

**Where the Ghosts of Meaning Are: Haunting and Spectrality  
in the Work of Hilary Mantel**

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**This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who told me stories.**

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## Abstract

Hilary Mantel has risen to mainstream prominence in recent years following her double Man Booker Prize wins for the historical novels *Wolf Hall* (2010) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012). Yet, despite Mantel's significant contribution to contemporary literature, and the extensive media attention she and her writing have garnered, critical studies of her oeuvre are still extremely limited. My thesis foregrounds the primary significance of the motif of the ghost and the situation of haunting for reading her work and in so doing seeks to address the critical occlusion Mantel's work has been subject to within the academy.

This thesis contends that Mantel's use of the spectral is not a self-contained phenomena which renders a handful of her texts 'ghost stories' in a literal sense, but a 'dis-organizing principle' which suffuses the entire body of her work. It argues that Mantel recognises the simultaneously revelatory and disruptive potential of the spectral and exploits its ability to trouble the status quo, to perform disturbing disclosures on multiple levels, disclosures which are as often opaque and enigmatic as they are clarificatory. In the five chapters which make up the thesis I read haunting and spectrality in relation to life-writing, care-giving, social and political marginalisation, technology and intertextuality, demonstrating the evolution of the 'Mantelian ghost' and the situation of haunting within Mantel's oeuvre and establishing them as articulating reactions to multiple concerns emerging from a complex and shifting social and political landscape. Ultimately, I argue that when one meets, in one of Mantel's texts, a situation of haunting or a ghost in the Mantelian mode, it is a profoundly ethical encounter in which something or someone previously rendered silent or invisible is made available for acknowledgement, consideration and debate.

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## Introduction

‘I think, the ghost has [. . .] become the basic metaphor for me.’ – Hilary Mantel

From her earliest writings to her most recent publications, it is clear that Hilary Mantel is a writer who recognises the power of haunting. The novels which comprise her debut duology – *Every Day is Mother’s Day* (1985) and *Vacant Possession* (1986) – deploy a host of spectres within a quasi-gothic framework to explore the politics of care-giving in Margaret Thatcher’s Britain. More recently her Booker Prize winning novels *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012) reanimate the historical dead; their ‘skulls [are] tumbled from their shrouds, and words like stones [are] thrust into their rattling mouths.’<sup>1</sup> The epigraph for my introduction is taken from an interview I carried out with Mantel in 2015.<sup>2</sup> It provides a useful critical formulation for the essential argument of this thesis, that is, that spectrality and the motif of the ghost preoccupy Mantel’s work, both formally and textually. It is a preoccupation which it is essential to be mindful of if the creative and ethical implications of her writing are to be fully apprehended. I analyse the situation of haunting in Mantel’s work not simply in terms of its privileging of the ‘unseen’ and ‘immaterial’<sup>3</sup> but, as Avery F. Gordon puts it, as ‘a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening.’<sup>4</sup> I argue that the trope of the ghost and the situation of haunting form highly plastic and overdetermined figures in Mantel’s writing whose inflections and implications are broad ranging and have evolved continually throughout her career in order to offer responses to a series of concerns arising from shifting social, political and cultural contexts. Mantel’s use of the ghostly and the spectral is not a self-contained phenomenon which renders a handful of her texts ‘ghost stories’ in a literal sense, but rather a ‘dis-organizing principle’ which suffuses the entire body of her work. I argue that Mantel recognises the simultaneously revelatory and disruptive potential of the spectral as a mode of existence and exploits its ability to trouble the status quo and perform disturbing

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 649.

<sup>2</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> ‘haunt, v.’ OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2016. Web. 7 July 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (London; Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8.

disclosures on multiple levels, disclosures which are as often opaque and enigmatic as they are clarificatory.

The title of this thesis is based upon a quotation taken from Mantel's 2003 memoir *Giving up the Ghost*.<sup>5</sup> In the memoir, while providing one of many accounts of her autobiographical project's purpose, the speaker states that she is writing 'to locate [herself], if not within a body, then in the narrow space between one letter and the next, between the lines where the ghosts of meaning are' (p. 222). This quotation offers a striking synopsis of the concerns of the following work, incubating the chiasmic questions 'where *are* the ghosts of meaning?' and 'what are the meanings of ghosts?' even as it gestures towards a gap accommodating something which is neither present nor absent. Through interrogating those spaces in Mantel's writing which are occupied by that which is not fully manifest, and starting from a position of attempting to locate that which may ultimately resist definitive location, my thesis asks what might become possible in the spaces occupied by such 'ghosts of meaning'. It questions how these ghosts might manifest and what work they might be put to, even as it acknowledges and maintains their essential evasiveness. Ultimately, this thesis establishes that the spectral provides the intellectual and, crucially, the ethical impetus for Mantel's writing. Before outlining the path I take through Mantel's corpus it is essential to define the terms on which this exploration of her work depends and to understand the distinctive nature of the Mantelian ghost.

### **Key Terms**

The ghost, spectrality, the gothic: these terms underpin the project undertaken in this thesis, yet all three are inherently shifting and unstable concepts, imbricated yet not, as they are sometimes deployed, synonymous. Running concurrent to a problematic critical blending of these terms (a blending which Mantel herself employs within her writing) is a sense that the ghost has become ubiquitous within the contemporary critical terminology following the so called 'spectral turn' of the nineteen-nineties.<sup>6</sup> The 'spectral turn' saw the figure of the ghost taken up as 'an analytical tool that

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<sup>5</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Giving up the Ghost: A Memoir* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Roger Luckhurst critiques the term in his essay 'The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the "Spectral Turn"' (Roger Luckhurst, 'The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the Spectral Turn', *Textual Practice*, 16 (2002), 527-46 (p. 527)). Yet already embedded within Luckhurst's critique is a problematic elision of the borders between the gothic, the spectral and the ghostly.



does theory'<sup>7</sup> and the language of the spectral adopted widely within the social sciences and the humanities as a critical vocabulary. This adoption has not been unproblematic, and has led to what some critics have termed 'rather cyclical, if not overstretched, interpretations of the uses, meanings, and possibilities of haunting.'<sup>8</sup> In unpicking the nature of the instability built into these terms and defining how they will function in this thesis I seek to clarify how Mantel knowingly exploits the slippages and associations between them while also maintaining a sense of their singularity, which gives her evolving use of the figure of the ghost and the situation of haunting its power. This clarification will lead to an understanding of her statement that the ghost forms 'the basic metaphor' within her writing as populating one side of a metaphorical equation, in which the ghost acts to represent or suggest myriad phenomena. The diversity of qualities and characteristics possessed by these phenomena renders the results of this 'basic metaphor' necessarily unpredictable and destabilising, rather than indicative of a flattening ubiquity.

As numerous critics have observed, the concept of the ghost resists homogeneity: '[t]heir representational and socio-cultural functions, meanings, and effects [are] at least as manifold as their shapes – or non-shapes as the case may be.'<sup>9</sup> Certainly Mantel's corpus reflects this heterogeneity. While her work often features representations of the ghost as the manifestation of a dead subject returned to the realm of the living, as will be observed in *Beyond Black* and *Wolf Hall*, other works feature more nebulous phantoms, not possessed of subjective identities but nonetheless haunting, apparitional presences granted a post-mortem existence. This class of ghost is most strikingly found in her debut duology, only partially contained behind the locked door to the spare room of an otherwise unremarkable detached house. Yet the circulation of the physically dead within the world of the living is only one variant of the Mantelian ghost. Mantel's memoir provides a striking explication of how she conceives of the ghost in a way which includes yet exceeds its traditional manifestation's post-mortem positioning, her enlarged conceptualisation of haunting encompassing instead a variety of liminal states. Early on in the text, the memoir's speaker states:

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<sup>7</sup> Esther Peeren and Maria del Pilar Blanco, 'Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities', in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. by Esther Peeren and Maria del Pilar Blanco (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 1-28 (p. 1).

<sup>8</sup> Peeren and del Pilar Blanco, 'Introduction', p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Peeren and del Pilar Blanco, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[w]hen you turn and look back down the years, you glimpse the ghosts of other lives you might have led. All your houses are haunted by the person you might have been. The wraiths and phantoms creep under your carpets and between the warp and weft of your curtains, they lurk in wardrobes and lie flat under drawer-liners. You think of the children that you might have had but didn't. When the midwife says 'It's a boy,' where does the girl go? When you think you're pregnant and you're not, what happens to the child that has already formed in your mind? You keep it filed in the drawer of your consciousness, like a short story that wouldn't work after the opening lines.<sup>10</sup>

As the text draws to a close, the speaker concludes: '[g]hosts are the tags and rags of everyday life, information you acquire that you don't know what to do with, knowledge that you can't process; they're cards thrown out of your card index, blots on the page' (p. 233). These rich extracts indicate a series of key aspects of the Mantelian ghost. The first of these is that, for Mantel, ghosts can be generated by potentialities: decisions untaken, lives not lived or cut short. The second, related, aspect is that the realm of the ghost is decidedly not (solely) the realm of the dead, certainly not the realm of the dead human subject. Elsewhere in her writing, media technologies, landscapes and objects take on a phantasmal existence or else act as facilitators of spectrality. As this thesis will make clear, in Mantel's writing a ghost can also be formed by a textual extract. Indeed, I demonstrate that her corpus displays a self-conscious and idiosyncratic approach to intertextuality which renders her intertextual play a mode of haunting in itself. The third key facet is the way in which the Mantelian ghost delimits and makes accessible the spaces occupied by the 'blots on the page', the unknowable, the incomprehensible and the unavowable. However, one of the most significant variants of the Mantelian ghost is formed not of the dead, nor the inanimate, but of certain living individuals. Psychiatric patients, domestic servants, criminals, prostitutes, the homeless, and those individuals who have simply been erased from the historical record: all are represented within Mantel's work as socially ghosted, crucially denied the status of full subject and living being.

These social phantoms represent a point at which the Mantelian ghost engages with the spectral, a mode of existence predicated not on the division between pre- and post-mortem but between absence and presence, visibility and invisibility. This play with spectrality signals to the attentive reader the final key facet of the Mantelian

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<sup>10</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Giving up the Ghost*, p. 20. All further references to this edition are given in parentheses within the text.

ghost: its highly political nature. As she herself puts it, ‘ghosts can be someone’s decision [. . .] ghosts are not necessarily made ghosts by accident or misfortune. You can elect people ghosts by excluding them.’<sup>11</sup> In this statement the status of the Mantelian ghost as a profoundly political matter is confirmed and its ethical implications begin to crystalise. At this point it is necessary to clarify how the terms ‘ghost’ and ‘spectre’ will be used in this thesis. The distinction between ‘ghost’ and ‘spectre’ is not a linguistic differentiation which Mantel makes, indeed, as is evidenced in the above passage, a plethora of terms for ‘ghost’ are used interchangeably in her work. However, I have chosen to make this critical distinction in order to remain responsive to the evolving and diverse nature of the Mantelian ghost and avoid the homogenising impulse present in a significant body of post-‘spectral-turn’ criticism, as discussed above. In the following chapters I use the term ‘ghost’ to describe a phenomenon created through, or metaphorically invoking, persistence after biological death, though such ghosts in Mantel’s work do not necessarily correspond to discrete human subjects (indeed various animals, body parts and objects also possess this kind of existence at certain points in her writing). Where ‘spectre’ and ‘spectrality’ are used, they concern a denial or lack of full presence (whether visual, auditory, legal or subjective) which is not predicated on biological death but may be generated by a range of factors including the closing down of historical and individual potentialities, political and social hegemonies or textual practice itself. These categories, while fruitful in terms of mapping the heterogeneity of haunting within Mantel’s work, should also be acknowledged as fragile and imbricated, with existence in the mode of spectre having the potential to give way violently to existence in the ghostly mode.

The persistence of the figure of the ghost within Mantel’s work has led to a critical debate which has contested the status of the gothic in her writing.<sup>12</sup> While this debate will be explored in detail in Chapter 2, it is pertinent at this point to clarify the position of this thesis with regards to Mantel and the gothic. Firstly, it is important to reiterate that while the literary gothic has, almost since its inception and certainly in

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<sup>11</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 294.

<sup>12</sup> This is most marked in Eileen Pollard’s repudiation of the gothic as a useful critical tool in reading Mantel’s work, particularly in her response to Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik’s reading of Mantel’s novel *Fludd* as comic gothic in their article “‘Releasing spirit from matter’: comic alchemy in Spark’s *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, Updike’s *The Witches of Eastwick* and Mantel’s *Fludd*” (*Gothic Studies* 2 (2000), 136-47). Eileen Pollard, “‘What is done and what is declared: Origin and ellipsis in the work of Hilary Mantel’ (PhD Thesis: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013), pp. 28-38.

its contemporary form, been closely allied with the trope of the ghost and with narratives of haunting, the presence of a ghost does not, in isolation, render a text gothic. More broadly, while the supernatural and the spectral have an affinity with the literary gothic, and often drive its narratives, they are not synonymous with the gothic mode and to use those terms as such robs them of their potency. In short, though Mantel's writing is rife with a host of ghosts and spectres, this thesis rejects the notion that her corpus can or should be characterised as gothic. This is not to say that the gothic is absent from Mantel's writing but rather that its presence in a selection of her works inflects rather than defines her canon. As the following chapters will make clear, she is a writer who understands the heterogeneity and nuance of the gothic, in particular its potential to generate debates which put at stake the political and ethical status quo, tapping into the gothic's ability to 'mediate between the uncanny and the unjust.'<sup>13</sup> In the terms of this thesis then, the Mantelian ghost is not a gothic trope by default. Nonetheless, when it makes an appearance in the context of one of Mantel's knowing deployments of the gothic, it necessarily takes on a different significance and the metaphors it is capable of accommodating subsequently shift.

### **Why Mantel Now?**

In the introduction to her 2013 PhD thesis "'What is done and what is declared': origin and ellipsis in the writing of Hilary Mantel', Eileen Pollard makes reference to the apparent 'invisibility' of Mantel within the academy.<sup>14</sup> In the three years which have elapsed between Pollard's observation and the writing of this thesis this invisibility has barely given way. Despite a wealth of literary awards, including her double Man Booker prize wins in 2009 and 2012 for *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*, acclaimed stage and screen adaptations of both novels,<sup>15</sup> and a number of

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<sup>13</sup> Sarolta Marinovich, 'The Discourse of the Other: The Female Gothic in Contemporary Women's Writing', *Neohelicon* 21(1994), 189-205 (p. 193).

<sup>14</sup> Eileen Pollard, "'What is done and what is declared': origin and ellipsis in the writing of Hilary Mantel', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> A stage adaptation of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2013. Adapted by Mike Poulton and directed by Jeremy Herrin, the plays enjoyed West End and Broadway transfers and were nominated for eight Tony awards, including Best Play. In 2015 the BBC broadcast a screen adaptation of the books which was awarded a Golden Globe for Best Miniseries or Television Film.

run-ins with the tabloid press which brought her to wider public attention,<sup>16</sup> Mantel's writing remains largely unrecognised within academia. Only a handful of articles and book chapters exist which tackle her work in any sustained fashion. Despite Mantel's writing career to date spanning three decades, her work is registered in criticism in what might be called a deeply phantasmal manner for the first twenty-four years of that career, with references to her writing cropping up briefly but regularly, in unexpected locations. A passing reference to *A Change of Climate* (1994) can be found in a 1998 article on eschatology published in *Religious Studies*.<sup>17</sup> A review of *The Giant O'Brien* (1998) appears in the *British Medical Journal* in the same year<sup>18</sup> while a nod to *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) can be found in an article concerned with historical re-readings of the French Revolution.<sup>19</sup> In 2004 a reference is made to one of Mantel's journalistic pieces for the *London Review of Books* in a review of Joseph Marie Perrin et al's book *The Four Simone Weils*,<sup>20</sup> while *Giving up the Ghost* is the subject of two lines in Nancy K. Miller's 2007 article, 'The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir'.<sup>21</sup> The first significant piece of academic writing on Mantel's work appears in 2009 with Victoria Stewart's 'A

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<sup>16</sup> In 2013, Mantel's lecture 'Royal Bodies', given at the British Museum and later published in the *London Review of Books*, attracted widespread denunciation in the tabloid press for what was described as criticism of the Duchess of Cambridge, with the *The Sun* newspaper defining Mantel's lecture as a 'bizarre rant' and the *Metro* deeming the talk to be a 'scathing attack' (see Karen Morrison, 'Plastic Princess slur at Kate', *The Sun*, 19 February 2013, <<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4801971/Hilary-Mantel-attacks-the-Duchess-of-Cambridge-as-plastic.html>> [accessed 29 February 2016] and Tariq Tahir, 'Booker Prize winner Hilary Mantel hits out at 'machine-made' Duchess of Cambridge in scathing attack', *Metro*, 18 February 2013, <<http://metro.co.uk/2013/02/18/booker-prize-winner-hilary-mantel-hits-out-at-machine-made-duchess-of-cambridge-in-scathing-attack-3502827/>> [accessed 29 February 2016]). Further controversy followed in 2014 following the publication of Mantel's most recent collection of short stories entitled *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), whose titular tale the *Daily Mail* described as a 'sick and perverted fantasy'. Indeed, protests followed when BBC Radio 4 adapted the short story from which the anthology takes its name for their 'Book at Bedtime' slot (Chris Hastings, 'Thatcher "murder" is BBC's Book at Bedtime', *Daily Mail*, 13 December 2014, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2873006/Thatcher-murder-BBC-s-Book-Bedtime-Radio-4-ignores-protests-author-s-sick-perverted-fantasy-coveted-broadcast-slot.html>> [accessed 29 February 2016]).

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Sherry, 'Redeeming the Past', *Religious Studies*, 34 (1998), 165-175.

<sup>18</sup> Bertram Cohen, 'The Giant O'Brien', *British Medical Journal*, 317 (1998), 1533. Cohen's review is deeply critical of Mantel's novel, and is predominantly concerned with exposing medical inaccuracies within the text. This failure to appreciate one of Mantel's novels as a work of cultural production, rather than a fictionalised expert account, is re-produced in much of the criticism of *Wolf Hall*, though in this case historians rather than clinicians fail to interrogate the creative work done by the text.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, 'Not Over After All: The French Revolution's Third Century', *The Journal of Modern History*, 74 (2002), 801-21.

<sup>20</sup> Erica Da Costa, 'The Four Simone Weils – Review', *The Women's Review of Books*, 21 (2004), 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy K. Miller, 'The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of Memoir', *PMLA*, 122 (2007), 237-48.

Word in your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*.' At this point Mantel had published eleven novels and been awarded the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize (1990) and the Hawthornden Prize (1996)<sup>22</sup> among numerous other accolades, including being shortlisted for the Orange Prize. Despite these indicators of the sophistication and quality of her writing, only thereafter did academic criticism of her work begin to evolve in any meaningful way.

The timeliness and necessity of this thesis can in part be demonstrated through an analysis of the volume of critical material which has been generated around the work of Mantel's similarly acclaimed peers. Taking the cohort of double Booker Prize winners as an example, it is clear that a significant discrepancy exists between Mantel's minimal representation in the academy and that of her male counterparts. Aside from Mantel, two other authors have won the Booker Prize twice: J.M. Coetzee (in 1983 and 1999) and Peter Carey (in 1988 and 2001). To date, at least twelve significant monographs treating Coetzee's work specifically have been published alongside nearly thirty book chapters and over one hundred and thirty articles.<sup>23</sup> Carey's representation in academic criticism is admittedly less extensive but nonetheless comprises a large body of work, including over twenty-five journal articles, several book chapters and twelve monographs. While Mantel's Booker wins are certainly later than Coetzee's and Carey's, in terms of length her writing career is roughly equivalent to Carey's and the nine year difference between the publication of Coetzee's first novel and Mantel's own in no way accounts for the radical difference in critical attention. It should also be mentioned that Mantel's writing had been critically acclaimed for many years before the Booker Prizes which brought her to public prominence. Despite this fact, and the fact that her Booker wins were triply unprecedented,<sup>24</sup> representation of her work in the academy is vanishingly small, even four years on from her second Booker Prize. Arguably, critical attention to

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<sup>22</sup> To place Mantel's receipt of the Winifred Holtby Memorial and Hawthornden Prizes in context, previous winners of the former have included Kazuo Ishiguro, Jim Crace and Graham Swift, all Booker Prize winners or nominees. Winners of the Hawthornden Prize have included Justin Cartwright, another Booker nominee, and a number of canonical writers including Graham Greene, Alan Sillitoe and V.S Naipaul. In 2013 she was the recipient of the prestigious David Cohen Prize, awarded biennially in recognition of a writer's entire body of work. Previous winners have included Harold Pinter, Doris Lessing and Seamus Heaney, all of whom are also holders of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

<sup>23</sup> These articles include only those featuring J.M. Coetzee and his work in their titles.

<sup>24</sup> Mantel is not only the first woman to win the Booker Prize twice, she is the first British author to achieve that accolade. Perhaps most significantly, she is also the only author ever to win two Booker prizes for two books in a trilogy. <[themanbookerprize.com/facts-figures](http://themanbookerprize.com/facts-figures)> [accessed 18 June 2016].

Mantel's work has been stymied by an early (and erroneous) identification of her work as merely 'domestic' and a failure to appreciate the political and ethical significance of her domestic environments.<sup>25</sup> This thesis, in addition to illuminating the sophistication and significance of the motif of the ghost and the trope of haunting in Mantel's work, draws attention to a neglect of her writing within the academy which is simply not justified on the basis of its quality and complexity.

Coming at a time when, despite Mantel's critical acclaim and increasing public visibility, her work is still largely subject to an occlusion in the academy, this thesis makes a series of timely interventions in a number of critical conversations. Firstly, it forms a significant contribution to a field of study which, as has been made clear, is still very much in its infancy. Attending to both the successes and the weaknesses of Mantel criticism thus far, I put forward a sustained reading of her work which draws out the political and ethical significance of the Mantelian ghost as a force capable of exposing and undermining, if only partially, the forces which occlude, deny and obscure certain people, voices, events, places and texts. In doing so I seek not only to recognise the unique contribution Mantel's writing makes to the tradition of narratives of haunting but also to secure an acknowledgement that the academy itself has up until now largely failed to recognise the work of an author whose comparable male counterparts have been granted full and nuanced presence.

### Critical Reception

Despite this academic occlusion, a small but significant body of criticism has emerged which engages with Mantel's work in a meaningful way and even within that small sample a number of trends in Mantel studies are beginning to emerge. Before moving to consider what critical interventions this thesis will make, both in terms of those trends and more broadly, a mapping of these existing critical

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<sup>25</sup> Sara L. Knox picks up on this categorisation of Mantel's work in her article 'Giving Flesh to the "Wraiths of Violence": Super-realism in the Fiction of Hilary Mantel', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 25 (2010), 313-323. This attitude can also be found in early journalistic writing on her novels, exemplified by the reviewer who dismissed Mantel's French Revolution novel, *A Place of Greater Safety*, on the grounds that it included too many descriptions of wallpaper (Anna Murphy, 'Hilary Mantel Interview', *The Telegraph*, 01 March 2010 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/7345476/Hilary-Mantel-interview.html>> [accessed 18 June 2016]) while *The Independent*'s Joan Smith decried the novel as an 'upmarket soap opera.' Joan Smith, 'The Rough and Tumbrel of History: A Place of Greater Safety', *The Independent*, 5 September 1992, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/book-review-the-rough-and-tumbrel-of-history-a-place-of-greater-safety-hilary-mantel-viking-pounds-1549781.html>> [accessed 18 June 2016].

tendencies, such as they are, is necessary. Mentioned above as forming the first sustained piece of critical work which took Mantel's writing as its focus, Victoria Stewart's article reads *Beyond Black* as 'an example of the renewed engagement with spiritualism in contemporary British fiction.'<sup>26</sup> The article puts Mantel in conversation with her contemporaries for the first time and offers a convincing reading of *Beyond Black*'s experimentation with the figure of the medium as an interrogation of narrative voice and the role of the omniscient narrator. Following the publication of *Wolf Hall* in 2009, a handful of articles appeared which sought to problematise the novel from a historicist standpoint and in doing so failed to appreciate the cultural work the novel might be undertaking, choosing instead to critique the work on the grounds of historical accuracy. The most extreme example of such a critical approach can be found in P.I Kaufman's 'Dis-Manteling More', an article which accuses the novel of 'recycl[ing] old and threadbare accusations' regarding the historical figure of Sir Thomas More, and which describes *Wolf Hall* as 'prejudicial' and Mantel's imagination as 'mistaken.'<sup>27</sup> This is not to say all critical responses to the historical novels are flawed in this way. Jerome de Groot's intelligent and sustained reading of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* specifically privileges their literary status and, crucially for my current study, acknowledges the importance of haunting within them, mapping the complexity of its function astutely.<sup>28</sup>

Sara L. Knox's 'Giving Flesh to the Wraiths of Violence: Super-Realism in the Fiction of Hilary Mantel', published in the same year as Kaufman's piece, does not concern itself at all with *Wolf Hall*.<sup>29</sup> Instead Knox's article usefully and thoughtfully puts a number of Mantel's novels in conversation with each other, and is the first work to try and identify a broad preoccupation within her corpus, namely

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<sup>26</sup> Victoria Stewart, 'A Word in your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 50 (2009), 293-312.

<sup>27</sup> P.I Kaufman, 'Dis-Manteling More', *Moreana*, 47 (2010), 164-93. Other, less defensive, examples of criticism of *Wolf Hall* which nevertheless take a potentially reductive historicist approach to the novel and its sequel include B.D Stoker's 'Bygonese: Is this really the Authentic Language of Historical Fiction' (*New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 9 (2012), 308-313) and D. Roder's 'Hilary Mantel's Anne Boleyn: Locating a Body of Evidence' (*Forum for World Literature Studies*, 6 (2014), 575-585).

<sup>28</sup> Jerome de Groot, *Re-Making History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> This omission can be read as symptomatic of a splitting that has occurred, both in popular and academic readings of the novel and its sequel *Bring up the Bodies*, wherein the historical novels have been understood as a straightforward break with Mantel's work up until that point. As will be made clear in the following chapters, the opposite is arguably true.



through her understanding of Mantel's fiction as possessing a moral dimension which is inscribed through its representation of rejected, marginal or disenfranchised subjects. The other key critical move Knox makes is to point out how the political significance of Mantel's domestic environments has been ignored, enabling her early work to be 'consigned to obscurity for the "narrowness" of its concerns.'<sup>30</sup> Knox is also the first writer to give any sustained consideration to the significance of the ghosts and spectres to be found in Mantel's early work and to accommodate the possibility of a linkage between Mantel's memoir and her fiction. Unfortunately it is in this regard that Knox's approach becomes problematic, since the article proposes a connection between the two texts which situates the memoir as a straightforward origin point for elements of the novel instead of interrogating that connection fully. The desire to root Mantel's fiction firmly in her autobiography, and the attendant problematic approaches to her memoir, *Giving up the Ghost* (2003), is evident in a number of other texts, notably Victoria Nelson's reading of the text in her monograph *Gothika: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural* (2013) and Amy Prodromou's "'Writing the Self into Being": Illness and Narrative in Inga Clendinnen's *Tiger's Eye* and Hilary Mantel's *Giving up the Ghost*'.<sup>31</sup> While Prodromou's chapter, like Stewart's article, places Mantel alongside one of her peers in a way which opens up a number of critical possibilities, it ultimately succumbs to the temptation to reduce the memoir to a narrative of illness rather than accommodating its multiplicity and allowing the memoir's complexity to inform the representations of illness it includes.<sup>32</sup>

The most significant piece of Mantel criticism to date is Pollard's PhD thesis, a project which 'questions the suitability of the "origin" paradigm within the criticism [on Mantel] that is available, which closes off the *excess* of Mantel's texts through attempts to unite her corpus.'<sup>33</sup> Pollard reads Mantel's work with and through the

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<sup>30</sup> Knox, p. 311.

<sup>31</sup> Amy Prodromou, "'Writing the Self into Being": Illness and Narrative in Inga Clendinnen's *Tiger's Eye* and Hilary Mantel's *Giving up the Ghost*', in *Identity and Form in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Ana María Sánchez Arce (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 195-209.

<sup>32</sup> Eileen Pollard's 2011 article "'But at second sight the words seemed not so simple" (Woolf 1929): Thickening and Rotting Hysteria in the Writing of Hilary Mantel and Virginia Woolf' (*Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 80 (2011), 24), stands alone in providing a sophisticated reading of Mantel's life-writing and the account of illness it includes. In the article Pollard resists the temptation to subject the work to reductive reading strategies, usefully putting Mantel into conversation with one of her key predecessors.

<sup>33</sup> Pollard, 'What is done', p. 6.

thought of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy on ellipsis and in doing so seeks to ameliorate not only the invisibility of Mantel's work within academic criticism but also the way in which 'Derrida's notion of ellipsis has been eclipsed by philosophy.'<sup>34</sup> Pollard's thesis, with its emphasis upon maintaining the openness of Mantel's writing and privileging its excesses, deftly avoids a number of the problematic reading strategies that have been present in Mantel criticism thus far and makes a valuable and nuanced contribution to the incipient field of Mantel studies. However, Pollard's dual focus on Mantel and Derrida, while demonstrating the depth and rigour of Mantel's writing through its ability to accommodate and elucidate Derridean thought, can at some points lead to a re-eclipsing of Mantel. Likewise, Pollard's rejection of the gothic as a critical framework with regards to Mantel's work on the grounds of its potentially stifling use to homogenise her canon, while understandable in the context of certain readings, risks shutting down numerous pertinent avenues of interpretation and precludes a way of reading Mantel with the gothic that facilitates the very openness Pollard is rightly keen to maintain.

In summary then, while clearly there exists a small body of work which addresses Mantel's writing critically, and within that body of work there is much of value and numerous adroit critical gestures which have yet to be brought to fruition, there remain significant problems and absences within Mantel scholarship. I argue that the kinds of literalising and reductive readings which have, for example, closed down the relationship between the author's biography and her fiction, and given rise to a treatment of *Wolf Hall* as a faulty historical document rather than a literary work are in part produced by a failure to meaningfully recognise and interrogate haunting and spectrality as a fundamental preoccupation in Mantel's writing.<sup>35</sup>

### **Critical Interventions**

Mantel's privileging of the motif of the ghost and the situation of haunting engages with a proliferation of ghosts in works of cultural production since the 1990s, a trend which, as is pointed out by Colin Davis, has been accompanied by a preoccupation

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<sup>34</sup> Pollard, 'What is done', p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Rather than engaging extensively with Mantel's existing critical interlocutors at this early stage, I return to them in more detail in the following chapters in order to more precisely mobilise their contributions and address their problematic elements.

amongst contemporary theorists and critics with the dead and the undead.<sup>36</sup> Before I examine where Mantel's writing engages with this trend, not simply in terms of works of cultural production generally, but in the work of contemporary women novelists specifically, I wish to briefly sketch the critical landscape against which Mantel's writing career has unfolded and posit the interventions in that landscape this thesis argues her work is making.<sup>37</sup> As Roger Luckhurst puts it 'a certain strand of cultural theory in France, Britain and America embraced a language of ghosts and the uncanny – or rather of anachronic spectrality and hauntology – following the publication of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* in 1993 (translated into English in 1994).'<sup>38</sup> A wealth of publications emerged in the wake of Derrida's text, and the apparent 'permission' it granted to scholars to 'deal with ghosts.'<sup>39</sup> While a great deal of valuable work is done by these texts,<sup>40</sup> Luckhurst's article is 'suspicious' of this spectral turn and what he terms its 'very generalized economy'.<sup>41</sup> He cites Derrida's exhortation in *Spectres* that 'it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. This is what we would be calling here a hauntology',<sup>42</sup> and goes on to argue that Derrida's statement has been read, particularly by literary critics, in a way which has robbed haunting, and the ghosts and spectres that give rise to it, of their political, social and geographical specificity. Ghosts and haunting become

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<sup>36</sup> Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> A key text whose publication in itself asserts the dominance of the figure of the ghost and the situation of haunting within contemporary critical and cultural theory is Esther Peeren and Maria Del Pilar Blanco (eds), *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). The excerpted texts provide a comprehensive account of how critical interest in the trope of the ghost has proliferated and diversified since the aforementioned 'spectral turn' of the 1990s.

<sup>38</sup> Roger Luckhurst, 'The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the "Spectral Turn"', *Textual Practice*, 16 (2002), 527-46 (p. 527).

<sup>39</sup> Martin McQuillan. This is particularly apparent in Peggy Kamuf's admission in response to McQuillan's question '[a]re you a scholar who deals with ghosts?' that she was, 'though [she was] not sure [she] would have said so with as much conviction before *Spectres of Marx*.' Peggy Kamuf, 'Translating spectres: an interview with Peggy Kamuf', *Parallax*, 7 (2001), p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> As highlighted in Luckhurst's article, examples of this body of work include Jean Michel-Rabat's *Ghosts of Modernity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), Julian Wolfrey's *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, the Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), Carla Jodey Castricano's *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (Montreal; London: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003) and Colin Davis' *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Luckhurst, p. 534.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 161.

powerful, as Martin Jay puts it, ‘per se’ and ‘as such’, risking the elision of ‘the precise content of *what* is repeated’.<sup>43</sup>

While Avery F. Gordon’s 1997 book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and The Sociological Imagination*, certainly owes a debt to *Spectres*, ‘min[ing] thinkers including Karl Marx and Jacques Derrida for their concern with material conditions’,<sup>44</sup> Gordon is a theorist who firmly stresses the importance of the particularity of the ghost, the importance of its socio-political contexts. As she puts it, ‘[it] is not a case of dead or missing persons *sui generis*, but of the ghost as a social figure [. . .] a case of the haunting reminder of the complex social relations in which we live.’<sup>45</sup> In addition to asserting haunting as ‘a constituent element of modern social life [. . .] neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis [but] a generalizable social phenomenon of great import’,<sup>46</sup> Gordon’s text eloquently argues for the ghost’s ability to make revelatory interventions in the taken-for-granted fabric of everyday life and to make invisible things, however temporarily, visible. As Gordon puts it:

The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or apparition is one form by which something lost or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes makes itself known or apparent to us.<sup>47</sup>

Crucial for understanding the status of Mantel’s corpus as composed of ‘ghost’ stories is Gordon’s insistence that ‘that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence’<sup>48</sup> and, furthermore, that it is from this position that ghost stories, stories about ‘*permissions and prohibitions, presence and absence, about apparitions and hysterical blindness*’ are written.<sup>49</sup> Esther Peeren’s monograph, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (2014), in many ways builds on and elaborates Gordon’s work, positing the ethical and cultural

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Jay, ‘The Uncanny Nineties’, in *Cultural Semantics: Key Words of Our Time* (London: Athlone Press, 1998), p. 162.

<sup>44</sup> Caron Lipman, *Co-habiting with Ghosts: Knowledge, Experience, Belief and the Domestic Uncanny* (London: Ashgate, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Gordon, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Gordon, p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Gordon, p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Italics author’s own.

repercussions of the notion that ‘the ghost is a metaphor that certain people (are made to) live *as*, the cognitive and conceptual framework through which they are made sense of and come to make sense of themselves.’<sup>50</sup> It is with these psychoanalytically freighted yet socio-politically conscious theories of the forms, functions and meanings of ghosts in contemporary culture that Mantel’s work resonates, sharing with such critical thought an understanding of the ghost and spectre as metaphors for, amongst other phenomena, a number of specific marginalised and occluded groups whose status as living subjects has been devastatingly undermined.

In terms of what this thesis offers to the field of literary criticism, specifically of the contemporary narrative of haunting, it is useful first to note a striking ‘stopping short’ which exists in the literature to date. Though in recent years multiple studies have been published which trace the history of the ghost story, the majority falter before they reach the creative texts produced against the backdrop of the so-called ‘spectral turn’. Luke Thurston’s *The Haunting Interval: Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism* opts only to analyse the genre up to the mid-twentieth century, while Simon Hay’s *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story*<sup>51</sup> includes the slightest of treatments of contemporary narratives of haunting, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), but in terms of a sustained critical engagement, also ceases mid-century. Even Helen Conrad O’Brian and Julie Anne Stevens’ *The Ghost Story from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* features only two writers whose work was written and published in the later half of the century: Shirley Jackson and Chuck Palahniuk.<sup>52</sup> This being the case, arguably not only is there a lack of a meaningful interrogation of the ‘traditional’ ghost story as imagined in the contemporary period but this lack prohibits a discussion of how the ghost story might be understood more broadly or defined in a way which is more sensitive to the critical and theoretical work outlined above. As such, my reading of Mantel’s work as predicated on a plastic and evolving understanding of the ghost and the situation of haunting begins to address not only the critical silence around contemporary narratives of haunting

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<sup>50</sup> Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (London: Palgrave, 2014), p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Simon Hay, *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Helen Conrad O’Brian and Julie Anne Stevens, *The Ghost Story from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century: A Ghostly Genre* (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2010).

but proposes how such narratives might fruitfully be delineated in a more flexible way.

It is also important to note that Mantel's narratives of haunting form part of a wider trend in contemporary women's writing in which the 'ghost story', in a variety of forms, has proliferated since the 1980s. Though the beginnings of this proliferation are antecedent to the spectral turn, the growing number of narratives of haunting authored by women in many ways anticipates, and runs parallel to the contemporary critical preoccupation with the ghost. Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* (1983) is arguably one of the earliest manifestations of this trend, noted for its status as a traditional ghost story, with Clive Bloom describing it as 'Gothic horror revival'.<sup>53</sup> Published four years later, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is perhaps best known for putting the trope of the ghost to work not in a gothic context but to communicate overtly political material. The 1990s saw the publication of Alison Lurie's short story collection *Women and Ghosts* (1994) and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) which blended the crime fiction genre with that of the ghost story. The turn of the millennium brought a faster growth in examples of the genre, which, like Atwood's book, frequently blended the narrative of haunting with a number of other genres. Prominent examples of these include Sarah Waters' *Affinity* (1999) and *The Little Stranger* (2009) and Michelle Paver's Arctic narrative, *Dark Matter* (2010).<sup>54</sup> For the sake of brevity only a handful of examples are given here. Nonetheless, it is clear that this thesis' assertion of Mantel as a writer of narratives of haunting connects her work to a cultural trend in which the 'ghost story' is re-iterated and re-worked to myriad different ends. I argue that of all her contemporaries, it is Mantel's work which most potently, most playfully and most innovatively makes use of the figure of the ghost and its haunting function.

### Key Thinkers

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<sup>53</sup> Clive Bloom, *Gothic Horror* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> It is noticeable that middle-brow fiction in particular has seen a period of growth in terms of narratives of haunting during this period. Susan Hill alone has published three ghost story novellas in this time and has another anthology of ghost stories due for publication in late 2016 while Helen Dunmore's *The Greatcoat* (2012), Kate Mosse's *The Winter Ghosts* (2014) and *The Mistletoe Bride* (2014), and Joanna Briscoe's *Touched* (2014) combine to confirm Sarah Hughes' assertion in *The Guardian* that '[n]ot since the heyday of M.R. James and W.W. Jacobs has the ghost story been so in vogue.' Sarah Hughes, 'Out with vampires, in with haunted houses: the ghost story is back.' *The Guardian*, 24 October 2015, < <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/24/out-with-vampires-in-with-haunted-houses-ghost-stories-are-back>> [accessed 08 July 2016].

