual disruption violates the conventional definition of gender spatial relations in nineteenth-century Anglo-American domestic cultures. Secondly, this chapter probes the symbolism of the physical and textual metamorphosis of the female body within the subversive act of burning. I will show how the figures of mother, daughter and wife in Dickens and Poe move into a space of immateriality or ethereality represented by smoke. This transformation is integral to the creation of female discursive purity that gains a powerful position against

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<sup>4</sup> Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis*, p. 36

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

patriarchal discourses through what Thomas Carlyle calls ‘Fire-Baptism’.<sup>6</sup> For a woman to be raised ‘to majestic heights’ and imbued with ‘ethereal grace’ she has to die in fire which is portrayed as the best mode of purification. Writing in the nineteenth century, Lady Cook holds that purgation by flames elevates women into higher spheres of social representation. I use the term fire purgation here not in the traditional sense of uncleanness but as an act of feminine defiance whereby women are released and purified from patriarchal discourses attached to their bodies and texts. Cook states that ‘we cannot say of a woman that she is pure until she has passed through the fire’.<sup>7</sup> The chapter hence deals with the thematics of fire, textual purification and subversive female sexuality in Dickens’s *Great Expectations* and Poe’s short stories ‘Metzengerstein’ (1832) and ‘The Black Cat’ (1843). Other works by both writers, including Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854) and *Bleak House* (1853) and Poe’s short stories such as ‘Hop-Frog’ (1849), ‘The Purloined Letter’ (1844) and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ (1839) will be used in passing. The choice of these works is based on the abundance of light and flame imagery representing feminine power in what I call Dickens and Poe’s fictions of fire.

The Dickens-Poe relationship was short-lived as the preceding chapter showed. Even though their literary interaction was minimal, we know that Poe reviewed Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and criticised it for being too long to allow for anticipation of later events.<sup>8</sup> The novel, nonetheless, had perhaps a specific influence on Poe, and one might argue that the raven called

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<sup>6</sup>In a footnote, Sara Thornton states that ‘Fire-Baptism’ was the religiously connotive term he [Thomas Carlyle] coined for that act, for the soul’s self-enfranchisement from its pusillanimous subservience to the authoritarian bonds of tradition’. See Thornton, ‘The Burning of Miss Havisham: ‘Dickens, Fire and the “Fire-Baptism”’, in *Bloom’s Modern Critical Interpretations: Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2010), pp. 79-99 (p. 97). ‘Fire-Baptism’ was first used by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1831), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup>Lady Cook, *Talks and Essays*, 4 vols (Westminster: Roxburghe, n.d.), 3. 110-13. Cook’s argument in the 1890s is valid and important to my discussion in this chapter. Cited in Lloyd Davis, ‘The Virgin Body as Victorian Text: An Introduction’, in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature*, ed. Lloyd Davis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 3-25 (pp. 9-10).

<sup>8</sup>See J. Brander Matthews, ‘Poe and the Detective Story’, in *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism Since 1829*, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966), pp. 82-95 (p. 85).



Grip in Dickens's novel is the same one we see in Poe's 'The Raven' (1845). This is still one possibility, but is it also possible that *Barnaby Rudge* has other affiliations with Poe's literary taste? In Dickens's novel, three major places are caught in fire and the scenes of burning are narrated in a whirl of shrieks and Gothic imagery of conflagration. The Warren, the Vintner's House and Newgate Prison are all, at one point or another, sites of fire,<sup>9</sup> and if Poe thought the novel to be exasperatingly long, he could also see how other singular distinct incidents like the three fires had a unique place in the dark structure of the novel.

In the previous chapter, I argued that adesteaded letters represent miscommunication or confusion within the postal system, thus causing the circulation of women's desire or *voice* within public spaces. Here, fire also functions as a form of adestation that flags up issues with female sexuality, space, and the death of communication. The ostracism of fallen women 'from the sanctity of the hearth', as suggested by Nina Auerbach,<sup>10</sup> is caused by the Victorian spatial and moral perception of domestic spaces; the hearth is a construction of familial order and spatialised gender categorisations. However, when women or their letters burn in nineteenth-century fiction, they turn fireplaces and hearths into sites of hierarchical instability and gender disorder. The hearth in Dickens's *Hard Times* or fireplace in Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', for instance, becomes associated with women's passion or defiant erotic desire. Burning women offer a model of femininity that is, to borrow Sally Mitchell's term, 'ungovern[able]'.<sup>11</sup> Despite her patriarchal upbringing, Louisa Gradgrind in *Hard Times* is a young passionate woman who is

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<sup>9</sup> See Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of Riots of 'Eighty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), particularly ch. LXIV.

<sup>10</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> Sally Mitchell, *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class, and Women's Reading, 1835-1880* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981), 'Introduction' [no page numbers included].

always seen ‘looking at the fire’, wondering and yielding “such unmanageable thoughts”.<sup>12</sup> The Queen’s purloined letter in Poe’s story is found hanging ‘beneath the middle of the mantle-piece’<sup>13</sup> over the fireplace. Why is it a fireplace? It is logical to argue that the erotic link between the letter representing the Queen’s body and the Minister’s alien fireplace is implied. Derrida suggests a connection between the interior of a fireplace and what lies between the legs of a woman: it is ‘between the “legs” of the fireplace’ or woman that the letter/meaning is found.<sup>14</sup> Derrida’s analogy implies that both places are sites of subversive passion whereby women as domestic figures become capable of turning the sacred location of the hearth into a disruptive space of death and denial. In death by fire, not only is there a denial and termination of masculine discourse or what Derrida calls the crumbling of ‘dissemination’,<sup>15</sup> but also a feminine return to textual disembodiment where the female body is transformed into incorporeal smoke. Bachelard states that smoke is symbolic of ‘pure spirit’.<sup>16</sup> Upon burning, the female body is transformed into a spiritualised form of being – smoke – that refuses the masculine world and becomes sexually inaccessible. Smoke is a pure text, and its representation in Miss Havisham’s immolation or Baron Metzengerstein’s destruction whilst riding a fiery horse representing his mother’s body during the conflagration of his castle emphasises the role of fire in textual purification and the victory of feminine discourses over patriarchy.

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<sup>12</sup> Dickens, *Hard Times* (London: Penguin English Library, 2012), pp. 60-61. Subsequent references will be parenthetically given in the text as *HT* followed by page number.

<sup>13</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Purloined Letter’, in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), pp. 598-613 (p. 610).

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Purveyor of Truth’, trans. Alan Bass, in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida & Psychoanalytic Reading*, ed. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 173-213 (p. 184).

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, *Feu La cendre* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1987), p. 45. Derrida’s text was translated as *Cinders* in 1991 by Ned Lukacher, but I relied on Françoise Meltzer’s translation in her interesting study of the symbolism of fire and female sexuality, see *For Fear of Fire: Joan of Arc and the Limits of Subjectivity* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 184.

<sup>16</sup> Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis*, p. 104.

Women's acts of self-immolation or burning letters are a fundamental aspect in the subversive structure of nineteenth-century Anglo-American writing. In Dickens's and Poe's mid-Victorian writing, death by fire of the female body or epistle offers new readings of gender constructions. The high demand on women's purity within nineteenth-century domestic spaces gives fire and the act of burning symbolic power beyond definition. Self-immolation functions as an act of resistance on the part of women who, by burning themselves, defy traditional patriarchal formulations of purity and domestication. The fear of fire, the monster that lurks in the innermost corners of the Victorian home, is the fear of free passion that is always ready to ignite, to counteract and sexually come to represent itself in women. The struggle against fire, as seen in Miss Havisham's fighting off the flames surrounding her body in *Great Expectations* or Mary's apocalyptic rise towards the top of the Baron's castle as a fire horse in 'Metzengerstein', is a struggle against 'sexual impulses', to use Bachelard words.<sup>17</sup> Both scenes explore sexual transformation: Miss Havisham changes to an amiable character the moment she burns since 'fire is a vehicle for change', Sara Thornton suggests;<sup>18</sup> Mary ascends to the sky in the form of a mythical horse made of fire and smoke. Again, enveloped in 'a whirl of fire' (*GE*, 380), Miss Havisham moves as if she were dancing to the flames, rushing to meet the young man Pip 'for the first (and the last) time'.<sup>19</sup> In her introduction to Bachelard's *The Flame of a Candle*, Joanne Stroud connects fire to 'naked animality, a kind of excessive animal';<sup>20</sup> thus the scene of the old spinster running towards Pip is suggestive of naked sexual animality. This animal acts in a way

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<sup>17</sup> Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis*, p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Thornton, p. 87. Susan Walsh goes further to suggest that this scene in Dickens's novel has 'overtones of assault and rape', in 'Bodies of Capital: "Great Expectations" and the Climacteric Economy', *Victorian Studies*, 37: 1 (1993), 73-98 (p. 92).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> Joanne H. Stroud, 'Forward', in Bachelard, *The Flame of a Candle*, trans. Joni Caldwell (Dallas: The Dallas Institute Publications, 1988), pp. vii-xv (p. ix).

that echoes Miss Havisham's wild erotic rage and Mary's symbolic presence in the shape of a sexually transgressive horse that carries her son, the Baron, into the heart of flames, into death.

'Animality' here does not suggest a reductionist view of the statuses of women in Dickens's and Poe's writing; on the contrary, it is a powerful characteristic of fire that is deconstructive of masculine reason and conventional discourses of rationalism. Fire in these scenes acts as a transmitter of love or wild passion, invalidating the patriarchal organisation of nineteenth-century homes as spaces of social order and patriarchy's rationalisation of the female body. Bachelard associates burning with love and desire; for him, burning is an act of 'licentious love', which results from an initial process of rubbing that he reads as 'a highly sexualized experience'.<sup>21</sup> Bachelard also points to the vertical, 'phallic' shape of the flames,<sup>22</sup> which consolidates the link between fire and eroticism, and for the purpose of this chapter women and fire. The vertical, 'phallic' image of flames, as described by Bachelard, seems to suggest that the burning of the female body would appear to be consumption by the ever-present masculine discourse. However, I take up and develop Bachelard's idea of the 'phallic' by divesting the 'phallic' of its patriarchal force. By employing flames as tools of textual purification, women transcend the strictures of nineteenth-century patriarchy. Released from the domestic space of the hearth, fire thus becomes a medium for women's liberation from the boundaries and influences of external discourses. The 'phallic' flames become the abstract conduit for female agency and linguistic control. In his visits to Miss Havisham, Pip describes her as always sitting 'with her two hands crossed on her stick, her chin resting on them, and her eyes on the fire' (*GE*, 221). Bachelard suggests that '*sexual reverie is a fireside reverie*';<sup>23</sup> Miss Havisham's

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<sup>21</sup> Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>22</sup> Northrop Frye, 'Preface', in Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, pp. v-viii (p. vi).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

contemplation of the fireside thus signifies sexual daydreaming that later turns into a violent spectacle, which is the symbolic culmination of sexual frustration and abandonment by her fiancé. In the burning of Miss Havisham, fire takes the vertical/sexual form of consumption. The flames rising from her body ascend upwards, assuming the sexualised form that Bachelard described earlier as ‘phallic’. Miss Havisham runs towards Pip with a blazing fire ‘soaring at least as many feet above her head as she was high’ (*GE*, 380). Through the investment in the vertical imagery of flames and sexual day-dreaming, Dickens builds up subversive moments of passion at the very place where sentiment is denied. ‘Fireside reverie’, as typified by Miss Havisham and Louisa, the latter being brought up within a firm patriarchal system to think but not to feel, excites passion, building to a point of unconventional social subversion via burning or disobedience.

Prior to Miss Havisham’s violent act of self-immolation, Dickens draws attention to her state of being and domestic affairs that are associated with coldness, silence and stillness. Nothing stirs in Miss Havisham’s house; nearly everything is static including the progress of time in her room which stopped at twenty to nine in the morning many years ago. Tongues of hearth fire and candle flames are the only animate subjects in her room. When Pip visits Miss Havisham for the first time, he

crossed the staircase landing, and entered the room she indicated. From that room, too, the daylight was completely excluded, and it had an airless smell that was oppressive. A fire had been lately kindled in the damp old-fashioned grate, and it was more disposed to go out than to burn up. (*GE*, 78)

Pip’s description implies a chilling scene of domestic coldness, abandonment and painful solitude; however, the fire that has ‘been lately kindled’ in Miss Havisham’s fireplace signifies

warmth, hope and the possibility of change. Amongst the deadly images of immobility in the room, the 'damp grate' represents 'the ultra-living element' or the fiery space where desire or passion for change is kept active.<sup>24</sup> Being betrayed and abandoned by her fiancé, Mr Compeyson, who is a criminal accomplice of Abel Magwitch, Miss Havisham leads a monotonous life in Satis House where all physical objects lose significance and animation; the hearth is nevertheless the only place that carries high expectations via its potential for physical and psychological transformation. The hearth functions as a time machine that takes Miss Havisham back to that past moment of physical beauty and liveliness. The hearth, thus, is the key to a powerful discourse represented by Miss Havisham's release from patriarchal language and cultural inscription. The ability to employ the hearth as a time machine that mediates between the past and present is a reminder of injustice and sexual frustration, yet also a critical juncture of transgressive self-immolation that grants Miss Havisham the power to govern her actions, both physical and verbal. The grate is described as 'damp' and the room is generally 'oppressive' to an extent that makes fire itself 'more disposed to go out' and escape the contours of this domestic space. Yet the significance of fire as a transgressive reminder of sexual disappointment makes it central to the narrative's plot. The space occupied by the hearth does not only communicate moments of sadness and frustration but also desire for revenge against Mr Compeyson, the man who turned Miss Havisham's passion into dispassion.

The fireplace disrupts the nineteenth-century patriarchal categorisations of home as a sanctified space where mothers occupy the domestic, angelic role in the house. The hearth as a place of 'sanctity'<sup>25</sup> and moral indoctrination is transformed into a sexualised space where the Angel in the house becomes a subversive woman. Louisa and Estella, the young female orphan

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<sup>24</sup> Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Auerbach, p. 159.

brought up by Miss Havisham at Satis House, feature in *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations* respectively as victims of strict, unsympathetic systems of education in which sexual knowledge, as suggested by Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, is seen as ‘impurity’ in girls who are accordingly coerced into states of passivity and sexlessness.<sup>26</sup> Through fire, however, the novel is able to produce female characters who challenge traditional expectations of female purity within domestic spheres. Estella, who represents cold-heartedness through living most of her life in darkness with only the company of candles, changes towards the end of the novel, and for the first time Pip sees her shedding tears of passion and love. On the other hand, the married Louisa who can figuratively be regarded as a phoenix-like day-dreamer disrupts the entire patriarchal didactic system. Her habit of fireside contemplation that is symbolic of ‘sexual reverie’ leads her into subsequent sexual transgression with her lover Mr James Harthouse. When Tom speaks with his sister Louisa, the latter sits ‘in the darker corner of the fireside, now looking at him, now looking at the bright sparks as they dropped upon the hearth’ (*HT*, 58). Martin Danahay links Louisa’s sexual imagination to fire, arguing that fire provokes ‘the plot of Louisa’s temptation by Harthouse, and her own almost literal “fall” as she edges closer and closer to infidelity’.<sup>27</sup> According to conventional nineteenth-century views on domesticity, women are brought up to live like ‘goddesses of the hearth’.<sup>28</sup> The space Louisa occupies, however, violates the ‘hearth’ convention as a place of moral dedication. Her position challenges Victorian binarisms of space such as insideness (domestic devotion) and outsideness (sexual transgression). By sitting and

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<sup>26</sup> Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, *Victorian Heroines: Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art* (New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 15

<sup>27</sup> Martin A. Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), p. 70.

<sup>28</sup> Auerbach, p. 15.

watching the fire in her father's house, Louisa symbolically sits before 'Hell':<sup>29</sup> the centre of passion and subversion. Unlike, Miss Havisham, Louisa does not die in the novel; fire does not literally consume her body but through contemplation she is changed, proving the faultiness of her father's partisan educational system. Miss Havisham, however, becomes far more transgressive by using the hearth space in her house as an altar of sacrifice. She burns herself in the very place where she and her departed husband-to-be, Mr. Compeyson, might have shared a happy wedded life.

Richard Gough argues that burning also takes place 'inside' the one contemplating fire; 'fire has to be inside'.<sup>30</sup> This insideness, as seen in Miss Havisham's tragic end, signifies not only the internalisation of pain but also the 'death-drive', which is defined by Robert Rowland Smith as the 'desire to return to a state of inertia, that wish on the part of the organic to become inorganic',<sup>31</sup> a drive that explains Miss Havisham's transformation into a disembodied construction of fire and smoke during self-immolation. The hearth in Poe's stories similarly stands for anomalous force of death. Whilst the hearth represents a space of sexual transgression and 'destruction' in Miss Havisham's and Louisa's cases,<sup>32</sup> it evolves as the supernatural dynamism of death as typified in Poe's 'Metzengerstein' and 'Hop-Frog' or a form of deadly domestic violence as exemplified in 'The Black Cat' and Poe's detective stories. The death-drive via fire in the latter stories, however, reveals a solid connection between female corpses or letters and fireplaces or chimneys. The Queen's epistle in 'The Purloined Letter' was found hanging

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<sup>29</sup> Danahay argues that the description of the red flames in the scene where Louisa sits before the hearth provokes imagery of 'Hell', p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Gough, 'Burning Bodies: Transformation and Fire', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 18: 1 (2013), 9-23 (p. 23).