The self-proclaimed decisive avoidance of a ‘rigid application of theory’<sup>55</sup> in Pollard’s thesis yields a number of fascinating insights into Mantel’s work. While this thesis deploys a similarly flexible approach to the use of critical and theoretical voices, seeking always to yield to Mantel’s texts rather than force them to adhere to the theory, I argue that the nuance and complexity of her fiction does necessitate a rigorous and thoughtful deployment of theoretical material capable of receiving and maintaining its difficulty and multiplicity. In a response to a question in my 2015 interview regarding a possible relationship between her work and psychoanalytic thought Mantel responded that ‘it’s not that I read psychoanalytic texts and used them to form my work; it’s more that the texts gave form to what I intuited.’<sup>56</sup> It is this ‘giving form’ that the theory mobilised in this thesis seeks to achieve: the provision of a critical vocabulary through which the complexities and implications of Mantel’s literary project can begin to be expressed and their nuances captured.

Appropriately given the heterogeneity of Mantel’s fiction, in terms of her experimentation with both style and genre, I make use of a wide variety of theoretical paradigms. My project does not subscribe to a single school of theory or cultural criticism but rather draws upon a range of thinkers whose work, while not united by critical genealogy or disciplinarity, shares an ability to accommodate the diversity and overdetermination present in Mantel’s writing. My choice of critical voices is born out of the varied demands made by each of the texts studied and the need to establish a critical vocabulary capable of responding to the multiple thematic, political and contextual preoccupations of those texts. Key thinkers whose work shapes the following readings include psychoanalysts Jean Laplanche and Jacques Lacan and philosophers Jacques Rancière, Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler. While these thinkers may in some respects appear disparate, they have been selected for the ability of their thinking to privilege the boundary between the visible and invisible, sensible and insensible traversed by the ghost in movements which make licit its significance, and to think ontological disturbance, uncertainty and ambiguity more broadly. Rancière’s ‘distribution of the sensible’, Lacan’s ‘Big Other’, Derrida’s ‘secret’ and Stiegler’s theory of technics are all on some level concerned with boundary phenomena (and indeed the troubling of the possibility of imposing

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<sup>55</sup> Pollard, ‘What is done’, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Email Interview – Answers*, Appendix 2, p. 255.

and maintaining boundaries) in a way which makes them invaluable for understanding the heterogeneity and plasticity of the Mantelian ghost.

The specific historical, political, technological, religious and geographical contexts of Mantel's work, and the rigour with which her novels are researched, demands an equally nuanced and specific response in order to draw out the specific politico-social implications of the Mantelian ghost as it is found in individual texts. As such, alongside the work of the theoretical thinkers discussed above, sits a plethora of material by scholars selected due to the specificity of their research, which ranges from discussions of synaesthesia, accounts of Thatcherite social care policy, articulations of the history and tenets of Wahabbi Islam, through analysis of the history of spirit mediumship, to the emergence of European print culture.

This critical material is synthesised with extracts from interviews undertaken with the author herself, both in person and electronically. These extracts are in no way intended to dominate the readings offered here. Rather, when studying the work of a writer as unique, and as critically overlooked, as Mantel, it is apposite to recognise and interrogate the author's own contribution to debates around her work and their presence here valuably inflects the scholarly voices mobilised within the thesis, adding to what I hope to be a fruitful and vibrant critical multivocality.

### **Chapter Summaries**

The opening chapter of this thesis reads Mantel's memoir *Giving up the Ghost* (2003) alongside her collection of short fiction *Learning to Talk*, which was published in the same year. Taking as its catalyst the failure in journalistic and critical responses to Mantel's life-writing either to accommodate its complexity as a creative work or interrogate its relationship with the author's fiction, the chapter argues that *Giving up the Ghost*, far from being a straightforward literary memoir, actively interrogates the unstable and often paradoxical nature of life-writing. I illustrate how this interrogation takes place primarily through Mantel's construction of the text's spectral speaker who understands the work of the memoir as a will-to-presence through writing which is perpetually deferred. The spectrality of *Giving up the Ghost*'s central voice is supplemented by a series of formal and conceptual hauntings, each of which questions the status of the self, fiction, and authenticity in relation to the autobiographical project. I argue that these hauntings are orchestrated through



Mantel's use of a specifically self-referential mode of intertextual play as a vehicle for questioning the possibility of a coherent narrative of self, particularly with regard to *Learning to Talk* as contested intertext. Such hauntings are also created through the rendering of the physical body as precarious and unpredictable, and through a privileging of the secret and the unknowable within the life-narrative. Through my analysis of these creative gestures I produce a reading of *Giving up the Ghost* which is predicated on preserving rather than exorcising the text's haunting elements. In doing so I demonstrate its demand for an understanding of life-writing not as manifesting an integrated, stable self but as testifying to a story of self which is fabricated, contingent and partial but nonetheless valuable, a story of self which is, as Mantel puts it, 'complete with the missing bits.'<sup>57</sup>

In my second chapter I deal directly with Mantel's fiction, namely her debut duology *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession*, which traces the lives of two West Midland families over the course of the late 1970s and 80s. Alongside *Beyond Black*, these novels offer some of Mantel's most overt engagements with the supernatural and, I argue, make knowing use of the tropes of the gothic while nevertheless subverting and exceeding it. Highlighting the anxiety circulating around the regulation of the domestic space and the family unit which is common to both early gothic texts and the political landscape of Britain in the 1970s and 80s, this chapter argues that Mantel utilises the gothic in order to articulate how, during the Thatcher administration, a number of care-giving frameworks were subject to a series of ruptures and collapses. I posit that it is from the site of those failures that the ghosts and spectres which haunt the texts emerge. My examination of familial, medical, psychiatric and social care in both texts reveals care-giving in the duology's fictionalised Thatcherite milieu to be a fragile and contested process. My reading interprets the haunting presences, produced by politically and socially generated breakdowns of care, as attesting to and articulating that fragility and in doing so, communicating the ethical imperatives which adhere to the provision of care, whether by the family or the State.

From an examination of a single aspect of the State as having the potential, through its policies, to produce ghosts and spectres, in Chapter 3 I broaden my analysis of the

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<sup>57</sup>Hilary Mantel, 'P.S. Ideas, Interviews, Features', interview by Fanny Blake, in Hilary Mantel, *Giving up the Ghost: A Memoir* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 8.

interactions between the political and the spectral through a reading of Mantel's 1988 novel *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*. Based on Mantel's own time living in Jeddah, the novel relates the experiences of Frances Shore, and her husband, as she struggles to adapt to life under Saudi Arabia's extremely conservative Wahabbi regime. By engaging with philosopher Jacques Rancière's notion of dissensus and the division of the sensible, I argue that the novel's Saudi Arabian setting allows the complex and often paradoxical relationship between the political and the spectral to be made licit. My analysis of the representation of certain marginalised groups within the text foregrounds how the novel depicts politico-religious regimes as capable, directly and indirectly, of rendering certain living subjects spectral by denying them full political (and in some cases physical) presence. Conversely, I also draw out the text's articulation of a relationship between agency and invisibility that grants political authority its potency through a consideration of the government 'spook' whose anonymity and imperceptibility facilitates rather than precludes political participation. With this paradox established, I go on to demonstrate the novel's simultaneous self-reflexivity. I articulate how the gothic is put to work in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* to illustrate the conflicts and tensions which arise from attempts to translate one culture into the idiom of another, positing the possibilities that emerge from the use of the gothic and the ghost in a non-Western milieu which accommodates neither.

Having demonstrated the existence in *Eight Months* of a host of spectres whose spectrality is not contingent on any post-mortem positioning, in Chapter 4 I examine one of Mantel's most striking deployments of the traditional ghost: her 2005 novel *Beyond Black*. Centring upon the experiences of Alison Hart, a spiritualist medium working at the turn of the millennium, I argue that *Beyond Black* is concerned with the position of the ghost in a historical moment which is, at least in part, defined by its relationships with tele-technologies. In this chapter I demonstrate that the novel questions the status of the ghost in the contemporary period, asking what relationship with the dead is on offer to those in the dormitory towns of England, and which modes of spectrality are made possible or alternatively rendered obsolete in this specific historical and geographic context. I posit that potential answers to these questions can be found in the interactions between the notions of skin, screen and spectre in the novel. Through an interrogation of a multitude of screens, composed of

technologies, bodies and language, drawing out the texts inscribed upon them or which they themselves inscribe, I demonstrate that what this text ultimately communicates is the requirement of the ghost and the spectre for a surface upon or against which to manifest.

Progressing from an analysis of *Beyond Black* which dissects the contemporary relationship with history, the final chapter of this thesis is concerned with *Wolf Hall* (2009), the first of Mantel's Tudor novels and a text which has itself generated multiple conversations about the contemporary subject's relationship to the historical. The chapter argues that *Wolf Hall* has, until now, been subject to a series of reductive reading strategies and rejects them in favour of an approach that privileges the novel's position as primarily a literary text whose project is both more subtle and more expansive than previous critical viewpoints have allowed. Taking into account two key contextual details arising from the novel's setting within the upheavals of the Protestant Reformation – the explosion of print culture in England and on the continent and the abolition of Purgatory – I make licit *Wolf Hall*'s meditation on textual practice, and on the ways in which the acts of reading and writing are subject to acts of haunting. I also foreground the work's treatment of inheritance and ethical responsibility towards the dead, demonstrating how these themes exceed the historical and are made to resonate with the act of authorship and the position of the author both as literary testator and legatee. Ultimately, I argue that *Wolf Hall* is a text which displays a 'complex self-consciousness'<sup>58</sup> about writing itself through a dramatisation of the linkages between textuality and spectrality.

This thesis demonstrates the flexibility of the motif of the ghost and the situation of haunting within Mantel's work, establishing them as being capable of articulating responses to the various concerns emerging from a complex and shifting social and political landscape, a series of which forms the basis of the following five chapters. It should be noted that I do not make an attempt here to address the entirety of Mantel's fictional output, nor would it be possible to do so in the space of a doctoral thesis. The works under consideration have been chosen for their ability to illustrate most clearly the evolving and varied role of haunting within Mantel's work. While this approach necessarily leads to significant omissions – namely of two of her mid-

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<sup>58</sup> Byatt, 'Fathers', in *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000), pp. 9-35 (p. 9).

career novels, *A Change of Climate* (1994) and *an Experiment in Love* (1996), *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992), Mantel's first novel and initial experiment with the historical novel form and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), the second novel in the Tudor trilogy – it is hoped that the thesis will open a critical space in which analysis of these excluded texts could take place, and the 'resonance of the omitted thing' (*Wolf Hall* p. 517) can be manifested.

Speaking of the poetry of Thomas Wyatt in *Bring up the Bodies* Mantel writes: 'his lines fledge feathers, and unfolding this plumage they dive below their meaning and skim above it. [. . .] You close your hand as it flies away. A statute is written to entrap meaning, a poem to escape it.'<sup>59</sup> It is in this space, between entrapment and escape, that the work of this thesis locates itself, seeking not to capture and constrain the meaning within Mantel's canon but to trace instead its spectral lines of flight. As this thesis will make clear, to discern meaning in Mantel's writing is to encounter ghosts and spectres. It is with Mantel's memoir, where, alongside literary meaning, a host of other, more enigmatic 'phantoms [flap] and [churn] the air' (*Giving up the Ghost* p. 99), that this exploration begins.

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<sup>59</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Bring up the Bodies* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), p. 414.

## Chapter 1

### **Not Giving up the Ghost: Preserving the Spectral in Mantel's Memoir**

In a thesis which demonstrates the primacy of the ghost and the situation of haunting to the work of Hilary Mantel it is perhaps unsurprising that the critical gaze should be drawn in the first instance to the publication which seems most immediately and overtly to engage with these themes: her 2003 memoir *Giving up the Ghost*.<sup>1</sup> However, this instinctive critical focus immediately raises a number of issues, falling as it does upon a text highly unusual in Mantel's oeuvre for its status as life-writing.<sup>2</sup> A self-declared memoir, *Giving up the Ghost* participates in a proliferation of autobiographical writing which has been gathering pace since the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup> A striking element of this life-writing boom has been an attendant proliferation of sub-genres, including the misery memoir, the spiritual memoir, the celebrity autobiography, the conversion narrative, so called 'schtick lit'<sup>4</sup> memoirs and even the animal memoir.<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite this growing raft of sub-genres, the terminology that life-writing has produced is far from clear and stable, even with regards to the terms 'memoir' and 'autobiography'. An examination of these instabilities is necessary if the work undertaken in *Giving up the Ghost* is to be properly contextualised.

Ben Yagoda's succinct history of the memoir form refutes the distinction between autobiography and memoir, instead using them to mean 'more or less the same thing: a book understood by its author, its publisher, and its readers to be a factual account

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Giving up the Ghost: A Memoir* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003). All further references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the body of the text.

<sup>2</sup> *Giving up the Ghost* is the only example of Mantel's life-writing to be published in print. *Ink in the Blood: A Hospital Diary* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010) is also autobiographical but was published only as an e-book and comprises a single essay.

<sup>3</sup> This inexorable growth is illustrated convincingly in Yagoda's observation that '[a]ccording to Nielsen bookscan, which tracks about 70 percent of US book sales, total sales in the categories of Personal Memoirs, Childhood Memoirs, and Parental Memoirs increased more than 400 percent between 2004 and 2008.' Ben Yagoda, *Memoir: A History* (New York: Riverhead, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Yagoda defines these texts as 'books perpetrated by people who undertook an unusual project with the express purpose of writing about it,' Yagoda, p. 11. As he points out, this sub-genre was arguably originated in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854).

<sup>5</sup> This sub-genre has seen memoirs of dogs, cats and even owls. Yagoda, pp. 6-7.

of the author's life.'<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, his book traces the evolution of both terms and the historical oscillations between their definitions. To give just one example, Yagoda notes that, while in 1876 Gustave Vapereau asserted that '[a]utobiography leaves a lot of room for fantasy, and the one who is writing is not at all obliged to be exact about the facts, as in memoirs,'<sup>7</sup> Gore Vidal's memoir, *Palimpsest* (1996), overturns Vapereau's definition and understands memoir as 'how one remembers one's own life, while an autobiography is history, requiring research, dates, facts, double-checked.'<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in recent years the relationship between life-writing, such as memoir, and fictional forms, such as the novel, has been closely interrogated, generating the neologism of 'autobiografiction'. As Max Saunders puts it, 'however truthful or candid an autobiography might be judged, it is nonetheless a narrative, and shares its narrative features with fictional narratives.'<sup>9</sup> Memoir in particular is situated uniquely on the borderland between the fictional and the autobiographical, due to its etymological root in the French *mémoire* or 'memory'. As Yagoda points out:

[A] century of psychological research has confirmed [that] the human memory is very far from a completely trustworthy mechanism. [. . .] In experiment after experiment, study after study, [. . .] psychologists have [established] that memory is by nature untrustworthy: contaminated not merely by gaps, but by distortions and fabrications that inevitably and blamelessly creep into it. It is itself a creative writer, cobbling together 'actual' memories, beliefs about the world, cues from a variety of sources, and memories of *previous* memories to plausibly imagine what might have been, and then, in one master stroke, packaging this scenario in the mind as the real one.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, on the one hand the memoir is positioned as 'a factual account of the author's life', yet on the other it inherently resorts to narrative strategies common to fiction and is built upon inevitable fabrications, some conscious, for example, the generation of conversational material that would be impossible to recall verbatim, and some unconscious, undertaken even in the process of forming memories.

It is necessary to ask, then, where *Giving up the Ghost* sits within the complex and often contradictory landscape of contemporary life-writing. Initial indications that

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<sup>6</sup> Yagoda, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Yagoda, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Yagoda, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Max Saunders, *Self-Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Yagoda, p. 103.

the text exceeds the conventions of contemporary memoir are found in the way that *Giving up the Ghost* not only acknowledges its status as memoir but explicitly comments on the form. For example, in the first few pages the memoir's speaker states: 'I used to think that autobiography was a form of weakness, and perhaps I still do. But I also think that, if you're weak, it's childish to pretend to be strong' (p. 6). In terms of the speaker's own apparent understanding of the work her memoir is to accomplish, and the book's status within her canon, the text appears initially to adhere to the conventional definition of what such a work seeks to achieve. Early on the speaker says of *Giving up the Ghost*: '[t]his story can be told only once, and I need to get it right' (p. 5), before going on to describe the work as 'an attempt to seize the copyright in [her]self' (p. 71) and to relate how '[t]he story of my own childhood is a complicated sentence that I am always trying to finish, to finish and put behind me. It resists finishing, and partly this is because words are not enough' (p. 23). Read together these extracts appear to form a statement of intent, positioning the memoir as an exercise in completion, the generation of a whole and authentic self, claimable only by the speaker. Yet, simultaneously this intention is undermined as the memoir acknowledges that such an exercise in completion can only ever be partial due to the insurmountable resistance offered by the insufficiency of language. She then goes on to warn that 'some deceptive sights are seen through glass, and the best liars tell lies in plain words' (p. 5), before asking '[i]s my writing clear: or is it deceptively clear?' (p. 5). This rhetorical question, with its compound destabilisation in which the reader is asked to ascertain the presence of a clarity whose very transparency may be paradoxically misleading, is characteristic of the memoir's numerous double gestures.

Despite these provocations on the part of the memoir for reading strategies that exceed generic conventions and accommodate the text's multiple – perhaps undecidable – possibilities, critical responses to *Giving up the Ghost* have, for the most part, attempted to shut down the text's ambiguity and multiplicity. These responses are particularly apparent in readings of the ghostly presences which populate the text. A number of conventional ghosts can be found within the pages of the book, from the ghost of the speaker's stepfather, Jack, descending the stairs on the opening page to the ancestral dead 'peering at their place cards, and shuffling into their chairs' (p. 252) at the memoir's close. Yet to assume that the memoir's

titular ghost corresponds with, and is circumscribed by, these traditional phantoms is to refuse the ambiguity of the text. This refusal is only one element of a constellation of naïve readings present in reviews of the memoir, which endeavour both to pin down the class of ghosts which haunt it, and then to exorcise those presences from the narrative or even allege that their exorcism is the project the narrative undertakes.

Early on in the memoir the speaker recalls Margaret Atwood's assertion that '[t]he written word is so much like evidence – like something that can be used against you' (p. 6). This 'evidential' treatment of the memoir is the one that has most often been employed by reviewers of the text, who conflate the author of the book and its speaker. Kathryn Hughes, writing in the *Guardian*, states that in *Giving up the Ghost* 'Mantel has booted out all of those shadowy presences that have jostled her all her life.'<sup>11</sup> In a review for the *New York Times*, Inga Clendinnen posits the possibility that a traumatic and mysterious encounter involving the young Hilary is simply '[a] "realization" of vulgar Catholic teachings intensified by shame at the masked improprieties within her household.'<sup>12</sup> Marianne Brace, writing in *The Telegraph*, cannot resist the urge to begin her review (strikingly titled 'Hilary Mantel: The Exorcist'): '[w]hen Hilary Mantel was seven she met the Devil,'<sup>13</sup> even if she does quickly back away from such a rigid interpretation of the memoir's account of a possibly supernatural encounter. The same cannot be said of the *New Yorker*'s blithe assertion that '[w]hen the English novelist Hilary Mantel was seven years old, she saw the devil standing in the weeds beyond her back fence,'<sup>14</sup> while a review in *Publisher's Weekly* problematically insists that the text's 'first and foremost ghost [. . .] is the baby [Mantel] will never have.'<sup>15</sup> This statement attempts to establish a linkage in the memoir between haunting and Mantel's experience of endometriosis and resulting infertility but does so in such a way as to delimit, crassly and

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<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Hughes, 'Ghost Stories', *Guardian*, Saturday 10 May 2003 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/may/10/featuresreviews.guardianreview18>> [accessed 03 September 2015].

<sup>12</sup> Inga Clendinnen, 'Unsuited to Everything', *The New York Times*, 05 October 2003 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/05/books/unsuited-to-everything.html?pagewanted=all>> [accessed 16 November 2012].

<sup>13</sup> Marianne Brace, 'Hilary Mantel: The Exorcist', *Telegraph*, Saturday 10 May 2003 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/hilary-mantel-the-exorcist-590258.html>> [accessed 03 September 2015].

<sup>14</sup> 'The Devil's Work: Hilary Mantel's Ghosts', *New Yorker*, Monday 25 July 2005 <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/07/25/devils-work>> [accessed 03 September 2015].

<sup>15</sup> 'Giving up the Ghost: A Memoir', *Publisher's Weekly*, 14 July 2003 <<http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-8050-7472-7>> [accessed 03 September 2015].



reductively, the ghosts within the text. Perhaps understandably given the impact the illness has had on Mantel, most recently documented in her e-book *Ink in the Blood*, critical writing on *Giving up the Ghost* specifically, and on Mantel more widely, has been preoccupied with the author's experience of endometriosis. The keenness to define and control the ghosts and apparitions in Mantel's memoir evidenced above, to render unambiguous those elements of the text which are most difficult, is paralleled in this pre-occupation with her illness.

Academic work on the memoir is limited and much of it displays similarly problematic refusals of ambiguity and susceptibility to unhelpfully reductive or clinically preoccupied readings. Amy Prodromou's chapter 'Writing the Self into Being: Illness and Identity in Inga Clendinnen's *Tiger's Eye* and Hilary Mantel's *Giving up the Ghost*'<sup>16</sup> defines Mantel's memoir as merely an account of illness, an 'autopathography'.<sup>17</sup> Such a definition has the effect of effacing the complexity of the work and allowing illness straightforwardly to dominate interpretation in the same way as it is represented within the text as dominating the speaker's life.<sup>18</sup> Alongside this issue sits a further problem: a lack of nuanced engagement with the relationship between Mantel's life-writing and her fiction. One of the only texts in which this is attempted is Sara Knox's article 'Giving Flesh to the "Wraiths of Violence": Super Realism in the Fiction of Hilary Mantel'.<sup>19</sup> Yet Knox's piece does not focus solely on *Giving up the Ghost*. Indeed the memoir is only invoked briefly as a point of origin for a moment in *Beyond Black*.<sup>20</sup> Clearly such a use of autobiography as origin for fiction is dubious, particularly in this case where the apparent re-appearance of the moment, 'changed but still recognizable,'<sup>21</sup> is uninterrogated and understood merely as evidence that 'the world of Mantel's fiction

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<sup>16</sup> Amy Prodromou, 'Writing the Self into Being: Illness and Identity in Inga Clendinnen's *Tiger's Eye* and Hilary Mantel's *Giving up the Ghost*', in *Identity and Form in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Ana Maria Sánchez-Arce (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 195-209.

<sup>17</sup> Prodromou, p. 195. Here Prodromou is adapting a term first coined by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins in her book *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> The onset of a chronic period of the illness is described in *Giving up the Ghost* as follows: 'a pain sliced through me, diagonal, from my right ribs to my left loin. It was a new pain: but not new for long. It stole my life: it stole it for ten years and for a double term, and then for ten years more' (p. 173).

<sup>19</sup> Sara Knox, 'Giving Flesh to the "Wraiths of Violence": Super Realism in the Fiction of Hilary Mantel', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 25 (2010), 313-323.

<sup>20</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Beyond Black* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005). All further references to this edition given in parenthesis in the body of the text.

<sup>21</sup> Knox, p. 320.

is not so very far from the world of her life.’<sup>22</sup> In her thesis “‘What is done and what is declared’”: origin and ellipsis in the writing of Hilary Mantel’, Eileen Pollard isolates the key issue with Knox’s use of *Giving up the Ghost* when she states that within the article ‘there is no *suspicion* of the link’<sup>23</sup> between the memoir and *Beyond Black*.

I argue that Mantel’s memoir has been read naïvely, not only in terms of how it operates within the crowded field of contemporary life-writing, but in terms of how the potentially supernatural elements of the text, including the titular ‘ghost’, have attracted a stubbornly literal critical approach. While *Giving up the Ghost*’s engagement with haunting at first glance seems glib (exemplified by the humorous colloquialism of the memoir’s title) and slight, and while this thesis will go on to deal with an array of more traditional ghosts and spectres, privileging the spectral as a plastic yet principal mode within *Giving up the Ghost* allows the critical shortcomings outlined above to be addressed. In opposition to these reductive reading strategies, this chapter demonstrates that *Giving up the Ghost* must be understood not as a straightforward literary memoir but as a conscious and complex response to the changing status of life-writing within the cultural sphere. The book mischievously references a number of the sub-genres listed above, at various moments evoking the spiritual memoir, the memoir of illness and disability and, in one crucial passage, alluding to but dismissing the tropes of the misery memoir.<sup>24</sup> Yet this playful understanding of genre forms only part of *Giving up the Ghost*’s self-conscious engagement with memoir. In addition to telling a story of Mantel’s life (and indeed a sincere and moving one) *Giving up the Ghost* openly works with the memoir’s roots in memory, and the inherent flaws and fictions these roots bring with them, making available a notion of memory as a ‘creative writer’, complicating

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<sup>22</sup> Knox, p. 319.

<sup>23</sup> Eileen Pollard, “‘What is done and what is declared’”: origin and ellipsis in the writing of Hilary Mantel’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013), p. 122. My italics.

<sup>24</sup> In the moments before the memoir’s speaker begins to relate a traumatic childhood encounter she notes ‘you are aware that readers – any kind readers who’ve stayed with you – are bracing themselves for some revelation of sexual abuse. That’s the usual horror’ (p. 106). This statement alludes to the preponderance of autobiographical narratives of child abuse which came to prominence with David Pelzer’s *A Child Called It* (2000) and which continue to dominate the non-fiction paperback charts. For a detailed discussion of the evolution of the misery memoir see Esther Addley ‘So Bad It’s Good’, *Guardian*, 15 June 2007, <<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/jun/15/childrenservices.biography>> [accessed 15 January 2016].

and interrogating the contested boundary between autobiography and fiction.<sup>25</sup> In addition to exposing the tense relationship between creativity and authenticity upon which memoir is predicated, playing out the ‘irresolvable conflict between the capabilities of memory and the demands of narrative’,<sup>26</sup> *Giving up the Ghost* is also an elegant exposition of the inextricable connection between, and perpetual work of, the creation of narrative and the creation of self. If Saunders argues that ‘[a]utobiography does not transcribe a self that already exists’, but rather is an ‘act of narration that brings that self into being’,<sup>27</sup> *Giving up the Ghost* chronicles a will to presence through writing which is perpetually deferred and disavows the possibility of a full and stable ‘transcription’ of such a presence. As Linda Anderson, paraphrasing Derrida, has put it ‘[a]utobiography as a demand for unmediated selfhood is, it seems, doomed to reiterate itself endlessly as text.’<sup>28</sup> This deferral and disavowal renders the memoir’s speaker a spectre in her own right, and *Giving up the Ghost* a ghost story in more ways than one.

In this chapter I propose an alternative mode of responding to the memoir’s multitude of ghosts and spectres which understands the book’s speaker as possessing a spectral existence. Furthermore, that spectral voice is augmented by and refracted through a variety of other hauntings, both thematic and contextual, whose disorganizing and destabilising effects serve to question the status of life-writing as a project in producing a choate narrative while nonetheless emphasising its ethical possibilities. From an exposition of the spectral status of *Giving up the Ghost*’s ‘I’ speaker, I interrogate how the memoir’s intertextual materials form haunting structures which question the notion of a straightforward and uncontested personal identity. Continuing to think about what the complicated and ‘undecidable’ elements of *Giving up the Ghost* make possible, I look to how the memoir fosters a haunting secrecy which produces readings which are, like the speaker’s narrative project, never complete and never stable. Rather than giving them up (whether by exposing, exorcising or debunking them), it is the preservation of ghosts, in all of their forms, that is crucial to this interpretation of Mantel’s memoir.

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<sup>25</sup> Writing in his essay *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* Derrida usefully identifies how ‘a distinction between fiction and autobiography [. . .] not only remains undecidable but, far more serious, in whose indecidability, [. . .], it is impossible to *stand*, to maintain oneself in a stable or stationary way.’ (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Yagoda, p. 109.

<sup>27</sup> Saunders, p. 511.

<sup>28</sup> Linda Anderson in Saunders, p. 504.

## A Ghost, Writing: The Spectral Speaker

The 'I' speaker of memoir occupies a slippery and contested place within the field of life-writing in which it makes a claim for authenticity and authority that is frequently problematic and precarious. The artificiality of the autobiographical 'I' is reflected upon by Inga Clendinnen in her own autobiographical narrative of illness *Tiger's Eye: A Memoir*. In it she states: '[t]his stuck together "I" is tired of introspection, that interminable novel of the invention of the self. I am tired of the "I", with its absurd pretensions to agency, so elegant, so upright, moving so serenely through the thickets of lesser words, surveying them from such a height. Poised on so narrow a base. It is difficult to take that preposterous pronoun seriously when you know it to be a fabricated, chemically supported, contingent thing.'<sup>29</sup> Working from Virginia Woolf's assertions about the speaker within autobiography, Pollard puts forward an apt conceptualisation of the autobiographical 'I', particularly within *Giving up the Ghost*, as an artificial creation,<sup>30</sup> 'a convenient term for one who has no real being.'<sup>31</sup>

One of the crucial elements of Mantel's memoir which sets it apart from other contemporary literary works of life-writing is the speaker's seeming acknowledgement of herself as such a one 'who has no real being.' If, as Shari Benstock puts it '(in the Lacanian style) [. . .] autobiography is a fiction that conceals a lack',<sup>32</sup> in the case of *Giving up the Ghost*, this lack is what the text on the one hand openly acknowledges and seeks to ameliorate and on the other preserves. On several occasions the speaker frames the work of the memoir as an act of writing herself into being, the crafting of a singular autobiographical narrative posited as an antidote to feelings of fragmentation and dispossession. She states that 'this story can be told only once, and I need to get it right' (p. 5), and describes herself writing the memoir 'in order to take charge of the story of my childhood and my childlessness' (p. 222), seeking to 'seize the copyright in [herself]' to prevent '[her] parents, [. . .]

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<sup>29</sup> Inga Clendinnen, *Tiger's Eye: A Memoir* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2000), p. 286.

<sup>30</sup> Eileen Pollard, "But at second sight the words seemed not so simple" (Virginia Woolf, 1929): Thickening and Rotting Hysteria in the Writing of Hilary Mantel and Virginia Woolf, *The Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 80 (2011), 24-26 (p. 24).

<sup>31</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984), p. 4. The above understanding of the autobiographical 'I' does, however, have implications for the terminology used to speak about the author of *Giving up the Ghost* in contrast to its speaker. To that end, in this chapter the name 'Hilary' refers to the memoir's narrator while 'Mantel' will be used to refer to the book's author.

<sup>32</sup> Shari Benstock, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 11.

the child [she] once was, and [. . .] [her] own unborn children, stretching out their ghost fingers to grab the pen' (pp. 70-1). The idea of this narrative being the 'authorised' version of the speaker's life is paired with a notion that writing this account can provide her with a coherent presence in a way that mere physicality has failed to. Speaking of her traumatic medical history, which involved a number of misdiagnoses, major surgical procedures and numerous drug regimens, Hilary states:

I have been so mauled by medical procedures, so sabotaged and made over, so thin and so fat, that sometimes I feel that each morning it is necessary to write myself into being – even if that writing is aimless doodling that no one will ever read, or the diary that no one can see till I'm dead. When you have committed enough words to paper you feel you have a spine stiff enough to stand up in the wind. (pp. 222-3)

Yet, at every turn this will to presence through the act of writing is not only thwarted but its very possibility undermined by the speaker herself. The passage above concludes that 'when you stop writing you find that's *all* you are, a spine, a row of rattling vertebrae, dried out like an old quill pen' (p. 223, my italics) and the writing which is intended to perform reparations for the disruptive disintegrations brought about by her medical and familial history is constituted not only by the memoir but by material which goes unread or which, paradoxically only becomes legible after the speaker's death. Rather than providing a definitive account, the work of the memoir is described as first deferred (as Hilary puts it 'I have hesitated for such a long time before beginning this narrative' (p. 70)) and then perpetual. The speaker is 'always trying to finish' a work which 'resists finishing [. . .] because words are not enough' (p. 23). Indeed, in its early pages the autobiographical project is described as almost Sisyphean: 'any style [of writing] you pick seems to unpick itself before a paragraph is done' (p. 4). The memoir's attempts to find stability and place among the 'ghost fingers' seeking to possess Hilary's life-story, and the unpredictability of her own fluctuating and painful endometriotic body, ultimately locate themselves 'not within a body' but 'in the narrow space between one letter and the next, between the lines where the ghosts of meaning are' (p. 222).

On a number of occasions the memoir's speaker situates herself not among the living but among ghosts, occupying their spaces and taking on their qualities. The alternative space in which Hilary seeks to manifest through writing ('between the lines', 'between one letter and the next') is in fact a haunted void, which does not

communicate but rather accommodates the not-yet formed and the not-yet finished. It is also, as will be discussed at the close of this chapter, the place at which the 'ghosts of [her] own sense impressions' 're-emerge [. . .] and shiver' (p. 23). Towards the close of the text Hilary asks '[w]hat's to be done with the lost, the dead, but write them into being?' (p. 231), implicitly placing herself among this company. Even in the text's less self-reflexive moments Hilary both claims for herself, and has allotted to her, the position of spectre. She tells of how she is cast as a ghost in Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* (p. 54), and relates how, after a childhood illness her 'bullet-like presence, [her] solidity, has vanished. Ambiguity has thinned [her] bones, made [her] light and washed [her] out (p. 57). Upon attending primary school she distinguishes herself from her peers stating: 'I knew, [. . .], so many people who were old, so many people who were dead; I belonged to their company and lineage, not to this, and I began to want to rejoin them' (p. 60). Later still, another bout of fever causes her to imagine 'every cell of [her] body thinning, stretching, becoming transparent, forming and re-forming in some other dimension' (p. 94). Yet if the work of the memoir places the speaker among a company of ghosts, this placement reverberates through the text. One of these reverberations is found in the memoir's critique of subjective identity, its formation, articulation and cohesion, a critique which is achieved through a series of complex and self-conscious intertextual interventions.

### **'Show your workings': Identity and Intertextuality**

*Giving up the Ghost* not only meditates upon the author's experience of subjective identity and personal history as created, contingent and contested but posits that experience as being to some extent universal. Hilary states: 'There are other people who, like me, have had the roots of their personality torn up' (p. 222) and, in a significant passage towards the memoir's close, implicates the reader in the complex process of self-assembly resulting from such ruptures through her use of the second person:

When you were a child you had to create yourself from whatever was to hand. You had to construct yourself and make yourself into a person, fitting somehow into the niche that in your family has been always vacant, or into a vacancy left by someone dead. Sometimes you looked towards a dead man's shoes, seeing how, in time, you would replace your grandmother, or her elder sister, or someone who no one really remembered but who ought to have

been there: someone's miscarriage, someone's dead child. Much of what happened to you, in your early life, was constructed inside your head. [. . .]. [Y]ou had to listen at doors for information, or sometimes it was what you overheard; but just as often it was disinformation, or half a tale [. . .] How then can you create a narrative of your own life? (p. 223)

In this extract the process of self-formation is understood both as necessarily synthetic and predicated upon a complex series of hauntings in which the subject tries to occupy a space left by the dead but in so doing allows that dead ancestor a ghostly existence rather than claiming an individual identity and solid presence for itself. The hold the familial dead have over their living relatives, and the impossibilities of evading that grip, are fictionalised in Mantel's short story 'Destroyed' in which the narrator's mother insists that '[c]hildren should be named for themselves. They shouldn't be named for other people'<sup>33</sup> before nevertheless going on to choose 'George' as her new child's middle name, after her dead brother (p. 30). Significantly, the narrator observes that this middle name is intended as a secret: 'there was something else about the baby's name, something that was going to be hidden' (p. 29). This hiding of the dead in plain sight within the identities of the living is central to *Giving up the Ghost*. Yet the familial ghosts who haunt the memoir's speaker, by turns helping and hindering her struggle to form an account of her life, are paralleled by a series of formal hauntings. At the end of the passage quoted above Hilary invokes fellow writer Janet Frame's comparison of the creation of a life narrative to 'finding a bunch of old rags and trying to make a dress' (p. 223). Such 'rags', as discussed in my introduction, form a crucial element of Mantel's definition of the ghost as 'the tags and rags of everyday life' (p. 233). The memoir offers a self-conscious demonstration of the patchwork nature of a life-narrative through a complex deployment of ghostly intertextual 'rags' which, like the 'hidden' name discussed in 'Destroyed' frequently function, if not invisibly, then in partial occlusion. In doing so they assure the artificial quality of memoir and formally play out the blending of fiction and non-fiction on which life-writing depends.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'Destroyed', in *Learning to Talk* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), pp. 21-44 (pp. 21-2). All further references are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>34</sup> As Yagoda has observed, Nancy Miller speaks provocatively about the unstable frontiers of fiction with regards to its place within memoir: 'I could write down what I remembered; or I could craft a memoir. One *might* be the truth; the other a good story . . . When I sit down to reconstruct my past, I call on memory, but when memory fails, I let language lead . . . As a writer, the answer to the question of what 'really' happened is literary – or at least textual. I will know it when I write it. When

Before examining a series of intersections between Mantel's memoir and her fiction I offer a reading of two intertextual moments within 'King Billy is a Gentleman', the opening story of *Learning to Talk*. An extensive exploration of the importance of intertextuality to Mantel's work and the specifics of her intertextual play can be found in Chapter 5's analysis of *Wolf Hall* and *Fludd*. However, where the intertextual ground in those novels serves to complicate and critique the notion of textual practice itself, the intertextual material present in *Giving up the Ghost* is of a different quality. Here it supplements the memoir's assertion of the ersatz nature of self and the narratives through which that self becomes, or attempts to become, present. Additionally, the memoir's external intertexts set up a resonance between Mantel's life writing and her fiction, and map out an intertextual strategy which is equally applicable to her use of self-quotation.

Before embarking on an examination of how *Giving up the Ghost* interacts with the rest of Mantel's canon, it is important to note that the author herself has described a specific relationship between her short fiction in particular and her own life, describing it as 'an attempt to address mysteries' and going on to state that 'a great deal of [the short fiction] is about childhood and puzzles left over from my childhood which I'm trying to work on in fiction.'<sup>35</sup> While this admission should not be taken as evidence for superficial readings of the short fiction as uncomplicated products of Mantel's biography, it is indicative of a need for sensitivity to the resonances which exist between *Giving up the Ghost* and *Learning to Talk* and the implications readings of the memoir might have for readings of the short fiction, and vice versa. This need also necessitates an understanding of the two texts as participating in what Derrida refers to as 'the possibility of literature [. . .] that innocently plays at perverting all of [the] distinctions' between 'testimony [. . .] fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury.'<sup>36</sup> By attending to the intertextual play within and between these two texts, not only does Mantel's use of intertextuality here emerge as articulating the hybrid, synthesised nature of the narrative of self, it also allows the identification of those moments where her writing troubles the distinctions between

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I write it, the truth will lie in the writing. But the writing may not be the truth; it may only look like it. To me.' Nancy Miller in Yagoda, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup>Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 267.