<sup>31</sup> Robert Rowland Smith, *Death-Drive: Freudian Hauntings in Literature and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Thornton, p. 94.



over the fireplace or what Kay Stockholder calls the Queen's 'cloaca';<sup>33</sup> the mutilated bodies of Madame L'Esplanaye and her daughter in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841) are jammed up the chimney in their dwelling; the narrator's wife in 'The Black Cat' is inserted and walled up in the fireplace; and lastly, Baron Frederick Metzengerstein dashes with the magical fiery horse representing his mother's body into the domestic space of his blazing castle. The interrelation between dead female bodies in these texts and fireplaces creates a counter-narrative to the internal hearth as peaceful, homely and ordered. Poe does not only link the fireplace to 'the maternal body',<sup>34</sup> but also produces a disturbing image of the homely hearth as *unheimlich*, erotic and subversive. The insane narrator in 'The Black Cat' murders his wife when she tries to stop him killing their pet – the black cat – and in his constant attempts to conceal the body, he goes to the cellar and finds out that:

in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the red of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect anything suspicious.<sup>35</sup>

That Poe connects sexual desire, death and fireplaces is evident in the association of conflagration, wife and cat. The latter two turn into obsessive desires in the narrator's mind: after killing the cat Pluto, the narrator kills his wife as a phantasmagoric extension of that desire. The cat and wife symbolically stand as duplicates of each other; whereas the cat's killing brings to light the narrator's fear of blackness, witchcraft and internal horror, the wife's murder underlines this irrational fear via its association with the cat, which is traditionally depicted as a witch's

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<sup>33</sup> Kay Stockholder, 'Is Anybody at Home in the Text? Psychoanalysis and the Question of Poe', *American Imago*, 57: 3 (2000), 299-334 (p. 312).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328.

<sup>35</sup> Poe, 'The Black Cat', in *The Complete Tales*, pp. 531-539 (p. 536). Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text as 'BC' followed by page number.

familiar. Whilst Allan Smith argues that the cat and wife are “allusion[s]” to the abominable necromantic female figure,<sup>36</sup> Christopher Benfey believes that Poe is more interested in the mind-reading of cats.<sup>37</sup> Whilst Benfey denies any relationship between cat and wife, Freud argues that cats are ‘genital symbols in mythology and folklore’.<sup>38</sup> Whereas I do not go as far as Freud, I disagree with Benfey based on the fact that the repetitive act of killing or obsessive chase of pleasure is embodied in the cat and wife: both represent sexual desire and subversive femininity. The most compelling issue at hand, however, is how fire reveals itself as the body of desire within the narrator’s act of murdering his wife and cat. The text is full of conflagrant imagery: ‘fireplace’ suggesting death by fire, ‘chimney’ implying smoke and the aftermath of immolation and ‘red’, which is the colour of fire, signifying erotic desire. My interest, then, is not so much whether the cat could be associated with the wife or not; it is rather in the fact that the desire to kill both is manifested in the fire reverie of the delusional narrator. The fireplace is a space that represents the narrator’s symbolic act of sexually annihilating the cat, and thus wife. The fireplace affirms the sexual dimension of the murder through the implication that the narrator is keen on the eradication and concealment of an ‘intimacy intolerable’ on the part of cat and wife.<sup>39</sup> The cat is at times unbearably close to the narrator, and so is the wife by presumption. Such intimacy or desire is implied through the unfathomable burning of the narrator’s house after the cat’s (named Pluto) and wife’s death and burial in the fireside.

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<sup>36</sup> Allan Smith, ‘The Psychological Context of Three Tales by Poe’, *Journal of American Studies*, 7: 3 (1973), 279-292 (p. 280).

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Benfey, ‘Poe and the Unbearable: “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”’, in *New Essays on Poe’s Major Tales*, ed., Kenneth Silverman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 27-45 (pp. 39-40).

<sup>38</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (London: George Allan & Unwin, 1954), p. 357.

<sup>39</sup> Benfey, p. 41.

What John Bryant calls the ‘hint at sexual aggression’ within the hearth space where the wife’s body is hidden,<sup>40</sup> a transgression that is reminiscent of Miss Havisham’s suicidal act of self-immolation, gives a feminine virginal meaning to the fireplace. It is in this place that primary sexual desire is fully revealed and patriarchy undermined, and this revelation is made manifest through fire. The narrator’s arousal ‘from sleep by the cry of fire’ (‘BC’, 533) that devours his house and his later desire to cut up his wife’s corpse and destroy it ‘by fire’ (‘BC’, 536) expose his frailty throughout the story. The wife’s death is portrayed as an act of ‘sexual love’. Edward Davidson portrays lust and death as a ‘bridal’ or virginal woman lying ‘on the wedding bed or funeral bier’, an image that is symbolic of the double dimension of sex (bed) and death (bier) in the wife’s murder.<sup>41</sup> The wife’s disappearance in the fireplace problematises the presence of masculinity and causes what Barbara Creed calls ‘phallic panic’.<sup>42</sup> The husband is arrested by the police, and whereas his body moves into absence, his wife’s body becomes present more than anything in the text. The metaphoric bed of the fireplace develops awareness of desire and absence; the bridal and the fatal fully merge together as one, as do love and death. The ‘intolerable intimacy’ of the cat and wife takes place in the cellar where the fireside is kept. The fact that the cat and wife are intolerably close to the narrator in the place where they are killed and buried, i.e. fireside, signifies the unity of the desire to love and passion to kill. Not only is desire spatially explained within the territories of the fireside, but also the mysterious conjugal relations between the narrator and his wife. Poe does not dwell on detailed description of the narrator’s communication with his wife, but by means of firesides we come to know the

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<sup>40</sup> John Bryant, ‘Poe’s Ape of UnReason: Humor, Ritual, and Culture’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 51: 1 (1996), 16-52 (p. 35).

<sup>41</sup> Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Massachusetts, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 109-111.

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. xvi.

nature of this domestic correspondence even though fire itself brings about the ultimate death of communication in the household. James Gargano points out that the sudden breakout of fire in the narrator's house after the killing of Pluto is 'absurd'; the absurdity of the domestic fire and the desire to burn or entomb the wife's corpse later in the story, however, demonstrate the narrator's guilt.<sup>43</sup> The narrator is a victim of his own desires and the fireside where he buries his wife's corpse, a space which also symbolises the wife's powerful silent desire. It is true that we do not hear the wife in the text but she acts through her silence by being the corpse that resists concealment. The voices that come from the fireside function as a reminder of feminine presence, bearing in mind the fact that the wife is actually dead. At the end of the story, Poe juxtaposes the husband's silence and the wife's speech: the husband 'sunk into silence' until he 'was answered by a voice from within the tomb' ('BC', 538). It is true that the husband's unconscious brings the wife to life by alerting the police to the place where she is concealed, thus bringing destruction upon himself. Yet the wife's bodily performativity within the fireside spurs the police into action and gives her a powerful position against her oppressor. She does, though, fall prey to a masculine discourse of irrational monstrosity represented in his attempt to keep away desire that becomes miscarried in conjugal communication and finally terminated by absurd fire.

The absurdity of conflagration in Poe's and Dickens's texts arguably emanates from a supernatural connection between women and fire. In these texts, absurdity is associated with desire that is embodied in the return of fire in the very space that represents the birth and death of repression: the fireplace. The narrator, like Pip who tries to put out the fire by throwing coats on

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<sup>43</sup> James W. Gargano, "'The Black Cat': Perverseness Reconsidered', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Poe's Tales: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. William L. Howarth (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 87-94 (p. 88, 92).

Miss Havisham's blazing body while 'she shrieked and tried to free herself' (*GE*, 380), struggles to control the fire and contain its symbolic sexual violence. In both texts, fire is described as 'wild', and in relation to this, I consider the fireplace as a domestic space that resists domesticity; it is wild and alien, and it subverts the masculine desire to control and contain. Whilst Pip burns himself badly trying to rescue Miss Havisham's body, the narrator in 'The Black Cat' loses control over his crime, as the fireplace unfolds a 'greatly decayed and clotted [corpse] with gore', that is described as standing 'erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with *red* extended mouth and solitary *eye of fire*, sat the hideous beast' ('BC', 538, my emphasis). The murder is out; the body unexpectedly rises like a phoenix out of the ashes. The description of the state of the found corpse affirms the link between fire and the impossibility of domestication. The cat with the 'solitary eye of fire' stands on the wife's head as a symbol of defiance to order. The cat and wife are represented as powers of outsideness that escape the masculine laws of domestication, which is actualised in the fact that the house catches fire. Poe deconstructs the image of masculinity by focusing on the destructive nature of fire within the household and the Gothic space of firesides, thus positioning himself as a writer of fire.

The affinity of women and flames in Poe's texts attests to the fact that Poe is a writer of fire, thus complicating Bachelard's argument that Poe is a poet of water. Bachelard even contradicts himself by categorising Poe as the author of watery imagination in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*<sup>44</sup> and later as a writer upon 'the Mountain of Fire's Summit' in *Fragments of a Poetics of Fire*.<sup>45</sup> In the former book, Bachelard classifies Poe as watery based on a subjective reading of 'The Fall of the House of Usher'. It is true that the tarn in front of the house haunts its external structure

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<sup>44</sup> Bachelard *The Psychoanalysis*, p. 91.