<sup>36</sup>Derrida, *Demeure*, p. 29.



fiction and autobiography, ‘calls [them] into question or causes them all to tremble.’<sup>37</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the intertextual ground of Mantel’s novels is also present in *Learning to Talk*. The collection contains stories published across a sixteen-year span (1987-2002) and all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, contain overt references to other texts. ‘King Billy is a Gentleman’ is a complex work, concerned in part with Irish Nationalism and the narrator, Liam’s, experience of living in England but being of Irish descent while simultaneously trying to make sense of a vexed and haunted childhood.<sup>38</sup> The story contains two notable intertextual references. The first is found in the phrase ‘[u]rban, squat and packed with guile’, a quotation from Rupert Brooke’s ‘The Old Vicarage at Grantchester’<sup>39</sup> which the narrator uses to describe his mother’s attitude towards Mancunians. The other is to W.B Yeats’ poem ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’<sup>40</sup> whose line ‘[n]ine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee’ is quoted in full with reference to the narrator’s neighbour’s garden. This example of two apparently off-hand references (indeed the latter is so peripheral as to appear in parenthesis as a summary gesture intended to encapsulate a desire for a solitary idyll) and the ways in which they complicate the text has profound implications for our treatment of those other intertextual fragments drawn from Mantel’s own work, specifically those that have roots within her autobiographical writing. These implications become apparent when the authors of these intertexts are considered alongside each other.

Brooke is a poet in many ways defined by his Englishness and his Grantchester poem embodies a growing nostalgia for rural England in the early 1900s. A member of the British Navy killed in action in the First World War, Brooke became ‘for the elite as well as the popular readership [. . .] a kind of receptacle for discourse on

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<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, p. 26

<sup>38</sup> Liam’s childhood resonates with the account of Irishness given in the memoir in which Hilary frequently asserts the Protestantism of objects, animals and people in contrast to her own Irish Catholicism and recalls ‘a Protestant boy across the road point[ing] and jeer[ing]’ at her as she stands in her communion dress, preparing ‘for one of the Feasts of the Church’ (*Giving up the Ghost*, p. 102). The details of the troubles in Northern Ireland, and how they impacted upon her, are skated over in a brief reference to her great aunt’s sectarian views: ‘she could not fail to hate [. . .] a black and tan. And for people of the Orange persuasion she can’t care’ (p. 48).

<sup>39</sup> Rupert Brooke, ‘The Old Vicarage at Grantchester’, *The Complete Poems of Rupert Brooke* (Sidwick and Jackson, Ltd, London, 1934), p. 93.

<sup>40</sup> William Butler Yeats, ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’, *The Collected Poems of W.B Yeats*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran and George Mills Harper, 1<sup>st</sup> edn. (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 44.

patriotism.<sup>41</sup> As Alisa Miller puts it, '[t]he myth of Rupert Brooke, the nation's poet soldier, offered a simplified version of an ideal that much of England wanted to see and hear.'<sup>42</sup> Yeats on the other hand was famously an Irish nationalist and, in the words of Marjorie Howes, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' 'offers a speaker whose nostalgia for an idealized Ireland [. . .] will remain perpetually deferred.'<sup>43</sup> In his early career Yeats was a prominent member of the Irish Literary Revival and 'The Lake Isle' is an example of the work produced as part of that movement which sought to create poetry that was Irish in origin rather than adhering to English standards and traditions.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, Yeats and Brooke are embedded within 'King Billy is a Gentleman' to enact a covert playing out of the sectarian tensions which are explored in microcosm within the narrative and touched upon in *Giving up the Ghost*. However, Brooke and Yeats are quoted not in the context of an overt discussion of nationalism or nation but incidentally, to facilitate laconic observations or doomed attempts at horticulture. Their political significance permeates the text secondarily, becoming apparent only when these poetic intertexts are closely interrogated. Thus, the voices of Brooke and Yeats perform another function in the story. Just prior to the moment in *Giving up the Ghost* when Hilary admits uncertainly, 'I used to be Irish but I'm not sure now', she states: '[a] question people pose is, How many beans make five?' (p. 36), echoing Yeats' bean rows, an echo which indicates that the intertextual voices within the short story may speak to an individually felt tension between Englishness and Irishness, and by extension Protestantism and Catholicism, as much as a national one. This reading is supported by a twinning of two folk rhymes, one of which can be found in *Giving up the Ghost*, the other in 'King Billy'. In the memoir Hilary describes skipping with her Great Aunt and singing an extract from the Irish street ballad 'The Wearing of the Green' (p. 98), a traditionally Republican song. By contrast, the narrator of 'King Billy' endures his English neighbours singing the anti-Catholic, Unionist rhyme 'King Billy is a Gentleman' (p. 13).

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<sup>41</sup> Alisa Miller, 'Rupert Brooke and the Growth of Commercial Patriotism in Great Britain 1914-18', *Twentieth Century British History*, 21(2010), 141-62 (p. 152).

<sup>42</sup> Miller, p. 162.

<sup>43</sup> Marjorie Howes, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats*, ed. by Marjorie Howes and John Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-18 (p. 3).

<sup>44</sup> Howes, p. 4.

The inclusion of Yeats and Brooke within ‘King Billy’ is not merely a wry intertextual opposition of English and Irish cultural positions. Rather, it plays out the uncertainty which characterises the phrase ‘I used to be Irish but I’m not sure now’, a sentiment mirrored in Liam’s characterisation of himself as ‘one of life’s Provisionals’ (p. 20), which emphasises a sense of potentiality even as it references the Irish Republican Army. As the story progresses it becomes apparent that its intertexts and mirrorings produce tension rather than resolution. Yeats’ own relationship with Irish nationalism was complex and mutable, continually evolving throughout his career.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the section of ‘The Wearing of the Green’ that is quoted in *Giving up the Ghost* mentions James Napper Tandy, a Protestant who was also a member of the Catholic Republican organisation ‘The United Irishmen’ and was far from an uncomplicated figure within the conflict. Likewise, the extract from ‘The Old Vicarage at Grantchester’ does not subscribe to a cliché of bucolic Englishness but rather dwells on negative traits, particularly a sly, cunning intelligence. No single conclusion can be drawn from this complex intertextual play. Rather it should be understood as a negotiation around self and identity which is never complete and never straightforward. Moreover, the discussions of Irishness which take place both in *Giving up the Ghost* and *Learning to Talk*, despite the phantasmal quality of their association, nevertheless form a tense intertextual network. The implications of Mantel’s intertextual play in ‘King Billy’ resonate beyond that text to haunt the way Irishness can be read in the memoir, meaningfully recognising Mantel’s own acts of ‘working through’ and their significance for the work of *Giving up the Ghost*.

Mantel’s canon is saturated with intertextual references to a vast range of material. However, in the critical responses to her work, very little comment has been made upon the relationship Mantel’s texts might have to each other in terms of their containing acts of self-quotation. The significance of these self-quotations within the context of the literary memoir has previously been touched upon by Saunders. He sets apart the autobiographies of literary authors as differing in a number of crucial ways from other examples of the genre and understands the most significant of these differences to be the way that such writings have a specific intertextual relationship

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<sup>45</sup> Miller, p. 10.

with the author's works of fiction.<sup>46</sup> He asserts that '[t]he form of intertextuality constitutive of literary autobiography is the relation between autobiography and the autobiographer's other texts' and as such these autobiographies are capable of 'play[ing] complex games with intertextuality and hybridity.'<sup>47</sup>

The tense and circuitous connections between memoir and fiction forged by Mantel's use of Yeats and Brooke in 'King Billy' are doubly haunting by virtue of the writers in question being deceased and the quotations themselves unmarked and, to a degree, invisible. Bearing this in mind I turn now to analyse several moments in which Mantel uses her own work as spectral intertext. It is important to note that this chapter does not seek to chase down every moment of intersection between *Giving up the Ghost* and Mantel's fiction. Rather I seek to expose how these texts interact, and how those interactions produce and preserve the enigmatic gaps and spectres so crucial for understanding her work. It is useful initially to sketch out the manifestations these textual spectres take, and to state their complex chronological relationship to each other. As with Mantel's approach to intertexts by other authors, it is possible to observe full and partial quotations as well as misquotations of material which bridge the memoir and the fictional texts. For example, in Mantel's 1989 novel *Fludd*, Catholic priest Father Angwin states of his congregation: '[t]hese people are not Christians, they are heathens and Catholics' (*Fludd*, p. 22) and insists that 'the Bible [is] a Protestant book' (*Fludd* p. 75). This construction re-emerges in *Giving up the Ghost*, though in this instance it is Hilary who recalls how '[m]y Grandmother thought you didn't want to be reading the Bible, she thought it was a Protestant book' (pp. 204-5) and claims 'I was bought up a Christian, in so far as a Catholic may be called' (p. 204). One of the most striking direct quotations to be deposited throughout Mantel's corpus concerns the distantly heard slammed door. The motif appears in a number of her novels but a particularly strong correlation can be observed between *Giving up the Ghost* and *Fludd*:

Somewhere in the house a door slams. (*Giving up the Ghost*, p. 86)

Somewhere else in the house, a door slammed. (*Fludd*, p. 8)

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<sup>46</sup> Contrary to Saunders' insistence that the novelist's memoir traditionally constitutes a coda of sorts to the author's writing life and forms a commentary upon that author's oeuvre (Saunders, pp. 516-7), *Giving up the Ghost* sits stubbornly at the centre of Mantel's writing career, refusing this traditional position and thus significantly complicating the work of the memoir.

<sup>47</sup> Saunders, p. 6.

Mantel's memoir, published in 2003, is pre-dated by all but four of her novels to date. As such, the works have a complex relationship to each other in terms of chronology as incidents in Mantel's early life are rendered in the memoir yet have in many cases already been subject to a fictionalising transplantation prior to the memoir's publication. There is a disorientating doubling back and forth which gives certain references a predictive quality of which one is rightly suspicious. This doubling back also produces the kind of chronological disturbance associated with the ghost or spectre, whose apparitions bring the past into the present and threaten future return. The pair of quotations given above enacts this problematic chronology through the subtle differences in their phrasing, the extract from the memoir remaining in the present tense while the extract from the novel 'relocates' the slamming door physically ('somewhere *else*') and temporally, placing the incident in the past tense. The fact of *Fludd's* publication prior to *Giving up the Ghost* further disrupts any notion of linear temporality and negates the possibility of finding an 'originary text'. Yet the extracts also prompt a questioning of the effect such a relocation has upon the work an intertext can do within a narrative. Close examination of a number of enigmatic instances of haunting reveal the pressures and reverberations produced by Mantel's use of self-quotation to form a mode of haunting in their own right.

*Giving up the Ghost* features a compelling description of the apparent haunting of Brosscroft, one of Hilary's childhood homes. The fragmented account of this haunting takes place over sixty pages at the (dead) centre of the novel.<sup>48</sup> The inexplicability of the atmosphere at Brosscroft, and the concurrent search for explanations, is vocalized by Hilary's mother who is overheard apparently rebuking Hilary's stepfather, for an unspecified theory regarding the events in the house: "'so? So what do you think it is?'" Her voice rises, in an equal blend of challenge, fear and scorn. "What do you think it is? *Ghosts?*" (p. 96). As is the nature of hauntings, these textual moments do not only appear once. However, unlike other potentially supernatural and ambiguous occurrences in the text, these (re)appearances are to be found in a number of Mantel's short stories.

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<sup>48</sup> In fact, during one of the more expansive passages detailing the Brosscroft hauntings, the term 'dead centre' is used twice in quick succession, once to describe the lightless and troubling space of the stairwell in the middle of the house and then again to describe the positioning of a front door key, mysteriously lost and just as mysteriously returned to the top of the china cabinet (pp. 87-8). Such a repetition is one of many indications that not merely the dead, but the enigmas they leave behind, are the key to understanding this text.

We lived at the top of the village, in a house which I considered to be haunted. My father had disappeared. Perhaps it was his presence, long and pallid, which slid behind the door in sweeps of draught and raised the hackles on the terrier's neck. ('King Billy is a Gentleman', p. 2)

The puppies had a pretty good life, except at night when the ghosts that lived in our house came out of the stone-floored pantry, and down from the big cupboard to the left of the chimney breast. Depend upon it, they were not dripping or ladies or genteel [. . .] These were ghosts with filed teeth. You couldn't see them, but you could sense their presence when you saw the dogs' bristling necks, and saw the shudders run down their backbones. ('Destroyed', p. 27-28)

I think I see someone turning the corner, down the corridor to the bedroom where my father Henry now sleeps in a single bed. (*Giving up the Ghost*, p. 86)

The dogs, who are no longer puppies, squeal with fear in the night. My mother comes down to them, shivering in her nightdress, and sees their hackles raised, their thin forms shrinking against the dawn light. (*Giving up the Ghost*, p. 96)

I went into the dim pantry with the deep stone shelves. The ghosts rolled under them, sucking their teeth in envy and malice. (*Giving up the Ghost*, p. 120)

The relationships among these extracts, given here in order of publication, are complex and without quoting at unmanageable length the nuance of their interconnection is difficult to convey. Nonetheless, examination of their particular points of contact demonstrates how the texts refuse the possibility of a straightforward relationship between Mantel's biography and her work. Taking the image of the dogs, terrified by invisible presences, as a starting point, it is clear that these incidents mirror each other in various ways. Yet, just as the differences in tense present in the 'slamming door' quotations enacted the temporal disturbances produced by the complex relationship between Mantel's fiction and her memoir, the transformation from grown dog to puppyhood and back to maturity rejects the notion of an original from which other textual manifestations emerge. Secondly, the resonances on the level of language that are produced when the three passages are read together contribute to a sense of simultaneity. This is particularly apparent in the descriptions of the ghosts and their dwelling places; the emphasis on the teeth of the phantoms is common to both the memoir and the short fiction, as are the descriptions of the stony space of the pantry and the deep recesses from which the ghosts emerge (the 'deep stone shelves' and 'big cupboard' on the sinister 'left' of

the chimney breast).<sup>49</sup> From the dogs terrified by supernatural forces to the stony pantry, with the images of the flat stones evoking grave markers, there is an implication that these domestic spooks somehow haunt the same house, are the same ghosts. Yet we should be suspicious of such a reading; material from one location may appear the same when relocated but the effects that material will produce may be radically different.

As Hilary's mother's frightened and indignant questioning makes clear, the presences that trouble the Brosscroft house in *Giving up the Ghost* prompt a desire for definitive interpretation while simultaneously refusing any such interpretation.<sup>50</sup> Hilary speculates that her smallest brother cries in the night owing to the 'shady inhabitants' of their 'new upstairs' whose 'strange shape[s] pass against the curtains and the street lamp' (p. 68) and describes the rooms of her new home as having 'filled silently with unseen, hostile observers' (p. 81). These amorphous 'strange' and 'shady' presences also manifest as uninterpretable scraps and traces, they 'discharge from the burnt walls in puffs, they are scraped into slivers as the old wallpaper peels away, and lie curled on the floors, mocking the bristle brush (p. 96). To assign these phenomena either the status of supernatural tenants (of the kind which, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, haunt the protagonists of Mantel's debut duology *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession*), or manifestations of familial trauma, is to prevent them from functioning in the way that the text demands; that is, as unresolvably enigmatic to both the adults and children present. Yet the appearance of these phantoms in 'Destroyed' and 'King Billy is a Gentleman', both fictional tales, places them upon a spectrum of literary ghosts. The placement of these household ghosts within a fictional context locates them alongside other varieties of phantom, for example the conjectured ghost of Clara, the narrator of 'Destroyed's' drowned cousin, with 'her sodden blouse frilled at the neck' (p. 27). Clara's description recalls the tragic or romantic phantoms of the gothic period and

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<sup>49</sup> In *Giving up the Ghost's* account of the emergence of the apparent household ghosts, it is interesting to note that they are reported to manifest from, amongst other locations, 'the glass-fronted cupboards to the right of the fireplace' (p. 96), rather than the left hand side described in the short story. This mirror image offers a succinct example of the transformative effect of relocation on textual material.

<sup>50</sup> Indeed, even this desire is compromised by a desire *not to know* and *not to speak*, as Hilary reports how she is 'not supposed to overhear' about the fear experienced by a workman in the house (p. 86) and recalls that her mother's attribution of the household disturbances to ghosts 'speaks [her] thoughts: which [she] thought were unspeakable' (p. 96).

alongside her, the Brosscroft presences and their fictional counterparts, demand that the reader broaden her understanding of haunting to accommodate not merely the ghostly presence of the dead returned to life but that which haunts by virtue of its unknowable, undecidable quality.

### **The Secret Garden: Cultivating Enigma**

‘To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body. If you let it stay there after it has got in you may never get over it as long as you live.’

- *The Secret Garden*, Frances Hodgson Burnett

Thus far this chapter has established *Giving up the Ghost* as being narrated by a spectral voice whose attempts to tell a life narrative, and through that telling be granted secure presence and place, are supplemented by a variety of hauntings, both familial and intertextual, which serve to make licit the instability and hybridity of narratives of self. Yet, the most critiqued moment of the memoir, the so-called ‘secret garden’ incident (*Giving up the Ghost*, pp. 105-8), does not rely on supplementation. Rather it centres upon an unnegotiable void which is equally as haunting and destabilising. An analysis of this incident establishes it not as an anomaly within the series of disorganizing hauntings examined thus far but as a provocation for a reading strategy as perpetual and undecidable as the speaker’s project of self-narration.

The passage in question relates Hilary’s childhood encounter with an apparently malevolent presence which defies description. The encounter has an indelible effect on the memoir’s speaker who states that it ‘wrapped a strangling hand around [her] life’ (p. 106). As demonstrated in the introduction to this chapter, the majority of critical responses to the text crystallise around this moment in a reductive manner, either proffering a lay medical or psychological diagnosis of the incident or else identifying the presence in the garden as a ghost or devil without attempting to analyse the implications of that identification for how the text might be read. In opposition to these responses I offer a reading which, rather than cloaking the incident with a simplistic supernatural gloss, privileges the moment’s defining ‘secrecy’.



The centre of this profoundly enigmatic passage is provided by a being which is defined primarily through its exceeding of physical presence:

I am seven, and I am in the yard at Brosscroft; I am playing near the house, near the back door. Something makes me look up: some shift of the light. My eyes are drawn to a spot beyond the yard, beyond its gate, in the long garden. It is, let us say, some fifty yards away, among coarse grass, weeds and bracken. I can't see anything, not exactly see: except the faintest movement, a ripple, a disturbance of the air. I can sense a spiral, a lazy buzzing swirl, like flies; but it is not flies. There is nothing to see. There is nothing to smell. There is nothing to hear. But its motion, its insolent shift, makes my stomach heave. I can sense – at the periphery, the limit of all my senses – the dimensions of the creature. It is as high as a child of two. Its depth is a foot, fifteen inches. The air stirs around it, invisibly. [. . .]. I am looking at a space occupied by nothing. It has no edges, no mass, no dimension, no shape except the formless. (pp. 106-7)

In this description of a confrontation which is supernaturally freighted though by no means straightforwardly supernatural, the speaker's vocabulary repeatedly proves inadequate. The enigmatic blank at the centre of the passage defies description and comprehension, both on the part of Hilary and the memoir's reader, forming a moment of ontological excess.

The 'secret garden' incident repeatedly emphasises the unknowable, indefinable quality of the presence at its heart. Gestures towards description and definition when they are made are immediately contradicted. For instance, the presence is initially positioned as measurable and is described as being 'as high as a child of two. Its depth is a foot, fifteen inches'. Yet the following sentence insists that '[i]t has no edges, no mass, no dimension, no shape except the formless' and the tension between the two statements remains unacknowledged. Certainly the 'secret garden' incident describes a confrontation which is experienced as traumatically invasive, both physically and psychologically; Hilary states that '[w]ithin *the space of a thought* it is inside me, and has set up a sick resonance within my bones and in all the cavities of my body' (p. 107). In his essay *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* Jacques Derrida makes an equation between 'truthful testimony, autobiography in good faith [and] sincere confession' stating that '[i]n essence, testimony is always autobiographical: it tells, in the first person, the sharable and unsharable secret of what happened to me, to me, to me alone, the absolute secret of what I was in a

position to live, see, hear, touch, sense, feel.’<sup>51</sup> This emphasis on testimony’s phenomenological component is shared with Hilary’s account of her encounter. She speaks of ‘the thick taste of blood and sick’ in her mouth, the heaviness of her body, the ‘sweat running from [her]’ (p. 107). Yet what is also common to both Derrida’s account of autobiographical testimony and the ‘secret garden’ incident is the notion of the ‘sharable and unsharable secret’, something Derrida refers to elsewhere as ‘unexperienced experience.’<sup>52</sup> For while the passage is replete with details of Hilary’s own bodily reaction, the stimulus she reacts to wilfully exceeds phenomenological description, there is ‘nothing’ to sense (p. 106), it is ‘intangible’, ‘formless, borderless’ (p. 107), even the air it disturbs is ‘invisible’ (p. 106). The ‘secret’ at the heart of the experience proves, as Derrida puts it ‘not merely difficult to know [. . .]; it is strictly impossible, no doubt not because there is always more to be known but because it is not of the order of knowledge.’<sup>53</sup> Despite the passage’s framing as the confession of a profoundly traumatic secret whose telling is an act of will for the speaker, what the passage ultimately conveys is communicated at its outset when Hilary states ‘sometimes you come to a thing you can’t write’ (p. 105). The ‘secret garden’ incident is a testimony of encountering the unencounterable, it tells of being *unable to tell* and of the unavowable quality of its secret. Rather than describing the presence at its centre it in fact describes a confrontation with unknowing. As Hilary states ‘I don’t know how, or what it was’ (p. 106).

*Giving up the Ghost*, then, is a text in which, as Ginette Michaud describes ‘[t]he secret is kept in the very place of testimony, without being hidden or concealed’ its ‘particular strength [coming] from the way [it] keep[s] (the) secret, the way [it] set[s] it to work, engendering and letting its effects be felt, the way [it] touch[es] upon it while leaving it intact.’<sup>54</sup> Yet, the ‘phantasmaticity’ which structures the ‘unexperienced experience’ at the heart of the passage, which ‘exceeds the opposition between real and unreal, actual and virtual, factual and fictional’<sup>55</sup> has been met with various (attempted) critical exorcisms. Previous interpretative gestures

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<sup>51</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, p. 47.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> Ginette Michaud ‘Literature in Secret: Crossing Derrida and Blanchot’, *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 7 (2002), 69-89 (p. 78).

<sup>55</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, pp. 72-3.

have rendered this passage an encounter with the devil or a ghost, the fantasy of a traumatised child or else a migrainous hallucination. However, the text itself anticipates these reductive readings and looking to precisely how they are outmanoeuvred allows us side-step the search for origins, definite interpretations and revelations of secrets, maintaining the vital critical ‘suspicion’ advocated by Pollard that accommodates the ambiguities of *Giving up the Ghost*. The first element of the memoir’s circumvention of such literalising readings is found just prior to the opaque unfolding of the secret garden episode. Hilary describes her childhood faith, giving an account of ‘carry[ing] a space for God inside me: a jagged space surrounded by light, a waiting space, cut out of my solar plexus’ (p. 105). This bodily account of an opening maintained with traumatic results (as Hilary observes directly after this ‘[b]ut what came wasn’t God at all’ (p. 105)), seems to warn against perpetuating such an opening which has the capacity to be experienced as invasive and destabilising. Yet the filling of that hollow with interpretative gestures results in the denial of the passage’s undecidability, as illustrated in the journalistic reviews of *Giving up the Ghost* which attempt to fill the ‘space occupied by nothing’ with either supernatural or pathological ‘somethings’.

This somewhat opaque anticipatory move, designed to stress the importance of the unknowable, insatiable ‘gap’, is followed and bolstered by a more expansive textual gesture which repeatedly emphasises the wholly inadmissible quality of the ‘secret’ at the heart of the passage. If, as Derrida claims, testimony is necessarily autobiographical, ‘in order to remain testimony’ it must also ‘allow itself to be haunted. It must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths, the *possibility*, at least, of literature.’<sup>56</sup> This ‘haunting’ of autobiographical testimony by literature is self-consciously undertaken by Mantel, as evidenced in her use of literary intertexts within the memoir, the most significant of which is Frances Hodgson Burnett’s novel *The Secret Garden* (1911) from which the critical episode explored above takes its name. The connection between the autobiographical incident and the famous children’s book is a rich one and through its analysis both an understanding of the memoir’s central ‘secret’ as untellable and the interactions of intertextuality with the project of writing the self are made licit.

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<sup>56</sup> Derrida, *Demeure*, p. 29

*The Secret Garden* centres upon the recovery of two apparently sickly children and the actions of incompetent medical professionals. As the memoir recounts, as a young girl Hilary is often ill, leading her family doctor to give her the derisory nickname ‘Little Miss Neverwell’ (p. 82), and dismissive and neglectful medical care is a prominent feature of the memoir. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the parallel between the two texts is so straightforward as to be unworthy of interrogation. Hodgson Burnett was a prominent believer in Christian Science and *The Secret Garden* has frequently been interpreted as espousing its tenets, the garden of the title being the location for processes of healing and recovery. Conversely, the ‘secret garden’ of *Giving up the Ghost* is the location of a loss of faith and a strangulation of well-being: ‘[a]fter my bad time in the secret garden, my *mauvais quart d’heure*, I stopped believing in an omnipotent God’ (p. 152). While Hodgson Burnett’s fictional garden is a place where occluded things are brought to light, traumatic incidents worked through and losses grieved for, the garden at Brosscroft performs the opposite role, forming the location for a moment defined by occlusion and secrecy which are not ameliorated but rather reverberate and perpetuate themselves. Hilary’s garden is a place in which the secret ‘remains inviolable even when one thinks one has revealed it.’<sup>57</sup> The connection between text and intertext here cannot be simply defined. Instead, just as the Brooke and Yeats material analysed above articulated the impossibility of a simplistic account of Irish heritage, the relationship between *Giving up the Ghost* and Hodgson Burnett’s narrative is composed of frictions and tensions, with certain elements of the texts forming neat parallels while others pull against and complicate each other.

Close attention must be paid both to the presence of this intertext in the memoir, and to the way in which the use of *The Secret Garden* in a direct account of receiving a narrative gives way to a knowing, creative use of the narrative in question. The reference to Hodgson Burnett’s novel precedes the encounter in the garden at Brosscroft and the young Hilary’s relationship with the story itself is multifaceted. Rather than reading the book as might be expected (Hilary’s reading habits are described in great detail) Hilary encounters *The Secret Garden* in adaptation, through watching it as a BBC television drama:

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<sup>57</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Passions: ‘An Oblique Offering’, in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 5-35 (p. 21).

Mr and Mrs Aldous have a television set. I go down to watch the children's serial. It is *The Secret Garden*. The curtains are pulled, so the black-and-white picture stands out more; we lie on the rug, chins in our hands, like children in picture books, like illustrations of ourselves. [. . .] At the end of many weeks I have saved up the entire story. I go home and announce it to my mother: *The Secret Garden*, here is that story. It spools out and out of my mouth, narrative, dialogue and commentary. (pp. 76-7)

This account of how Hodgson Burnett's story comes to enter Hilary's life is extremely rich. The description of the two children watching the serial 'like children in picture books, like illustrations of [themselves]' is a compound fictionalisation as Mantel depicts the Hilary of the memoir as understanding herself and her friend as emulating fictional ideals of themselves. This gesture further spectralises the 'I' speaker who is depicted as someone else's creation, even as she tries to take ownership of herself through the autobiographical act. Crucially the account situates *The Secret Garden* in a very particular way with regards to the notion of the secret itself. Initially, *The Secret Garden* possesses no secrecy; the young Hilary 'has' it, possesses it and can reproduce it for her mother, seemingly as a piece. Yet the story which is told within *Giving up the Ghost* is not that of *The Secret Garden* but the encountering of *The Secret Garden*. There is a gap where the novel might be and indeed its plot and characters are never mentioned; only the 'black and white' images on the television screen are indicated. Thus, when the title of the novel is repurposed to provide a short-hand for the otherwise inexpressible incident in the garden a series of tensions arise. For example, unlike Hodgson Burnett's narrative, the 'secret garden' incident is a story which will not 'spool out' neatly and clearly; it is not a story that can be fully told, either to the reader or, at the time, to Hilary's mother whose astonishment remains reserved for her daughter's account of the fictional tale. The story of the 'secret garden' incident 'resists finishing', built as it is around a secret that can never be told. Furthermore, having been adapted from its original context as novel and turned into a television series, Hilary's adoption of the book's title is also a bid to bring to light 'the ghosts of meaning' among which she seeks to locate herself. The shifting emphasis created by her appropriation, whereby both Hodgson Burnett's garden where both plants and people are secretly cultivated, and Hilary's garden in which secret or hidden things grow, is a neat demonstration of how Mantel's intertextual play brings to light such ghosts of meaning. The appropriation of the title of Hodgson Burnett's novel, and its use in a number of

divergent contexts, serves to warn the memoir's reader not to assume the story we are being told is the story we expect, or even the one it purports to be. In using *The Secret Garden* in this way Mantel emphasises how a multiplicity of signifiatory content is frequently subordinated or rendered excess and gestures at the potential of recognising such spectralised meaning.

### **'I am disconnecting from my body': Precarious Embodiment and Sensory Haunting**

Thus far this chapter has demonstrated the need identified in *Giving up the Ghost* to access a means of becoming present and coherent through the act of writing and has explored how that project is necessarily compromised by the presence of intertextual fragments (both familial and literary) and un-disclosable secrets. Crucially this is a project which is explicitly framed as bypassing the bodily. As Hilary puts it 'I am writing [. . .] in order to locate myself [. . .] *not within a body* (p. 222). Indeed, the body, rather than providing an incontestable reference point for subjective identity, is represented in the memoir as an unstable volume whose organs and senses do not behave in predictable ways. In this final section I examine the representation of embodiment in the memoir in order to demonstrate how, by populating *Giving up the Ghost* with corporeal bodies which are frequently on the point of disintegration, and by questioning the incontrovertibility of sensory inputs, the text disavows corporeal integrity as a guarantee of self. Moreover, I demonstrate how these moments of disintegration and disorganization are seized upon as opportunities to question the possibility of a plenary life-narrative which might allow the speaker to become fully manifest.

Before moving to analyse *Giving up the Ghost's* striking account and utilisation of synaesthesia, I wish to briefly sketch how the memoir constructs a linkage between the malfunctioning body and the supernatural in a way which renders the body uncanny and prevents it providing a reliable vantage point from which the work of memoir might conceivably be attempted. The body as fallible object is a central trope of the memoir. Hilary's description of her endometriotic body is couched in the language of the supernatural (as distinct from the spectral). Describing her physical condition on the day she is due to re-marry her former husband Hilary states: 'I felt very ill that morning, queasy and swollen, as if I were pregnant; there was a pain

behind my diaphragm, and from time to time something seemed to flip over and claw at me, as if I were a woman in a folk tale, pregnant with a demon' (pp. 11-2). A photograph taken of her following the ceremony shows her 'hollow-eyed, like a turnip lantern' (p. 12), recalling the carved vegetable lanterns often created for Halloween. Later, discussing the weight gain experienced as a side effect of certain medication, she describes herself as 'solid, set, grounded, grotesque: perpetually strange to myself, convoluted, mutated, and beyond the pale' (p. 54). As the memoir comes to focus more closely on an initial period of chronic illness, diagnosis and treatment, the descriptions of her bodily discomfort become more dense and extensive: 'I had a pain which I could not explain; it seemed to wander around my body, nibbling here, stabbing there, flitting every time I tried to put my finger on it' (p. 155). Concerned about the level of pain medication she has been taking when her doctor suggests she might be pregnant, Hilary muses: 'I hope not [. . .]. If so, I've overdone it with the aspirin. It'll have fins. Or feathers. Three extra aspirin, three extra heads' (p. 168). The body in the grip of pathology continues to be rendered through supernatural similes until the memoir's close, as Hilary undergoes an ultrasound to rule out the possibility of pregnancy which shows up nothing but 'the ghost of [her] own heartbeat' (p. 194). Later, still experiencing severe side effects of her medication, she welcomes her move to Saudi Arabia where cultural norms frequently force her to remain inside, 'under artificial light, waxing like some strange fungus' (p. 216).

While the ghost can be grouped among supernatural phenomena, it is important in this case to distinguish it from those figures which Mantel chooses as metaphorical tools to speak about the body. These are predicated not upon distinctions between pre- and post-mortem, or degrees of visibility, as in the case of the ghost or the spectre, but rather on perversions or manipulations of the flesh into something excessive or unpredictable. The witches, demons, chimeras and strange funguses which are referenced with regards to Hilary's body in the throes of illness, are figures which throw embodiment and the body's possibilities into question. The use of such metaphors to speak about the body, albeit a body as Hilary puts it 'enclosing a disease process' (p. 218), posits it as equally unreliable, unpredictable and prone to disordering excess as the memorial material and familial heritage to which the memoir's spectral speaker turns in order to patch together her narrative.

Elsewhere in the memoir the fallibility of the body simultaneously provides a further mechanism through which the ‘ghosts of meaning’, whose revelation drives the text, can be made manifest, if only fleetingly. This mechanism is most evident in *Giving up the Ghost*’s treatment of synaesthesia as a kind of haunting, a status which has significant implications for the way the use of language in the text can be understood. Synaesthesia is a profoundly double concept, both in construction and application. From the Greek *syn*, meaning ‘together’, and *aisthesis*, meaning ‘sensation’, the term is predicated on a coupling of phenomena. In a clinical context synaesthesia refers to a neurological situation occurring when ‘stimulation of one sensory modality automatically triggers a perception in a second modality, in the absence of any direct stimulation to this second modality.’<sup>58</sup> To this initial definition we should also add that ‘cognitive modality’ can be substituted for ‘sensory modality’ when describing the structure of synaesthesia. This specification of sensory *or* cognitive pathways is crucial. In recent years dispute has emerged over whether synaesthesia is an accurate term for the phenomenon, depending as it does on a construction which pairs sensory input with sensory response. Danko Nikolić has argued that, in fact, synaesthesia should ‘be understood as an unusual type of “semantic” association whereby, in addition to wiring up different concepts, it wires concepts to sensory activations.’ Nikolić suggests that a more accurate term for the phenomenon would be ‘ideasthesia’.<sup>59</sup> It is this ‘wiring up of different concepts’ which can be observed in *Giving up the Ghost*, achieved through an account of Hilary’s early experience of (and later use of) language as onomatopoeic, rather than the classic model of synaesthesia which refers to a disorganisation of specifically sensory modes. It is also worth noting that synaesthesia is not listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM); it is not an illness nor is it harmful; it does not ‘usually lead to problems in daily living,’<sup>60</sup> yet it is a pathology. Medical definitions of synaesthesia insist that the phenomenon ‘is distinct from hallucination and

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<sup>58</sup> Simon Baron-Cohen and John E. Harrison (eds), *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Danko Nikolić, ‘Is Synaesthesia actually “Ideasthesia”: An Investigation into the phenomenon’, in *Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Synaesthesia, Science and Art* (Granada, Spain, 2009) <<http://www.danko-nikolic.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Synesthesia2009-Nikolic-Ideaesthesia.pdf>> [accessed 14 September 2015].

<sup>60</sup> Richard E. Cytowic, *The Man who Tasted Shapes* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. x.



metaphor.’<sup>61</sup> Yet synaesthesia is also defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘[t]he use of metaphors in which terms relating to one kind of sense-impression are used to describe sense-impressions of other kinds; the production of synaesthetic effect in writing or an instance of this.’<sup>62</sup> Already there is a tension within the term as its various uses pull against each other, one being ‘distinct from’ metaphor and the other constituting a specific type of metaphor. If ‘[l]iterary synaesthesia is the exploitation of verbal synaesthesia for specific literary effects,’<sup>63</sup> Mantel’s memoir plays with this tension and complicates the division between the phenomenon’s clinical and creative applications.<sup>64</sup>

This play has a number of other implications for how the memoir can be read. Reuven Tsur argues that ‘one conspicuous contrast between “genuine” and literary synaesthesia is that the former involves rigidly predictable combinations of sensory modes, whereas the latter requires exceptionally great flexibility in generating and understanding unforeseen combinations and, by the same token, abandoning established combinations.’<sup>65</sup> This formulation is key to understanding the significance of the textual pathology of synaesthesia in *Giving up the Ghost*. As we will see, words and concepts within the world of the memoir operate within a synaesthetic logic as the ‘ghosts of sense impressions’ cause a perceptual and textual disorganization in which words amass phantom duplicates. By writing about and through synaesthesia Mantel is able to demonstrate how the materiality of a word, its graphical inscription and letter sounds, generate associations which exceed conventional linguistic definitions. The following reading of the ‘ghosts of [her own] sense impressions’, ‘shiver[ing] between the lines’ (p. 23) in Mantel’s work leads to

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<sup>61</sup> Siri Carpenter, ‘Everyday Fantasia: The World of Synaesthesia’, *Monitor on Psychology*, 32(2001), < <http://www.apa.org/monitor/mar01/synesthesia.aspx> > [accessed 14 September 2015].

<sup>62</sup> "synaesthesia, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2015. Web. 27 July 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Reuven Tsur, ‘Issues in Literary Synaesthesia’, *Style*, 47 (2007), 30-52 (p. 30).

<sup>64</sup> The majority of medical texts dealing with synaesthesia insist on a clear demarcation between clinical synaesthesia and synaesthetic metaphor, some even going so far as to sort artists of whom diagnoses of synaesthesia have been made into ‘true’ synaesthetes and those merely using the structure creatively. Yet Cytowic and Eagleman assert that such a strict differentiation is impossible and that the two phenomena exist on a continuum which inextricably links perception with language: ‘Orderly relationships among the senses imply a cognitive continuum in which perceptual similarities give way to synaesthetic equivalences, which in turn become metaphoric identities, which then merge into the abstraction of language. In other words, the progression looks like this: *perception–synaesthesia–metaphor–language*.’ Richard E. Cytowic and David M. Eagleman, *Wednesday is Indigo Blue: Discovering the Brain of Synaesthesia* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), p. 166.

<sup>65</sup> Tsur, p. 30.

an understanding of her use of synaesthesia as characteristic of the way haunting acts as a 'disorganizing principle' for her work.