<sup>45</sup> Bachelard, *Fragments of a Poetics of Fire*, ed. Suzanne Bachelard, trans. Kenneth Haltman (Dallas: The Dallas Institute Publications, 1990), p. 94

and gives a chilling watery image of its premises but the story ends with a powerful ‘wild light’, ‘unusual gleam’ and ‘radiance’ that accompanies the return of the dead-alive Madeline Usher from her basement tomb and brings the House of Usher to a disastrous end: the walls go asunder and the house falls fragmented in the dark tarn.<sup>46</sup> The fall of the house, according to Gavin Jones, is associated with ‘New York City’s great fire of 1835, which was identified as one of the causes of the subsequent economic downturn’.<sup>47</sup> This is a possible source of Poe’s interest in fire as much as the great fire of London in 1666 and the great fire of Newcastle and Gateshead in 1854 are for Dickens.<sup>48</sup> More interestingly, however, is the textual development of fire as a symbol of sexual desire, wild passion, revenge, transgression and purity in both writers, making their literary works intersect at every turn.

Dickens’s use of Miss Havisham as a figure of transgressive passion and revenge through her death by fire links up with Poe’s use of fire as a mode of revenge and sacrifice. In Poe’s ‘Hop-Frog’ for example, Trippetta, a young girl taken captive with a dwarf called ‘Hop-Frog’, is insulted by the King and his council when she tries to defend the dwarf. ‘Hop-Frog’, knowing the king and his councillors to be extreme fun-lovers and jesters, prepares for a festive ‘fiery revenge’ in which he burned the King and his seven councillors and left their corpses swinging ‘in their chains, a fetid, blackened, hideous, and indistinguishable mass’.<sup>49</sup> Trippetta, in response to the King’s emotional and social insult, does not burn herself but, not unlike Miss Havisham, she symbolically turns into the luminous revengeful spirit who ‘ascends even higher [...] she is

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<sup>46</sup> Poe, ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’, in *The Complete Tales*, pp. 299-314 (p. 313).

<sup>47</sup> Gavin Jones, ‘Poor Poe: On the Literature of Revulsion’, *American Literary History*, 23: 1 (2011), 1-18 (p. 4). For detailed information on New York Great Fire 1835, see Duncan Faherty, *Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity 1776-1858* (New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007), p. 116.

<sup>48</sup> The Great Fire of London lasted for three days, consumed thousands of houses and many churches and killed a few citizens even though the death toll is still unknown, whereas the Great Fire of Newcastle and Gateshead tragically destroyed a large amount of estate in the north and east of England, killing also 53 and injuring hundreds. Dickens’s description of the conflagrations in *Barnaby Rudge* is perhaps associated with these great fires.

<sup>49</sup> Poe, ‘Hop-Frog’, in *The Complete Tales*, pp. 772-780 (p. 779).

Beauty, now'.<sup>50</sup> The mode of revenge used by 'Hop-Frog' against the King's insult manifests again the association of passionate women, death by fire and domestic subversion. Death in 'Metzengerstein', however, is even more communicative of the transgressive erotic female body, as it costs Frederick Metzengerstein his life. This transgression, moreover, does not only signify female subjectivity but also textual transformation. By means of fire, the female body moves into a stage of ethereality, sexual inaccessibility and rhetorical disembodiment that is immune to masculine forms of dictation. Through burning, the female body goes through a process of spiritualisation in which text/body becomes pure smoke. The production of smoke points to a new connection between fire and textual purity in which burning women turn into virginal, insurmountable linguistic sites in the texts of Dickens and Poe.

The House of Usher in Poe and Satis House in Dickens are structural and textual duplicates. They seem deserted and bleak with horrifying ugly topographies, and their fall is similarly caused by the heat of natural light or radiance and fire. Both houses are even occupied by women who are represented as 'inferior, diseased and dangerous', according to nineteenth-century medical discourses on the evil, consumptive female body.<sup>51</sup> Madeline Usher and Miss Havisham are portrayed as the other, diseased, wild and menacing female figures because of their uncontrollable sexuality. Madeline's sexual 'release' or return from the tomb causes the destruction of the mansion,<sup>52</sup> whereas Miss Havisham's passion leads to her self-immolation and Pip's serious injuries. The houses reflect on the textual tapestries of Dickens's and Poe's narratives and the female occupants who are tarred with the brush of disease. Some might argue

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<sup>50</sup> Bryant, p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> Aspasia Stephanou, 'Lovely Apparitions and Spiritualized Corpses: Consumptions, Medical Discourse, and Edgar Allan Poe's Female Vampire', *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 14: 1 (2013), 36-54 (p. 51).

<sup>52</sup> Jon Stratton, *The Virgin Text: Fiction, Sexuality, and Ideology* (Norman, London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 27. D. H. Lawrence reads Poe's story as a 'love' story where Madeline's 'vibrations' and unconscious 'ecstasy' lead to her own annihilation and the ruination of the Usher's edifice. See Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Martin Secker, 1933), p. 84.

that the female occupants themselves become texts within texts: diseased women within infirm sullied houses. Yet the representation of women as ‘diseased’ or impure is problematised in Dickens’s and Poe’s narratives. Both texts deconstruct the labelling of women as impure by employing fire as a manifestation of women’s textual purity. Even though both writers communicate the image of nineteenth-century women as inferior or contaminated, they assert that women’s death by fire amounts to a pure linguistic form that points up the infirmity of patriarchal structures. In Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’, the Queen’s private letter which is representative of her body is found ‘much soiled’, ‘crumbled’ and ‘torn nearly in two, across the middle’.<sup>53</sup> The body of Madame L’Espanaye in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ is, likewise, ‘torn nearly in two’ like a dirty letter. It is also in ‘The Mystery of Marie Rogêt’ that ‘the violated maternal body receives its fullest representation in the description of the camouflaged letter’, as suggested by Stockholder.<sup>54</sup> Poe’s three detective stories show how the violence or physical damage discharged on female bodies or letters points to the nineteenth-century perpetuation of women as hysteric or ill within medical discourses. Miss Havisham’s frustration as a bride, an emotional state that led to her mania and that also echoes the mental condition of Poe’s women within a nineteenth-century context, is communicated in a deceptive letter she receives from her fiancé in which he renounces their wedding. Miss Havisham, in a last act of revenge, burns all the letters she possesses. The burning of the letters is not evident in the novel, but it is one of the most remarkable incidents in the latest BBC adaptation of *Great Expectations* (2011).<sup>55</sup> Burning letters causes the fire to spread and catch Miss Havisham’s yellowish dress, which is textually symbolic of decayed yellow paper, cleansing herself of masculine discourses

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<sup>53</sup> Poe, ‘The Purloined Letter’, in *The Complete Tales*, pp. 598-613 (p. 610).

<sup>54</sup> Stockholder, p. 328.

<sup>55</sup> ‘The arrival of Magwitch threatens everything that Pip holds dear’, episode 3, *Great Expectations*, dir. Brian Kirk (BBC Company, 2011), 29 December, 2011.



and nineteenth-century medical representations. Fire in these texts is a formidable purifier, and death by fire stands as an absolute return to pure femininity.

Fire, argues Bachelard, is ‘*all-purifying*’ because it possesses the power of ‘*deodorization*’; it ‘separates [nauseous] substances and destroys material impurities’.<sup>56</sup> What remains after a selfless act of self-immolation – selfless as one voluntarily gives oneself away to consuming fires – is a heap of ashes that signifies the transformation of the female body, the disappearance of all impurities attached to that body by other masculine or social discourses and the birth of a ‘dematerialized [...] pure spirit’.<sup>57</sup> Meltzer, in her study of bodies and flames that takes Bachelard’s works on fire and psychoanalysis as a basic theoretical background, argues that the dialectics of purity and impurity constitute the double-edged symbolic meaning of fire: ‘impurity because it is sexualized [...] purity because it silences nauseous smells’.<sup>58</sup> Despite the implications of impurity in the figuratively sexualised act of women’s self-immolation, fire entertains an unearthly sublimity of meaning and turns out to be a pure power of transcendental destination, a mysterious invisible force that elevates the female self/soul to unknown higher spheres which lie beyond the grasp of physical suppression and linguistic control. What remains of a ‘fire withdrawn’, as Derrida calls it,<sup>59</sup> is ashes in which we see the tangible traces of impurities, as labelled by nineteenth-century medical discourses, and the evidence of physical reconstruction or what John Cunningham names ‘moral regeneration’.<sup>60</sup> This figurative rebirth, seen in the flight of light or the ascendancy of flames above Miss Havisham’s head, is implied in

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<sup>56</sup> Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis*, p. 103.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> Meltzer, p. 182.

<sup>59</sup> Derrida, *Feu la cendre*, p. 45. Cited and translated by Meltzer, p. 183.

<sup>60</sup> John Cunningham, ‘Christian Allusion, Comedic Structure, and the Metaphor of Baptism in *Great Expectations*’, *South Atlantic Review*, 59: 2 (1994), 35-51 (p. 45).

her name 'Miss Have-a-sham(e)',<sup>61</sup> a woman who discards the social language of shame attached to her name, which is represented in her yellowish dress and decayed letters, in an unusual, lustral act of self-immolation.

The act of self-immolation bears a transgressive correspondence to nineteenth-century constant demands on 'feminine purity'. Purity, states Mitchell, was both 'natural' and 'valuable', and thus extreme safeguards were taken 'to preserve it'.<sup>62</sup> This correspondence, however, does not imply the Victorian recognition of fire and immolation as a viable form of purification. Death and purification by fire does necessarily expose the infirmity of moral codes of the Victorian society: fire purification or 'baptism' reveals the impurity of moral laws. Transgressive fire communicates the harsh, inner processes of the social system and its understanding and treatment of feminine purity or chastity. Flames seem not only to signify a transgressive mode of death that cleanses and necessarily transfers the female body to a virginal state of being, but also to reveal anxieties about cultural malaise and social misfortunes within nineteenth-century Anglo-American contexts.<sup>63</sup> The fact that a woman's purity might require death makes self-immolation a subversive mode of becoming or empowerment, leading also to the degrading downfall or unbecoming of social laws. Fire brings awareness of social injustice and the imperfection of moral conventions. Through fire, the Victorians become morally aware of the painful experience of women such as Miss Havisham, who on the other hand enjoys the position of a pure text. Bachelard states that the cleansing flame 'is a becoming-being, a being-becoming';<sup>64</sup> within the process of burning, Miss Havisham moves from being into becoming. Towards the end of *Great*

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<sup>61</sup> Joseph A. Hynes, 'Image and Symbol in *Great Expectations*', *ELH*, 30: 3 (1963), 258-292 (p. 259).

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell, 'Introduction', pp. x-xii.

<sup>63</sup> I use 'cleanse' to refer to the emancipation of female bodies from the enslaving social and medical discourses of nineteenth-century Anglo-American cultures.

<sup>64</sup> Bachelard, *The Flame*, p. 24.

*Expectations*, we see her in a fresh, unbounded textual form. Whilst trying to extinguish her blazing body, Pip narrates:

I knew nothing until I knew that we were on the floor by the great table, and that patches of tinder yet alight were floating in the *smoky* air, which a moment ago had been her faded bridal dress.

(GE, 380-81, My emphasis)

Pip's description affirms the textual transcendence of Miss Havisham whose baptism in fire transforms her body into light, into 'patches of tinder yet alight', floating around and kindling the room. Dickens's use of fire and light imagery in describing the post-immolated body of Miss Havisham, which borrows from 'the ancient Christian iconography that associates light with baptism',<sup>65</sup> reveals not only moral and psychological changes in the characters of Miss Havisham and Pip but also physical ones pertaining to the former. The 'patches of tinder' signify the rebirth of Miss Havisham into a pristine corporeal construction and new textual representation that challenges the moral indoctrination of Victorian patriarchy. Prior to her death by fire, Miss Havisham 'entered that ever-evolving textual space' of Victorian culture through certain material identifications which are pertinent to her yellowed, 'faded bridal dress'.<sup>66</sup> The coalescence of factors such as old age and the bridal dress that is still virginal yet yellowish and shroud-like presents Miss Havisham as an exception to the nineteenth-century's emphasis on physical beauty and flawless behaviour within the domestic sphere. The element of fire in the text, however, eliminates the grotesqueness of Miss Havisham's body and transmutes her into 'smoky' air; she textually evaporates into ungraspable, unadulterated air: she becomes smoke which is a pure text.

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<sup>65</sup> Cunningham, p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> Thornton, p. 79.

The new state represented by the metamorphosed Miss Havisham emphasises the quality of smoke that endows her textual presence with unorthodox, incorporeal values: she is the spiritualised smoke of the novel. Fire liberates Miss Havisham in body and text, and according to Thornton, she is textually purged from ‘the pages of these urban novels of manners which practice a quite extraordinary violence towards women’.<sup>67</sup> This textual purgation transpires in pure smoke that ascends from the burned body and disperses into nothingness, blankness or an irreproachable stage of being. It is true that the ‘logic of fire’ dictates the law of purification in Miss Havisham’s death<sup>68</sup> but it is also the logic of smoke that ultimately expresses the meaning of ethereality in the text. The withdrawal of fire leaves nothing but threads of smoke that register an evolving meaning of female sexuality or the subversive desire of Miss Havisham’s burning body, to be more specific. In *Hard Times*, Danahay associates smoke with ‘sexual transgression’,<sup>69</sup> which is also applicable to Miss Havisham’s transgressive self-immolation. The smoke suggests a long period of sexual frustration and social repression represented in an apocalyptic act of burning and leading to the annihilation of body, desire and communication. Not unlike fire, the logic of smoke determines the dialectics of power or the being-becoming of burning women in the text. The white smoke that ascends from Miss Havisham’s yellowed dress and epistolary correspondence positions her in a powerful position where she escapes, defies patriarchal textual/sexual dictations and becomes pure, unreachable spirit. Karl Marx states that ‘all that is solid melts into thin air’,<sup>70</sup> and with Miss Havisham’s body vanishing into ‘smoky air’, desire as defined by Victorian masculine laws is challenged: smoke deconstructs the

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<sup>67</sup> Thornton, p. 82.

<sup>68</sup> Lucy Frost, ‘Taming to Improve: Dickens and the Women in *Great Expectations*’, in *New Casebook – Great Expectations*, ed. Roger D. Sell (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 77, also cited in Thornton, p. 96.

<sup>69</sup> Danahay, p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, New York: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 70.

Victorian ideal of beauty. Miss Havisham's physical change from solidity to fluidity is a refutation of gender paradigms and certain expectations of models of femininity. That Miss Havisham turns into smoke, thus constituting a departure from Gough's suggestion that 'there is no smoke for those who burn',<sup>71</sup> problematises the Victorian persistence on quintessential beauty and domesticity by being the means of her own end. Smoke takes Miss Havisham back to a stage of ethereality that positions her beyond the grasp of patriarchal voices.

The last thing we see of Miss Havisham and her letters is the light that illuminates the room and cleanses the pages in Dickens's text before it gives way to 'smoky air', a process that implies a call for the reconfiguration of women's roles. If firelight in the novel 'signals truth or reality',<sup>72</sup> smoke subverts the patriarchal constructions of gender roles. Smoke is a metonymy of Miss Havisham's cataclysmic death, which not only shrouds her in a mist of spirituality but also problematises the masculine presence and social relations later in the novel. Pip, for instance, cannot 'get rid of the impression of the glare of flames, their hurry and noise, and the fierce burning smell'. Whenever he tries to sleep, he is awakened by the smell of Miss Havisham's smoke that symbolises her rage and 'cries' (*GE*, 383). Even though the smoke that flows out from Miss Havisham's body metaphorically beclouds the readers' vision to what lies beyond, it functions as a moment of revelation because it shows her relatives to be mere hypocrites who hope for a substantial inheritance after her death. In the novel, Miss Havisham is normally surrounded by her relatives whose feelings towards her are best manifested after the smoke is figuratively cleared. With the recession of smoke, however, we see authentic moral life in the novel where most characters change under different circumstances. Despite the fact that smoke amounts to the highest form of textual purity, it lingers in the air as an alarming signal for what

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<sup>71</sup> Gough, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Hynes, p. 286.

Linda Raphael classifies as ‘cruel mothers, stepmothers, and witch-like figures’ whose internal desire leaves the scene with a smouldering atmosphere.<sup>73</sup> Miss Havisham fits the previous categories, but her purgation and the presence of smoke during self-immolation invoke defiance of patriarchy and sympathy for her repressed desire that was never satisfied but in fire.

A similar image of the lingering, smouldering smoke in Dickens’s text can also be seen in the concluding action and words of Poe’s ‘Metzengerstein’. During the conflagration of the Baron’s castle, wild flames envelope the whole property and imperceptibly merge into a ball of white smoke in the shape of ‘*a horse*’:

A white flame still enveloped the building like a shroud, and, streaming far away into the quiet atmosphere, shot forth a glare of preternatural light; while a cloud of smoke settled heavily over the battlements in the distinct colossal figure of — *a horse*.<sup>74</sup>

‘Metzengerstein’ was first published in Philadelphia’s *Saturday Courier* magazine in 1832, and in that version of the story, two paragraphs were deleted: ‘one detailing Frederick’s mother’s death from consumption’, which is very significant to my argument, ‘the other, at the end of the tale, noting the disappearance of the name Metzengerstein from the Hungarian aristocracy’.<sup>75</sup> The first narrative is pertinent to my interest in a discourse that links flames, the fiery horse, the Baron’s mother, sexual desire and female prerogative. I will not, however, go as far to suggest an incestuous reading of the act of horse-riding and mother-son relationship as Marie Bonaparte did in her psychoanalytic reading of Poe’s story. Bonaparte argues that ‘the son’s incestuous union with the mother’ is obvious in the unconscious, insane rush of the Baron with the horse towards the all-consuming flames. Fire, which represents a magnetic power that pulls the rider into its

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<sup>73</sup> Linda Raphael, ‘A Re-Vision of Miss Havisham: Her Expectations and Our Responses’, in *New Casebooks – Great Expectations*, pp. 218, 220, quoted in Thornton, p. 85.

<sup>74</sup> Poe, ‘Metzengerstein’, in *The Complete Tales*, pp. 113-120 (p. 119); emphasis on ‘*a horse*’ is in original.