The notion of synaesthesia as a mode of spectrality permeates *Giving up the Ghost*. I have already observed how, in the memoir's early pages, when speaking of the difficulty involved in writing about one's childhood, Hilary states '[t]he story of my own childhood is a complicated sentence that I am always trying to finish, to finish and put behind me. It resists finishing because words are not enough' (p. 23). However, Hilary goes on to attribute this linguistic lack to the fact that '[her] early world was synaesthetic, and [she is] haunted by the ghosts of [her] own sense impressions' (p. 23). I initially invoked this passage by way of explicating *Giving up the Ghost* as self-consciously undermining the coherence and completion implied by the autobiographical project. I return to it now to examine how, in the same way as the traditional ghost causes the past to erupt into the present and blurs boundaries between absence and presence, these synaesthetic 'ghosts of sense impressions' cause various ontological disorganizations, in this case between the sensory and the conceptual. These disorganizations are repeatedly registered in the second chapter of the memoir, which is concerned with Hilary's early childhood. The young Hilary likes to 'get close to people who are thinking, to glue [herself] to the warm, buzzy, sticky field of their concentration' (p. 39). Kath, the mother of a friend, is considered to have a 'melting name' (p. 42). The nasturtiums in Hilary's garden evoke 'stately and imperial melodies' and 'combine every virtue, the portentous groan of brass, [. . .] to the eye, the crushable texture of velvet, but to the fingertip, the bruise of baby skin' (p. 43). This description in particular provides a neat exemplar of literary synaesthesia, the vision of the flowers inducing the sounds of music, the texture of velvet palpable not through touch but sight, the 'bruise of baby skin' not discerned through looking but the touch of a fingertip. Crucially, though, Mantel includes in the description some of the rationale for these linguistic choices, revealing the structures through which literary synaesthesia is produced. The music the flowers are depicted as producing, their status as 'musical instruments' (p. 43), is evoked 'because [the nasturtiums'] shape is like that of gramophone horns' (p. 43). The 'storshions', as Hilary's grandfather calls the flowers, produce distortions of perceptual reality that have a basis in non-linear associations and unconventional doublings.

The nasturtium passage provides such a clear example of literary synaesthesia because it emphasizes the origin of the descriptions within a creative, imaginative act as the child ‘imagine[s] [the flowers] to be musical instruments.’ Yet synaesthesia as a neurological phenomenon is not absent from the text and, though its presence is complicated and compromised, it too is articulated through the language of the spectral. The most extensive example of the complication in *Giving up the Ghost* of the dividing line between clinical and literary synaesthesia can also be found in its second chapter. In the passage preceding the paragraph below, the young Hilary has come to believe that she has, in the act of eating a marzipan sweet, ingested or inhaled a housefly: ‘The fly was in the room and my mouth was open because I was putting into it a sweet. Then the fly was nowhere to be seen’ (p. 31). Having been told that ‘[f]lies are universally condemned and said to be laden with filth, crawling with germs’ she concludes that ‘what more sure way to die than swallow or inhale one?’ (p. 31):

Something is tugging at my attention. Perhaps it is a sense of absurdity. The dry rasping in my throat persists, but now I don’t know if it is the original obstruction lodged there, or the memory of it, the imprint, which is not going to fade from my breathing flesh. For many years the word ‘marzipan’ affects me with its deathly hiss, the buzz in its syllables, a sepulchral fizz. (pp. 32-3)

Though embedded in a highly descriptive and writerly passage, this incident provides a recollection of clinical synaesthesia as the word ‘marzipan’ comes loose from the object it signifies and instead brings with it a buzzing and hissing, an association both with the fly, and with the sepulchral and deathly. This synaesthetic quality of words for the young Hilary persists, seemingly with the rigid predictability that defines neurological synaesthesia according to Tsur.<sup>66</sup> Two years after the marzipan incident, Hilary questions her mother about the necessity of her attendance at school:

[w]hat if I didn’t, I asked, what would occur? She supposed, said my mother, we would be summonsed. I said, is that like sued? I had heard the word ‘sued’. It sounded to me like the long, stinking hiss emitted when a tap was turned on the gas cooker, before the match was applied. Sued, gas: the words had a lower hiss than ‘marzipan’ and long after they were spoken their trail lingered on the air, invisible, pernicious. (p. 62)

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<sup>66</sup> Tsur, p. 30.

Again, in this example the linguistic definition of a word and its materiality, its visual and spoken iterations, are divorced and an association is created between these two disparate concepts which is built upon letter sounds rather than semantic sense. However, the carefully drawn line between what Tsur terms ‘genuine’ synaesthesia and literary synaesthesia is beginning to break down in this passage as the young Hilary is depicted as experiencing the words as genuinely synaesthetic, while Mantel simultaneously turns this experience into a creative textual gesture through the image of the word sounds persisting as lingering physical presences.<sup>67</sup> The final episode in this account of the young Hilary’s disordered sensory world continues to develop this blurring of pathology and textuality and offers at its close an insight into the ultimate significance of such synaesthetic textuality not only to *Giving up the Ghost* but also to Mantel’s writing as a whole.

The episode occurs on the evening that Hilary and her family move to Brosscroft, the house in whose garden Hilary will experience her ‘*mauvais quart d’heure*’ (p. 152). Her father has gone out to retrieve items left at the old family home:

My mother goes to the new stove, and then peers into the dark cupboard where the gas meter is kept. The gas is turned off, she says, I will have to – No! I say. I stop her hand. I beg her. No, no, don’t do it. Don’t turn on the gas before my Daddy comes back. Gas, sue, sue, gas, hiss, hiss bang. I am begging and beseeching. I can’t tell her my reason. [. . .] She looks at me, a long considering look: ‘All right,’ she says. I am as astonished as she was when I recited the entire *Secret Garden* at a stroke. (pp. 78-9)

In time Hilary’s father returns: ‘[m]an switches on gas. No one sued. No one dead. No mysterious escapes. No invisible presences’ (p. 79). Clearly this complex passage contains a powerful account of the potency of the young child’s synaesthetic experience, in which words, sounds, concepts and properties become traumatisingly disordered. Yet its construction reproduces the creation of those associations through the repetition of the sibilant ‘s’ sounds at the root of the synaesthetic concomitance. An examination of the passage’s central sentence (‘[g]as, sue, sue, gas, hiss, hiss, bang’) reveals a lack of any connectives or a discernible subject, which structurally

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<sup>67</sup> This sublimating of words and concepts into gaseous presences is repeated later in the novel in a similarly inextricable blending of clinical and literary synaesthesia wherein it is not clear whether the synaesthetic image is a metaphor created by Mantel or an account of ‘Hilary’s’ perceptual reality: ‘We are talked about in the street. Some rules have been broken. A darkness closes about our house. The air becomes jaundiced and clotted, and hangs in gaseous clouds over the rooms. I see them so thickly that I think I am going to bump my head on them’ (p. 86).

reproduces the lack of any straightforward linguistic basis for these associations which are instead enabled by the pure phonic materiality of the signs, the noises created in the word's verbal expression. The 'mysterious escapes' and 'invisible presences' threatened by Hilary's synaesthetic experience, combined with the fact that this last instance of synaesthesia takes place in Hilary's apparently haunted home, re-enforces the haunting quality possessed by synaesthesia in the memoir, where the pathological structure is described as allowing the ingress of spectral phenomena whose effects are unpredictable, disruptive and traumatic.

The significance of the passage exceeds this blending of the textual and the pathological. The young Hilary struggles desperately to express the cause of her terror ('I am in the first killing crisis of my life and unable to explain how to avert it' (p. 79)), unable to articulate the linkages which have formed between the words 'gas' and 'sued' and the affective response they produce in her. What we see in this moment of killing panic is that the spoken concept of 'gas' brings with it into Hilary's kitchen phantom words and sounds which contaminate and problematize the original term in a way which is inexpressible. Synaesthesia as utilised by Mantel goes further than making links between pathology and textuality, though it does so usefully and subtly. It also acts to highlight how 'the ghosts of meaning', constituted by the 'mysterious escapes' and 'invisible presences' that the young Hilary desperately tries to avert and dispel, come to haunt the original word and compromise its conventional meaning, agents of a semantic and conceptual disorganization upon which much of Mantel's work relies.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> It is useful to note that many of the manifestations of synaesthesia within *Giving up the Ghost* are concerned with eating. The marzipan incident is accompanied by a rich paragraph in which Hilary describes a dream of eating bees and notes 'their milk-chocolate sweetness' and texture 'like lightly cooked calves' liver' (p. 3). While this description constitutes a disordering within one sensory modality, that of taste, it prompts, in a fashion analogous to the marzipan incident, consideration of the anxiety produced by the notion that in the process of ingesting or otherwise internalising, something unexpected and extraneous may also be taken in. This notion is acknowledged by Mantel as also occurring at the point of transmission: when discussing how the process of writing frequently exceeds the author's intentionality she observes '[l]ook at what I said, without meaning to.' Mantel, 'In Conversation' in Eileen Pollard "'What is done and what is declared": origin and ellipsis in the writing of Hilary Mantel' (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013), pp. 201-30 (p. 197).

## **‘Other lives you might have led’: Memoir as Ghost Story**

‘All of your houses are haunted by the person you might have been’ (*Giving up the Ghost*, p. 20)

At the beginning of this chapter I drew attention to the elision of the difference between *Giving up the Ghost*'s speaker and the author Hilary Mantel, elisions which were accompanied by a naïve approach to illness or else a literalising approach to spectrality. These elisions have the effect of understanding memoir and autobiography as a unifying force. As Prodromou puts it ‘[t]he autobiographical act – writing the self – challenges postmodern theories of fragmented subjectivity by offering the possibility of the creation of a unified self.’<sup>69</sup> At first glance the memoir may seem to accommodate such a reading. As has been demonstrated, *Giving up the Ghost* is a text insistent upon its function and purpose. It is to be a ‘seiz[ing of] copyright’ (p. 70), undertaken ‘in order to *locate* [the speaker]’ (p. 222, my italics). However, these attempts are undermined at every moment in the memoir, their very possibility questioned not only by the spectral quality of the text’s speaker, but by the familial hauntings and haunting intertexts she is subject to and author of. Clearly, rather than demonstrating the apparently unifying power of the narrative of the self, *Giving up the Ghost* undertakes a much more slippery and complex enterprise. It produces a narrative of self-as-spectre, a self whose attempts to become fully manifest are perpetually deferred. Yet these attempts have themselves been seized upon by reviewers and critics who ignore the speaker’s provocative rhetorical question: ‘is my writing clear: or is it deceptively clear?’ (p. 5) in their desire to complete the memoir’s project even as the text’s speaker acknowledges such a task to be interminable.

Even as Mantel’s account of her life makes claims to be a project in filling lacunae, in digging over the ground of the past and forcing it to ‘yield up its dead secrets’ (p. 119), it rejects the feasibility of such an endeavour and insists upon the significance of the enigmatic, of the spectral or barely manifest, and of the seemingly empty spaces around which narratives coalesce: ‘[w]riting about your past is like blundering through your house with the lights fused, a hand flailing for points of reference. You locate the stolid wardrobe, and its door swings open at your touch,

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<sup>69</sup> Prodromou, p. 195.

opening on the cavern of darkness within. Your hand touches glass, you think it is a mirror, but it is the window. There are obstacles to bump and trip you, but what is more disconcerting is a sudden empty space, where you can't find a handhold and you know that you are stranded in the dark' (p. 167). While initially appearing to subscribe to the idea that '[a]n autobiography is [. . .] a straightforward document', Mantel's memoir ultimately demonstrates that it is '[i]n reality [. . .] a Chinese box of identity where the "I" of the text and the name on the title page are not, and can never be, completely equivalent.'<sup>70</sup> It espouses a model in which it is made clear that '[t]he autobiographical self is a fictional construct within the text, which can neither have its origins anterior to the text, nor indeed coalesce with its creator.'<sup>71</sup> When Hilary states '[a]ll your houses are haunted by the person you might have been' (p. 20) she implicitly adds her own spectral voice to that host of potentialities.

Mantel's short story 'A Clean Slate',<sup>72</sup> which closes *Learning to Talk*, eloquently illustrates the impossibility of producing a complete and unified account of family history and, through that history, of self. It does so through an exploration of the relationship between autobiographical fact and fiction. The story centres on a writer's attempts to coax a number of genealogical details from her aging and evasive mother and is concerned with the point at which the factual fails and the gaps which these failures create, what Mantel describes as 'the interface between myth, folk memory and the actual historical record.'<sup>73</sup> The narrator's mother, Veronica, is said to 'lik[e] to make mysteries and imply she has secret knowledge' (p. 124), understanding her history through stories, jokes and 'witty snubs that have come unfastened from their origins' (p. 121). Conversely, the narrator 'distrust[s] anecdote' preferring 'to understand history through figures and percentages of these

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<sup>70</sup> Yagoda, p. 180.

<sup>71</sup> Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography', in *Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory*, ed. by Moira Monteith (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), pp. 54-71 (p. 56).

<sup>72</sup> The title of this story resonates with the description given in the memoir of one of Hilary's childhood toys, the 'magic slate', 'a rectangle of carbon paper covered by a sheet of plastic' (p. 69). Despite seeming to offer the possibility of a 'clean slate', the surface's inscriptions apparently wiped away after use, Hilary reports that 'when [she] held the slate away from [her] and turned it, [she] saw that the pen left marks in the plastic sheet, like the tracks of writing on water. It would have been possible, with some labour and diligence, to discover the words even after they had been erased' (pp. 69-70). This discovery of the palimpsest casts the search for a definitive account of a family history within 'The Clean Slate' as doomed to failure, positing instead a multiplicity of possible accounts laid one on top of the other. As the narrator confirms, her mother 'has her own versions of the past, and her own ways of protecting them' (p. 131).

<sup>73</sup> Hilary Mantel speaking at 'An Evening with Hilary Mantel', Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, 30 September 2015.

figures, through knowing the price of coal, the price of corn, and the price of a loaf in Paris on the day the Bastille fell' (p. 121). Yet within the story the factual is continually undermined. The medical documents concerning her mother contain a false age (p. 124) and certain details of her family history told 'AS A FACT' (p. 131) are proven wrong. Even the narrator herself by the end of the story admits 'I am suspicious of these round figures' (p. 133). Ultimately it is the lacunae that her ancestral narrative encompasses which drive the short story and give it its power. These lacunae are most powerfully registered by the narrator's absent descendants whose lives exist in the state of perpetual potentiality which defines the Mantelian ghost: the only children who 'failed to marry' or 'spent much of [their] life in an asylum' (p. 125), the 'child who died unchristened within minutes of birth. [. . .] Not really a person: more like a negative that was never developed' (pp. 122-3). The lessons of 'A Clean Slate' indicate that we are right to maintain our suspicion of Mantel's deceptive clarity in *Giving up the Ghost* and to conclude that when Mantel says of her memoir '[a]nd I begin to construct myself, complete with the missing bits',<sup>74</sup> what is encouraged is an understanding of personal narrative as complete *with* the missing bits, that the secrets, gaps and hollows are a pre-requisite for its production. Indeed, such a reading confirms Benstock's assertion that:

[a]utobiography reveals gaps, and not only gaps in time and space, or between the individual or the social, but also a widening divergence between the manner and matter of its discourse. That is, autobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins on the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premise of its construction.<sup>75</sup>

By maintaining its secrets and preserving rather than relinquishing its ghosts, it is possible to understand Mantel's memoir not as a stable, unified point of origin, nor as a narrative *of* illness, but as an exploration of the dependence of life narrative upon enigmatic hollows, and the ghostly potentialities such hollows produce. *Giving up the Ghost*, with its 'missing bits' and spectral supplements offered by the voices of dead authors and ancestors alike, does not provide a diagnostic or interpretative framework through which to understand Mantel's fiction. Rather it points to a particular mode of reading capable of privileging the secrecy and ambiguity in Mantel's work as a whole.

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<sup>74</sup> Blake, 'P.S. Ideas, Interviews, Features', p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Benstock, p. 11.



## Chapter 2

### **Spectres of Margaret: Thatcherism, Care-Giving and the Gothic in *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1985) and *Vacant Possession* (1986)**

Half way through *Vacant Possession*, protagonist Muriel Axon, in her role as housekeeper, observes the current inhabitants of her childhood home, number 2 Buckingham Avenue, as they go about their business, and eagerly anticipates their domestic demise:

The air was choked with tension and spite, and on the landing all the doors were closed; it was just like Mother's day. The children were locked in their rooms, sniffing glue and crying. From behind the doors came soft sounds of breathing. It was nothing now but a matter of time. [. . .] Suzanne's untended child would wail from the back garden, bleating for the peace of the clouded water from which it came. The evergreens would grow, blocking out the light at the back of the house; foul necessities would incubate in the dark. Soon cracks would appear in the walls, and a green-black mould would grow along the cracks and spread its spores through the kitchen cupboards, through the wardrobes and the bed linen [. . .]. Their trivial domestic upsets would turn soon to confusion, abandonment and rage. Acts of violence would occur; there would be bodies. (p. 128)

The gothic inflection given to this anticipated collapse of dormitory town domesticity is characteristic of Mantel's debut duology, of which *Vacant Possession* forms the second part.<sup>1</sup> The novels' rendering of the lives of two families in an anonymous West Midlands town in the late 1970s and 1980s coalesces around that quintessential gothic trope of the decaying family house in which nightmarish events take place and which plays host to a series of malevolent ghosts. Yet the above passage is not simply and straightforwardly an example of contemporary gothic. The imagined dereliction of 2 Buckingham Avenue takes place on a profoundly quotidian level. Earlier in the passage Muriel imagines dirty milk bottles going uncollected while elsewhere she imagines an accumulation of household waste which brings about not a plague of vermin but a single rat. Crucially, the presences which populate the passage are not phantoms but infants and mothers (p. 128). In this passage it is the wailing and bleating of the 'untended' child which form the disturbance at the heart of Mantel's gothic domestic sphere.

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Every Day is Mother's Day* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006) and Hilary Mantel, *Vacant Possession* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006). All subsequent references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the text.

At this juncture it is important to differentiate the work of the duology from the mode of the ‘suburban gothic’ which emerged in America in the 1950s and which has since become ubiquitous within contemporary popular culture.<sup>2</sup> The suburban gothic has been defined by Bernice Murphy as a genre most intensely associated with the United States, whose emergence allowed the dramatization of ‘anxieties arising from [. . .] mass suburbanisation [. . .] and which usually features suburban settings, preoccupations and protagonists.’<sup>3</sup> The concerns of Mantel’s duology exceed the historical and geographic specificity of the suburban gothic as Murphy defines it and to deem the texts suburban gothic runs the risk of failing to interrogate the characteristics of that sub-genre meaningfully.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, describing the setting of the duology as suburban is problematically reductive as it homogenises domestic spaces that fall between the locations of the rural and the urban, a homogenisation which Mantel rejects, defining her locations not as suburbs but as ‘dormitory’ or ‘satellite’ towns, stating of their populations that ‘people go there [and] they sleep.’<sup>5</sup>

Within Mantel’s dormitory gothic environment, Muriel’s fantasy of the unattended crying child alone in the garden of 2 Buckingham Avenue encapsulates the focus of *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession*; that is absent, or failed care-giving. In the following chapter I argue that the duology as a whole responds to and articulates such failures of care-giving through a nuanced deployment of the gothic mode in which particular emphasis is placed upon the trope of the ghost.<sup>6</sup> I contend that the duology’s depiction of these failures and collapses of care forms a critique of the

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<sup>2</sup> Notable examples of the sub-genre include Richard Matheson’s *I am Legend* (1954), Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Ira Levin’s *The Stepford Wives* (1972) and Anne River Siddons’ *The House Next Door* (1978).

<sup>3</sup> Bernice Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> An example of this critical misstep can be found in Robert Mighall’s discussion of Victorian ‘sensation fiction’ as belonging to the suburban gothic, where no meaningful attention is paid to what impact an English (as opposed to American) suburban context might have upon the functioning of the sub-genre. Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic: Mapping History’s Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 118-30.

<sup>5</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 265.

<sup>6</sup> The relationship between the literary gothic and the ghost is one that is frequently taken for granted. However, while maintaining an awareness of the close connection between the mode and the trope, it is important to recognise that not all literary ghosts are gothic and not all gothic narratives contain ghosts. As Julia Briggs puts it ‘[g]host stories constitute a special category of the Gothic and are partly characterised by the fact that their supernatural events remain unexplained.’ Julia Briggs, ‘The Ghost Story’, in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 122-131, (p. 123). Briggs’s assessment of the place of the ghost within the gothic, and the gothic ghost’s inexplicability encourages a reading of the ghosts present in the duology as specifically inflected. In other words, the ghosts present in a gothic text can be argued to function in a way which is distinct from the ghosts found in other modes.

nuclear family and the familial domestic as inherently nurturing contexts in which the process of parental care-giving plays out functionally. Furthermore, I argue that this critique has a profoundly political significance. The novels' fictionalisation of Britain during the tenure of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, a period in which medical and social care underwent dramatic upheavals in terms of both logistics and rhetoric, invites a reading which recognises that, through their use of the gothic mode, these texts articulate how society's relationship with care-giving on every level was crucially put at stake during the Thatcher administration.

The identification of a gothic mode at work in Mantel's writing is, however, not an uncontroversial critical gesture. Unlike the voluble journalistic reaction to *Giving up the Ghost* observed in Chapter 1, a critical reticence surrounds the duology. Despite the author's well-documented rise to prominence in recent years, and a slow but steady increase in academic work on her writing, *Every Day is Mother's Day*<sup>7</sup> and *Vacant Possession* have thus far garnered only fleeting critical attention. Indeed, even Pollard's 2013 thesis on Mantel makes only passing reference to the earlier novel. Such a sustained lack of critical engagement, found even within Pollard's dedicated study, is provocative and its cause is potentially to be found in the ambivalent relationship these two books have with the gothic, simultaneously exploiting and evading it. The gothic as a mode has for some time been a contested site within scholarship on Mantel, in both academic and journalistic contexts. Pollard suggests that the academic response to the media representation of Mantel's canon as being defined by its indefinability<sup>8</sup> has been to fall back upon the gothic as a unifying element within Mantel's work.<sup>9</sup> While this rejection of the gothic as a homogenising framework is apposite, this chapter demonstrates that there is a danger

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<sup>7</sup> From this point onward *Every Day is Mother's Day* is referred to in the abbreviated form *Every Day*.

<sup>8</sup> This attitude is exemplified in Hephzibah Anderson's 'Hilary Mantel: On the Path from Pain to Prizes' in which she asserts that 'attempts to define [Mantel] and her work fall invariably short' before going on to dismiss the gothic as a potentially useful category to apply to Mantel's fiction, speculatively coining her own description of 'Northern gothic?' before rejecting it, concluding 'No, not really.' Hephzibah Anderson, 'Hilary Mantel: On the Path from Pain to Prizes', *The Observer*, 19 April 2009, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/19/hilary-mantel-man-booker>> [accessed 15 December 2015].

<sup>9</sup> Eileen Pollard, 'What is done and what is declared: origin and ellipsis in the writing of Hilary Mantel', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013) p. 10. Pollard refers specifically to Victoria Nelson's study of Mantel's work in her book *Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). However, Pollard's thesis as a whole positions itself in opposition to any attempt to demonstrate that the gothic offers anything of value to studies of Mantel's work, a position which replicates the kind of universalising approach it appears to disavow.

here of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. This chapter does not subscribe to Sara L. Knox's assessment of Mantel as 'no writer of the gothic', an assessment which Pollard appears to encourage. Instead it takes as its point of departure Knox's understanding of the gothic as 'too small a handle for Mantel's work'<sup>10</sup> and considers which doors this 'small handle' might open even as the duology exceeds and subverts it.

Having established the critical context within which my reading of the duology takes place, it is necessary to determine two disparate yet related points of historical context. The first concerns the appearance of the gothic as a literary mode in the late eighteenth century when a constellation of factors contributed to its emergence. Occurring as it did 'at a time of bourgeois and industrial revolution, a time of Enlightenment philosophy and increasingly secular views,'<sup>11</sup> the development of the gothic was 'bound up with shifts from feudal to commercial practices in which notions of property, government and society were undergoing massive transformations.'<sup>12</sup> One of these transformations in particular, and the element which is most significant for the current discussion, concerned the status of the domestic space within cultural, social and economic life. As Kate Ferguson Ellis has argued, the gothic emerged in part as a reaction to the increasing separation between the 'fallen' world of commerce and production and the domestic sphere. This separation left the space of the home a site of idealization and thus 'attendant anxiety'<sup>13</sup> arising from the difficulty of maintaining the 'constitution of the home as a "place of peace" into which evil never came.'<sup>14</sup> Moreover, if the gothic developed partly as a reaction to the idealisation of the domestic sphere, it is also particularly preoccupied with the figure traditionally placed at the centre of that sphere: the mother. Indeed multiple critics have posited that at the heart of the female gothic in particular is a confrontation with motherhood and mothering.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sara L. Knox, 'Giving Flesh to the Wraiths of Violence: Super-Realism in the Fiction of Hilary Mantel', *Australian Feminist Studies* 25 (2010), 313-323 (p. 313).

<sup>11</sup> Fred Botting, 'In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture', in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter, (London: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 3-14, (p. 4).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. ix.

<sup>14</sup> Ellis, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Sarolta Marinovich, 'The Discourse of the Other: Female Gothic in Contemporary Women's Writing', *Neohelicon*, 21 (1994), 189-205 (p. 191). Though Marinovich is here considering

These concerns and confrontations were in circulation once again in Britain in the latter part of the twentieth century as Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government placed the space of the home and the status of the nuclear family, indeed motherhood and parenting in general, at the forefront of much of their rhetoric. This placement is evident in the language used by the New Right to articulate their view of the role of government. The British New Right, the political movement from which Thatcherism emerged, expressed a desire for policy decisions to emulate, as Rodney Lowe puts it, the actions of 'responsible parents [. . .] who strive for the independence of those temporarily dependent upon them' and compared a government's economic decisions to '[those] of a housewife balancing her budget',<sup>16</sup> while Thatcher herself described the State as 'that [. . .] imaginary mother figure for our age.'<sup>17</sup> Outside of her overtly party political speeches, the Prime Minister repeatedly used newspaper and broadcast interviews to reiterate the centrality of the family and the home to the nation's success. In addition to giving numerous accounts of her own childhood in which her mother's prowess as a housewife and homemaker was repeatedly foregrounded,<sup>18</sup> Thatcher's media appearances continually reified the familial domestic and insisted that Thatcherite Britain was a country in which 'family life is rightly treasured.'<sup>19</sup> In a speech to the Conservative Women's Conference she insisted that, 'the family is the building block of society. It is a nursery, a school, a hospital, a leisure place, a place of refuge and a place of rest. It encompasses the whole of society. It fashions our beliefs. It is the preparation for the rest of our life.'<sup>20</sup> The space of the privately owned family home (understood by Thatcher as 'more than ownership of bricks and mortar. [. . .] something to hand on to the next generation'<sup>21</sup>) was similarly idealised and inextricably linked with

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contemporary female gothic, such confrontations with motherhood are to be found in some of the earliest gothic texts. For example both Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' (1871) and Coleridge's 'Christabel' (1816) feature motherless protagonists persecuted by replacement mother/lover figures.

<sup>16</sup> Rodney Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 320.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to the Canadian and Empire Clubs in Toronto', 27 September 1983, <<http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/105443>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

<sup>18</sup> Indeed the roles of 'housewife and mother' were held up by Thatcher as almost unmatched in terms of 'long term satisfaction and importance.' Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to the Conservative Women's Conference', 25 May 1988, <<http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/107248>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children', May 16 1984, <<http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/105682>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to the Conservative Women's Conference'.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Women's Conference'.

successful and responsible parenting. As Thatcher put it in her speech to the Conservative Party Conference in 1981:

[. . .] the family is the basic unit of our society and it is in the family that the next generation is nurtured. Our concern is to create a property-owning democracy and it is therefore a very human concern. It is a natural desire of Conservatives that every family should have a stake in society and that the privilege of a family home should not be restricted to the few.<sup>22</sup>

This manipulation of the language of the familial domestic went beyond rhetoric, as is apparent in policy decisions around social care in this period, which took place against the backdrop of an ideological project concerned with the regulation of the domestic space and the family unit. In 1988 Thatcher insisted that the family must be strengthened, issuing the dire warning that ‘[u]nless we do so, we will be faced with heart-rending social problems which no Government could possibly cure – or even hope to cope with.’<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the family and the familial domestic were repositioned as the only truly appropriate environment for care-giving (including the care of children, the elderly, the disabled, and the mentally ill): ‘Conservatives were convinced [. . .] that the proper agency for personal individual care was not the State. Rather, it was the family.’<sup>24</sup>

Beginning with an examination of the domestic space within *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* in the context of Thatcherite reification of that environment for its care-giving potential, in the initial section of this chapter I analyse the significance of 2 Buckingham Avenue’s status as a ‘haunted house’, reading the various ghosts that populate that home as remnants of dysfunctional and abusive care-giving relationships. In the chapter’s mid-section I examine how the hospital as a quintessential care-giving environment is presented as compromised and collapsing. Focussing on the account of mental health care provision in the duology, this section demonstrates the spectralising potential of psychiatric care in this period. Finally, I analyse how *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* use the gothic mode to critique Thatcherite social care policy with particular reference to the ‘Care in the Community’ initiative and establish how the duology depicts these initiatives, and welfare services in the Thatcher era more broadly, as rendering their recipients social

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<sup>22</sup> Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech at Conservative Party Conference (plus address to overflow meeting)’ 17 October 1981, <<http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/104717>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to the Conservative Women’s Conference’.

<sup>24</sup> Lowe, p. 349.

ghosts. Via an exploration of care-giving on these three concentric levels (domestic, medical and societal), I identify and analyse a multitude of ghosts and spectres that emerge from, and populate the scene of, care-giving in Mantel's Thatcherite Britain. More broadly my reading of *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* demonstrates how, from the earliest moments of her writing career, Mantel is interrogating the ethical and political implications of the figure of the ghost, tapping into the gothic's ability to 'mediate between the uncanny and the unjust,'<sup>25</sup> in order to recognise that, as Avery Gordon puts it, 'the ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life.'<sup>26</sup>

### **Haunted Houses, Monstrous Mothers and the Scene of Domestic Care-Giving**

In her 1979 'Renewal of Britain' speech Margaret Thatcher asserted that '[t]here is no adequate substitute for genuine caring for one another on the part of families, friends and neighbours.'<sup>27</sup> Her statement is typical of the Thatcherite position outlined above; that it was the family unit who were best placed to undertake caring responsibilities and the space of the privately owned home<sup>28</sup> was the appropriate environment for that care. Indeed, during Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister, Conservative policy on social care and welfare was predicated on the rolling back of 'the boundaries of State activity in terms of social provision' and a concurrent promotion of the "traditional family unit as an institution."<sup>29</sup> Yet Mantel's representation of the relationship between Muriel Axon and her mother, Evelyn, speaks back to the figure of the ideal mother which was returning to prominence in

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<sup>25</sup> Marinovich, p. 193.

<sup>26</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Social Imagination* (London, University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to the Conservative Political Centre Summer School', 6 July 1979, <<http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/104107>> [accessed 16 January 2016].

<sup>28</sup> The physical space of the family house occupied a crucial place within Thatcherite rhetoric. Policy after policy was introduced to promote the purchase of council housing, including the 1986 Housing and Planning Act. Thatcher herself deemed council estates to be 'breeding grounds of socialism, dependency, vandalism and crime' while '[h]ome ownership, in contrast, encouraged all the virtues of good citizenship.' Rodney Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). '[W]hat was called a "property owning democracy" in 1979 was called a "home owning democracy"' in the 1983 manifesto. Geoffrey K. Fry, *The Politics of the Thatcher Revolution: An Interpretation of British Politics, 1979-1990* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 23. This emphasis on private home ownership is recognised in the duology by Colin who, reminiscing about his childhood home, muses '[a]h, property [. . .] that is what they are, not merely houses but a statement of values. But surely, he thought in mild surprise, those are not the values I hold?' (*Every Day*, p. 67).

<sup>29</sup> Fry, p. 108.

the 1980s and to the Western notion of the ideal mother more generally,<sup>30</sup> serving to question the possibility of a model of mothering that is either unimpeachable or unequivocally abusive. It is apt, then, to begin this analysis with an exploration of the domestic spaces to be found within *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* and the acts of care-giving their inhabitants undertake and/or receive.

Throughout the duology Mantel presents her readers with a range of domestic spaces, each of which, through its dereliction and disorder, undermines the Conservative idealisation of the familial domestic and its ability to provide a care-giving environment. However, the domestic landscape she presents is not merely a fictional device. It is also reflective of the historical reality of the situation which evolved around housing stock in England during Thatcher's premiership. Writing in *The Guardian* in 1984, Peter Jenkins remarked on the ubiquity in Britain of 'urban dilapidation and squalor, a rotting housing stock and rusting transport facilities; shabby-looking people in filthy streets.'<sup>31</sup> The English House Conditions Survey, carried out between 1986 and 1987, 'found about 900,000 homes in England, nearly 5 percent of the total, which were unfit to live in.'<sup>32</sup>

Mantel makes reference to this dereliction of the domestic sphere through the multitude of slums, squats and dilapidated residences described in the texts. One of these spaces is home to Colin Sidney's daughter, Suzanne, who ends up living in an 'unfit' residence following the birth of her daughter: '[t]he flat – two rooms really – was dirty and neglected, a near slum. There was a scrap of fraying carpet, then bare boards; windows were cracked and crisscrossed with tape. There were mattresses strewn over the floor' (*Vacant Possession* pp. 225-6). Muriel herself ends up living in another of the homes deemed unfit to be occupied. The house on Napier Street where she rents a room has been 'condemned long ago, put on a schedule for

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<sup>30</sup> As Ros Coward has pointed out, during the 1960s and 70s a 'demystification of the joys of self-sacrificing motherhood was crucial in the formulation of feminist politics' which 'led feminists to call for men to be more involved in parenting, for the state to provide better child-care facilities, and for the provision of proper benefits for mothers who lost the support of men.' Coward goes on to point out that 'throughout the 1980s this discourse was eroded [. . .] A reaction set in. During the 1980s motherhood was romanticised again, so much that the '*Kinder und Küche*' images of the 1950s now look like social realism.' Ros Coward, 'The Heaven and Hell of Mothering: Mothering and Ambivalence in the Mass Media', in *Mothering and Ambivalence*, ed. by Wendy Holloway and Brid Featherstone (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 111-18 (p. 116).

<sup>31</sup> Peter Jenkins, 'How the policies of decay may stir Britain towards a New Beginning', *The Guardian*, 28 December 1984.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Riddell, *The Thatcher Decade: How Britain Has Changed in the 1980s* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 148.



demolition, but it seemed likely that before its turn came it would demolish itself, quietly crumbling and rotting away, with its wet rot and dry rot and its collection of parasites and moulds' (*Vacant Possession* p. 69). Even the Sidneys, a nuclear family in the ideal Conservative mould, complete with stay-at-home mother, initially live in a house in which everything 'had been rickety, leaky or shoddy' and which 'was a triumph of jerry-building' (*Vacant Possession* p. 22). Clearly the space of the home within these narratives is far from the idealised environment described in Thatcherite rhetoric. Rather, these domestic spaces allow Mantel to articulate a sense of homes of all kinds (not only the rented flat but the privately owned home) as being riddled with flaws that are pernicious and endemic but difficult to locate, like the various kinds of rot that affect the house on Napier Street, undermining the structure imperceptibly until the moment of its collapse.

*Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* present the family home as a space which is at best not fit for purpose and at worst on the verge of physical collapse, explicitly undermining the notion of such spaces as optimal care-giving environments. While such a representation is an acknowledgement of the profound problems with housing stock in Britain in the 1980s it is also important to acknowledge that the significance of these degraded spaces goes beyond a recognition of historical reality. In order to fully understand how the domestic architecture of the duology comments on care-giving relationships it is necessary to analyse the relationship Mantel builds between these homes and the care-giving relationships that take place within them. In doing so it is possible to demonstrate that, rather than the gothic providing a smokescreen behind which the horrifying realities of perverse and failed care are obscured, the use of this mode allows Mantel to emphasise that, in contrast to the safe havens of Conservative ideology, homes, even in the middle-class and leafy neighbourhood of Buckingham Avenue, 'are very unsafe spaces to linger.'<sup>33</sup>

In the early pages of *Vacant Possession* Muriel recalls being pregnant: '[s]he felt a movement inside her, very strange. Mother said, you're occupied' (p. 38). Evelyn's description of her daughter invokes what Marinovich terms the 'House-Body equation',<sup>34</sup> an analogue between the figure of the mother and the space of the home

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<sup>33</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'Author, author', *The Guardian*, 24 May 2008, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/may/24/1>> [accessed 11 April 2016].

<sup>34</sup> Marinovich, p. 191.

which has wide reaching implications for the present study. In the passage that opened this chapter, Muriel's musings upon the degradation of 2 Buckingham Avenue are not restricted to architecture and furnishings. Instead, as the house is imagined to fall apart Sylvia Sidney, matriarch of the Sidney household, is fantasised growing morbidly obese, 'waddl[ing] and roll[ing] about the house, and hid[ing] when the doorbell rang' (p.128). In *Vacant Possession* Isabel Field, Muriel and Evelyn's former social worker, newly returned to the area and in the early stages of pregnancy, describes herself as disorganised and unstable, 'always [. . .] bursting into tears, and falling over, and losing things' (p. 21). Correspondingly Isabel's reintroduction to the narrative takes place among sealed packing crates and damaged household objects in her new home (p. 21). '[V]ery cold' (p. 211) and sparsely described within the narrative, Isabel's house mirrors her antipathy towards and inability to fulfil a maternal role; when her husband suggests they adopt his lover's baby Isabel replies that she would 'rather drown it' (p. 179). Later in the same conversation, she reveals her own pregnancy to her husband who insists that she stop drinking, fearing damage to the baby. To this Isabel replies '[y]ou never know [. . .], who'll be damaged most in the end' (p. 179). Clearly, then, these disordered and dilapidated homes, not merely historical details or parodic nods to the derelict ancestral homes of early gothic narratives, form analogues with the putative carers who inhabit them. Yet, it is not simply physical decay and degradation that besets the family home in the duology. While 2 Buckingham Avenue, home initially to Evelyn and Muriel, and subsequently, following Evelyn's death, the Sidney family, is in a poor state of repair structurally,<sup>35</sup> it is set apart from the other domestic spaces within the duology by virtue of the fact that it is profoundly haunted. This quality prompts questions about the nature and significance of the ghosts of 2 Buckingham Avenue within the context of Mantel's critique of care-giving.

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<sup>35</sup> Florence Sidney's ill-judged Christmas visit to 2 Buckingham Avenue offers an insight into the squalor of the house: '[t]he upholstery of the suite was greasy and worn, the wallpaper yellow with age. What a way to live, Florence thought; creating a slum, here in this neighbourhood. What was the need for it? She tried to place the smell. Cats?' (*Every Day* p. 111).