<sup>75</sup> Benjamin F. Fisher, ‘Poe’s “Metzengerstein”’: Not a Hoax’, *American Literature*, 42: 4 (1971), 487-494 (p. 493).

centre, 'is the classic symbol of urethral eroticism'.<sup>76</sup> The sexual meaning of Frederick's riding through the flames does not lie in an 'incestuous' unification with the mother, but in the son's asexualised return to the mother's blazing body, to pure language, textuality or smoke. That the fiery horse and the burning castle stand as symbols of the maternal body is logically valid, which might allow for various sexual interpretations such as Bonaparte's. Yet, in desexualising the son's return to the maternal body, which is communicated through the mad riding of the fiery horse, whose shape is assumed by the smoke at the end of the tragic story, I see the female body take on an ethereality, beauty and purity that – like Miss Havisham's – flees the grasp of material or textual social representation.

Lady Mary, the Baron's mother, dies in 'the hey-day of young blood – the heart of passion – the imagination all fire – amid the remembrances of happier days'.<sup>77</sup> Poe's description of Mary's death illustrates the contrast he draws between the passionate mother and cold son who is later driven into the purifying flames. Given the story's eastern European background (Hungary), the paramount presence of imagery of passion or fire, which Poe represents hyperbolically, is rooted in the 'sensuality, terror, idyllic pleasure [and] intense energy' that, according to Edward Said, characterises nineteenth-century perceptions of oriental cultures.<sup>78</sup> The death of the Hungarian mother in the prime of life and sensuality imbues the story with intense pleasure and loss. The unanticipated disappearance of the young mother creates a fissure in the erotic fabric of Poe's

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Mario Praz, 'Poe and Psychoanalysis (1933)', *The Sewanee Review*, 68: 3 (1960), 375-389 (p. 384).

<sup>77</sup> Travis Montgomery, 'Poe's Oriental Gothic: 'Metzengerstein' (1832), 'The Visionary' (1834), the Imagination, and Authorship's Perils', *Gothic Studies*, 12: 2 (2010), 4-28 (p. 8).

<sup>78</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1994), p. 118. I am grateful to Montgomery for his intriguing article on the Oriental Poe; an article that unpacks the oriental elements in Poe's fiction, especially in 'Metzengerstein', p. 10. The oriental presence in the story can also be traced in the symbolic act of horse-riding through flames as a purgation process. Gough reminds us of Las Luminarias de San Anton festival of San Bartolome de Pinares, held annually on the sixteenth of January in honour of Saint Anthony the patron saint of Animals, and in which stallions are ridden through burning pyres or bonfires. This 'frenzied and maniacal event' or ritual is believed to have a 'purifying significance', pp. 18-19.

*bildungsroman* – a space that is sought to be fulfilled. Carolyn Dever argues that maternal loss leaves a ‘space of sexual desire’.<sup>79</sup> This argument is significant when paralleled with the vanishing horse and its representation of ‘absence’,<sup>80</sup> passion or repression. Both horse and mother, symbols of loss, immateriality and unrestrained imagination, vanish from Poe’s text; the mother even disappears earlier as a result of his revision of the story. No wonder Poe deliberately changes the folkloric water-horse into ‘fire-horse’, as the latter becomes more suited to the symbolic representation of absent desires. The ‘fire-horse’ typifies the mother’s absent, passionate body, whose return, argues Grace Smith, is connected with the return of the spirits of the dead.<sup>81</sup> Fire destroys everything, but the mother’s return as smoke in the shape of ‘a horse’ that lingers over the battlements of Metzengerstein stands as the most ideal and purest meaning of the whole narrative. Whilst Miss Havisham’s smoking body ascends and allows the reader to see through the subsequent moral changes in the novel, the horse-like smoke of the metaphoric mother’s burning body in Poe’s story blocks our vision to what lies beyond, as this smoke is meant to be the final, quintessential image of linguistic sublimity.

The last image of the horse-like cloud of smoke is, to conclude, the most striking and controlling picture in the text, because it is in this spectral structure of ethereality and textual purity that the mother’s space is represented post-conflagration. The figurative withdrawal of desire or passion into smoke, which Meltzer categorises as ‘feminine because it *veils*’,<sup>82</sup> hinders our journey throughout the text and leaves us with the most perfect picture of retracting fires –

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<sup>79</sup> Carolyn Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 30.

<sup>80</sup> Grace P. Smith, ‘Poe’s Metzengerstein’, *Modern Language Notes*, 48: 6 (1933), 356-359 (p. 358).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>82</sup> Meltzer, p. 179.



Pure Mary.<sup>83</sup> The Baron's mother's name, Mary, is suggestive of a pure body of language which manifests what Hegel terms the 'spirit of the flame' and the transcendent inaccessible *fumée* of the text.<sup>84</sup> Before the final act of conflagration, which is smoke, Mary or her representative, the horse, is 'shot forth' like 'a glare of preternatural light' that flees the contours of linguistic representation and masculine gender classifications. The mother or horse rises to the top of the decayed castle, which is symbolic of Baron Metzengerstein's body/text, and finally becomes phenomenal smoke and a spiritual form of being. Even though the maternal bodies of Mary and Miss Havisham in Poe's and Dickens's texts are painfully consumed in the purifying fires they subsume what is 'beautiful, pure and spiritual'. 'Romantic passion',<sup>85</sup> which is a significant literary characteristic of Poe's and Dickens's women, turns into ethereal beauty and discursive eminence. The disappearance on the part of Mary does not suggest lack in its literal sense but the denial of masculine structures, which is represented in the destruction of the Baron's castle and the ascendance of smoke, symbolising the transcendence of feminine discourse over the masculine. At the end of a classic fiery scene in Dickens's and Poe's texts, we see nothing but what the painter in the latter's 'The Oval Portrait' (1842) sees: 'the spirit of the lady' whose spiritual presence flickers up 'within the socket of the lamp',<sup>86</sup> the centre of the portrait or the heart of the text.

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<sup>83</sup> The Virgin Mary is represented in Christian discourses and iconography as the purest woman who ever lived. The celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 by the Catholic Church asserts that Mary's conception was sinless. Poe's choice of Mary as a name for the Baron's mother draws on this religious discourse, thus inviting comparisons to the Virgin Mary.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Meltzer, p. 184. *La fumée* in French means smoke, and I am indebted to Meltzer for pointing out the missing differentiation in the translated English text between the masculine fire (*le feu*) and the feminine smoke (*la fumée*). The word *feu* in French offers a space for wordplay, in that it does not only mean 'fire', but also 'my late mother' as in *feu ma mere*, see Meltzer's footnote, p. 184. Building on Meltzer's footnote, I argue that *feu* assumes feminised meanings of mother/*cendre*, death and fire, and thus establishes the connection between Frederick's 'late' mother, Mary, the metaphorical cinders of desire and the horse-like smoke lingering over the battlements of Metzengerstein.

<sup>85</sup> Stephanou, p. 38.

<sup>86</sup> Poe, 'The Oval Portrait', in *The Complete Tales*, pp. 435-438 (p. 437).

The immolated female bodies in Dickens's and Poe's works shed light on the complications of communication within nineteenth-century correspondence cultures. Death of communication, both physical or epistolary and verbal, becomes problematic in an ever-evolving process of textual transformation in the materialistic transatlantic culture. In the explored British and American texts, the scenes of burning women and the images of light or smoke indicate an emerging dilemma of miscommunication. Failing conversations between Miss Havisham and Pip after the act of burning, or between the narrator and his wife in Poe's "The Black Cat", emphasise a state in which meaningful communication becomes impossible. Roderick Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher" gives another example of the impossibility of perfect communication. Roderick trembles whilst he tells the narrator that 'I dared not — *I dared* not speak!'. It is only before his sister Madeline, the 'wild light',<sup>87</sup> reappears that Roderick and the House of Usher fall out of existence, discourse or the subject of communication. This fragmented textual detachment on the part of Roderick happens through Madeline's spectral return, which is associated with preternatural light or fiery gleam in the text. The transformation of women into spectral, luminous figures and/or symbolic subjects of supernatural fire and smoke does not present them as 'passive'. Departing from Jules Zanger's argument that Poe's female protagonists are 'essentially passive',<sup>88</sup> I suggest that even though Poe's women are restricted in action and generally denied access into the terrains of masculine language, their 'passivity' is accompanied by physical horror and discursive fear – metaphorically speaking – which are invoked by their corporeal change via fire and spectral return as smoke. Female active presence in Dickens and Poe acquires a supernatural significance due to its association with fire, conflagration, pure light or smoke. Joan Dayan states that Poe's women return 'no longer

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<sup>87</sup> Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', p. 313.

<sup>88</sup> Jules Zanger, 'Poe and the Theme of Forbidden Knowledge', *American Literature*, 49: 4 (1978), 533-543 (p. 535).

pure’;<sup>89</sup> however, I believe that their return in the form of fire and smoke is untainted and beautifully poetical. The pure returning of female spirits such as Mary’s, moreover, functions as a criticism of nineteenth-century cultural representation of women within domestic spheres and their exclusion from communication. Fire and spectral return stand as a pure protest against oppressive patriarchy.