**‘The spectre of ambivalence’:<sup>36</sup> Haunting Ambivalence and Maternal Care-  
Giving**

From the outset of *Every Day* it is clear to the reader that 2 Buckingham Avenue is a home populated as much by the dead as the living. Structurally compromised by the ghosts embedded within its architecture, the house is ‘a three-bed two-reception property on a large corner plot, all jostled and crammed with the teeth-baring dead, stranded souls whistling in the cavity walls, half animated corpses under the flagstones outside’ (*Vacant Possession*, p. 37). Sara Knox describes the Axons’ home as ‘a house so in possession of itself that it has no truck with its occupants’<sup>37</sup> and certainly the phantoms that occupy Evelyn and Muriel’s home ‘re-signify the terms under which it might be occupied,’<sup>38</sup> placing a variety of permanent and semi-permanent embargoes on entry to various rooms. The kitchen is subject to periodical ghostly occupation; early on in *Every Day* Evelyn receives a note stating ‘GO NOT TO THE KITCHIN TODAY [sic]’ and observes that ‘[t]he days when they forbade her the kitchen were becoming more frequent, they were driving her increasingly to the front parlour with its hard chairs where she had seen the dead’ (*Every Day* p. 20).

Likewise, the Axons’ spare room is occupied by what Evelyn terms ‘the less substantial tenants’ (*Every Day* p. 88) and the door is kept locked in an attempt to contain the malevolent impulses of the ghosts within who ‘taunt’ and ‘gibber’ (*Every Day* p. 88). Yet, while the ghosts of 2 Buckingham Avenue provide one of the most striking and idiosyncratic elements of the duology, it is essential to recognise how Mantel, from the opening pages of *Every Day*, creates a link between the situation of haunting and the provision of care. Extracts from Muriel’s social work case file are bookended by the account of Evelyn’s performance of a séance at the request of her neighbour, Mrs Sidney (p. 10), and various disturbing descriptions of the spectral activity that has recently taken place in the Axon household (pp. 17-21). The vexed and complicated relationship between Evelyn and her daughter provides the central focus for the narrative within *Every Day*. An analysis of this deeply problematic maternal relationship provides the key for understanding the origins, functions and meanings of the ghosts which populate the Axons’ home.

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<sup>36</sup> Roszika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago, 1995), p. 40.

<sup>37</sup> Knox, p. 314.

<sup>38</sup> Knox, p. 316.

In the wake of what Evelyn takes to be an act of ghostly vandalism she attempts to explain to her daughter the nature and activity of the numerous phantoms within the house. As Evelyn puts it, '[t]here is more than one set of persecutors. There are the tenants with their constant jibes, their petty destructiveness [. . .]. It is possible to see them, quite possible, but they are very quick. [. . .] But the other inhabitants, their effect is more – she presses her hand to her ribcage. In the soul, she wants to say' (pp. 27-8). Yet, despite Evelyn's insistence that there are 'two sets of persecutors' the ghosts that haunt the Axons' house do not act according to any strict definition or division, however much Evelyn may wish to impose one as a way of exerting some control over their potency. They are overdetermined, possessing various interlinked significances which make available a number of simultaneous yet valid interpretations of their activities. This overdetermination is crucial in that it renders the phantom 'tenants' and 'inhabitants' of 2 Buckingham Avenue capable of accommodating the complexity of the parent-child relationship and the multitude of factors that shape and potentially contaminate and incapacitate it. In the next section I examine both the multiplicity of the Buckingham Avenue ghosts and the way in which they are united by their emergence from a scene of compromised care giving characterised by the presence of overwhelming maternal ambivalence.

### **An Unhappy Medium: The Séance as Care-Giving Situation**

As will be made clear, the ghosts haunting 2 Buckingham Avenue are the 'tags and rags' of a care-giving process hopelessly marred by a maternal ambivalence produced by and producing trauma, abuse and depletion. However, the maternal relationship is not the only situation in which ambivalence in a caring context, and its haunting consequences, are demonstrated. At least some of Evelyn's persecutors make their entrance into the Axon household via the situation of the séance. Advising an acquaintance against using a Ouija board, Evelyn warns that 'people get in . . . things get in . . . the house gets overcrowded' (*Every Day* p. 135), while Muriel recalls how Evelyn 'regretted her séances' and observes that '[t]he house was full of what she had conjured up' (*Vacant Possession* p. 37). Though not at first glance a self-evident example of a situation in which care-giving takes place, Mantel's treatment of the séance, both within the duology and elsewhere in her writing, allows the relationships between medium and client, and medium and ghost,

to be read as involving a variety of kinds of care, even if the provision of such care is by no means inevitable.

Evelyn is not the only medium to appear in Mantel's work. Her 2005 novel, *Beyond Black*,<sup>39</sup> tells the story of Alison Hart, a spiritualist making her living from her mediumistic practice at the turn of the millennium. Alison understands her profession to be based on the provision of comfort and consolation to her living clients, ameliorating the unbearable truths about death and the nature of the dead. Faced with an audience member who has lost her pet dog and her husband, Alison implies that the pair will be reunited in death: 'Let her think it, that dog and master are together now; let her take comfort, since comfort's what she's paid for. Let her assume that Tiddles and his boss are together in the Beyond' (*Beyond Black* p. 23). On another occasion Alison makes contact with an audience member's dead son, who was delivered stillborn. In addition to passing on messages apparently given by the boy's ghost Alison carefully manages the parent's grief and distress:

'I'm sure those nurses and doctors were doing their best, and they didn't mean to hurt you, but the fact is, you weren't given a chance to grieve.'  
The woman hunched forward. Tears sprang out of her eyes. [. . .]  
'What I want you to know is this.' Al's voice was calm, unhurried, without the touch of tenderness that would overwhelm the woman entirely; dignified and precise, she might have been querying a grocery bill. 'That little boy of yours is a fine young man now. He knows you never held him. He knows that's not your fault. [. . .] He understands what happened. He's opening his arms to you, and he's holding you now.' (pp. 38-9)

These acts of comforting render the séance situation one in which care-giving ought to be taking place. Indeed, it is implied that there is a high price for failing or refusing to undertake such care. When Alison is questioned by Colette, her assistant, on why she insists upon managing and sanitising the information she gives to her clients, Alison replies that if she did not do so: 'They'd run a mile [. . .] It'd kill them' (p. 32).

Evelyn's attitude to her trade is radically different from Alison's. As has been noted, *Every Day* opens with Evelyn giving a séance for her recently bereaved neighbour. Yet Evelyn's mediumistic practice is devoid of any actions that might provide

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<sup>39</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Beyond Black* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005). All further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

comfort or moderate grief, fear or distress. When brusquely prompted by Evelyn to speak about her late husband, Mrs Sidney's response is one of unadulterated grief:

Mrs Sidney crumpled, as if she had been dealt a blow; her bag slid from her knees to the floor, her shoulders sagged, great gouts of grief came dropping from her mouth. [. . .] her face seemed to be slipping in and out of some grotesque and ludicrous mask. [. . .] As she talked she gasped and retched at the memories, but in the end she calmed *herself*. (pp. 11-2, my italics)

As this passage makes clear, despite her overwhelming distress, Mrs Sidney is left to calm and comfort herself as Evelyn fails to intervene. Evelyn's own description of her contact with the dead dispenses with any traditional consolatory fictions of the afterlife, as she states: '[i]t appears that they tell some people that all is very beautiful on the ninth plane and that there are flowers and organ music, but they never said that to me, and if they do say it I think they must be confusing it with the funeral' (p. 12). When she finally appears to make contact with Mrs Sidney's husband her account of his whereabouts is as uncompromising as it is catastrophic for Evelyn's client, reporting that Arthur Sidney 'is roasting in some unspeakable hell' (p. 13). It is only much later in the novel that the effects of Evelyn's mediumistic practice upon Mrs Sidney are revealed through a conversation between her adult children, Florence and Colin:

'We talk about her as if she were dead.'

'I sometimes wish she were [. . .] I think and think . . . that morning when I went over to Cousin Eileen's, and I came back, she'd been out, there was her bag in the hall, four months after Father's death – whatever happened, Colin? She was normal in the morning.'

'They said her brain was damaged.' (p. 93)

Colin goes on to recollect how, following this nebulous 'damage' to Mrs Sidney's brain, she is admitted to hospital where her doctor reports that she is suffering from 'delusions of nihilism' in which she believes 'she no longer exists' (p. 94). These extracts confirm the shattering effect upon Mrs Sidney of Evelyn's failure to practice her mediumship in a way which provides care. Her terror and grief ignored and dismissed, then compounded by Evelyn's assertion of Arthur Sidney's horrifying fate, Mrs Sidney is traumatised to the point of putative non-existence, her subjective integrity utterly compromised.

Clearly, then, Evelyn's mediumistic practice, devoid of any of the care-giving elements observed in Alison's spiritualist work, has a disintegrating effect upon those who come into contact with it. However, the consequences of Evelyn's séances are not only felt by her clients. Her inability to meaningfully mediate between the living and the dead also allows into her home a number of ghosts who, rather than appearing as whole deceased subjects, manifest as distressing and frightening fragments: '[a]s [Evelyn] moved to the foot of the stairs something grazed her sleeve, and she pulled away. Go, go, she thought savagely; I did not invite you here. A bloody handprint stained the cream emulsion, the leprous skull grinned behind glass. Mr Sidney's twisted mouth, in another place' (p. 17). Yet, it is not merely Evelyn's mediumistic work which gives rise to a host of persecutory phantoms. Her role as a mother is similarly compromised. Having broken the news of the deceased Arthur Sidney's whereabouts Evelyn hurries Mrs Sidney from the house and there follows a brief paragraph in which Evelyn worries not about the well-being of her client but about her own health and the effect the séance has had on her, crucially stating: 'I shall give it up [. . .] because it is making me ill; if one day I took some sort of fit and were laid up, what would happen, who would look after Muriel?' (p. 14). Building on the earlier analysis of the analogue Mantel constructs between care-giving figures and the environments of care, I now address the question of by whom, and in what ways, Muriel is "looked after", and the phantoms that maternal ambivalence gives rise to in the duology.

Put simply, maternal ambivalence refers to a mother's simultaneous possession of feelings of love and hatred towards her child.<sup>40</sup> The phenomenon has been recognised by a number of child psychotherapists and psychoanalysts, most notably D.W. Winnicott, the originator of the notion of 'good enough' mothering, who stated in his paper 'Hate in Countertransference', 'the mother [. . .] hates her infant from the word go'<sup>41</sup> a description that resonates with Evelyn's memory of Muriel's birth in which her daughter is both 'like someone horribly executed' and 'a lovely daughter' whom Evelyn views with 'pity, turning at once to exasperation' (p. 102). In her book *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* Roszika Parker asserts that while '[m]aternal ambivalence is not a static state but a dynamic

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<sup>40</sup> Parker, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> D.W. Winnicott, 'Hate in Countertransference', *International Journal of Psychotherapy* 30 (1949), 69-74 (p. 73).

experience of conflict [. . .] ambivalence itself is emphatically not the problem; the issue is how a mother manages the guilt and anxiety ambivalence provokes.<sup>42</sup> Parker goes on to posit the existence of manageable maternal ambivalence, in which the ‘safety catch’ of maternal love prevents full rein being given to feelings of hatred and destructiveness, in opposition to unmanageable maternal ambivalence, in which this ‘safety catch’ fails<sup>43</sup> and the urge ‘to destroy the child, to feed off its life, to turn it to stone, drive it mad, abuse or abandon it’<sup>44</sup> always present in the mothering experience, gains the upper hand.

The unmanageable quality of Evelyn’s ambivalence towards her daughter is inscribed throughout *Every Day*. ‘Mother always said she would haunt’, recalls Muriel as she is being admitted to Fulmers Moor psychiatric hospital (*Vacant Possession* p. 45), and while Evelyn’s threats of post-mortem return are never explicitly realised, the relationship between mother and child, from Muriel’s birth onwards, is nonetheless deeply dysfunctional. The reader is provided with an extensive if not exhaustive account of Evelyn’s attitude towards her daughter in the early pages of the novel in the form of excerpts from Muriel’s social services file, documents whose recognisable official format gives the lie to the Conservative notion that the family unit held the key to healthy and adequate care-provision. These passages not only place Evelyn and Muriel’s relationship within a constellation of care-giving that includes both the family unit and the agents of State-sponsored care but also give an early indication that this ostensibly care-giving relationship is deeply flawed. As Muriel’s first social worker puts it: ‘[Mrs Axon’s] attitude to [Muriel] seems to be one of basic contempt and that the client does not have ordinary feelings [. . .] she seems to have a negative attitude to client’s mental and emotional development’ (*Every Day* p. 15). As the novel progresses a picture emerges of Evelyn as unable to relate to Muriel as fully human. Having already speculated as to whether Muriel possesses a soul (p. 28), Evelyn goes on to recall how ‘the first years were spent in cleaning Muriel, in reconciling herself to her existence’ (p. 44), understanding and treating Muriel as an object, an object that is, moreover, malevolent and frightening: ‘[a]t first [Muriel] had said,

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<sup>42</sup> Parker, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Parker, pp. 86-7.

<sup>44</sup> James Hillman, ‘The Bad Mother, An Archetypal Approach’, in *Fathers and Mothers*, ed. by P. Berry (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1990), p. 107.



“Mother, Mother,” and Evelyn thought that it was “Murder” she had called out in the dark’ (p. 44).

If the ambivalence present in Evelyn’s relationship with Muriel is played out practically, it is also echoed and amplified in her interactions with the ghosts which haunt her home. When Evelyn recalls Muriel’s early life it is made clear that at least some of the ghosts who persecute her begin to arrive following Muriel’s birth. With reference to Muriel’s early years the text states that ‘Evelyn wanted to be alone in the house; the house filled up, more than she dreaded’ (*Every Day* p. 44). The actions of those phantoms with free run of 2 Buckingham Avenue have a profoundly infantile quality and include pushing and pinching, undertaking acts of petty vandalism and tugging at Evelyn’s clothing in a parody of a child seeking attention from a distracted adult. In one episode Evelyn is subjected to an entire morning of ‘rappings and bangings at the front door’ and the ‘screams and laughter of spiteful children [ring] in [her] ears’ (*Every Day*, p. 182), an incident which places Evelyn in the role of ‘a child [. . .] at the mercy of manipulative, malevolent, withholding beings.’<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the most striking element of Muriel and Evelyn’s relationship is a pathological lack of differentiation, echoing Estella Welldon’s characterisation of the ‘perverse maternal attitude’ as one which ‘manifests as a desire to engulf, to de-humanise, to invade, to take control of and merge with the [child].’<sup>46</sup> Muriel experiences Evelyn as capable of taking over both her mind and her body. Mantel describes Evelyn as reading Muriel’s mind, ‘thinking in her brain’ (*Every Day* p. 29) and, most disconcertingly, depicts Muriel physically transforming into her mother: ‘Muriel’s shoulders droop. Her knees stiffen, her hand quivers for support on the banister. At each tread she feels pain, she grimaces, she gasps a little. All her resources for today are played out. She is becoming Evelyn, for the night’ (*Every Day* p. 26).

The most interesting instance of this ‘mind reading’ occurs with reference to Muriel’s physical hunger. The episode merges a discussion of feeding, a process whereby something is taken inside oneself and an instance of violent invasion of,

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<sup>45</sup> Parker, p. 92.

<sup>46</sup> Welldon in Parker, p. 220.

and extraction of something, from the self by the other. The facilities for the provision of food in the Axon household have already been significantly skewed by the ghostly embargo on entrance to the kitchen and Evelyn and Muriel have been driven into the parlour where they are reduced to eating food out of cans stored in a sideboard:

[Muriel] wants one of the tins of meat; all evening she cherishes her longings and her hunger, the feelings she has that Evelyn does not know about. At eight o'clock Evelyn says, 'We could have a tin of meat.'

Inside, Muriel squirms in pain. Her thought has been read again. Dragged, filleted, out of her living head. (*Every Day* p. 25)

Mantel's description here queasily collapses the differentiation between psychic and biological sustenance while simultaneously collapsing inter-subjective boundaries. Muriel's physical hunger is inextricably linked to her reflections and feelings around it, the word 'filleted' being applied to Muriel's thoughts. This moment of 'mind-reading' is given a particular potency through the way in which it perverts a conventional parent-child interaction in which the parent intuits the hunger of their child and provides appropriate sustenance in a timely manner. Here this parental intuition is rendered not as comforting or satiating but as traumatic and invasive, extracting something of the child's essence in a display of cannibalistic maternity.

This image of the devouring care-giver is registered on a metaphorical level in the duology through recurrent references to the eating of eggs, themselves symbols of reproduction and new life which implicate the mother figure. In *Vacant Possession* Sylvia tries to deny her husband eggs on the ground that he is on a diet while Colin's disregard for his wife's advice and attempts to cook one for himself are unsuccessful and troubling: 'Colin stood over the cooker and looked down at his egg, bobbing dizzily in a froth of leaking white. As if alive, it flew about and tapped itself against the side of the pan' (p. 12). This idea of the egg still being alive as it is cooked is alarming in itself but read alongside Colin's later comparison of 2 Buckingham Avenue to the house of Atreus (p. 203), renowned in Greek mythology for its association with the parental cannibalisation of children, it gains a further sinister significance, undermining Colin's status as a hapless but harmless father figure. Muriel's treatment of eggs elsewhere in the duology carries a similar metaphorical weight. In *Every Day* she displays a preference for raw eggs, at one point placing her

breakfast egg on her palm and allowing it to roll off and smash on the kitchen floor (p. 80), while *Vacant Possession* features the recurring image of Muriel sucking the yolk out of hard boiled eggs. There is something abject and unsettling about this image and the quality of Muriel's egg eating habits is commented upon by one of the Sidneys' children: 'Daddy,' Claire said, 'You should see the way [Muriel] eats eggs, it's really disgusting. She cuts a piece off the end, then she sucks it out – like this –' (*Vacant Possession* p. 154). Mantel's description of the painstaking way in which Muriel breaks into her egg before eating it, shattering the shell which contains the egg's contents and maintains its structural integrity, peeling away the skin beneath to suck out the centre and leave a hollow behind, operates as an extended metaphor for the chronic lack of definition, not only between Muriel and the 'mind-reading' Evelyn, but between carers and the recipients of care of all types within these texts.

As has been indicated above, scenes of feeding and eating in the Axon household are notably maladjusted. Descriptions of the food and drink available in the house are universally unappealing, the foodstuffs stale, raw or otherwise inappropriate. Likewise Muriel's relationship with food is thoroughly dysfunctional, a dysfunction which is inextricable from her maternal relationship. The following passage describes the consequences of Muriel's disobedience as imposed by Evelyn:

As punishment, [Muriel] was being deprived of food. It annoyed Evelyn that she wasn't more affected by this. If you put food in front of her, she ate it; if not, she didn't miss it. By herself she would starve, Evelyn thought, or make herself very sick. She would bring a raw egg to the table, and set it down with every appearance of satisfaction; choose what was raw or half-cooked or stale, in preference to the good food her mother provided for her. (*Every Day* p. 67)

Mantel's emphasis here on Muriel's choice of 'what was raw, half cooked or stale' is telling, confirming Muriel's possession of 'an indiscriminate appetite ("a craving to take in everything that offers itself, together with an inability to distinguish between what's valuable and what's worthless")'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mary Jacobus, *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 28.

Clearly the scenes of feeding and eating within the duology provide an index for the quality and character of the care-giving relationships in which they take place.<sup>48</sup> In one overt example Mantel juxtaposes Evelyn's contemplation of feeding her daughter to the ravenous spectres of 2 Buckingham Avenue with a detailed description of the meal that Sylvia Sidney had prepared for her family that evening:

[Evelyn] always plans that if they get too close she will put her hand on Muriel's chest and push her slithering down to them, fat bait, something to lick their lips over.

Sunday: Sylvia cooked roast beef (she does it brown, a full twenty-five minutes per pound plus twenty minutes), roast potatoes, carrots, frozen peas: rhubarb crumble, at which she is a dab hand, and custard. (*Every Day* p. 59)<sup>49</sup>

This stark disparity sets up an uncomfortable contrast between two very different maternal approaches to the provision of nutrition. It should also be noted that, just as familial relationships with food and nutrition are spectrally compromised in the duology, the agents of state care-giving are depicted as being disordered with regards to food consumption. By the opening of *Vacant Possession* former social worker, Isabel Field, has developed a drinking problem as a response to her traumatic experience of providing care for Evelyn and Muriel; even the intercessor between state and familial care-giving struggles with taking in what is valuable, and keeping out what is damaging.

As Evelyn's fantasy of feeding Muriel to the ghosts of 2 Buckingham Avenue attests, it is not only the house's living inhabitants whose approach to food and feeding is disturbed and disturbing. The phantom tenants haunting the house are understood to

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<sup>48</sup> It is useful to note here the generalised disordering of scenes of feeding and eating present in *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession*, a disordering which forms a trope that allows the reader to confirm when a moment of care-giving is, or should be but is not, taking place. For example, a series of disastrous Christmas meals are staged both inside and outside 2 Buckingham Avenue. Florence Sidney's Christmas visit to the Axons' bearing a plate of warm home-made mince pies ends with several of the pies pitched to the floor and Florence having a large glass of neat scotch forced upon her at half past eleven in the morning. Meanwhile, at the Sidneys' house, the remains of Christmas dinner congeal or else are trodden into the carpet while the assembled company are described as 'nauseous', 'gross and sated' (*Every Day* p. 119). Crucially, during the Sidneys' residence at 2 Buckingham Avenue, milk brought into the house goes off with alarming speed, referencing the chaotic treatment of the formula milk that Evelyn brings home for Muriel's new-born baby. The text relates how, only two days after the birth of the baby, 'there was no more milk. Muriel had spilled a lot, wasted it, even drunk some of it herself' (*Every Day* p. 190). This focus on milk as spoiled, wasted and insufficient articulates the notion that the first feeding relationship between mother and infant forms a blue-print for subsequent feeding relationships but by no means is the positive quality of that relationship taken for granted.

<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that Sylvia is described as over-cooking the meat in the meal, avoiding any hint of rawness or indigestibility.

be possessed of a sadistic hunger and this urge to devour is remarked upon by both Evelyn and Muriel:

Evelyn sat on the bottom step, and rocked herself back and forth like a child. Such appetites, she thought, such vile appetites for raw and bloody meat. Were their jaws at work, behind the spare-room door? And if she went up there would she hear them, salivating and sucking, smacking unpicturable lips? Baby flesh would tear like butter. (*Every Day* p. 136)

Bearing in mind the use of feeding relationships within the duology to reflect and critique parental and maternal relationships, a question is posed by the destructive hunger associated with these ghosts, namely, what significance they have for Mantel's exploration of domestic care-giving. The horror inspired in Evelyn by the appetites of 2 Buckingham Avenue's ghosts is a manifestation of the maternal ambivalence already demonstrated in her relationship to Muriel, and communicates a terror of being cannibalised and overwhelmed by infantile demands, a feeling eloquently expressed by one of the mothers interviewed for Parker's *Torn in Two*: 'I can't bear the endless demands, [. . .], the impression of a bottomless pit. I feel that I am going to be devoured; that there will be absolutely nothing left of me.'<sup>50</sup>

Thus far the persecutory ghosts of 2 Buckingham Avenue have been identified not as a homogenous mass with a single effect and meaning, but as divergent entities emerging from séances in which Evelyn's inability to effectively mediate between the living and the dead permits unreconstituted fear, horror and grief to enter and populate the Axon household. It has also been demonstrated that these phantoms, products of a failed caring interaction, simultaneously make manifest the consequences of the unmanageable ambivalence Evelyn demonstrates towards her daughter. Whilst Evelyn suffers the consequences of her haunting ambivalence towards her daughter in the form of the persecutory and devouring infantile spectres who frighten and humiliate her, Muriel too possesses her own mode of spectrality born of receiving such compromised and ambivalent care.

A deliberate concomitance is created between Muriel and the house's 'less substantial tenants' from the opening pages of *Every Day*. Muriel herself imitates the malevolent activities of the house's poltergeists, stealing and moving household items (p. 17), committing acts of self-harm which she insinuates are the work of the

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<sup>50</sup> Parker, p. 78.

ghosts (*Every Day* pp. 29-30) and leaving (it is implied) threatening notes which Evelyn takes to be of supernatural origin (*Every Day* p. 24, p. 32). Muriel's resemblance to the ghostly inhabitants of the Axons' home goes further than a conscious aping of their persecutory activities. Evelyn experiences her as somehow phantasmal and not fully present, feeling '[m]ore and more, when [she] was in a room with her daughter, [. . .] as if no one was there' (*Every Day* p. 32), and describing the pregnant Muriel as '[a] ghost carrying a ghost' (*Every Day* p. 79). Muriel's indiscriminate appetite echoes the 'vile appetites' of the household ghosts and Evelyn's recollection of Muriel as a young child possessing 'a powerful urge to bite, to tear with her teeth' (*Every Day* p. 44) further reinforces her correspondence with the inhabitants of the spare room and their 'unpicturable' jaws (*Every Day* p. 136). Psychoanalyst Leonard Shengold has asserted that 'a result of chronic early overstimulation or deprivation' in children is a retreat into a state of 'hypnotic living-deadness, a state of existing "as if" [they] were there.'<sup>51</sup> Muriel's manner of relating to her mother closely resembles such a state, reinforcing her status as ghost within the Axon household:

[. . .] when Evelyn spoke to her, she became like an empty cavern. Muriel Alexandra's body stands irreproachable like a guardsman on parade, while her own thoughts slip off to gambol and strut, enjoying their own existence. (p. 24)

Shengold goes on to recall Sándor Ferenczi's assertion that an abused child 'changes into an obedient automaton' adding that 'the automaton has murder within' and indeed the reader finds Evelyn's suspicions of Muriel's murderous intentions to be proved correct:

She thought certain thoughts, like: I will kill you. Then many times a day Muriel would think thoughts, rejoicing in the deception. I will trip you down the stairs and break your neck. Mother mother mother. (p. 24)

That the ghosts which populate 2 Buckingham Avenue make manifest the various consequences of a series of care-giving relationships malfunctioning beneath the weight of unmanageable ambivalence is clear. Yet, if, as Winnicott suggests, '[m]others who do not have it in them to provide good enough care cannot be made good enough by mere instruction . . . there are those who can hold an infant and

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<sup>51</sup> Leonard Shengold, *Soul Murder: The Effects of Childhood Abuse and Deprivation* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 21.

those who cannot',<sup>52</sup> Mantel's duology asks where that lack or inability originates. *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* possess a textual landscape in which no positive representation of familial care-giving is to be found and in which caring relationships are characterised at best by distance and apathy.<sup>53</sup> Nowhere is this underlined more clearly than with reference to the story of Evelyn's own profoundly traumatic childhood, a story which includes the death of both parents, one to a progressive and distressing unnamed illness, the loss of her family home, the stigma of her father's extra-marital affairs, profound emotional neglect and her contemplation of suicide (pp. 116-8). Throughout this passage Evelyn is represented as neglected, cold and inadequately clothed and located outside of the sphere of parental attention. The adolescent Evelyn periodically visits her ill mother who is confined to a nursing home and described as 'smelling of urine' and 'scream[ing] if she was touched.' When we consider Roszika Parker's assertion that '[m]othering is a multigenerational process'<sup>54</sup> (and indeed Margaret Thatcher's own assertion that 'the family is not only mother and father and children – it is grandparents, aunts'<sup>55</sup>) it becomes clear that Evelyn's inability to provide comfort and containment, to mediate unbearable emotional excitation, as in the case of Mrs Sidney's séance, or to connect with her daughter as fully human is attributed in the novel to Evelyn's own lacking and traumatic experience of parenting. These multigenerational failures of mothering affirm child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim's assertion that 'the key to good enough childcare is empathy, stimulated by the parent's capacity to recall their own childhood emotions and experiences.'<sup>56</sup> Evelyn's childhood, which seems to her 'to have taken place in

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<sup>52</sup> D.W. Winnicott in Parker, p. 59.

<sup>53</sup> Colin Sidney, recalling his own childhood, fantasises an idyllic domestic scene in which his mother greets him after school, provides a snack and a cosy environment in which to do his homework before admitting that 'the past had not been like that. It was negligence, not sentiment, that kept things in their place year after year' (*Every Day* p. 92). This contrasts starkly with a description given by Margaret Thatcher of her own childhood, in an interview with *The Sun* newspaper in which she recalls walking home from school 'to a living room with a nice warm fire' and states 'my mother was there. She'd want to know what happened at school. We'd toast bread for tea. [ . . . ] Then there would be homework to do.' Margaret Thatcher, 'TV Interview for HTV *George Thomas in Conversation*', 13 September 1983, <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105188>> [accessed 27 May 2016].

<sup>54</sup> Parker, p. 73.

<sup>55</sup> Margaret Thatcher, 'Interview for *Woman's Own*', 23 September 1987, <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>> [accessed 27 May 2016]

<sup>56</sup> Parker, p. 39.

another century' (p. 118), is a wasteland of loss, neglect and trauma which, in her interactions with Muriel, is handed down to her daughter.

While the ancestral ghosts of Evelyn's own emotionally deprived childhood haunt the narrative only through her reminiscences, her deceased abusive husband does so explicitly, a phantom manifestation of the persistence of trauma and its impact upon maternal capability. Shortly after her mother's death, when Evelyn is seventeen, she is abruptly married off to Clifford Axon, one of her uncle's work colleagues who, troublingly, is suspected 'of indulging in sexual deviations' (*Every Day* p. 118). Despite his sudden death when Muriel is six, Clifford malevolently persists in the narrative, appearing first in ominous anecdotes, then as an inscription in his old overcoat which Muriel discovers and hangs up in the hall, implying to Evelyn that 'Clifford had come back, and hung his coat on the hallstand' (p. 86). However, it is only as *Every Day* is coming to its close that the suspicions of Evelyn's uncle are revealed to be true:

Perhaps we should have more children, [Evelyn] thought [. . .]. But after Muriel, Clifford had not wanted to risk repetition. He said that he would amuse himself. He would go down to the shed and she must turn a blind eye. A blind eye to whatever he kept in there and whatever comings and goings there were. That was what she had always done, until one day she had seen the child from next door heading down the path. [. . .] When Clifford came in for his tea [. . .] she asked him, 'Do you take children down there?' [. . .] Clifford's face then: 'A blind eye, Evelyn, a blind eye'; the threats in his voice, the promise of a week of bruises, and Muriel tossed into her bedroom unfed and screaming. (*Every Day* p. 174)

The image of Muriel's mistreatment combines with the confirmation of the perpetration by an adult of the abuse of small children to stand in stark contrast to the gothicised events of the narrative preceding it owing to the deliberate rooting of the revelation within the quotidian domestic. The full length passage details Evelyn's nervous spilling of milk and sugar on the table as she confronts Clifford and includes mundane details of the day and time of the scene ('three thirty – it was a Sunday'). The eruption of such physical violence into a text which has previously been preoccupied with the paranormal and supernatural produces a shift in the work the gothic does and has been doing in the novel up to this point. To fully understand the nature of that shift, it is necessary to turn to an anecdote told to Colin by Isabel, the Axons' social worker.



Isabel recounts to Colin the story of a Jewish couple hiding from the Nazis during the Second World War. The couple's hiding place is a small 'hole under a trapdoor inside [a] farmhouse. The floor of the farmhouse was made of earth' (*Every Day* p. 129). The environment is claustrophobic and suffocating. During the course of the war, the woman gets pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl, all the while underground. In order to maintain silence and not give away their position whenever the baby cried '[t]hey put their hands over her mouth. For a year and a half' (p. 131). The couple survive the war but the toll on their child when they emerge from hiding is terrible. As Isabel puts it, '[s]he was like a wild animal. When she was brought out of the hole she screamed and clawed and attacked people. At other times she was completely mute. As if they still had their hands over her face' (p. 131). This disturbing story, in which parental care is horribly perverted by terrible circumstances appears at first to have little in common with the horrors and abuses perpetrated in the Axon household. Yet certain details tie the two narratives together in such a way as to put them on a spectrum of collapsed, failing or otherwise perverse parental relationships. The description of the young Muriel's 'urge to bite, to tear with her teeth' echoes the animalistic behaviour of the traumatised child in Isabel's story, but a more striking commonality emerges in Muriel's apparent reaction to this urge which is 'to keep her mouth covered with her hand' (*Every Day* p. 44). This resonance between the two images of a hand over a child's mouth is accompanied by a further textual echo. Following the revelation of Clifford's abuse the passage continues: '[y]ears passed like this, the nameable fears giving way to the unnameable, the familiar dread of evening muffled under a pall of fog, of blackness, of earth; all the days lived as if underground, and Muriel, [Evelyn] thought, if I could have mourned myself, if I could have drawn breath, I might have pitied you' (p. 174). This description of Evelyn and Muriel's life at 2 Buckingham Avenue during Clifford's lifetime powerfully echoes the description of the deeply traumatised family unit living beneath the earth, in fear for their lives.

While, clearly, these two narratives of warped and dysfunctional parental relationships are not analogous, their inclusion in *Every Day* and the points of resemblance and of tension between them gesture to a specific ethical position regarding how and why care-giving fails. As Bettelheim, and countless caring professionals after him have repeatedly emphasised, the key to successful care-

giving relationships is the care-giver's capacity for empathy. Evelyn's comment that if she could have 'mourned' herself and 'drawn breath' she might have pitied her daughter poignantly illustrates how that capacity for empathy is snuffed out by parental trauma. Yet it is not only maternal care-givers whose empathic potential is compromised. Isabel too complains that in qualifying as a social worker attempts have been made to 'educate [her] out of feeling' (*Every Day* p. 74).

This refusal or inability to empathise suffuses the novel, reaching beyond those who perform a care-giving role, to encompass public attitudes towards familial care and the abuse that can be perpetrated under its auspices. When Colin complains that Isabel's story is a 'terrible one', stating that he doesn't 'like to think about stories like that', Isabel counters that '[n]one of us likes to think of other people's hells. We avoid it if we can' (p. 131). The treatment of Evelyn and Muriel's narrative by the other characters within the duology displays a similarly avoidant attitude to their dysfunctional care-giving relationship. This is exemplified when, half way through the novel the Axons' social services file is lost by Isabel and then stolen by one of Colin's work colleagues. Ignorant of who the individuals involved actually are, Colin's colleague, Frank O'Dwyer, plans to use the case notes as the basis of a novel. Speaking of the file one of his friends states that 'Frank could never [. . .] have invented such grotesquerie by himself' while O'Dwyer goes on to suggest that he 'might turn it into a sort of allegory, [. . .], about the state of our society' (p. 159). When Colin informs Isabel of this turn of events she protests: 'But it's not a story, it's just what people do. It's just a record of what they do' (p. 164).

While O'Dwyer's plans for a 'state of the nation' novel based on Evelyn and Muriel's case file self-consciously parodies what Mantel herself is undertaking within the duology, they also make a complex statement about the relationship the novels have to non-fictional accounts of horrific abuse, neglect and deprivation occurring within the privacy and notional safety of the family home. The gothic tropes around which the Axon household is constructed, the poltergeists and persecutory phantoms, the dilapidated family home with its forbidden rooms and arcane objects, serve to distance and misdirect readerly attention, obscuring, almost until the novel's close, the human origins of the terror and trauma in Evelyn and Muriel's lives. Through O'Dwyer's planned novel, the Axons' 'real' suffering forms

the basis for a work of fiction, and in so-doing, real-life equivalents for Evelyn and Muriel are also implied.<sup>57</sup> Mantel's own experiences of social work are pertinent here, particularly as communicated in her short essay 'The Woman in the Hall' which accompanies the 2006 edition of *Every Day*.<sup>58</sup> The triad of the duology, O'Dwyer's planned novel and Isabel's 'factual' account of her professional experiences work to communicate a self-conscious awareness of the ethical responsibility inherent in turning real suffering into fiction. This self-reflexiveness is compounded by the way in which the suggestion of real world 'women in the hall' refuses to allow the reader the chance to participate in an avoidance of 'other people's hells'. It is this refusal that changes the stakes of Mantel's use of the gothic mode in *Every Day*, demanding that the reader recognise how both the interpersonal and professional structures which would facilitate the empathic connection upon which healthy care depends are so frequently inadequate or absent.

### **'This homely home-from-home': Medical Care-Giving**

The domestic environment is far from the only care-giving situation to feature within the duology. Mantel's critique of care-giving within the milieu of the 1970s and 80s also takes in a number of clinical settings, the most compelling of which is Fulmers Moor, the psychiatric hospital to which Muriel is removed following her mother's death. In representing the space of the psychiatric hospital Mantel contributes to an

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<sup>57</sup> It should be noted that serial killers Fred and Rosemary West, whose horrifying crimes against their own children, among other victims, were committed in their family home, were active during the period in which the duology is set and in the same broad geographical area. Though the crimes did not come to light until after the publication of the duology, a sinister resonance between the texts and the notorious acts of familial violence is apparent to the contemporary reader. The body of Heather West, the Wests' oldest daughter was buried under the patio at the family home along with a number of the Wests' other victims. This detail resonates disturbingly with the sinister implications of several comments made regarding the garden at 2 Buckingham Avenue. There are numerous indications in the text that Clifford is not only sexually abusing children in the grounds of 2 Buckingham Avenue but murdering them and burying them under the flagstones in the garden. Initially inflected as a comedic conflation on the part of Muriel between 'flagstones' and 'gravestones' (p. 53), the implication gathers troubling pace as she later contemplates how pleasant it would be 'to find out who was under the stones' (p. 81) and culminates in Colin Sidney's ominous admission, upon moving into 2 Buckingham Avenue, that '[h]e had never known what the police were looking for when they turned over the garden, and he was not sure whether they had known themselves' (p. 211).

<sup>58</sup> The essay details this period of Mantel's life and the two specific house calls that provoked the novel. Mantel's recollection of attempting to dismiss how 'profoundly' troubled she is by her encounter with an elderly lady and her mentally-ill adult daughter ('But I said to myself, the household is fine, the trouble is all in your head' p. 11) is particularly striking when compared to Isabel's experience of trying to care for Evelyn and Muriel.

extensive literary tradition,<sup>59</sup> but her depiction of Fulmers Moor deviates significantly from many of the best known accounts of in-patient psychiatric treatment. Unlike Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* (1961), Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) and Susanna Keysen's *Girl Interrupted* (1993), there is no acknowledged autobiographical element within the representation of Fulmers Moor, an element which significantly inflects the work of the three texts above. As will be demonstrated, *Vacant Possession* also makes implicit reference to the abuses of power that can occur within the psychiatric hospital setting, though the text is not primarily concerned with narrating these gross abuses and highlighting their predominance, as in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). In terms of historical and geographic contexts, Mantel's treatment of the psychiatric ward environment differs significantly from the majority of canonical novels on the subject. Crucially *Vacant Possession*'s treatment of in-patient psychiatric care concerns a specific moment in the history of mental health policy in the United Kingdom, taking in the beginning what Andrew Scull has termed 'decarceration' - that is, the closure of psychiatric wards housed in former Victorian asylums and discharge of their former patients into the community - a context which, as is demonstrated below, is specifically inflected through Mantel's use of the gothic mode.