It is through fire that women are not only purged from the sexual and textual suppression but also reborn into a realm of active presence where they have autonomy. The interaction of fire and writing/bodies in Dickens and Poe results in the death of communication between characters; however, it leads to the emergence of forms of female empowerment. Whilst male characters such as Poe’s Roderick Usher and Dickens’s Mr. Krook in *Bleak House* (1853) fall short of coherent communication with the surrounding world, the latter being paradoxically obsessive with keeping documents in his rag-and-bottle shop although he is illiterate, self-immolated women continue to influence the narrative’s plot. Roderick drowns in the light that swallows his house; and Krook dies of combustion that eats up his body, documents and figuratively his voice. In these examples, fire terminates patriarchal speech or writing; on the other hand, it repositions the feminine word/body on a powerful stage that Bachelard calls ‘nothingness, a painful nothingness, the nothingness of writing’,<sup>90</sup> or what I term the suspension of textual dissemination, in which women’s voices become detached from and more resonant than patriarchal discourses.

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<sup>89</sup> Joan Dayan, ‘Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves’, *American Literature*, 66: 2 (1994), 239-273 (p. 240).

<sup>90</sup> Bachelard, *Flame of a Candle*, p. 76.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

And as the smart ship grew  
 In stature, grace, and hue,  
 In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

(Thomas Hardy, 'The Convergence of the Twain', 1915)<sup>1</sup>

Hardy expresses a deep-seated feeling of melancholy and loss for the catastrophic shipwreck of the Titanic in the middle of the Atlantic waters in 1912, an accident that caused the 'deaths of 1,513 passengers, two acquaintances [of Hardy] among them'.<sup>2</sup> Hardy's lament for this disaster takes the form of 'anti-elegiac detachment',<sup>3</sup> dealing with the pain of loss through the ironic description of the incident. Simply speaking, we do not see Hardy's tears between the lines; instead, we mark 'a grim humor' in depicting the painful accident. This humour, argues Jahan Ramazani, focuses on the two ships; the "'smart ship" [and] her "sinister mate"', being in 'sexual union':<sup>4</sup> 'Till the Spinner of the Years/ Said "Now!" And each one hears,/ And consummation [communication] comes, and jars two hemispheres' (II. 31-33). In contrast to Ramazani's vision of a passionate mating of ships in the Atlantic, I read this failed unity in terms of thwarted transatlantic communication and/or relationships. In alluding to 'silent distance' and the jarring of 'two hemispheres' in the above quotation, Hardy uses sexual imagery to highlight the relationship between Britain and America. The failure of desire in distance highlights an emerging discourse of miscommunication that developed drastically towards the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy, 'The Convergence of the Twain (*Lines on the loss of the "Titanic"*)', in *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy* (Hertfordshire: The Wordsworth Editions, 1994), pp. 288-290 (p. 289), II. 22-24.

<sup>2</sup> See Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

nineteenth century, the Edwardian era (1901-1910) and the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918). Yet this failure also emphasises a pivotal moment in the history of Anglo-American relationships; a history dominated by a cycle of failure and reunion, death and rebirth.

Within the historical and literary context of transatlantic correspondence, this thesis has tackled four nineteenth-century modes of communication: mesmerism and spiritualism (psychic) and telegrams and letters (material). Throughout the thesis, I have examined these forms of communication in relation to nineteenth-century female sexuality and women's subversive power within patriarchal cultural media. During the mesmeric treatments of female patients at the hand of male physicians, I argued that magnetic therapies turn into a mediation of sexual desire. Being physically and mentally vulnerable, female patients are used as sexual objects by male magnetisers as I showed in Hawthorne's and Collins's texts in the first chapter. Female participants in mesmeric treatments, however, undermine the authority of their mesmerists and their exclusion from the equation of communication by a means of bodily performance: mesmerised women *gaze back* and challenge masculine desires. Women's subversive acts inside Victorian homes, which spiritualism in later years embodied by situating women in the centre of cultural mediation, emphasise their position on both sides of the Atlantic as more powerful mediums than men. Within the context of spiritualism in which women communicate with the dead, female séance conductors like those in Marryat's and Phelps's fiction, incorporate cultural dominance. Even though nineteenth-century patriarchy viewed women as passive and incompetent outside their domestic spheres, spiritualist practices problematised this traditional thinking by asserting that passivity, which is physically more advantageous in female mediums, is a prerequisite for powerful mediation and cultural agency. The Victorian spiritualist understanding of the female body as more receptive to external spectral effects than the male

body increased the social influence of women whose bodies turned into sites of social authority. Female mediums, for instance, used sound via table-rapping as an acoustic tool that helped their desires reach beyond the walls of drawing rooms. The sound of tables and correspondent spirits represented women's voices and constituted a significant step towards the expression of desire and the free articulation of authority.

Telegraphic and epistolary correspondence flourished in the mid-nineteenth century following the development of the already established penny post and the rapid increase of telegraph offices in both England and America. Through telegraph offices, women could access public information and participate in the secretive exchange of knowledge as I exemplified in the female telegraphist's figure in James's *In the Cage*, who is able to decode Captain Everard's and Lady Bradeen's private telegraphic erotic communication. Female letters, likewise, played an integral role in the emancipation of women's voices and desires via a destination. Erroneous delivery of female letters has an impact on women's expression of desire and the subversion of gender roles within nineteenth-century transatlantic spaces. Dickens and Poe problematise definitions of publicity and privacy in their literary texts by focusing on the misaddressed female letter and the embodied sexual meaning. In private places, however, Dickens and Poe also show how a destination via fire becomes an instrument in the hands of nineteenth-century women whose acts of self-immolation or burning private letters transfer them to another level of cultural subjectivity: they become ethereal subjects beyond the reach of masculine discourses. These modes of communication were not only pivotal in the empowerment of transatlantic women and their movement into liberated spheres within nineteenth-century culture but also integral to the development of modes of communication in subsequent centuries. Mesmerism, spiritualism, telegraphy and the epistolary mode formed the basis for women's later increasing control and use

of various forms of media. It is true that nineteenth-century modes of communication redefined gender roles and manifested women's authoritative voices, but they also reshaped the understanding of Anglo-American communicational apparatuses and relations in later centuries.

Communication in the nineteenth century is the framework upon which modern technological practices and developments pertaining to social and international correspondence are based. With the exception of the traditional epistle, nineteenth-century advances in communication rested upon incorporeality, instantaneity and geographical contraction, leading to what is called the 'global village'; all of which are fundamental to modern-day communication technology. The fact that nineteenth-century industries became involved in the invention of disembodied forms of communication that draw principally and heavily on mesmeric mediation, telegraphic or telephonic ether, and telepathic contact inspired twentieth- and twenty-first-century technologies into long-distance invisible communication. These new discoveries importantly facilitated women's agency and the concept of freedom: modern communication functioned as a vehicle that transports women both physically via geographical borders and virtually through screens or telephone handsets. By means of nineteenth-century technologies that gradually problematised the conventions of privacy and sexuality, modern communication has become more revelatory. Modern-day communication conceals nothing, a fact that challenges gender dichotomies based on internal and external discursive correspondence. Women can, to a large extent, freely communicate outside domestic spaces by using modern technologies.

Moving out of the nineteenth century, we observe significant developments in Anglo-American relationships on different levels. Economically, America suffered an unprecedented decline during the first half of the twentieth century. The Wall Street Crash in 1929, for example, not only led to a period of severe depression in America but also had far-reaching effects on

British economic and political life. Economic failures accelerated an urgency to strengthen the ties of the two Atlantic hemispheres, speeding up political affiliations between America and Western Europe. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) was founded in 1949, following the two world wars and the manic economic downfall. NATO offers an example of a growing beyond-the-sea awareness of the necessity to link globally, and globalisation thus arises as a result of multiple forms of communication that appear to be unmanageable. Writers on both sides of the Atlantic recognised the danger of a struggle for global power and the worsening of social conditions. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) give a pessimistic reading of the turbulent political and economic circumstances that pervaded the twentieth century. Both writers and others foresee a time of increasing correspondence between countries and nations, but also call into play the negative aspects of communication. The problem of ethnic integration in the American society during the 1920s, for instance, culminated in the violent practice of lynching Afro-Americans for the simple act of *speaking* to white women. The description of lynching 'as a theater of mastery' points to a white mechanism to prevent social change and more importantly bring erotic language under control.<sup>5</sup>

In the nineteenth century, various media – letters, newspapers, magazines, psychic contact, wired and wireless correspondence – formed the basis for substantial advancements in the subsequent century, but the twentieth century can be considered as a period of particularly rapid development in the history of communication and international relationships. Even though the radical prevalence of global discourses and transmission increased the dilemmas of world affairs such as wars and racism, modern modes of communication such as the radio, popular music, television, mobile phones and especially the Internet have helped women to find a way into the

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<sup>5</sup> Koritha Mitchell, *African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2011), p. 3.



public sphere. The 1929 Wall Street Crash and World War I were catalysts for certain social effects: women have increased social rights such as voting. It is, however, through modern technology, which is fundamentally grounded in nineteenth-century Anglo-American communications, that twentieth-century women occupied social positions in media and controlled the postmodern screen space.