If, in *Every Day*, Muriel is rendered incapable of fully differentiating herself from Evelyn's paradoxically over-proximate yet neglectful mothering, the account given of psychiatric care in *Vacant Possession* presents a similarly troubling picture. Just as Muriel's subjectivity is eroded through her experience of maternal care, the care-giving undertaken in the context of Fulmers Moor has a spectralising effect upon its patients. This spectralisation can in part be attributed to what I argue is Fulmers Moor's status within the novel as a particular variant of what Marc Augé has termed 'non-place.'<sup>60</sup> For Augé 'non-place is a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity.'<sup>61</sup> Non-place is usually characterised by its nature as a transitory space through which individuals pass; examples include

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<sup>59</sup> This tradition is mapped skilfully in Charley Baker's *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction* (London: Palgrave, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> Augé, p. 77.

shopping complexes, airports, train stations and hotel chains. The space of the psychiatric hospital, as described in *Vacant Possession*, constitutes a non-place occupied by non-transitory individuals, whose confinement to that non-place and its strictures have a devastating effect on their subjective integrity.

Situated outside of the dormitory towns in which *Every Day* took place, Fulmers Moor is initially described in such a way as to give an impression of a deracinated and a-historical location, its ‘crumbling grey core’ (p. 44) deprived of any architectural features which might situate it within history, supplemented by the prefabricated and temporary structures of ‘Nissen huts’ (p. 44) and ‘new buildings made of metal and varnished wood and plate glass’ (p. 44), lacking in any meaningful history and reproducing its surroundings through its reflective surfaces rather than solidly occupying its space and differentiating itself from the wider landscape of the hospital grounds. The grounds themselves are ‘dotted with little signposts: Hunniford Ward, Greyshott Ward, Occupational Therapy’ and Muriel is directed into the hospital by following ‘the notices that said ADMISSIONS’ (p. 45). These markers form examples of what Augé terms the ‘instructions for use’ which define non-places and ‘may be prescriptive [. . .], prohibitive [. . .], or informative.’<sup>62</sup>

Muriel’s admission to Fulmers Moor is presented as a thorough process of depersonalisation as she is inculcated into the routines and spaces of the hospital: ‘[t]his is your locker, this is your orange bedspread, this is your bedside mat, this is where you will live. [. . .] The nurse took away her dress. She took away her knickers. She gave her a thin cotton gown’ (p. 45). This description attests to Augé’s comment that ‘a person entering the space of “non-place” is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he experiences in his role as passenger, customer or driver’,<sup>63</sup> or in Muriel’s case, patient.<sup>64</sup> This deindividuation is not just gestural but inscribed linguistically. The nurses use the pronoun ‘us’ and ‘we’ to refer to patients

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<sup>62</sup> Augé, p. 96.

<sup>63</sup> Augé, p. 101.

<sup>64</sup> The process of depersonalisation of a subject upon entry to a psychiatric hospital has been described by Erving Goffman as “trimming” or “programming” because in thus being squared away the new arrival allows himself to be shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations.’ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transactions, 2007), p. 16.

when defining what kind of behaviour is acceptable from the patients and what is not as the following exchange demonstrates:

The nurse smiled. ‘We don’t want to droop, do we?’  
‘I don’t know what we’re talking about,’ Muriel said, ‘Our head hurts.’  
‘We mustn’t be cheeky. We’ll learn that soon enough, dear.’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 45)

The seeming gesture of friendliness and inclusivity in this exchange is undercut by an aggressive exertion of control and the implication that punitive consequences are attached to a failure to learn the spoken and unspoken rules of the hospital.<sup>65</sup> The apparent muddying of the division between nurse and patient is commented on by another patient, Sholto Marx: ‘The patients for the shifts,’ he remarked, ‘or the shifts for the patients?’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 53). His remark calls into question precisely who is at the service of whom in the in-patient setting. The border crossing from the outside world into the world of the hospital, and being subject to the hospitality offered by that setting begins a process of spectralisation that is presented as being compounded by nursing practice. Mantel’s choice of narrative voice when relating the experiences of the patients at Fulmers Moor attests to an erasure of individual identity, collapsing as it does any discrete subjective voice and implying a blending together of individual experience which recognises the creation in non-places of ‘a shared subjective identity’:<sup>66</sup>

My mother died . . . I had this accident . . . I worried all night because I hadn’t done my homework . . . I should never have gotten married [. . .] I had no idea there was such filth in the world . . . At this point there was no food left in the house . . . I knew he had got a knife . . . I knew that if I allowed myself to go to sleep I should die during the night. Each night in the six o’clock news there is a special message for me. People stare at me whenever I set foot in the street. Someone had broken my glasses/started a fire/informed on me [. . .] Marilyn Monroe stole my giro. I went to the café till my money ran out. (*Vacant Possession* p. 47)

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<sup>65</sup> This exchange provides an illustration of Goffman’s statement with regard to the entry of a patient into a psychiatric hospital or similar residential institution that ‘[s]taff often feel that a recruit’s readiness to be appropriately deferential in his initial face-to-face encounters with them is a sign that he will take the role of the routinely pliant inmate. The occasion on which staff members first tell the inmate of his deference obligations may be structured to challenge the inmate to balk or to hold his peace forever.’ Goffman, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> Augé, p. 101.

Augé contends that only when exiting non-places are subjects treated as individuals and the significance of this border crossing from non-place to place and back is inscribed materially in a passage which relates how Muriel and her fellow patients are given ‘special clothes’ for an excursion into the community:

She had special clothes for the outing, given her out of a cardboard box kept in the nurses’ room: a blue frock with six buttons and a mackintosh that was only a bit small. Back on Greyshott she got given her old smock again. A nurse stood over her waiting to take the outside clothes away. (p. 51)

The correlation between Augé’s non-place and Fulmers Moor is compelling. The hospital forms an atopia within the novel where the patients’ attempts to create place and ‘organic society’<sup>67</sup> through their interactions (for example patient Emmanuel Crisp’s impromptu parodic sermons and communal hymn singing (p. 50)) are inevitably thwarted by the routines of the hospital or the patients’ own illnesses, and where the strictures and routines of the hospital environment continually reinforce the ‘solitary contractuality’ which non-places create.<sup>68</sup>

Yet if Fulmers Moor functions as a non-place within the narrative, it deviates from Augé’s original model in a crucial way. Rather than the transitory passengers, guests or customers who pass through the non-spaces of supermodernity - the malls, airport lounges and chain hotels - the patients of Fulmers Moor are forced to carry out their entire existence within a non-place which, by its nature, denies them individual identity and autonomy, a state which frequently becomes unbearable. In one memorable outburst Effie, another of Muriel’s fellow patients runs ‘screaming and cursing down Greyshott Ward and out into the corridor’ where she protests that ‘I don’t need getting up at six thirty every day, Christmas day, birthday, Queen’s official birthday and every bleeding Sunday. I need to get up when I want and make myself a little cup of tea’ (p. 53). Following this outburst Effie is ‘dragged’ back to her ward and ‘dumped’ on her bed after which she ‘subside[s] [. . .] her chest heaving with the shock and horror of her outburst’ (p. 53).

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<sup>67</sup> Augé, pp. 111-112. The attempts by the patients to partake in ‘organically social’ interactions also serves to illustrate Augé’s insistence upon the relationship between place and non-place. Augé states: ‘the first is never totally erased, the second is never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten.’ p. 79.

<sup>68</sup> Augé, p. 94.

Clearly, as the orderlies' response to Effie's attempts to break free of hospital routine demonstrates, violent and direct outbursts are ineffectual in counteracting the deathly depersonalisation of existence at Fulmers Moor. Unable to countermand the 'instructions for use' that determine the patients' existence (provided not only by the signposts mentioned above but by the implicit threats and physical restraints used by the hospital staff) the slippage of subjective identity created within non-places forces upon the patients of Fulmers Moor a deeply spectral existence. The patients seemingly oscillate between presence and absence. This occurs literally in terms of the removal of certain patients from the hospital into the community only for them to return again. However, it is also manifested metaphorically, via the effects of certain drug treatments upon their recipients as this passage detailing another of Effie's manic episodes demonstrates:

From time to time a ripple of emotion made [Effie's] face quiver. She would put a hand up to stop it, and then she would leap up in a frenzied pursuit of the nearest nurse. 'I want my Largactil,' she would bleat, 'I want my Modecate, I want my nice Fentazin syrup.' Tranquillised, she would lean against the wall, her face serene again; only the blink of an eye, only a minute parkinsonian quiver of the extremities, to show that she was alive at all. (*Vacant Possession* pp. 51-2)

Effie's uncanny 'undead' quality, produced by her movement between tranquilised absence and agitated presence, is reproduced in the varying modes of liminality occupied by her fellow patients. These characters occupy a threshold between coherence and incoherence, delusion and clarity, subject and object. This last oscillation registers itself most potently in Muriel's fellow patient, Phillip, who suffers from a delusion that he is a machine: 'I am a tractor. I am a Centurion tank [. . .] I am the internal combustion engine' (*Vacant Possession* pp. 53-4).

It is important to remember that the 'insane asylum' only assumed its modern form in the eighteenth-century and formed part of the landscape of many early gothic texts.<sup>69</sup> Ellis describes it as an institution 'whose antipathy to domestic life is perceived as intrinsic'<sup>70</sup> and certainly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the psychiatric hospitals based in the original Victorian 'mad houses' constituted houses only in that they 'warehoused' the mentally ill, enclosing them structurally and

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<sup>69</sup> Ellis, p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



preventing their circulation in wider society. By once again utilising the psychiatric hospital within the gothic mode,<sup>71</sup> Mantel underscores how the long-stay in-patient wards of the 1970s and 80s exist on a continuum with their Victorian predecessors and is able to question whether, even in the absence of the gross abuses of psychiatric patients in that era, significant correlations might not still exist. The reading above gives rise to an understanding of the psychiatric hospital as a gothic non-place, whose gothic nature stems from its inescapable quality and whose capacity for providing meaningful care for the mentally ill is provocatively questioned since the environment inherently exacerbates the kinds of fragmentation of subjective identity which result from mental illness itself. As Effie's episode makes poignantly clear, *Vacant Possession* depicts the disintegrative effects of mental illness combined with drug treatment and nursing practice of the time as resulting in a spectralised individual, fluctuating between multiple binary states, trapped in a non-place and treated as a non-person.

### **Homing Instinct: Community Care-Giving in Theory and Practice.**

If this kind of in-patient care leads in Mantel's duology to a spectralisation of the mentally ill, in 1985 the Thatcher Government began to reform care in such a way that these particular spectres were exorcized from the institutions of the state, notionally to go and 'haunt' the houses of their families as part of the 'care in the community' movement. These individuals form societal spectres within Mantel's narrative, haunting their former communities in a multitude of ways. Following the 1983 Audit Commission report 'Making a Reality of Community Care' a model was adopted whereby patients were discharged from long-stay hospital wards into the care of their families or, where this was not possible, rented accommodation outside of a clinical setting. If in the eighteenth century 'the mental hospital replaced the family and the community as the epicentre of care and control'<sup>72</sup> in the 1980s a reversal of this position was effected with regard to psychiatric care: the decade

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<sup>71</sup> Notable examples of the 'lunatic asylum' as setting in gothic fiction can be found in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859), whose heroine is wrongfully incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital, and in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), in which the character of Renfield is detained in an asylum. It is interesting to note that this particular intersection between gothic and psychiatry gave rise to a parodic clinical term, namely 'Renfield Syndrome', coined by Richard Noll in his book *Vampires, Werewolves and Demons: Twentieth Century Reports in the Psychiatric Literature* (New York: Bruner/Mazel, 1992).

<sup>72</sup> Peter Bartlett and David Wright, 'Community care and its antecedents', in *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community 1750-2000*, pp. 1-18 (p. 1).

‘between 1972 and 1982 saw the closure of 40 of the larger psychiatric hospitals in England’ and between 1954 and 1982 the number of psychiatric beds in English hospitals was slashed by 55%.<sup>73</sup>

It has already been observed that the Conservative government sought to establish the family unit, alongside religious and charitable organisations, as the appropriate agencies for the provision of care. Mantel weaves a series of Thatcherite tenets throughout the narrative, placing them into the mouths of her characters. Colin parrots the famous Thatcherite maxim of the time: ‘there is no alternative’<sup>74</sup> and upon confronting the married banker who is the father of his daughter’s child states ‘[t]his is 1984. Victorian Values’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 164).<sup>75</sup> The doctor who attends Colin’s mother following her discharge from hospital, in response to Sylvia’s protestations that she can’t cope with her caring responsibilities, merely states that ‘[c]harity begins at home’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 178). Even Mantel’s choice of name for Francis, the Sidney’s local vicar, references Margaret Thatcher’s paraphrasing of the prayer of St. Francis upon her arrival at Downing Street as Prime Minister.<sup>76</sup> These ventriloquial repetitions render the Conservative dogma a further spectre circulating within the narrative. The public discord surrounding the widespread introduction of care in the community is voiced in the following extract by Francis and Sylvia. Both characters act as symbols for what the Conservative government of the day deemed the most appropriate agencies for care:

‘It’s a con trick, all this about discharging people into the community.  
They’re doing it to save money.’

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<sup>73</sup> Sarah Payne, ‘Outside the Walls of the Asylum? Psychiatric Treatment in the 1980s and 1990s’, in *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community 1750-2000*, ed. by Peter Bartlett and David Wright (London: Athlone Press, 1999), pp. 244-65 (p. 247).

<sup>74</sup> Though widely associated with Thatcher’s economic policy, the phrase ‘there is no alternative’, or TINA as it came to be called, was first used by Margaret Thatcher in the Press Conference for American Correspondents in London on 25 June 1980. <<http://www.margarethatcher.org/Speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104389&doctype=1>> [accessed 12 April 2016].

<sup>75</sup> Thatcher’s association with the term ‘Victorian values’ originated during a televised interview with Brian Walden for London Weekend Television’s *The Weekend World* on 16 January 1983. During the interview Walden put it to the Prime Minister that she subscribed to and approved of ‘Victorian Values’ to which she replied ‘Oh exactly. Very much so.’ <<http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/105087>> [accessed 12 April 2016]. The Prime Minister went on to repeat Walden’s term, and her endorsement of it, in a number of other speeches and interviews that year.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Thatcher, ‘Remarks on Becoming Prime Minister (St Francis’s Prayer)’ <<http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/104078>> [accessed 21 April 2016].

‘Quite true,’ Francis said [. . .]. ‘Community care properly carried through is a most expensive option. Done shabbily, it’s cheap. The social workers, God bless them, have been urging it for years. Now they’ve fallen right into the budgeters’ trap.’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 154)

This exchange neatly highlights the discrepancy between what theorist Richard Titmuss termed the ‘sense of warmth and human comforting’ evoked by the concept of care in the community and its reality. Titmuss states that ‘a situation was being created in which ‘the care of the mentally ill [was transferred] from trained staff to untrained or ill equipped staff or no staff at all.’<sup>77</sup> This situation is described in the narrative by Sholto who confirms that ‘[w]hat [the authorities] claim [. . .] is an ongoing bean feast, flats, nurses, jobs, day centres. But if you want to avoid all that you’ll have no trouble at all. There aren’t enough to go around’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 57).<sup>78</sup>

This lack of resources was not limited to psychiatric medicine. Services for the elderly were subject to the same enthusiasm for a move to community-based care, an enthusiasm which repeatedly led to disastrous breakdowns of the caring situation as family members struggled to cope with the demands of providing medical and personal care to elderly relatives who were often frail and confused. Writing in *The Guardian* in 1988, Jane Brotchie recorded the feelings of claustrophobia and isolation brought about by the sudden imposition of caring responsibilities upon ill-equipped individuals, stating that:

[I]lack of freedom of choice aggravates the strain and makes carers vulnerable to depression. As physical exhaustion takes its toll, feelings of inadequacy, failure, and hopelessness emerge. Carers often criticise themselves for being irritable and short-tempered with the people they look after. One spoke of her despair and of her desire to kill herself: she felt

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<sup>77</sup> John Welshman, ‘Rhetoric and Reality: Community Care in England and Wales, 1948-1974’, in *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community 1750-2000*, ed. by Peter Bartlett and David Wright (London: Athlone Press, 1999), pp. 204-226 (p. 223).

<sup>78</sup> Sholto’s comment voices the crucial problem at the heart of the care in the community initiative in the 1980s, that is, a critical discrepancy between demand and resourcing. As Ben Nelson put it in *The Times*, in response to the 1988 Griffiths report on community care, ‘[t]here appeared to be a grave mismatch of resources to need. About 90 per cent of expenditure on the mental health services was spent on hospital services and 10 per cent on community care. But the demand was almost exactly the other way round, with 90 per cent of people requiring help in the community and 10 per cent in hospital.’ Ben Nelson, ‘“Inadequate” Community Care Attacked: House of Lords, Parliament’, *The Times*, 8 December 1988.

increasingly unable to continue nursing her incontinent and physically abusive mother. The doctor prescribed anti-depressants.<sup>79</sup>

This account of one female care-giver being ‘strong-armed’ into taking on caring responsibilities previously shouldered by the State,<sup>80</sup> and her subsequent inability to cope, is sharply reflected in Mantel’s text as Florence’s mother, Mrs Sidney, (who is doubly incontinent and suffering from a delusion that she is May of Teck, a member of the British Royal family), is discharged from a geriatric ward into her daughter’s care after many years as an in-patient. The staff nurse on Mrs Sidney’s ward points out to Colin and his wife that ‘they want to close this place down, and anybody they can get out, they will get out’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 94). In short order Mrs Sidney is returned to her daughter’s home and unceremoniously abandoned: “‘all yours!’ [the ambulance crew] cried as they sped off down the path’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 161). After only a short period of attempting to care for her mother at home, Florence becomes overwhelmed, as she tries to explain to her mother’s doctor during one of his visits:

Florence had run downstairs after him and followed him into the street. ‘I can’t go on,’ she wailed. ‘Dr Rudge, listen to me.’

Dr Rudge stopped in surprise, bouncing his car keys on his palm. ‘But you’ve got the district nurse, Miss Sidney. Be thankful for small mercies.’

‘But I can’t manage! The smell! And the way she wakes up and thinks she’s at Marlborough House! It frightens me!’

[. . .]

‘[. . .] I can’t go on.’ Florence’s voice rose into the damp afternoon. ‘Don’t you understand? We can’t take anymore, any of us.’

[. . .]

Dr Rudge cursed under his breath, and felt in his overcoat pockets for his prescription pad. He scribbled on it and ripped the page off.

‘Try this to calm you down, Miss Sidney.’ (*Vacant Possession* pp. 183-4)

Florence’s experience of being forcibly repositioned as the most appropriate care-giver for her elderly mother clearly taps into contemporary accounts of how the move to a care in the community model often put unbearable pressure not only on the patients who were made subject to it but the relatives and neighbours who were intended to deliver it. Yet, this depiction of an unmanageable, suffocating caring

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<sup>79</sup> Jane Brotchie, ‘Do we care who cares? - The neglect of those who look after the ill at home’, *The Guardian*, 7 September 1988.

<sup>80</sup> Polly Toynbee, ‘Just One Cry for Help / Focus on the Association of Carers’, *The Guardian*, 10 December 1984.

relationship does not feature in the duology merely as a historical detail. Rather, it is given a gothic gloss.

As soon as Mrs Sidney takes up residence in her daughter's home eerie domestic malfunctions of the kind more usual in the adjacent 2 Buckingham Avenue begin to occur; the clocks stop telling the right time, pictures keep falling off the walls, the house-plants begin to die and broken glass appears on the kitchen floor, seemingly from nowhere (*Vacant Possession* p. 169). Mrs Sidney herself is described as a revenant: 'nothing but a nightgown of yellow winceyette held in the old lady's bones, but her face had become animated, lips twitching, eyes opening wide' (*Vacant Possession* p. 97).<sup>81</sup> The fact of her delusion that she is the deceased May of Teck, lends a further spectral aspect to her presence in the house. Mantel continues to render this instance of community care through the lens of a parodic gothic, as Mrs Sidney simultaneously occupies the role of gothic tyrant and sequestered heroine. When she is eventually murdered by Muriel, who provides her with an overdose of sleeping pills, suspicion immediately falls upon the harassed and overwhelmed Florence. Despite her vehement protestations Colin, Sylvia and the ineffectual Dr Rudge insist upon Florence's guilt while also conspiring to conceal it from the outside world. In creating this familial secrecy around a secret which in fact does not exist Mantel parodies the gothic convention of the family secret, the revelation of which drives the narrative while simultaneously constructing a situation in which medical, social and familial care-giving structures catastrophically rupture. The secret which the gothic ultimately reveals here is the open secret of the inadequacies of Thatcherite social care policy and the phantoms created through those inadequacies.

Mrs Sidney is not the only character to die as a result of their discharge into the community. Effie's ability to cope in the world outside of Fulmers Moor is questioned by Sholto explicitly when he remarks '[y]ou might [pass], Muriel. I might pass, if I don't fall down and foam. Crisp will pass. But Effie – never' (*Vacant Possession* p. 56). Sholto's suspicions prove correct; Effie's expulsion from Fulmers Moor directly results in her death; she becomes homeless and, having been brought

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<sup>81</sup> Mrs Sidney's status as an animated corpse is confirmed while she is still resident at her hospital, as the staff nurse addresses her but concludes: '[e]xpect a mummy to answer you [. . .]. Expect Tutankhamun to boogie into the sluice' (*Vacant Possession* p. 92).

into hospital ‘frozen and raving’, dies of pneumonia (*Vacant Possession*, p. 159). Effie, like Phillip who hangs himself in the anonymity of his council flat,<sup>82</sup> becomes a ghost in the traditional mode, her presence lingering in the text even after her death in the narrative. However, Effie’s fate is not shared by all of Muriel’s fellow patients. Some survive their discharge only to find themselves living not as literal ghosts but as social spectres in their former communities, as is the case for Sholto.

Following his discharge Sholto is depicted in the gloom of a pawn shop, amongst a multiplicity of obsolete objects such as the keys for unknown locks and a phrenologist’s head, a relic of a long debunked clinical discipline. He is described leaping out of the dark brandishing a sabre and blowing a ‘clarion call’ on a bugle, and the text asserts that ‘it would have been no surprise to hear him claim that now was the winter of his discontent’” (*Vacant Possession*, p. 76). Within this setting Sholto forms a further anachronistic relic, human remains of a care system that has become or been deemed defunct. The use of the opening lines of *Richard III* linguistically registers this anachronism while simultaneously pulling into circulation another. Sholto’s imagined claim also evokes the winter of 1978-9 during which widespread strikes were undertaken by a number of public sector trade unions, including those representing grave diggers and refuse collectors. The period came to be referred to in the press as the ‘winter of discontent’ and was a significant factor in the election of Margaret Thatcher in the June of 1979. By claiming for Sholto the Thatcher era as his ‘winter of discontent’ the text posits Sholto’s disenfranchisement as permanent;<sup>83</sup> he is isolated, unaffiliated with a ‘union’ of any kind that could represent him to the State structures which abandon him upon his discharge from hospital. It also undercuts the narrative put forward in Thatcher’s speech upon being elected Prime Minister in which, paraphrasing St Francis of Assisi, she stated that

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<sup>82</sup> Word of Phillip’s death is reported anonymously, the last in a series of snippets of news regarding patients who had recently been discharged: ‘Phillip got a council flat,’ someone said. ‘How did he like it?’ ‘He hanged himself’ (*Vacant Possession*, p. 57). His suicide is not merely an authorial conceit but reflects the real outcome for a significant minority of patients who were discharged from long-term care into the community. In 1985 Brian Brown, a 23-year-old man who had recently been discharged into the community from a psychiatric ward in West Lothian, threw himself from a bridge to his death. David Henke, ‘Suicide Claim leads to Social Security Debate’, *The Guardian*, 21 June 1985. Likewise, in 1986 an enquiry was called for following the suicides of fifteen patients of St John’s psychiatric hospital Lincoln, of whom ten had been recently discharged into the community. Jill Sherman, ‘Fears for former patients / Mental health association calls for greater supervision of people discharged from psychiatric hospitals’, *The Times (London)*, 11 August 1986.

<sup>83</sup> It is telling that the rest of the original line, in which the winter is rendered ‘glorious summer’, is absent from the description, leaving Sholto’s proposed winter of discontent unthawing.

her government would bring faith, harmony, truth and hope where before there had been doubt, discord, error and despair.<sup>84</sup> The combination of the original Shakespearean text the passage alludes to and the reference to a period in British history during which bodies went unburied and rubbish piled up in the streets proposes that, for Sholto and those like him, the advent of Thatcherism, far from ending the winter of discontent, was the start of its stubborn chill.

Through the character of Sholto, Mantel is able to address a specific issue surrounding state care-giving in the 1970s and 80s, namely the problem of those patients who are returned to their former communities only to find that they have been dissolved or rendered obsolete in the meantime. In a powerful passage Mantel describes how Sholto returns to his community only to discover a wasteland in its place:

When he turned off Adelaide Street, a terrible sight met his eyes. The whole district had been razed. Osborne Street was down, Spring Gardens had been flattened. The Primitive Methodist Chapel was boarded up and all the gravestones had been taken away. He tramped through the meadow of blight where the bones of Primitive Methodists had once rested; the ground was strewn with glass and broken pots. He squatted down, turning over the shards. The weather was damp; his holdall was smeared with yellow clay. From where he knelt he looked up and read a sign: MOTORWAY LINK BEGINS MAY 1983. (*Vacant Possession* p. 59)

This passage is particularly rich, locating the abandoned and rejected Sholto within a landscape defined by an absence of containing structures and the presence of broken and defunct objects. The broken pots he finds are indicative of a shattering of formerly containing objects and the literal human remains associated with this landscape, the ‘bones of the Primitive Methodists’, are rendered anonymous and liminal, their gravestones removed and the bodies themselves indeterminately located. The architectural structures in this landscape, the houses and chapel that had the potential to provide a containing, sheltering environment have all either been rendered one dimensional, ‘flattened’ or ‘razed’, or have had their openings onto the world boarded up, turning them from potential shelter to crypt. Mantel’s transformation of the graveyard into a ‘meadow of blight’ is significant too. Blight, a term for a plant disease but also conventionally applied to areas of urban decay, is

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<sup>84</sup> Margaret Thatcher, ‘Remarks on becoming Prime Minister (St Francis’s Prayer), 4 May 1979, <<http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/104078>> [accessed 20 May 2016].

the only thing that will grow in this degraded environment alongside rosebay willowherb, a weed which thrives on turned up earth and which proliferated in the bomb craters left following the Second World War. The cumulative effect of the damp mud, twisted scrap metal and the 'swastika spray-gunned on a wall' is to position this wasteland as a symbolic conflict zone, as Sholto recognises, stating 'I thought the war was over' (p. 59).

Sholto's fate is not the only aspect of state care-giving to be critiqued within the duology. While care in the community formed one of the most distinctive elements of Conservative health and welfare policy during the Thatcher decade, *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* also address the provision of State care more broadly, providing a provocative representation of the activities of the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS). As has been discussed, the care-giving landscapes within the duology, whether familial or societal, form sites where providers of care frequently come to dominate, invade and deplete those they are ostensibly caring for, sites upon which a kind of care-giving that spectralises the recipient takes place. This has been demonstrated in the case of Muriel, who operates as a kind of fleshly spectre within 2 Buckingham Avenue, confused with and frequently described as a ghost. In the case of the psychiatric patients admitted to Fulmers Moor, their physical and subjective presence is similarly compromised by drug treatments and mental illness. However, this spectralisation can also be observed on a social level in the character of Miss Anaemia.

### **Social Care – The DHSS and the Evil Eye of Welfare Provision**

Muriel's fellow tenant in the house on Napier Street, Miss Anaemia is a benefit claimant and as such comes into regular contact with the DHSS. The character provides a vehicle for Mantel to explore the psychological impact of this particular aspect of social care, an exploration which is coloured by a powerful element of irony, signalled by Mantel's description of Miss Anaemia's joblessness and experience of claiming benefit as a 'full-time occupation' (*Vacant Possession* p. 112). Miss Anaemia is referred to in the text predominantly by a nickname which obscures her true identity, reducing her to her unmarried status ('Miss') and a medical condition defined by lack or depletion. Her adoption of multiple identities in an



effort to claim her benefit payments is indicative of a fracturing of identity resulting from an attempt to access state care. She tells Muriel:

‘I’m a claimant. I make up different names. Primrose Hill’s one I go under. Penny Black.’ She whispered to herself. ‘Black Maria, Bad Penny. Faint Hope. Square Peg.’  
‘Is it frightening?’  
‘It’s terrifying,’ Miss Anaemia said. ‘It makes your palms sweat’ (*Vacant Possession* p. 81)

If we accept Julian Wolfreys’ assertion that ‘names, conventionally applied, fix the limits of identity’<sup>85</sup> then the use of a nickname here, bestowed on the character by Muriel but shared only with the reader, indicates an erasure of those limits. In a significant passage Miss Anaemia reflects upon the detrimental effect that her contact with the DHSS has had on her sense of self:

She never thought much about anybody else; claiming benefit was a full-time occupation. Her mind was getting narrowed down somehow; certain phrases like ‘means’ and ‘rebate’ seemed to have taken on an overriding significance, layers and layers of portent, which only peeled away for a split second, just as she was waking or falling asleep. When she saw a queue, she had an urge to join it. A hundred forms she must have filled in, two hundred; all this information spinning away from her, out of her head and off into space. The process was extracting something from her, filing away at her essence; she was no more than the virgin white space between two black lines, no more than a blur behind a sheet of toughened glass. (*Vacant Possession* p. 112)

This passage, concerned with the process of claiming social security payments, implies that the external systems through which the State provides financial support are internalised entirely by their recipients. Not only behaviourally (‘if she saw a queue she had an urge to join it’) but linguistically, the structures of State care-giving come to infiltrate and eventually obliterate individual subjectivity, the work of the DHSS dominating Miss Anaemia’s internal world. Mantel represents the work of the department as ideologically situated in such a way as to perform an erasure of subjective integrity and individual identity that turns Miss Anaemia into a social spectre. This status as a phantom is underlined by her physicality: she possesses an extreme pallor, a ‘fragile’ and insubstantial figure and ‘translucent’ skin. Even her touch is ‘ice-cold and clammy’ (*Vacant Possession* pp. 80-1). These physical attributes combine with Miss Anaemia’s sudden appearance at the top of staircases

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<sup>85</sup> Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic and the Uncanny* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. xi.

and from darkened doorways in the condemned structure of the house on Napier Street (*Vacant Possession* p. 80) to invoke gothic convention in a way which reinforces Mantel's sociological assertions.

The presence of the DHSS within the duology is depicted as creating an atmosphere of paranoia and a sense of constant surveillance. As Mr Kowalski, Muriel's landlord reports upon seeing Isabel Field observing the house: '[y]ou see new woman in the street, watching out of a car? Always watching, watching, seeing who comes and goes. Always silent, silent, silent like the grave' (*Vacant Possession* p. 219). A case of mistaken identity leads Miss Anaemia to believe that she is being watched by DHSS employees.<sup>86</sup> While in reality this is not always true, the unstable quality of Mantel's narrative voice and the paranoid outlook she grants to her characters render it impossible to identify the 'watcher' being spoken about at any one time. The fact that these ostensible agents of State care provision are represented primarily as forces of surveillance becomes particularly significant in the context of the concept of the 'Evil Eye'. Lucidly articulated by Stephen Frosh, the notion of the 'Evil Eye' is dependent upon the idea that 'looking involves appropriation; conversely being looked at means to risk having something taken away.'<sup>87</sup> This is particularly suggestive when read alongside Miss Anaemia's sensation of depletion, her feeling that 'the process [of securing financial support] was extracting something from her, filing away at her essence' (p. 112). That the watchful presence of the DHSS staff is responsible both for the depletion of Miss Anaemia's 'essence', her 'sense of self', and the insertion into her psyche of the linguistic and symbolic structures associated with the claiming of benefit, is also supported by Frosh's description of the 'Evil Eye' which understands the phenomenon as 'an example of destructiveness operating at a distance. No contact is necessary [. . .] just a devouring glance, that inserts something in the other and consequently poisons it from within, drying up its liquid, sucking out its inside.'<sup>88</sup> This description recollects the discomfiting images of egg eating discussed earlier with reference to parental care-giving and serve as a reminder that State care of the kind described in *Vacant Possession* can have an

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<sup>86</sup> It is worth noting here that Florence Sidney, when not acting as a carer for her mother, is employed by her local DHSS office to deal with benefit claimants and, it is implied, is one of the employees Miss Anaemia encounters during her repeated attempts to make her claims.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen Frosh, *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 249.

<sup>88</sup> Frosh, p. 250.

equally invasive and depleting effect upon its recipients. Indeed, all of the duology's characters struggle to separate themselves from their carers, both physically and psychically, to achieve definition and a subjective existence and to avoid being cannibalised or hopelessly hollowed out by the attentions of their ostensible care-givers. For Miss Anaemia this depletion is figured partially in Mantel's choice of name for the character. It was mentioned earlier that anaemia is a medical condition based on lack and this depleted state of one element of the body's liquid component is significant, providing a biological inscription of the detrimental effects produced by the watchful presence of State care-givers. Miss Anaemia's experience that something is 'filing away her essence' puts a suggestively bureaucratic slant on this manifestation of the evil eye; instead of being drained away or devoured in a cannibalistic sense, Miss Anaemia's essence is reduced to 'files', red tape and paperwork.

### **Confessions of a Social Worker: Isabel Field as Gothic Heroine**

'Help? She needs an exorcism' (*Vacant Possession* p. 166).

The above observation by social worker Isabel's husband allows access to the final facet of Mantel's representations of the interactions between haunting and care-giving in the Thatcher decade, that is, the consideration of whether to provide care is to open oneself up to the possibility of being haunted. As such, it remains to ask what does it mean to be haunted by attempts to provide care rather than as a result of receiving care and, more specifically, how does Mantel characterise such a carer, the figure of the social worker, within this deployment of the gothic? Informed by the time Mantel spent as a social work assistant in 1974,<sup>89</sup> the character of Isabel provides an embodiment of the intersection between the personal and politico-social faces of care giving. During the late 1970s and 1980s the social worker was a figure treated with profound suspicion by the Conservative government: 'Conservative ministers, like many members of the public, doubted the competence and were highly suspicious of the underlying motivations of social workers. Was their principal purpose to encourage their problem clients to conform to or challenge conventional norms [sic]. The fundamental Conservative instinct was that clearly it

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<sup>89</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'The Woman in the Hall', p. 10.

should be the former but in practice it was the latter.<sup>90</sup> I argue that this suspicion arises from the way that the social worker's role leads them to bridge the gap between the public and private spheres, to infiltrate the space of the home as agents of State care. The duology recognises in the social worker a figure possessed of a powerful congruence with the concerns of the gothic. Concerned primarily with those 'locked in and locked out' of the caring structure of the home,<sup>91</sup> the social worker's societal pre-occupations mimic the textual pre-occupations of the gothic, as they seek to expose family secrets, bring to light scenes of domestic violence and of enforced captivity. Isabel penetrates the threshold between public and private and on both visits to the Axon household provokes the kinds of 'confrontation with motherhood' frequently orchestrated within the gothic mode. Isabel's initial visit to 2 Buckingham Avenue allows Mantel to orientate her representations of maternal and social care alongside one another but her second visit, in which Evelyn tricks her into entering the spare room and locks her in, provokes rather a different confrontation.

The relationship between nutritional processes such as feeding, eating and digesting and their intra-psychic equivalents has been established in this chapter and it is a relationship which psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion also appreciated. He argued that 'the mind needed the nourishment of "getting to know a person" in much the same way as the body needs food and that terrible stuntings and bluntings occurred if the mind was starved of it.'<sup>92</sup> In this context the hunger of the ravenous infantile spectres in the spare room becomes more sharply defined, as does Isabel's traumatised response to encountering them. While the ghosts of the spare room figure rejected infant distress, hunger and fear, their power to terrorise comes in evoking the terror of being overwhelmed by the demands of an other, of an attempt to provide care that consumes the care-giver, that eats them alive. It is this to which Muriel refers when she relates to Sholto that '[i]n my mother's day [. . .] we had a special room in our

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<sup>90</sup> Lowe, p. 349.

<sup>91</sup> Both Muriel and Evelyn are at various times locked into or locked out of 2 Buckingham Avenue. While Muriel is immured by her mother in the back parlour Evelyn is forcibly ejected from the house as she stands on the doorstep: 'Suddenly she felt a terrific blow in the small of her back. She pitched forward, off the doorstep. One arm flailed in the air. With difficulty she regained her balance. She stood gasping, winded. The door clicked behind her. She was locked out' (*Every Day* p. 88).

<sup>92</sup> Anne Alvarez, *Live Company: Psychoanalytic psychotherapy with autistic, borderline, deprived and abused children* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1992), p. 9.

house. In that room my mother said there were things that would pick the flesh off your bones' (*Vacant Possession* p. 180).

Isabel's struggle is indicative of a wider difficulty with regarding social care during the 1980s. She states 'I didn't have anything left over from my work to give to anybody' (*Vacant Possession* p. 86). This lack of internal resources, her inability to cope with the anxiety and distress that her work brings her into contact with, is also indicative of the lack of physical and financial resources being offered to social workers during this period. It is a depletion which speaks to the profound difficulty of providing state care in the face of heavy case loads and 'generic' social workers, as Isabel's rationale for writing up and publishing her experiences of social work confirms:

[. . .] then everyone would know how social workers operate and why things go so badly wrong. How you get given cases you can't handle, and how clients conspire against you, and circumstances seem to conspire too. How it messes up your personal life. How you live with yourself afterwards; when disaster has occurred. (*Vacant Possession* p. 21)<sup>93</sup>

Textually, Isabel performs the role of a gothic heroine. Alternately locked out of and then into the domestic space she seeks to infiltrate, her quest for knowledge of Muriel's existence which she is denied, both in terms of access to 2 Buckingham Avenue and the lost and incomplete documentation associated with the Axon case, and her eventual incarceration in the spectrally occupied 'spare room' aligns her closely with the heroines of the original gothic texts.<sup>94</sup> As she tries to provide a framework for her gothic narrative of social care she trails off: 'WHILE I WAS IN THE BEDROOM –' (*Vacant Possession* p. 85). The lacuna at the end of the sentence implies the threat of sexual violence that forms the undercurrent of all gothic narratives and which is explicitly articulated in *Every Day*.<sup>95</sup> Through Isabel,

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<sup>93</sup> This lack of resources of all kinds in the sphere of social work in the 1970s and 80s is usefully spoken to by Brid Featherstone who, in her essay 'I wouldn't do your job: Women, social work and child abuse', maintains that 'in their dealings with abusive mothers [. . .] female social workers are hampered by poor theoretical tools and their location in organizational contexts which are often unhelpful', difficulties which are compounded by 'public sector contexts that are manifesting increased defensiveness and the inability to face both external and psychic reality.' Brid Featherstone, 'I wouldn't do your job: Women, social work and child abuse' in *Mothering and Ambivalence*, ed. by Wendy Holloway and Brid Featherstone (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 167-92 (p. 167).