Modern communication has increased public exposure or what Martin Heidegger calls 'world disclosure'.<sup>6</sup> Social enclosures and cultural boundaries that govern the relations between men and women dissolve with the painless possibility of women conducting free electric correspondence with the outer world, men and themselves. To be an agent in media is to de-hierarchise the demarcations of culture which is 'an instrument of inequality', according to James Watson.<sup>7</sup> Women's involvement in the developed industry of communication in the twentieth century means that they possess the powers of redefinition, informative control, persuasion and trance-like control of the beyond-the-screen audience. The privilege of overreaching the confines of domestic spaces, or what Watson terms 'a hands-around-the-globe effect',<sup>8</sup> facilitates a radical change in the position of women as 'the favourite target for mass-media messages'.<sup>9</sup> This privileging of women as the conductors of mediation reminds us of their nineteenth-century positions in the media of spiritualism and mesmerism where females are at the intersection between this world and the other, now and then, presence and absence. Despite the fact that these two nineteenth-century forms of communication were usually conducted at

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Maria Pia Lara, *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 111. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> James Watson, *Media Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Michele Mattelart, 'Women and the Cultural Industries', trans. Keith Reader, in *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Collins, James Curran, Nicholas Garnham, Paddy Scannell, Philip Schlesinger and Collin Sparks (London: SAGE Publications, 1986), pp. 63-82 (p. 63).

home, and thus restricted mediation to the space of the Victorian drawing room, the home itself posited a challenge to the binarisms of publicity and privacy, exteriority and domesticity in later twentieth-century contact forms such as radios, TVs and computers. The domestic space enables women to perform their voices, speak out their bodies and communicate them through cyberspace with a single click on the computer. Sadie Plant argues that computers ‘have the potential for dismantling patriarchal structures in society and existing gender relations’.<sup>10</sup> Home loses its conventional meaning, and patriarchy stands powerless against the cosmic widespreadness of networks hosted by the computer – the New Home.

The Victorian home, city or *polis* turns into what Christine McGourty terms the ‘global Netropolis’,<sup>11</sup> the *polis* of the net. Global networks compensate for periods of silence and suppression within nineteenth-century Anglo-American homes, thus allowing women free ‘access to the time of history, the time of planned action’.<sup>12</sup> In ‘Netropolis’, women express their feelings online without having to adhere to traditional psychological and biological discourses that have been employed to fix and subjugate them throughout the history of gender struggle. It is true that sexual expression can easily escape censorship within the vast unmanageable ‘Netropolis’ but it is also crucial to remember how erotic self-expression prevailed in various shapes in nineteenth-century networks in which female voices were challenged yet constituted the basis for significant advances in following centuries. Telegrams, for example, told stories of love, sexual scandals and blackmail especially in late-Victorian culture, a subject that attracted the pen of not only James in *In the Cage* (1898) but also the American expatriate Ernest Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926): ‘She stopped in front of us and took a telegram out of

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<sup>10</sup> Watson, p. 266.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>12</sup> Mattelart, p. 72.

the leather wallet that hung against her skirt'.<sup>13</sup> Skirts and telegrams, as fetishistic objects, could manipulate erotic feelings; however, whilst James calls this bold dissemination of desire 'vulgar',<sup>14</sup> Hemingway – a man 'becoming deeply fascinated with the lingo of the transatlantic cable'<sup>15</sup> – uses it in a loose liberal way. James and Hemingway thus represent the abrupt transformation of sexual communication from the shy nineteenth to the more candid twentieth century or from the Victopolis (Victorian City) to the 'Netropolis'. The transformation signifies a period when the voicing of sexual desires transcends traditional gender differences.

The 'Lonely Hearts' column as a feature within British newspapers dating back to 1695 is another example of how women have emerged out of traditional places into the free space of the 'Netropolis'. The corporeal advertisement through newspapers became prevalent in the nineteenth century as a form of distant erotic contact, albeit 'awkward and embarrassing'.<sup>16</sup> Advertising women and men felt constrained by the firm patriarchal structures of nineteenth-century culture, thus making most 'lonely hearts' discreet in their correspondence. In 'Netropolis', however, the proliferation of online dating websites has recast this old advertisement of desire, resulting in the disappearance of written forms of communication. The 'Netropolis' is a modern Freudian framework in which disembodied transference or communication between the sexes culminates in intimacy or sexual desire.<sup>17</sup> Within this framework, wherever there is correspondence, there is also sexual encounter and carnal

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<sup>13</sup> Earnest Hemingway, *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises* (London: Arrow Books, 2004), p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> James was concerned about establishing a reputation in the late-Victorian literary market through by excluding 'vulgarity' from his works. See Hugh Stevens, *Henry James and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 142.

<sup>15</sup> Milton A. Cohen, *Hemingway's Laboratory: The Paris in Our Time* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Fran Beauman, *Shapely Ankle Preferr'd: A History of the Lonely Hearts Ad, 1695-2010* (London: Random House, 2012), p. 112.

<sup>17</sup> Freud and Jung associate transference with psychology, hence my sexual reading of distant communication as sexual desire. See C. G. Jung, *The Psychology of the Transference* [1969] (London: Routledge, 2013).

hypnotism. The screen space of the Internet functions as a hypnotic media that can easily put cyber-individuals in a long-term trance. One might argue, in fact, that it is a psychic-surrogate for the perished nineteenth-century tradition of spirit communication. Instead of women conducting séances in Victorian closed rooms, we get the modern image of psychiatrists hypnotising through screens, or the screen itself being the hypnotising agent. A news article recently released on the Internet shows a male spirit chatting online to thousands of Internet users and claiming himself to be real; his followers exceeded seventy three thousand in just two days.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the true or false existence of the spirit, it is interesting to see how the spiritualist tradition continues today but more importantly how it screen-hypnotises the audience. People still believe in psychic transference which is enabled through contemporary disembodied technology. On the other hand, embodied communication such as love letters are no longer needed in online environments: the culture of intimate, passionate writing fades away in the excessively erotic regime of the 'Netropolis'. Spike Jonze's recent movie *Her* (2013) typifies the modern erotic 'Netropolis' by focusing on a recent divorcee, Theodore Twombly, who develops a romantic relationship – sometimes involving sexual acts – with his computer's female disembodied but vividly 'alive' operating system.<sup>19</sup>

With the dawn of the twenty-first century, letters and telegrams have lost much significance; the Internet now caters for the speed of sexual encounters between women and men. A woman does not need to go to the post office to send a confidential letter to her lover so long as she can communicate through electronic writing or e-mails which first appeared in 1993, Skype in 2003 or Facebook, 2004. These postmodern forms of communication offer excellent speed, individual

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<sup>18</sup> See Peace TV [online], 2013, updated 4 June 2013 <<http://www.salam-tv.ps/ar/news/43624.html>> [accessed 4 June 2013].

<sup>19</sup> See *Her*, dir. Spike Jonze (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013).

autonomy and more importantly permanency compared to the temporary duration of letters that decay and are thus hurled into the fire at the Dead Letter Office in Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener' (1853) as a result of adestation. Within a twenty-first century context, the Internet represents a site of historical conflict between social constraints and personal freedom, a contest that culminates in the triumph of free voices over society's stringent demands on language and bodies. Female voices go beyond these restraints by using modern *Windows* as a freeing space of nineteenth-century *windows*: the figure of the Victorian woman looking through glass windows changes to contemporary women communicating via advanced Microsoft Windows. Windows have become smaller in size, yet more effective in the practice of self-expression. One might also argue that late-Victorian telegraph offices and the female workforce have almost vanished in our age, because the female intermediary figure is no longer needed when two people can connect via cables. The domestic, professional and other external spaces become conflated with the glow of the screen, making the possibility of sexual encounters via new modes of communication a constant and immediate possibility.

The new space challenges the historical war waged against feminism and the social restriction of feminine voices. Modern women suffragettes, for example, could reach anyone sitting in front of a screen around the world within seconds. Various types of feminist group propaganda are publicly advertised without the slightest fear of repression, bigotry or hostility. The relationship between women and modern modes of communication such as Facebook, Skype and televisions has attracted various studies on sexuality, feminine agency and modern-day media. Recent studies which address feminism and social emancipation continue to open up fresh terrains of sociological and literary scholarship. Sue Thornham's *Women, Feminism and Media* (2007), for example, explores the relationship between women and new media technologies, and reconsiders

the absence of women's voices from the genres of news and documentary.<sup>20</sup> In this thesis, I hope to have added to the input of feminist discourse by looking into the ways in which the nineteenth-century Anglo-American female body emerges out of social and sexual suppression through communication. Reading women's nineteenth-century transatlantic communicative sexual acts helps reconsider the relationship between sexual expression and modern communication. Even though different critics have substantially written on women's place within modern forms of media, the field demands more examination of the subject, a gap I wish to fulfil in future research on women and the potential of communication in our postmodern society. How do women challenge social hierarchies through media? How does communication become feminine gendered? Are women able to lessen cultural tensions via communication? How far can women mediate sexual desire and free speech especially with the increase and proliferation of newer modes of communication in the twenty-first century? These and other questions will form a passageway for fascinating cross-cultural studies on Anglo-American women, prospective communication and female sexuality.

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<sup>20</sup> See Sue Thornham, *Women, Feminism and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

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