<sup>94</sup> Some of Isabel's early gothic predecessors include Princess Isabella who features in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), and the character of Agnes, who is imprisoned in a sepulchre for the duration of Ann Radcliff's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1796).

<sup>95</sup> Sedgwick, p. 3.

Mantel depicts social work as an endless and unachievable task whose very impossibility comes to haunt the individuals who undertake it.

Isabel's attempts to write her 'confessions', as she calls them, see Mantel invoking the gothic trope of the story so unspeakable it struggles to be told.<sup>96</sup> Throughout the narrative the motif of the illegible document recurs: Muriel's case file for example, which introduces her to the reader in *Every Day*, is riddled with lacunae caused by lost documents and is eventually lost in its entirety, then stolen not once but twice during the course of the narrative. Isabel first struggles to find the physical materials necessary to begin to write her narrative, eventually using fragments of paper which compound her already fragmented narrative. Her difficulty in binding together these written fragments and posting them in order to get them published in the Sunday papers denotes a generalised denial of the deficiencies and failures of State care: '[t]he exposé had turned quite bulky. She couldn't get it in an envelope. Strange that failure should take up so much space; that foolishness and ineptitude should need so many stamps' (*Vacant Possession*, p. 221). Isabel's testimony proves too large even to be contained by the postal service. Her narrative of attempts at and failures of care is rejected by a society for whom social workers were seen as interfering where no interference was warranted, for example in the 'Cleveland Scandal'<sup>97</sup> in which a number of parents were wrongly accused of child abuse, or failing to act when the family unit proves toxic, as in the case of Jasmine Beckford.<sup>98</sup>

### **Foregone Conclusions: Subjective Disintegration and Failures of Care**

What, then, are the results of these failures of care-giving which generate such a multiplicity of ghosts and spectres? Mantel states of Muriel that 'what she lacks is a theory of mind.'<sup>99</sup> It is possible to perceive in this remark the true repercussions of the failure of care-giving in these narratives, that is, the slippage of subjective identity. The failures of containment, absence of a caring figure and, conversely, the overly close, spectrally possessive caring relationships that Mantel depicts result in a textual landscape in which subjectivity is radically destabilised. This instability was

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<sup>96</sup> The most notable example of this trope can be found in Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778), a re-writing of Walpole's *Otranto*, which frames its narrative as containing various lacunae, including a four year break in the tale and various elements of the manuscript made illegible by damp.

<sup>97</sup> Lowe, p. 350.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'The Woman in the Hall', p. 13.

established with regards to Muriel's fellow patients in Fulmers Moor but is not limited to them. Characters such as Effie and Mrs Sidney, suffer from delusions about their own identities, believing themselves to be members of the royal family or supernatural beings, as typified by Muriel's own assertion that she is a changeling. Others have such a tenuous hold on their own identities that they risk being erased altogether in the case of Miss Anaemia, or having their identities appropriated in the case of Muriel's colleague 'Poor Mrs Wilmot', whose name and life story Muriel usurps. Mantel's nebulous use of narrative voice, which slides between free indirect discourse and numerous different first person narratives, contributes formally to this sense of the fragility of subjectivity in the face of a collapse of care giving. However, her use of the trope of the changeling provides an encapsulation of the devastating effect of inadequate care-giving on subjective integrity.

Soon after Muriel gives birth, Evelyn becomes convinced that her grandchild is not a human being at all but a changeling. By invoking this folkloric figure Mantel taps into a specific discourse regarding motherhood and the supernatural, but also adverts to a figure whose subjectivity is profoundly flawed. In folk belief a changeling is the replacement left when fairies or elves steal a human child while its mother is absent or distracted. In and of itself, then, the figure of the changeling is representative of a failure of maternal attention and Mantel's conceptualisation of it reaffirms this:

If it is a changeling, you ought to give some thought to getting the real one back. The ones they take lead miserable lives. They look in at people's windows. Their growth's stunted. They're always cold. (*Every Day*, p. 188-9)

A changeling's a filthy thing. It's got no imagination. [. . .] A changeling's a cruel thing. It likes its own company. It likes its own kind. (*Vacant Possession*, p. 145)

The statement '[i]t's got no imagination' confirms the changeling's status as an object which replaces a subject and its treatment in this narrative supports such an interpretation. This notion of the changeling is continued in Mantel's depiction of Colin Sidney's son Alistair who is described as being puny, or having stunted growth and is depicted in *Vacant Possession* wearing a 'jersey all-in-one' (p. 15) reminiscent of the romper suits worn by new-borns. Significantly Alistair has his bedroom in what the Axons used to term 'the spare room' and it is strongly implied that the previous occupants haven't given up their tenancy.

The disintegrative force of the collapse of care-giving frameworks is registered in Muriel's pathological attitudes to the formation of identity. She copies others, producing duplicates to be used at the opportune moment:

By watching other people, by stealing their expressions and practising them, she was adding to her repertoire. I was no one when I came here, she thought; but after a few years of this, there's no saying how many people I'll be. (*Vacant Possession* p. 51)

It was easy to assume the abject form of Poor Mrs Wilmot, but the imitation of Edna's vitality seemed to deplete her own inner resources to the point of near-extinction. She could not risk a situation where Edna and Poor Mrs Wilmot wiped out Muriel entirely. (*Vacant Possession* p. 73)

This approach to identity is accompanied by an attendant preoccupation with physical dismemberment, the literal disintegration of bodies. The bone Muriel steals from a neighbourhood dog at the outset of *Every Day* (pp. 23-4) forms the first of a plethora of disintegrations. Muriel comes across boxes of false eyelashes in a chemist's window and describes her interest at the news that her mother underwent a post-mortem after her death (*Vacant Possession* p. 73). Mrs Wilmot's false teeth are stolen and discovered in the lawn of 2 Buckingham Avenue, grinning up ominously at Colin Sidney (*Vacant Possession* p. 134). The phrenologist's head, first produced by Sholto and an icon of dismemberment in itself, symbolises the dissection of the human psyche into its component parts.<sup>100</sup> These macabre anatomisations physicalize the precarious nature of subjective identity in the face of the haunted and haunting care described by the duology.

By choosing the gothic mode Mantel gains access to a multiplicity of registers from the psychological to the socio-political to express widely circulating anxieties about breakdowns of care in the 1970s and 80s. These ghost stories perform an uncomfortable dissection of the potential for the family unit, far from providing the ideal environment for the provision of care, to incubate its opposites, neglect and

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<sup>100</sup> These bodily disintegrations are accompanied by a series of exhumations. Throughout the narrative physical corpses emerge at an alarming rate. The body of a murdered woman is found in a lake where it had been inadequately submerged (*Vacant Possession* p. 216), 'an Iron Age corpse' is found preserved in a bog and plans are made for the remains to go on show at the British Museum (*Vacant Possession*, p. 156), and the bones of what is implied to be Muriel's baby are fished out of the canal in which Muriel and Evelyn drowned it years earlier ('I think I read somewhere that babies' corpses often mummify and turn up years later, uncannily preserved' *Vacant Possession*, p. 87)). Such a prevalence of body parts and remains emerging within the pages of a duology set in the dormitory towns of the West Midlands points to an understanding of the dead and the mutilated as stubbornly persistent.



abuse. It is impossible to read *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* without recognising that what Mantel puts in question in these narratives is society's relationship with care on every level, from the individual psyche to the socio-political. Mantel herself advocates that fiction 'has a moral dimension'<sup>101</sup> and her novels demand that the reader be receptive to the experiences of the other. She states '[m]uch wickedness stems from our failure to imagine other people as fully human, and as our equals.'<sup>102</sup> Through treating the ghost story as 'a crucible for political mediation and historical memory',<sup>103</sup> and by situating her representation of Margaret Thatcher's Britain within a contemporary gothic framework, Mantel is able to articulate the potential for haunting that always attends scenes of care-giving and in doing so sets up an oscillation between the injustices that she perceives in the society around her and the 'spectres of Margaret' resident within and without the home.

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<sup>101</sup> Mantel, 'An Outsider's Eye', p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Gordon, p. 18.

## Chapter 3

### Spooks and Holy Ghosts: Spectral Politics and the Politics of Spectrality in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*

On the first page of her memoir, Hilary Mantel sees a ghost and makes an admission. She describes seeing a movement, ‘a flickering,’ on the staircase of her Norfolk home and states ‘I know it is my stepfather’s ghost coming down.’<sup>1</sup> This distinctive way of seeing and the problematic status of the knowledge it leads to, are familiar to Mantel. ‘I am used’ she says ‘to “seeing” things that are not there. Or – to put it in a way that is more acceptable to me – I am used to seeing things that “aren’t there.”’<sup>2</sup> This sensitivity to the apparently insensible, and in particular to the figure of the ghost and the operation of the spectral, is not limited to Mantel’s biographical experiences. Later in the same chapter she exhorts herself to tell her readers how she came to ‘sell a house with a ghost in it,’<sup>3</sup> a phrase which astutely describes her writing career. Yet, upon initial reading, Mantel’s third novel, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*,<sup>4</sup> based upon the author’s time living in Saudi Arabia, appears as an anomaly within this trend. The dead do not return in this narrative, indeed they are represented as irrevocably lost, and no ‘literal’ ghosts haunt the novel’s protagonists, Frances Shore and her husband, Andrew. Certainly, *Eight Months* is not a book about ghosts. Rather, this chapter argues, *Eight Months* is a text concerned with the hinterland between the sensible and the insensible occupied by the spectre. It is a text driven by the need to articulate the politically charged nature of that liminal space wherein individuals and events can be rendered spectral, rooting questions about the politics of invisibility in an interrogation of the politico-religious system operating in Saudi Arabia, where Wahhabi Islam forms the basis of political governance and where ‘there is no division between the secular and sacred or between church and state.’<sup>5</sup>

If, as has been discussed, *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* are texts predicated upon an articulation of the various phantoms occupying a haunted Thatcherite milieu,

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Giving up the Ghost: A Memoir* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Mantel, *Giving up the Ghost*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004). All further references to this edition are given in parenthesis in the text. From this point the novel will be referred to using the shortened form *Eight Months*.

<sup>5</sup> David E. Long, *The Culture and Customs of Saudi Arabia* (London: Greenwood, 2005), p. 18.

in which the concept of care-giving has become hopelessly compromised, *Eight Months* can be understood as continuing this project of contemplating the connections between haunting and the political. Constituting the kind of re-working of autobiographical material discussed in Chapter 1, *Eight Months* interrogates how the political operates according to spectral structures.

If *Eight Months* is not a book about ghosts but about spectres – things or persons whose presence is crucially compromised – the quality of spectrality itself must be understood as something related to but distinct from ‘ghostliness.’ In her memoir Mantel recalls playing the role of a ‘ghost’ in Noël Coward’s *Blithe Spirit* but rather than emphasising the post-mortem positioning associated with the ghost she characterises her role as ‘a phantom of air and smoke’ (*Giving Up*, p. 54). This description of a non-subject, composed of an emptiness permeated by smoky traces which evoke the process of burning and of dematerialisation, exemplifies precisely the play between absence and presence, visibility and invisibility, sensibility and insensibility that defines spectrality. It is specifically this liminal positioning which typifies the workings of political and religious systems<sup>6</sup> and that allows the state to operate invisibly but indisputably in homes and minds, allowing those apparatus to walk through the walls erected between public and private.<sup>7</sup> This ambiguous straddling of presence and absence which is undertaken by the apparatus of the state, and which gives its function a spectral quality, is lucidly described by Louis Althusser when he asserts that political or religious ideology possesses a material existence but that this existence ‘does not have the same modality as the material existence of a paving stone or a rifle.’<sup>8</sup> It is present and yet that presence is partial and idiosyncratic. This ‘spectral politics’ is precisely what is experienced by Frances and Andrew in *Eight Months*. Yet, Mantel’s rendering legible of these moments of political haunting is mirrored by a pre-occupation with the political significance of *being* spectralised, of being rendered a ‘phantom of air and smoke’ who can never be fully seen and fully heard. In identifying the significance of the invisibility associated both with the operation of politico-religious regimes and the spectralised subject, this chapter maps the complex interactions between the political and the

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<sup>6</sup> Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Althusser argues that it is possible for political and religious ideology to breach the private domestic domain precisely because it functions primarily invisibly through imaginary relations to the real conditions of existence. *On Ideology*, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Althusser, p. 40.

spectral in *Eight Months*. Diverging from the well-trodden critical path that looks to Jacques Derrida to facilitate discussions of the spectral and the political, I turn instead to the work of Jacques Rancière regarding what he terms ‘the distribution of the sensible’ in order to establish that, while haunting and spectrality are undeniably central components of the gothic project, in the context of *Eight Months* they are the key to recognising this text as a profoundly political novel. This is not the first occasion upon which Rancière has been put to work in reading Mantel. Esther Peeren’s analysis of mediumship in *Beyond Black* also turns to his definition of the political and the distribution of the sensible.<sup>9</sup> By deploying Rancière’s thought in the context of *Eight Months*, I seek to couple the potential for political insight and intervention he finds in the idea of ‘visiting as a foreigner’<sup>10</sup> with Mantel’s own narrative of travel and ‘foreignness’ in order to expose the potency of the political gestures made by *Eight Months*.

The initial section of this chapter is concerned with analysing how the operations of a State apparatus are presented as having a spectral quality within *Eight Months*. By reading Jacques Rancière and Jacques Lacan together I map out the complex and sometimes paradoxical relationships between agency, invisibility, spectrality and power present in the text. However, Robert Irwin’s review of the novel for *Time Out* provides a suggestion that this spectralised Saudi Arabia may be problematic from a critical perspective. Irwin describes the novel as ‘a Middle Eastern *Turn of the Screw*’<sup>11</sup> and while this reference to Henry James’ infamous ghost story rightly recognises the gothic atmosphere and profound ambiguity of Mantel’s text, and acknowledges the novel’s status as a ghost story of sorts, the presence of the gothic and the use of the spectral in *Eight Months* pose a problem that changes the critical stakes of what Mantel is attempting in this text.<sup>12</sup> The text critiques the politico-

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<sup>9</sup> Esther Peeren, ‘Spooky Mediums and the Redistribution of the Sensible: Sarah Waters’s *Affinity* and Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black*’ in *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (London: Palgrave, 2014), pp. 110-43.

<sup>10</sup> As Peeren notes ‘travelling and visiting as foreigners’ offers for Rancière the chance to encounter the ‘unexpected spectacle of another humanity’ (Jacques Rancière, *Short Voyages to the Land of the People*, trans. by James B. Swenson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 1). This ‘other humanity’ is comprised of those who have been deemed to exceed the sensible order whose existence and the demands for dissensus that existence provokes can only be observed from the position of foreigner. Peeren, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Irwin, *Time Out*. This quotation has been featured on the book jacket of all editions of *Eight Months* to date. At the time of printing no bibliographic details for the original review could be found.

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the gothic quality of *Eight Months* was initially opaque even to its writer who states of the writing of the novel ‘the only thing I can say is that when I lived through it I lived through it

religious regime in Saudi Arabia using a carefully crafted spectral metaphor, yet, within the Islamic faith, the concept of the ghost is wholly absent and folk belief in ghosts in Saudi Arabia is minimal. This being the case, Mantel's spectralisation of Saudi Arabia could be viewed negatively as an attempt to think about a politico-religious system in terms that do not apply to it or, worse, as an ethnocentric imposition. As such, having established the significance of spectrality to the novel, it is necessary to address this clash between subject matter and mode of representation. In closing, this chapter demonstrates that the discord between the overarching metaphor of the text and the theological assertions and cultural practices to which the text refers is intentionally created, that the imposition constituted by Mantel's invocation of the gothic is a deliberate one. Following a discussion with her Muslim neighbour Yasmin, Frances Shore concludes that '[o]f course [Yasmin] can't break out of her culture [. . .]. No more can I break out of mine. No more would I want to; no more does she' (p. 121). I argue that this impasse is what is principally highlighted by the presence of the spectral in *Eight Months*. By creating in Frances a quasi-gothic heroine who is only able to relate to the text's fictionalised Saudi Arabia through the decidedly Western, Protestant lens of the ghostly, and by crafting a narrative whose events are profoundly ambiguous, both to the novel's protagonist and to the reader, Mantel is able to articulate how attempts to translate the cultural and politico-religious milieu of Saudi Arabia into the terms of another culture can only result in stubbornly enigmatic remains which register affectively as well as textually. Just as Frances is thwarted in her attempts to gain an explanation for the mysterious events taking place in her home, to make visible and audible that which has been veiled and muffled, so too is the reader frustrated, left with a text populated by apparitions that refuse to fully appear, a narrative that refuses, ultimately, to tell. Mantel's spectral strategy also enables her to call into question previously taken for granted definitions of politics and political action, rendering the act of attempting to see 'beyond appearances [. . .] to another reality,'<sup>13</sup> the reality spectralised by mainstream political agents, the most deeply political of gestures.

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innocently. It wasn't until I had written the novel, indeed months afterwards, after it had been published and reviewed, that I thought 'I've written a gothic novel!' and then it all fell perfectly into place.' Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 284.

<sup>13</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'A Kind of Alchemy: Sarah O'Reilly talks to Hilary Mantel', interview with Sarah O'Reilly, *Fludd* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 8.

## The Ladies Vanish: Agency, Invisibility and the Writing of Jacques Rancière

As it seems to me the first right a person has is the right to be seen. And that is denied to women by the veil. But you really have to have lived there to know it, to know what a gang of women under the veil look like when they move through a public place. It is as if they are not there.<sup>14</sup>

It is a delimitation of [...] the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise that simultaneously determines the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the power to speak.<sup>15</sup>

*Eight Months* draws heavily upon Mantel's personal experience of living in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s. In a piece written for *The Guardian* newspaper she describes how, on arriving in Jeddah airport, her first experience was a lack of acknowledgment, stating '[n]o one met my eyes' and recounts how, in response to her sympathetic glance, the gaze of a male fellow passenger 'jerked away.'<sup>16</sup> This encounter with what Mantel describes as the 'avoidant gaze'<sup>17</sup> characterizes the experience of Frances as she attempts to negotiate her new life in Jeddah. Early on in the novel Frances attempts to purchase painkillers from a male shop assistant while out with her husband. Instead of speaking to Frances the assistant looks past her, addressing his questions about the transaction to Andrew '[a]s if [Frances] were a ventriloquist's doll' (p. 112), causing her to ask '[a]m I visible?' (p. 112). This exchange, with its central question of visibility, has impact far beyond articulating the experience of a female Western incomer to a conservative Muslim society. More broadly the incident illustrates lucidly the thinking of Jacques Rancière with regard

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<sup>14</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'Hilary Mantel – The SRB Interview', *Scottish Review of Books*, 5 (2009) <<http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/index.php/back-issues/volume-five/volume-five-issue-four/295-hilary-mantel-the-srb-interview>> [accessed 10 September 2014].

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'Veiled Threats', *Guardian*, 11 September 2004, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Speaking in an interview in October 2015 Mantel described this 'avoidant gaze' as constituting a 'virtual veil which is accorded as a sign of respect to women who are not wearing [the veil] but are deemed in the context to be respectable women' before going on to state that 'this respect takes the form of looking through one.' 'Interview', p. 21. This 'respect' manifests itself again in Mantel's short story 'Sorry to Disturb' (Hilary Mantel, *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014)) which similarly gives an account of a Western woman living in Saudi Arabia, negotiating a fraught relationship with her neighbours: '[m]y male Saudi neighbour would come down from the first floor on his way out to his car and step over my brushstrokes without looking at me, his head averted. He was according me invisibility, as a mark of respect to another man's wife' (p. 11). This imposition of an apparitional veil illustrates clearly how what Rancière terms the 'apparently "natural logic"' of what is deemed visible and what is not is in fact wholly synthetic and fabricated. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. by Steven Corcoran (New York: London: Continuum, 2010), p. 139.

to how political systems operate. It is important to note here that for Rancière ‘politics’ has a very specific meaning that differs from an understanding of the political as ‘the practice of power or the embodiment of collective wills and interests and the enactment of collective ideas,’<sup>18</sup> the policy making and enforcing of governmental bodies etc. Rather, Rancière defines politics as being ‘before all else [. . .] an intervention in the visible and sayable’<sup>19</sup> and understands a political action to be one that disturbs the distribution of the sensible, that is, the apparently ‘natural logic’ of the ‘distribution of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise [which] pins bodies to their places and allocates the private and the public to distinct “parts”.’<sup>20</sup> As such, participation in the political system is necessarily predicated upon what Rancière terms the division or ‘partition of the sensible’, a division between what and, more importantly, who ‘is visible or not in a common space.’<sup>21</sup> By bringing the two quotations that opened this section into conversation with each other it is possible to see that what Mantel defines as the denial of a basic right has profound political implications; to be deemed invisible, set outside the realm of the sensible, is automatically to be excluded not only from political enfranchisement as manifested in participation in the day-to-day processes of democracy but also from ‘the community of citizens’<sup>22</sup> as a whole, to be denied the status of those who ‘partake.’<sup>23</sup> Crucially, the correspondence between Mantel’s assertions and those of Rancière make it clear that *Eight Months* constitutes a political gesture in its own right, which places the ability to be seen and heard at the centre of political subjectivity and narrativises the difficulties and dangers associated with contesting the partition of the sensible.

As Frances’ experience in the pharmacy demonstrates, the difficulty of being seen that Mantel encountered upon her own entry into Jeddah is transposed into the Saudi Arabia of *Eight Months*. This preoccupation with visibility and invisibility exceeds Frances’ individual experience, finding its most potent articulation in the novel’s

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<sup>18</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 139.

<sup>21</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> See Aristotle’s definition of the citizen as ‘one who partakes in the fact of ruling and the fact of being ruled’ discussed in Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 27.

representation of veiling.<sup>24</sup> Shortly after her arrival in Jeddah, Frances comes into contact with a group of veiled Saudi women in a supermarket:

Around her, women plucked tins from shelves; women trussed up in their modesty like funereal laundry, women with layers of thick black cloth where their faces should be. [. . .] ‘I didn’t know the veil was like this,’ she whispered. ‘I thought you would see their eyes.’ (pp. 57-8)

The disappointment of Frances’ expectation that the full veil frequently worn in Saudi Arabia would not prevent eye contact emphasises how the veil not only negates visual identification, due to the ‘cloth where their faces should be’, but also prevents a more profound identification by precluding eye contact and rendering imperceptible the female viewpoint, literally the point from which these women see the world. The use of the verbs ‘pluck’ and ‘truss’ in the passage is linked through their association with the preparation of poultry and thus the same linguistic field is applied to the foodstuffs on the shelves and to the women purchasing them. Such an association has the effect of communicating the shift that full veiling in this context appears to produce – that from subject to object. This articulation of the ultimate consequence of invisibility being an acute difficulty in being recognised as a subject rather than an object is significant and resonates with another semantic trend in the novel concerning apparent confusions between subjects and objects. There are frequent moments in the text in which veiling, invisibility and lack of agency come to be associated with death or spectrality, associating living female subjects with the object of the post-mortem body. The ‘funereal laundry’ of the previous passage is the first indication of a link being created between death and the veiled women that Frances encounters and this image is compounded by an earlier description of a ‘mill of petitioners’ attempting in vain to attract the attention of a Saudi politician as ‘a basket of laundry animated by a poltergeist’ (p. 40). Later in the novel this association is given a further spectral inflection as, from the back seat of a car, Frances observes a veiled group crossing a busy road:

In front of them, a collection of black-veiled shapes had drifted into the road. They hovered for a moment, in the middle of the great highway, looking with

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<sup>24</sup> For the sake of clarity, it is important to state that the garment described as a veil in *Eight Months* is a niqab, a full face veil with a slit to allow the wearer to see. The slit is either permanently covered with a mesh which obscures the eyes or else has a detachable mesh panel which can be pulled down to conceal the eyes from view or raised to reveal them.



their blind muffled faces into the car; then slowly, they began to bob across to the opposite kerb. (p. 92)

The uncertain quality of the women's movements, hovering, drifting and bobbing, combined with their reduction to an indefinite physical 'shape' gives them a phantasmal quality and through invoking the crude image of the 'ghost in a sheet' of popular culture Mantel is also able to posit these women as being subject to a social ghosting in which they are 'muffled' and blinded, denied the ability to be, as Rancière puts it, among those 'who [have] the ability to see and the talent to speak.'<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere in the text veiled women 'glide' in a silent 'deep-below world' that recalls the underworld domain of the dead, a recollection made more potent when, in the following paragraph, Frances visits a souk where she handles some traditional beaded face-masks, intended to serve the same purpose as the veil and whose owners are conjectured to be either 'emancipated or deceased' (p. 210). Veiling provides a striking figurative representation of the way in which the politico-religious system in Saudi Arabia obscures or negates female presences in public spaces, the shared 'common' spaces in which Rancière argues participation in the political system must take place. However, this is not the only instance in the novel where certain subjects are depicted as possessing a mode of non-present presence. The representation of the domestic servants who quietly populate the text of *Eight Months* provides a crucial insight into how the Wahhabi regime actively produces social ghosts.

In his book *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* Rancière discusses how certain categories of individuals, for example women and workers, have been excluded from the social by virtue of an insistence upon their association with the sphere of the domestic.<sup>26</sup> The consequence of this occlusion of certain groups due to the spaces they occupy renders them unable to claim the position of political subject, of a 'person' fully occupying the realm of the sensible. This denial of personhood is strikingly demonstrated in the opening chapter of *Eight Months* as Frances discusses with an air steward the possibility of her taking a taxi when she lands in Jeddah:

'It's bad news, a man picking up a strange woman in a car. They can gaol you for it.'

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<sup>25</sup> Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 38.

‘But he’s a taxi driver,’ [Frances] said. ‘That’s his job, picking up strange people.’

‘But you’re a woman,’ the steward said. ‘You’re a woman, aren’t you? You’re not a person anymore.’ (p. 29)

This exchange posits an alarming impending transformation in which womanhood and personhood move from being two mutually compatible categories to a situation in which one category negates the other. The representation of veiling in *Eight Months* makes it apparent that the text is articulating the position occupied by the women of Jeddah as being profoundly compromised; in public and thus in the eye, and I use that word advisedly, of the law they are non-present presences. Situated outside of the realm of the sensible, unable to be fully seen, for their voices to be wholly audible and comprehensible as speech rather than as noise, the veiled women Frances observes occupy an uncomfortably liminal position between visibility and invisibility, subject and object. They are unable to be meaningfully and individually acknowledged due to their status as surplus to the sensible order as it applies to the public sphere in Saudi Arabia. Correspondingly, the ghost as phenomenon can in part be defined by its refusal of discrete ontological categories and its troubling of the notions of the sensible, occupying as it does a liminal space between sensibility and insensibility and straddling the boundary between the visible and the invisible. This placement is one shared by the domestic servants depicted in *Eight Months* and its impact is profound, rendering them non-persons, a group whose members cannot be addressed individually, not because they defy definition but because they have not been granted any subjective identity. Throughout the novel the names of domestic staff prove slippery and ungraspable to their employers and rather than attempting to master the difficult syllables, Frances’ friends try to perform dominating acts of renaming.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Frances’s inability to accurately pronounce Samira’s maid’s name is crucial as it not only co-opts Frances into the process by which domestic servants in the Kingdom are denied full personhood but also implicates the reader in this process as they are similarly forced to refer to the character through the mangled pronunciation provided by Samira. A similar scene of misnaming occurs during Frances’ first visit to her neighbour, Yasmin’s, home:

‘What’s [your maid’s] name?’

‘It is Shams.’

Frances repeated it, tentatively. ‘I can’t quite get hold of it.’

‘Shams’ Yasmin said. ‘As in Champs Elysées.’ (p. 68)

In this exchange Mantel orchestrates a neat demonstration of the dominating potential of these discussions around naming. Yasmin’s recourse to the phrase “Champs Elysées” as a way of assisting Frances’s pronunciation translates Shams’ name into an alien cultural milieu and in so doing references a further cultural appropriation since the Champs Elysées itself takes its name from the

‘What is your maid’s name?’ Frances asked. Samira told her. But she was none the wiser. It sounded like ‘Sarasparilla’. But that was not possible. In answer to her questioning look, Samira merely shrugged. ‘I did try to call her something simpler,’ she said. ‘But she won’t answer to it.’

[. . .]

Frances tried to catch the maid’s eye; perhaps she might, just with a look, express her concern? But she failed. The girl slid out of the room, seeming to melt into the shadows of the heavy furniture. (pp. 124-5)

Mantel’s description of Sarasparilla’s apparent immateriality, her ‘sliding’ from the room and ‘melting’ into the shadows, signals a systematic placement of those in service in Saudi Arabia as less ‘present’ in some crucial way than their employers. This lack of presence, which is in fact a lack of acknowledgement, a failure to be fully admitted to the realm of the sensible that Frances is also subject to, is symptomatic of a spectral existence. Indeed, Frances’ first discussion with Yasmin about the lives of domestic servants in Jeddah prompts Yasmin to state that ‘the poor things are trying to commit suicide [. . .]. They throw themselves off balconies’ (p. 68), a generalised description which creates an image of the maids as perpetually between life and death, ‘trying’ to commit suicide rather than ‘committing’ it, always in the act of falling between the domestic space and a post-mortem existence. While literary depictions of servants frequently draw upon the spectral metaphor,<sup>28</sup> the mode of ghosting the servants in *Eight Months* are subject to has a religiously freighted specificity. Yasmin mentions the fact that many of those in service have been forced by economic necessity to leave their children behind and emphasises their perceived lack of morality: ‘these young girls come to the Kingdom as housemaids, and then they cause trouble. [. . .] They get unhappy [. . .] [b]ecause they have left children behind them at home. Also, the Saudi men, you know, they find that these girls are not very moral’ (p. 68). Shortly after her conversation with Yasmin regarding her maid Frances reads the correspondence column in a newspaper in which one correspondent asserts that ‘[t]he Kingdom’s social and cultural heritage does not allow women to mix with men either in life activities or in work. The right place for a woman is to look after her husband and children’ (p. 73).

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Elysian Fields mentioned in classical Greek mythology. Meanwhile Frances’ difficulty in grasping the name in the first place gestures towards the wider struggle to ‘get hold of’ unfamiliar cultures that drives the narrative of *Eight Months*.

<sup>28</sup> Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, p. 5. As Peeren makes clear the character of Ruth Vigers in Sarah Waters’ novel *Affinity* (1999) who performs the role of maid to a medium is a particularly potent example of the spectral metaphor forming the basis for descriptions of fictional servants.

In having to leave behind their family units to take up paid work in households which will unavoidably bring them into contact with men to whom they are not related, either by birth or marriage, the female domestic servants of Saudi Arabia are depicted as necessarily situated outside of the purview of religion and the law; in order to carry out their jobs they must be considered to be non-persons or else be in perpetual violation of the laws of the Kingdom. Possessed of an existence and yet denied personhood, denied their own names and spaces,<sup>29</sup> the domestic servants of *Eight Months* are depicted as having no option but to live as social spectres.

Clearly, *Eight Months* is a text that engages compellingly with Rancière's suggestion that a lack of visibility frequently equates to a lack of agency and enfranchisement. Yet if Rancière insists that visibility is what guarantees participation in the political and legal system, he neglects to address the fact that the very invisibility that is imposed in order to disenfranchise and exclude certain groups mirrors the invisibility possessed by those organisations responsible for reinforcing the apparently 'natural logic'<sup>30</sup> of the partition of the sensible, a logic which is in fact wholly artificial and as such can be unsettled. However, the act of intervening to disrupt the distribution of the sensible is by no means without risk as an examination of two similar incidents from the novel makes strikingly clear. The presence of a group of veiled women who stray in front of the car carrying Frances and her neighbour almost results in a traffic accident: '[t]hey screeched to a halt. Hasan had stabbed his foot on the brake; they were flung forward against the front seat' (p. 92). Yet when Frances ventures out of her house without wearing the full veil and attempts to cross a main road, a motorist deliberately tries to run her down: '[a] boy in a Mercedes pulled up, waved her in front of him. As she stepped out from the kerb, he revved his engine, the car sprang forward, and she had to leap from under its wheels. She heard the brakes applied; caught herself up, heart racing, and looked back at the driver of the car; understood that it had not been an accident' (p. 238). Frances' very visibility compromises her presence within the common space of the street.<sup>31</sup> The spatial

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<sup>29</sup> This lack of private space for domestic servants in *Eight Months* is underlined by an incident in which Frances' neighbour forces her maid to sleep on the dining room floor despite hosting parties in the room which go on until three in the morning (p. 174).

<sup>30</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed the relationship between physical visibility and the recognition of someone as a subject with the ability to occupy public spaces is foreshadowed at the end of the first passage when, following their near miss, Frances asks her neighbour '[w]ould the drivers stop for me?' to which her neighbour replies 'I don't know. It might depend on how you were dressed' (p. 93).

aspect of these two instances of road crossing is important. For Rancière, the degree to which a subject is deemed to belong to the realm of the sensible is predicated upon ‘what they do and the time and space in which this particular activity is performed.’<sup>32</sup> The Jeddah of *Eight Months* is no exception to this formulation; the occupations open to women are tightly circumscribed, restricted to roles accommodated by the domestic sphere, and these roles are precisely situated outside of a common space. The movements that can be made by the women of Saudi Arabia are tightly controlled and the design of Jeddah’s pavements emblematises this politico-social circumscription as Frances finds out:

Every few yards it was necessary to step down from the eighteen-inch kerb and into the gutter; the municipality had planted saplings, etiolated and ill-doing plants inside concrete rectangles, and it did not seem to have occurred to anyone that the saplings would block the pavements, and pavements are for walking on. But clearly they are not for walking on, she thought. Men drive cars; women stay at home. Pavements are a buffer zone, to prevent the cars running into the buildings. (pp. 74-5)

This passage articulates clearly how the conspicuous yet anonymous restriction of certain people’s movements to certain spaces and times is a major pre-occupation, not just in this passage but in Mantel’s Saudi Arabia generally.<sup>33</sup> However, it is the anonymity and nebulous quality of the agency that insists upon these regulations which is perhaps the most striking element of the above passage and its powerfully present absence provides evidence of a paradox within Rancière’s thought. This paradox can be resolved, however, by returning, through Althusser, to Lacan and his concept of the big Other.

### **Spectral Surveillance and the Gaze – Rancière with Lacan**

‘You can almost think of nothing else in Saudi except for the business of looking and being looked at.’ - Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 284.

When Althusser describes the process of interpellation which ‘recruits subjects from individuals’<sup>34</sup> he states that for this interpellation to take place ‘a unique and Other

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<sup>32</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 139.

<sup>33</sup> Early on in the novel Frances and Andrew find themselves unable to move due to evening prayers: “‘There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is his Prophet,’” Andrew muttered. Grilles crashed down over the shop windows, doors were barred. [ . . . ] “‘We timed this trip badly. But people are always getting caught out like this. There’s only a couple of hours between sunset and night prayers.’” (p. 59)

<sup>34</sup> Althusser, p. 48.

Subject, i.e. God' is necessary, a 'Subject with a capital S to distinguish it from ordinary subjects with a small s.'<sup>35</sup> Graphically and conceptually this 'Other Subject' calls to mind another figure, one central to Lacan's conception of the Symbolic order: that of the big Other. In Lacanian thought the big Other comes to constitute the figure to whom we attribute the functioning of the Symbolic order, 'the locus of speech and (potentially) the locus of truth'<sup>36</sup> around which our social interactions are notionally structured. As Žižek lucidly points out, for Lacan 'the absolute "big Other" [is] God Himself'.<sup>37</sup> The narrator of *Eight Months* observes that the unyielding, repeating geometry of a rug in Frances' neighbour's home recalls 'the unfathomable nature and eternal vigilance of Allah himself' (p. 84). This description of Allah articulates perfectly the big Other's unapprehensible nature and, crucially, its omniscient scrutiny. It is this scrutiny that is made manifest in Lacan's conception of the gaze. The gaze here should be understood as the sense that one is observed, seen by something that one cannot see observing. It is a gaze 'that circumscribes us, and which in the first instance makes us beings who are looked at,' 'not a seen gaze but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.'<sup>38</sup> As we will see shortly, the gaze of the big Other renders legible the invisibility of the ultimate arbiters of politico-religious systems. However, this gaze also needs to be understood in the context of *Eight Months* as being involved in the same nexus of invisibility, spectrality and agency observed above with reference to the figure of the veiled woman, to be acknowledged as a spectre in its own right.

The Lacanian gaze can be described as 'a point of failure in the visual field [. . .] a point where perception breaks down',<sup>39</sup> it is unapprehensible.<sup>40</sup> If we consider for a moment the location of the spectre within the visual field, the point it occupies can be defined as 'the space in which representation is fragmented'<sup>41</sup> by virtue of the resistance of the spectre to the act of representation itself. The spectre is by its nature

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<sup>35</sup> Althusser, p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'The Big Other Doesn't Exist', *The Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, 5 (1997) p. 2, <<http://www.psychomedia.it/jep/number5/zizek.htm>> [accessed 18 February 2016].

<sup>38</sup> Lacan, pp. 75-84.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Krips, 'The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan, Žižek', *Culture Unbound*, 2 (2010), 91-102 (p. 93).

<sup>40</sup> Lacan, p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> Rodolphe Gasché, 'The Witch Meta-Psychology', trans. by Julian Patrick, in *Returns of the French Freud: Freud, Lacan and Beyond* ed by. Todd Dufresne (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 169-208 (p. 172).

never fully apprehensible and thus cannot be fully accommodated by conventional modes of representation or perception. Likewise, both spectre and gaze can be understood as that which resists being perceived and can only be acknowledged ‘at the limit of comprehension.’<sup>42</sup> The ghostly quality of the gaze is established in Mantel’s text from its opening chapters. On her first morning in Jeddah Frances is left at home alone by her husband. In his absence she takes a tour of her new home. She draws back her curtains to reveal wooden blinds. These in turn are raised to give a view onto a brick wall. The glass in her kitchen door is frosted, as is that in her bathroom window which slides open to reveal yet another wall (p. 45). Frances cannot see out and nor can anybody see in. Yet when she retires to her sitting room she is overcome with self-consciousness, feeling ‘as though someone were watching [her]’ (p. 47). Even as she is cloistered from the world by her opaque windows and locked doors, shielded from any human stare, the gaze, apparently emanating from a disembodied ‘someone’, continues to exert pressure on Frances who ‘[does] not feel at all in possession of the ground’ (p. 46) of her flat. Her constant movements – switching on lights, changing positions, abandoning her attempts to read, itself an activity which combines the visual quality of the word ‘see’ with its alternate meaning of ‘to understand’, in favour of unpacking – provide an illustration of the ways in which an awareness of the gaze causes the subject to ‘tr[y] to adapt himself to it.’<sup>43</sup> The surveying presence Frances experiences so profoundly renders her incapable of establishing her flat on Ghazzah Street as her home. It thoroughly displaces her in a movement which recalls Julian Wolfreys’ assertion that the ghost displaces us where we ought to feel most secure: within the domestic scene.<sup>44</sup> In the world of *Eight Months* such security is precluded from the start by this spectral surveillance.

As the novel progresses Frances feels herself haunted by this disembodied gaze both inside and outside of her home. Even when putative watchers are identified, these figures constitute only placeholders for the haunting and persecutory gaze of the big Other. These misrecognitions, in which the power of observation is attributed to an object which has eyes but does not ‘see’, can be found in the dead fish served to

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<sup>42</sup> Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic and the Uncanny* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Lacan, *Four Fundamental*, p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> Wolfreys, p. 5.

Frances at supper which ‘look[s] up at her with a small, dead, prehistoric eye’ (p. 223) and the tiles that decorate Frances’ hallway and which seem to resemble ‘small faces, each with its splash of scarlet, its swirl of black’ and leave Frances feeling ‘as if she were being watched by bloodied eyes; by the victims of some Koranic punishment’ (p. 202). It is in this final sentence that the potential source, if not identity, of the surveying presence is posited. The ‘Koranic punishment’ that Frances imagines implicates the political and legal authority constituted by Islam in Saudi Arabia in this process of observation and neatly encapsulates the ‘confusion’ between Althusser’s ‘law which interpellates individuals’ and ‘religious subjection’<sup>45</sup> that is perpetually taking place in Saudi Arabia where no difference is drawn between the religious and the legal. This surveying religious and legal presence is embodied earlier in the novel when Frances and Andrew visit the site of the building he is helping to construct in Jeddah. Already anxious about committing any inadvertent indiscretion, Frances observes that she and her husband are being watched: “Andrew –” she swivelled a glance over her shoulder, uneasy – “there’s a policeman across the road, he’s staring at us’ (p. 101).

To fully understand the significance of the presence of the police officer in the passage it is useful to return to Rancière and examine his conceptualisation of the police. Rather than constituting just one of the multiple apparatus which exist as ‘social function[s]’<sup>46</sup> ‘in relation to the requirements of legal practice,’<sup>47</sup> Rancière defines the police as ‘the symbolic constitution of the social’ stating that ‘the essence of the police lies neither in repression nor even in control over the living: its essence lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible.’<sup>48</sup> The authoritative stare of the police officer which discomforts Frances initially appears to constitute the voyeuristic gaze of an individual subject. However, just as the ‘eyes’ in the above passage were misidentified as the true source of surveillance, this understanding of the police officer’s stare is also not entirely accurate; it is not an individual that looks through the eyes of the police officer. Rather, his gaze is possessed by the discarnate presence of legal and religious authority: behind the individual police officer, Mantel positions the Rancièrian police.

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<sup>45</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> Althusser, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 36



In a rhetorical move which darkly satirises the use of retaliatory punishment or ‘qisas’ in Saudi Arabia and the related aphorism ‘an eye for an eye will make the whole world blind’, the omniscient and haunting stare of the religious authorities depicted in *Eight Months* is paralleled by a focus on Frances’ own specific mode of blindness which takes both deliberate and involuntary forms. The frustration she feels at the novel’s outset when she struggles to gain a view onto the outside world from her flat is reprised at the midpoint of the text when she is forced to leave her blinds closed all day, ostensibly to facilitate some repair work to her apartment. She complains that she has been ‘blinkerred’ (p. 99) and speaks of her desire for ‘a third eye [. . .] one that would see more deeply than the other two.’ This latter statement contains the double meaning of the word ‘see’, implicating not only the idea of visual apprehension but also intellectual understanding, and as the novel gathers pace the dangers of such ‘insights’ are repeatedly re-iterated to Frances, whose interrogation of and confrontations with the secrecy and occlusions that characterise life in Jeddah are a source of anxiety to those around her. Yet the gaze is only one element of how the phantasmal big Other functions in this text. Shortly after Frances’ encounter with the police officer she reads an article in a local newspaper about capital punishments carried out that week. The article states that ‘[w]hile giving out details of the offence and punishment, the Interior Ministry made it clear that the government would vigorously implement the Sharia laws to maintain the security of the land and to deter criminals . . . The executions were carried out after Friday prayers’ (p. 105). As the final sentence confirms, the invasive power of political and religious authority can, in an instant, move from the visual register to the material, from looking to touching.<sup>49</sup>

### **Political Poltergeists**

This shift from looking to touching is clearly inscribed in an incident that takes place as the novel draws to a close, an incident which constitutes the culmination of a determination by Frances to undertake her own ‘redistribution of the sensible.’ From

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<sup>49</sup> Avery F. Gordon lucidly sums up this spectrum of expressions of power, stating ‘[p]ower can be invisible [. . .]. It can be obvious, it can reach you through the baton of the police, it can speak the language of your thoughts and desires. It can feel like remote control, it can exhilarate like liberation, it can travel through time, and it can drown you in the present. It is dense and superficial, it can cause you bodily injury and it can harm you without seeming ever to touch you.’ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 3.

the outset of the novel Frances' combined curiosity and apprehension regarding the purpose of the flat that sits, ostensibly empty, above her own gathers momentum. She hears someone moving beyond the door of the 'empty' flat (p. 214). Later, while out on the roof of her apartment building she sees that a large crate has been inexplicably erected on the vacant apartment's balcony, a crate which then appears to have been moved by the struggling of someone or something enclosed within it (p. 221). Having caught her neighbour's maid about to enter the vacant flat with a meagre portion of food and been met with frightened dissembling when she asked for an explanation Frances comes to the conclusion that 'I have been told lies. I have been lied to all along, or rather I have been in error as to what I chose to believe' (p. 220). Despite warnings from multiple individuals Frances continues her attempts to reveal the truth as to the nature of the 'empty' property, demanding answers from Andrew's boss, Eric Parsons, whose response is chilling:

You know, you were told, about the empty flat. And you were told to be careful. [. . .] if you involve yourself – if you are thought, Frances, to be making a nuisance of yourself, to have come into possession of any information that you shouldn't have – then it will be Andrew who bears the brunt of any indiscretion. [. . .] I am first in the firing line, my dear, and there are some things that I cannot afford to know. Once past a certain point, you see, you become an undesirable person, and then who knows what happens? Because there comes a certain point where they don't want you here, and if you see what I mean, they don't want you to leave either. (p. 240-1)

What takes place here is clearly a rebuttal of Frances' attempt to disturb the partition of the sensible by breaking the silence imposed around the 'empty' flat on Ghazzah Street. Parsons' response to Frances constitutes nothing more than a reaffirmation of the 'taken for granted configuration of perception and meaning that [. . .] defines the conditions in which arguments can be made, recognised as such and engaged.'<sup>50</sup> Indeed, when Frances asks Parsons 'Won't you even listen to me?' he responds with a categorical 'No' (p. 241), shutting down any possibility of an argument taking place. This exchange vividly inscribes a confrontation between police and politics in which it is demonstrated that 'political struggle is not a matter of rational debate between multiple interests [but rather] a struggle to have one's voice heard and

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<sup>50</sup> Derek Ruez, 'Partitioning the Sensible at Park 51: Rancière, Islamophobia and Common Politics', *Antipode*, 45 (2013), 1128-1147 (p. 1128).

oneself recognised as a legitimate partner in debate.’<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Parson’s refusal to recognise Frances as ‘a legitimate partner in debate’ serves to support the current partition of the sensible. By placing the mystery of the empty flat outside of those phenomena that can be acknowledged, let alone debated, he adheres to the ‘principle of the police – ‘the absence of void and of supplement.’<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, Frances’ insistence upon gaining access to the flat’s concealed truth is an attempt to perform a profound act of dissensus, the political action constituted by the ‘demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself [. . .] mak[ing] visible that which has no reason to be seen’<sup>53</sup> from the perspective of the established sensible order.

It is following this exchange that Frances and Andrew return to their apartment from a shopping trip to discover that they have apparently been burgled: ‘The wardrobe gaped open; some of their clothes had been dragged from the hangers, flung about the room. Drawers were pulled out’ (p. 244). Yet as Frances and Andrew progress through the house they discover that their ‘housekeeping money’, a significant sum, has not been taken. Indeed the only thing of monetary value to have been stolen is the Shores’ camera, an object capable of capturing the visible, of holding it to account and providing evidence. As such the theft of the camera signals an intention by the invading presence to regulate the gaze and restrict its deployment. As the passage continues, the burglars’ point of entry into the Shores’ flat becomes a point of contention:

It was obvious how the burglars had got in. They had come through the big window with its sliding panel; the length of wood that should have blocked the track lay on the carpet. It had been removed from the inside. ‘You forgot to put it back,’ Andrew said. He saw her face. ‘I’m not blaming you. I know you want a breath of air sometimes. [. . .]’  
‘If I want air I go to the roof. I didn’t take the wood out.’  
‘You must have. Who else could it have been?’  
‘No one.’ (p. 244)

This ‘no one’, who opens up the Shores’ home ‘from the inside’ and leaves ‘no greasy fingerprints [. . .] no smudges’ (p. 249), identifies this instance of home invasion rather as a scene of home possession in which the items which are damaged

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<sup>51</sup> Stephen Corcoran, ‘Introduction’, in Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, pp. 1-34 (p. 9).

<sup>52</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 36.

<sup>53</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 38.

and stolen possess a symbolic value within a matrix of acts of vandalism and disruption designed to displace and disturb. Frances observes that ‘[t]hey’ve taken the Thagama candle sticks. Some food has gone, out of the fridge’ (p. 245). She later discovers that the intruders have ‘mauled and despoiled [her] summer frocks’ and that ‘her soapstone tortoise [is] gone from the bedside table’ (p. 246). With the theft of the candle sticks, structures for supporting illumination, the visual field is metaphorically thrown into uncertainty and it becomes more difficult to ‘see’ clearly. The destruction of Frances’ ‘summer dresses’, items of clothing which she cannot publically wear in the Kingdom, and theft of her soap stone tortoise (an object which breaks the Islamic prohibition on the figural representation of humans or animals), indicates the incursion of religious and legal restrictions into the private sphere of the home. Indeed, the dispossession of the Shores within their own home, the removal of ‘the small valueless things that [they] cannot bear to lose’ (p. 246) along with food items which are symbolic of the Shores’ ability to sustain themselves within their domestic space, constitutes a wholesale ‘destabilization of the domestic scene’,<sup>54</sup> a destabilisation which, as has been demonstrated, was already in play in the flat on Ghazzah Street from the moment Frances arrived. The ‘someone’ Frances senses watching her on that first morning has, through the burglary, been given flesh, removing any possibility that the Shores’ flat could constitute ‘home’ as Julian Wolfreys has defined it.<sup>55</sup>

The scene, framed as a burglary in the first instance, a criminal act, quickly takes on the sensation of poltergeist activity, the actions of a persecutory ghost who seeks to displace living tenants from their homes.<sup>56</sup> Having come to terms with their material losses, and decided not to involve the Saudi police in the matter, Andrew and Frances seek to settle their nerves with a drink. Alcohol being prohibited in Saudi

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<sup>54</sup> Wolfreys, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Inferences of potentially supernatural interference in the domestic space can also be found within ‘Sorry to Disturb’, the short story whose premise so closely maps that of *Eight Months*. On one occasion the protagonist rearranges her living room furniture only to find upon waking in the morning that ‘the furniture had been trying to move itself back. An armchair was leaning to the left, as if executing some tipsy dance; at one side its base rested on the carpet, but the other side was a foot in the air, and balanced finely on the rim of a flimsy wastepaper basket’ (p. 14). In another incident she returns to her spare room to find that ‘[t]he doors of the fitted wardrobes, which were large and solid like coffin lids, had been removed from their hinges; they had been replaced, but hung by the lower hinges only, so that their upper halves flapped like the wings of some ramshackle flying machine’ (p. 18). These scenes, again reminiscent of poltergeist activity, serve to underline the instability of Mantel’s Jeddah-based protagonists within the space of their own homes, intimating how little ‘in possession of the ground’ (*Eight Months*, p. 46) they really are.

Arabia, the bottle of Scotch they received as a present is secreted under their kitchen sink and their home-brewed wine stowed in the bathroom:

Andrew glowered over the remains of the bottle of Scotch; smashed, it lay on the draining board. [. . .] [He] turned quickly and made for the little bathroom where they kept their wine supplies. As soon as he opened the door a ripe heady odour from the upturned jerry cans rolled past them. Almost tangible, it billowed down the passageway, and washed through the flat. [. . .] There had been twenty-four bottles, in a cardboard box; even the box was ripped to shreds, and its remnants bobbed on the frothy tide from the jerry cans, a scum of yeast and water and half-fermented fruit. (p. 247)

The methodical destruction of the Shores' alcohol, the existence of which is a direct contravention of the law in Saudi Arabia, positions the invasion of the flat as spectral law enforcement, a disembodied yet potent force which is registered through the emphasis upon smell in the passage, causing the presence of the anonymous intruder to linger phantasmally after the corporeal perpetrators have departed. The presence that has occupied and vandalised the flat is 'almost tangible', pervading the entire property and yet immaterial. Present yet incomprehensible, the 'ripe, heady, odour' causes the Shores to reassess the status of their domestic space in relation to the Saudi authorities, of whom it had been previously stated that '[they] do not enter private homes on a whim. They'll come if you attract attention to yourself' (p. 63), and to acknowledge that the 'stench of fermentation' is more properly 'the smell of violence' (p. 248). Mantel's use of the word 'washing' invokes a paradoxical image in which these acts of destruction are, on some level, an act of cleansing. That this passage figures a religiously motivated act is explicitly stated:

'I think,' Frances said, 'that we have been left a message.'  
'Message? Rip off the *khawwadjis* and save them from sin, is that what you mean?' (p. 248)

In the wake of this spectral incursion, Andrew angrily repeats that he '[is] not going to be frightened off by the bloody vagaries of [his] imagination' (p. 248). His assertion underlines the potency with which the State's potential for persecutory action operates predominantly through the individual subject's imagination. In so doing, it underlines the concomitance between the State as represented in *Eight Months* and the figure of the ghost, a figure whose power is similarly 'mostly

exercised through the imagination.’<sup>57</sup> Andrew’s statement anticipates the persistence of the ghostly home invasion, if only in his mind where the possibilities for its repetition have the potential to be endlessly rehearsed, returning and returning again as revenant par excellence. Andrew’s statement makes apparent that this is law enforcement carried out by the most intimate of ‘interior ministries’, who can not only watch and act without being seen but whose offices are internalized, whose presence ‘is experienced, in the unconscious economy of the subject, as a traumatic, senseless injunction’<sup>58</sup> and whose actions are as potent and persecutory as those carried out by their embodied representatives.

### **‘Who knows what’s under the veil?’: Quasi-Gothic and Cultural Blindness**

Throughout *Eight Months* confrontations arise between the novel’s Western protagonists and their conservative Islamic environment. Perhaps the most powerful of these can be located as the novel draws to its close when, returning home from a trip to the doctor, Frances discovers a veiled stranger in the stairwell of her apartment building:

Someone was in the hall [. . .] a veiled figure, going upstairs. I no longer believe in the veiled lady, she thought; I know she is a fiction, a lie. [. . .] The figure moves, not at a visitor’s pace, but headlong: not furtive, decisive: and the momentary glimpse she caught seemed to contradict some observation she had once made.

[. . .]

The visitor stopped dead. An outline of features beneath black cloth [. . .]. The visitor was tall; a strapping lass. Frances raised her hand. The visitor pulled back but she had made contact. She tugged at the concealing *abaya*, felt it part, felt something cold, metallic under her hand. She reached up, with her other hand, and clawed at the veil. But a veil is not something that you can pull off [. . .] because the black cloth is wound around the head. The head strains back; and then she is pushed away with all of the visitor’s ungirlish strength, sent flying against the wall.

[. . .]

Frances stood up shakily. Surprisingly she felt no pain; no evidence of the encounter, except the chilly bar of flesh in the palm of her hand, where she had touched the metal of the gun’s barrel. (pp. 234-35)

This passage is powerful not least because it at first appears to adhere to the structures of haunting that permeate the novel before violently undermining those structures. The events that lead up to this confrontation all contribute to this passage

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<sup>57</sup> Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 43.

appearing initially as an instance of haunting.<sup>59</sup> As discussed above, from Frances' very first morning in her flat the presence of something or someone in the flat above her own comes to typify a feeling of occulted figures and forces in operation in her new country. As in a classic ghost story, footsteps and voices are overheard in supposedly unoccupied rooms, objects, whose purpose is unclear, appear, move, and disappear impossibly. The apartment building becomes a haunted house, the empty flat a forbidden enclave embedded within the narrative, whose spectral inhabitants can neither be identified nor fully repudiated.<sup>60</sup> Even the name Frances selects for the mysterious visitor that she has observed coming and going in the apartment on Ghazzah Street, the 'veiled lady', recalls the monikers given to the phantoms in folk narratives of haunting, the 'Grey Lady', the 'White Lady' etc. Frances herself comes to act within the narrative as a quasi-gothic heroine and nowhere is this positioning more apparent than in her final confrontation with the veiled intruder she discovers in the stairwell. Only a few lines prior to the encounter she has returned from a futile medical appointment, the result of which she suspects will be 'a little bottle of tranquilizing pills', conjecturing further that she will be required to make a self-diagnosis of a 'neurotic imagination' (p. 234). It is possible to read the passage as a failed exorcism, an attempt to 'debunk' the phantom that has been haunting the apartment by bringing its identity fully into the realm of the sensible. Yet to do so would be to miss the crucial significance of the passage.

Early on in the novel Frances learns of a rumour that the 'empty' flat is used by a couple having an adulterous affair, an explanation which attributes the haunted quality of the flat to the necessity of occulting certain activities from the spectral surveillance of the religious authorities. This rumour at first appears to be symbolically supported by the repeated image of a number of veiled women

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<sup>59</sup> The ambivalent approach to the trope of the ghost and the situation of haunting that characterises *Eight Months* is perhaps most succinctly captured early on in the novel as Frances notices in passing a man 'bent over an ironing board': 'The man swept a garment from the ironing board and held it aloft; it was a *thobe*, narrow, shirt-like, startling white against the shadows of the walls and the night sky. She imagined she could see the laundryman's face, creased with the weariness of long standing; as they turned the corner he laid the garment down again, and began to arrange its limbs. [. . .] She got out of the car. The laundryman seemed as clear and sharp and meaningless as a figure in a dream; she knew she would never forget him' (p. 60). Here the clichéd image of the 'ghost in a sheet' evoked by the empty white *thobe* silhouetted against the night sky gives way to the true spectre within the moment, the domestic worker whose face Frances does not encounter directly and can only imagine, but whose presence is pervasive and inescapable.

<sup>60</sup> This is not the first instance in which Mantel embeds an enigmatic haunted enclave within a domestic space: see also the 'spare room' of 2 Buckingham Avenue in *Every Day* and *Vacant Possession* discussed in Chapter 1.

ascending the staircase in the apartment building, in various states of distress and anonymity. These incidents, and the lack of significance they are attributed by any of the other characters, underline the way in which the domestic sphere in general is frequently de-politicised. In Rancière's terms the communications and apparitions ('groans or cries') issuing from the domestic space are only deemed capable of 'expressing suffering, hunger or anger' rather than constituting actual speech 'demonstrating a shared aesthesis'<sup>61</sup> that would demand acknowledgement or more broadly indicate a belonging to the realm of the sensible. The ostensible 'de-politicisation' of the domestic sphere within *Eight Months*, or rather the refusal by the Saudi State to grant any explicit political significance to what takes place within the 'female' space of the domestic is underlined throughout the novel, both through the actions of State apparatus and the comments of those subject to that apparatus. This can be observed in the early assertion that Saudi police do not enter private homes 'on a whim' (p. 63), an assertion that appears to evidence an official position wherein the space of the home is one in which nothing of legal or political note takes place (an understanding which the 'burglary' of the Shore's home renders specious). Likewise, Andrew's dismissal of Frances' concerns as fabricated and unimportant, emerging as they do from her domestic interactions with her neighbours: 'you sit around the house, confabulating, making plots, and making your dull life brighter' (p. 153), combines with Eric Parson's patronising assessment of Frances' relationship with the other housewives in her apartment complex ('I can understand it of course – all you women together in the flats, you've got to know each other, that's nice, and you're sure to talk amongst yourselves' (p. 240)) to reinforce the overt placement of the space of the home as one in which only trivial matters are spoken of and inconsequential events take place.

Yet, the 'veiled ladies' of Ghazzah Street, despite being dismissed as part of the fabric of domestic life in Jeddah and as such not admitted in any meaningful way to the realm of the sensible, possess a powerful significance within the narrative. While, in a strategy which echoes the crime fiction authors Frances reads so avidly, Mantel's 'veiled ladies' turn out to be red herrings, their purpose as misdirection rather than key to a central, highly politicised secret serves not as a formal inscription of the de-politicisation of the domestic space but rather allows Mantel to

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<sup>61</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 38.



interrogate the culturally-freighted difficulties that Frances encounters as she tries to make her interventions in the division of the sensible. As the narrative progresses Frances becomes convinced that the existence of the adulterous couple suggested by the anonymous veiled women she repeatedly encounters in her apartment block is a fiction, that the ‘rumour [. . .] was tailor-made [. . .] for Westerners with their prurient minds’ (p. 121). This notion of a narrative ‘tailor-made’ for ‘Westerners’ is significant. Rather than a confrontation between a spectre and a subject the clash between Frances and the veiled figure should be read as signifying an encounter between the Western notion of spectrality, through whose lens Frances views the events that unfold, and a Middle Eastern milieu by which the notion of the ghost and the concept of haunting are not accommodated.

The spectres of Ghazzah Street are profoundly metaphorical, they are the socially dead, the government ‘spook’. This knowing deployment of what Peeren would term ‘the spectral metaphor’ indicates an intersection between the cultural context of the novel and the cultural background of its writer. Many forms of Christianity accommodate the notion of a ‘ghost’ and ghosts are certainly spoken about with reference to Christian religious practice even if interpretations of scriptural evidence of ghosts forming a part of Christian dogma is conflicted and ambiguous.<sup>62</sup> Islam on the other hand does not have the same familiar relationship with the notion of the ghost and indeed there is no such thing as a ghost mentioned within the Koran, wherein the dead ‘can never return, either to right past wrongs or to communicate with the living.’<sup>63</sup> Rather, the Koran describes an impermeable barrier (*barzakh*) raised between the dead and the living until judgement day.<sup>64</sup> The most closely related phenomenon to be found in Islamic culture is that of the djinn, a supernatural, shape-shifting creature capable of both disruptive and altruistic magical feats. Crucially, the djinn is not understood to be the spirit of a dead person. It stands outside of the binary of life and death as a non-human presence. At one point in the text the lack of superstition within the Wahhabi community is remarked upon by one of Frances’ neighbours: ‘You must know, Frances, that here they are Sunni Muslims [. . .] They don’t go for shrines and tombs and processions. They call these things

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<sup>62</sup> See the passage concerning Saul and the witch of Endor, First Book of Samuel, 28:3-25.

<sup>63</sup> Jane Idleman Smith & Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 32.

<sup>64</sup> Koran 23:100.

superstition' (p. 145). This is echoed in non-fictional accounts of the historical destruction of tomb decorations or visible structures by Wahhabi adherents,<sup>65</sup> supporting the sense of a community in which the dead and their ghosts have no place, as Islam 'hurries to inter the dead' (p. 292) who are immured behind the purgatorial 'veil' of *barzakh*, incapable of ingress into the world of the living.<sup>66</sup> This being the case, Mantel's creation of a haunted Jeddah populated with manifold spectral inhabitants could be interpreted as an attempt to articulate a culture using terms that do not apply to it, or worse, as an ethnocentric imposition. Yet to pursue this reading would be to fail to grasp the true extent of Mantel's spectral strategy in this novel, in which no clash or contradiction is orchestrated without purpose.

### **Lost in Translation – Turning the Screw of Ethnocentrism**

The notions of translation, of language and of access to knowledge are at the heart of this novel. Frances is a cartographer by training but the impossibility of mapping Jeddah is one of the first things she learns about her new home, her flight attendant assuring her that '[she is] redundant. [The Saudis] don't have maps. [. . .] The streets are never in the same place for more than a few weeks together' (p. 27). This assertion is borne out later when Andrew brings her maps of Jeddah which turn out to be completely inaccurate: '[t]he shape of the coastline is different', roads run into the sea and the apartment on Ghazzah Street is just a vacant lot (p. 81). This 'CARTOGRAPHY BY KAFKA' (p.81), as Frances describes it, the inability to translate the geographical reality of Jeddah into a legible document is just the beginning of a series of difficulties she encounters with 'translations' relating to Saudi culture and society. When her neighbour, Samira, provides her with a translated copy of the Koran she apologises saying, '[y]ou must understand that the very language of the Holy Koran is sacred, and so this little Penguin Book is just a little lacking the nuances' (pp. 117-8). Later, upon enquiring how Frances is getting on with the book, Samira reasserts this position, stating '[o]f course you do not get the full idea in translation' (p. 127). From these interactions a sense emerges of Frances' struggle to translate the Wahhabi beliefs and doctrines that shape Saudi society into an accurate and nuanced form that she, as an outsider, can fully grasp.

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<sup>65</sup> Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications, 2002), p. 34.

<sup>66</sup> Idleman Smith & Haddad, p. 7.

This struggle repeatedly proves futile as the problems inherent with the process of translation continue to present themselves.

By creating Frances in the mode of a gothic heroine, the young female protagonist ‘who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine,’<sup>67</sup> and by casting the apartment building on Ghazzah Street as the classic haunted house, complete with forbidden enclaves, Mantel orchestrates a situation in which the gothic narrative of the search ‘for the centre of a mystery [. . .] following clues that pull [the protagonist] onward and inward,’<sup>68</sup> can be played out within the context of Saudi society. Unlike the gothic novel, however, *Eight Months* stubbornly maintains its ambiguity until the novel’s close, encouraging the epistemological drive towards the resolution of a mystery that typifies gothic narratives but ultimately refusing to show or tell. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the appearance and violent disappearance of Adam Fairfax, one of Andrew’s work colleagues. In the context of *Eight Months* Fairfax’s name generates a powerful irony, invoking the notion as it does of a ‘fair copy’, the copy of a document produced after the final corrections and forming the definitive version. *Eight Months* can on one level be understood as a search for such a definitive account which is perpetually thwarted. Frances’ expatriate neighbours frequently recount stories which are riddled with omissions and contradictions. For example when the Shores’ host a dinner party for Andrew’s expatriate colleagues, the attempt to recount the story of the alleged rape of two female tourists at a local souk disintegrates into conjecture, hear-say and contradiction in which the narrative is bolted together with a plethora of “I heard”s, “what actually happened”s and allegations of factual inconsistencies (pp. 162-3).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Sarolta Marinovitch, ‘The Discourse of the Other: Female Gothic in Contemporary Women’s Writing’, *Neohelicon*, 21(1994), 189-205 (p. 192). Literary predecessors for Frances can be found in Emily St Aubert, the protagonist of Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and investigator of its titular mysteries.

<sup>68</sup> Claire Kahane, ‘The Gothic Mirror’, in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays on Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, Madelon Sprengnether (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 335.

<sup>69</sup> The passage ends with one of Frances’ guests concluding ‘I have to say though, I have heard so many versions of that story, I don’t know what to believe.’ (p. 163) Certainly, this struggle to get a story straight not only forms the basis of the gothic narrative form but also seemingly characterised Mantel’s experience of living in Saudi Arabia. She states that ‘[w]hat really interested me about the Kingdom and interests me even more in retrospect was the way that you never got a story straight, not the simplest thing, and people would tell you versions of public affairs in perfectly good faith and then somebody else would tell you a different version.’ Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 285.

Though productive, Fairfax's significance for the narrative exceeds this ironic provocation to recognise the ubiquity within *Eight Months* of unreliable narrators. His arrival is foreshadowed from the earliest pages of the novel, when Frances overhears two fellow passengers on her flight to Jeddah discussing someone of the same name (p. 27), and his eventual appearance at the Shores' apartment combines the arrival of a romantic hero, bearing flowers, with the entrance of a spectre; he is 'quite insubstantial', possessed of a 'transparent pallor' and a 'transparent smile', even his suit is 'lightweight' and his hair 'as fine as cobwebs' (p. 252). Having celebrated Fairfax's arrival with a meal and several bottles of wine Andrew and Frances retire to bed leaving Fairfax asleep on the sofa. Frances is awoken to find the front door of the flat open and Fairfax, drunk and distressed, crouching in the stairwell of the apartment building having attempted to get onto the roof for some fresh air. Yet when Frances tries to discover the cause of his shock and fear Fairfax is incapable of articulating what he has seen:

'Fairfax, wake up, tell us,' He did open his eyes, for an instant; he looked at her warily, directly. She saw pain and fear. But he said nothing.  
'He's not really all that drunk,' she said. 'Not any more. He's just made a decision I think.' She turned away, distraught. 'He's not going to tell us.' (p. 262)

By the time Frances and Andrew wake in the morning after Fairfax's enigmatic encounter, their guest has disappeared from the flat. This first incident details a somewhat mundane inability to find words to describe a shocking and frightening sight. Yet the scene of "unspeakability" is more nuanced than this. Fairfax's presence invokes notions of England and Englishness that have been largely absent from the novel previously, though Yasmin's description of the translation of the Koran she gives to Frances as a 'little Penguin book' very much roots their conversation about translation within the context of a translation not only into the English language but via a well-known British publishing house. The group discuss Frances and Andrew purchasing a flat in London and Fairfax describes his home in the village of Cumbernauld. This evocation of Englishness borders on parody as Fairfax is described as looking 'like a schoolboy who had been given the task of imitating [. . .] the governor of the Bank of England' (p. 255). This 'bubble' of Englishness that Fairfax creates, referencing as it does Mantel's own description of

ex-pat communities in Saudi Arabia,<sup>70</sup> positions Fairfax's inability to describe what he has seen or explain what has happened to him very specifically as a failure of cultural translation.

Following Fairfax's disappearance Andrew arrives at work to be given a transcription, in Arabic, of a telephone message from Fairfax. Complaining that he can't read the 'Arabic scrawl' (p. 267), he hands the note back to his colleague Hasan who reads it out to him:

[Fairfax] says, 'I go up to your roof last night and saw two men with box and down the stairs carrying a person who is dead. I am advise you to leave that place.'

Andrew reached out and snatched back the piece of paper. He stared down at it. The loops and squiggles defied comprehension. (p. 267)

Andrew's inability to comprehend, to read from the original source, is both literal and symbolic and the translation provides only enigmatic remains of the original message. Indeed, only two pages later Andrew breaks the news to Frances that Fairfax is dead, apparently killed in a car accident on his way to the airport, at which point Fairfax's corpse comes to profoundly embody these enigmatic 'remains' as Frances and Andrew struggle to obtain an explanation for what has taken place and to locate his corpse. Finding and viewing the corpse can only be achieved through the efforts of a translator and Fairfax's body proves in itself 'meaningless' (p. 292), providing no clarity as to the events that led to his death:

It was a while before the man in charge extricated himself, came out from behind his untidy desk and held some conversation with Hasan.

[. . .]

The man made a fussy gesture, to hurry them on; then briefly slid open the mortuary drawer, and showed them Fairfax's dead face. There was no error, no mistake in identity, and for all the inexpert eye could tell, he had died just as the police had given out. The head seemed twisted on the spinal column, the face was clamped, jaundiced, marked by a trickle of black blood; the expression was meaningless. (p. 289-90)

Yet when walking out of the mortuary Frances passes two anonymous, shrouded corpses, their winding sheets knotted around their heads (p. 289). This image, evoking the veils that in themselves prove so ambivalent and problematic in this novel, brings us to what is ultimately at stake in Mantel's use of spectrality to speak

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<sup>70</sup> Hilary Mantel, 'Last Morning in Al Hamra', *The Spectator*, 14 August 2012.

about a system in which the spectre is not accommodated. Recall Frances' acknowledgement of the impossibility of tearing off a veil (p. 173) and the failure of her own attempt to do so (p. 235); these scenes provide a powerful metaphor for the inability of any attempt to translate another culture, another politico-religious system, to be complete and for such attempts not to result in ambiguous and enigmatic traces that persist and discomfort. These traces are inscribed in the image of Fairfax's broken body, refusing to disclose the circumstances of death. They are found in the empty rooms of the apartment block on Ghazzah street at the novel's close which retain the residues of lives that were never wholly comprehensible to Frances or the reader, where the 'smell of goatflesh, of onions and herbs, of chemical air-freshener and baby powder' has 'a thick and tangible quality, as if it were a tapestry with which the walls had been draped' (p. 295). The most striking manifestation of these ambiguous remnants is perhaps the final chapter of the novel itself. Describing Frances and Andrew as human leftovers, the last vestiges of a 'golden age' of construction in the Kingdom, living in a 'ghost town' (p. 297) of a compound on the outskirts of Jeddah, the brief chapter provides an enigmatic kernel at the close of the novel which leaves the reader wrong footed and denied the traditional scene of elucidation which conventionally rewards the reader of the gothic novel. Whichever way they turn the reader, like Frances in the final paragraph of the novel, is left looking down blind alleys and roads that appear to lead nowhere:

I look out through the glass, on to the landscape, the distant prospect of travelling cars. Window one, the freeway: window two, the freeway. I turn away, cross the room to find a different view. Window three, the freeway, window four: the freeway. (p. 299)

### **Conclusion**

It is not possible for Frances to comprehend what is happening in Jeddah within her own cultural framework; her symbolic universe is insufficient and so despite her attempts to reconcile and interpret what she sees and hears on Ghazzah Street, she is always left with occluded elements whose opacity refuses to yield to interpretation. The significance of this impenetrability and the repeated 'failures of translation' in the text are best elucidated through a consideration of the phenomenon of what is described by Rancière as the 'mute letter.' The text of Fairfax's note, twice translated and unfathomable, provides an excellent example of the 'mute letter', the

letter that '[goes] its way without a father to guide it [. . .] that [speaks] to anybody without knowing to whom it had to speak and to whom it had not [. . .] that [speaks] too much and endows anyone at all with the power of speaking.'<sup>71</sup> Indeed, from the moment when Eric Parsons' driver, Hasan, is asked to read the letter he becomes an articulate subject in the narrative, offering advice and an interpretation of events, stepping from a ghostly background existence within the narrative into the flow of discourse. It is perhaps one of the most political moments in the novel, a moment in which the accepted order of who can speak and be heard is radically disrupted. By reading *Eight Months* with Rancière it becomes possible to understand the novel not as primarily fictionalised autobiography or conventional thriller, but as political fiction on Mantel's own terms, in which she understands the political as an issue of who and what can be seen and heard. Mantel's propensity for 'privileging the unseen' allows her to 'frame a new fabric of common experience, a new scenery of the invisible and a new dramaturgy of the intelligible.'<sup>72</sup> In other words, *Eight Months* forces the reader to question whose experiences are being excluded from the realm of the socially visible and provides a space in which the 'sensory self-evidence of the natural order'<sup>73</sup> is, for a moment overturned, allowing those subjects, statements and events previously deemed insensible, and thus incomprehensible, by the prevailing social order to be recognised and acknowledged, and permitting them to move from the status of the apparitional to fully appear. Her utilisation of the logic of haunting and spectrality achieves a series of acts of dissensus, critiquing the haunted operation of politico-religious authority in Saudi Arabia and bringing to light previously occulted experiences. The narrative skilfully demonstrates that just as 'there is no straight path from the viewing of a spectacle to an understanding of the state of the world',<sup>74</sup> as Frances learns from her multiple encounters with the 'veiled lady' of Ghazzah Street, there is no straight path from an encounter with a spectre to an understanding of the implications of their spectrality. In my next chapter I continue to explore depictions of the kinds of social ghosting which dominate *Eight Months*, continuing, in Mantel's words, to '[look] at the defining question of who is human, what is human and what rights therefore adhere.'<sup>75</sup> However, I will be doing so in

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<sup>71</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 157.

<sup>72</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 141.

<sup>73</sup> Stephen Corcoran, 'Introduction', p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Rancière, p. 143.

<sup>75</sup> Mantel, 'Interview', p. 30.

the context of Mantel's simultaneous engagement with the figure of the traditional ghost, reading her 2005 novel *Beyond Black* as articulating a contemporary rupture with history and the ancestral dead.



## Chapter 4

### The Princess and the Palimpsest - Skin, Screen and Spectre in *Beyond Black* (2005)

In the previous chapter the spectres of *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* were seen not to be characterised by the post-mortem positioning of the traditional ghost. Instead they were composed of the ‘spooks’ of politico-religious authorities and the individuals whose existence is spectralised by those authorities. By contrast, Mantel’s *Beyond Black*, is a text in which the physically dead continue to circulate within, and forcefully act upon, the realm of the living. The novel, which relates the life of Alison Hart, a spirit medium performing in the orbital towns of southern England in the late 1990s, is populated by a host of ghosts. Perhaps the most striking haunting to occur in the text is the manifestation of the ghost of Princess Diana in the hallway of a detached new-build on a housing estate, as the televised highlights of her own funeral play in an adjacent room (pp. 213-4). Diana’s apparition, clothed in her dishevelled wedding dress and with her press cuttings pinned to her skirts, typifies the novel’s preoccupation with the intersections between death and the tele-technological which materialised with greater and greater frequency at the turn of the millennium.

This chapter reads *Beyond Black* as a text responding to an uncertainty about the place of the ghost and the moment of haunting in a contemporary period which has in many ways been defined by the ubiquity of tele-technologies, and the hyper-visibility and hyper-connectivity that accompanies that ubiquity. Previous work on *Beyond Black* has in a number of cases limited the critical impact of the novel to an ‘experiment with narrative voice’,<sup>1</sup> or understood it as a gothic text engaged in renegotiating the terms upon which we relate to the domestic.<sup>2</sup> While these readings are accommodated by the novel, this chapter looks to establish its broader significance. I argue that the Mantelian ghost manifests within *Beyond Black* alongside the figure of the spirit medium in order to pose certain central questions:

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Stewart, ‘A Word in your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black*’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 50 (2009), 293-312 (p. 293).

<sup>2</sup> Sara L. Knox, “‘Giving flesh to the Wraiths of Violence’: Super-realism in the fiction of Hilary Mantel’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 25 (2010), 313-323.

what happens to the ghost in the millennial moment? What modes of spectrality are made possible and which are rendered obsolete in an age of ubiquitous tele-technologies and mass media? How does the contemporary subject relate to the dead?

I posit that possible answers to these questions are provided in the novel through an interplay between the affiliated motifs of the screen and the skin, whose functions are at multiple points in the text demonstrated to be interchangeable. This interchangeability is articulated in the work of a number of thinkers, both in terms of research around the role of the skin in culture and in terms of the tele-technological screen. Didier Anzieu for example famously described the skin as a screen in his seminal text *The Skin Ego*,<sup>3</sup> while Steven Connor identifies how the skin ‘is no longer primarily a membrane of separation but a medium of connection or greatly intensified semiotic permeability’.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, the very notion of the screen is multifarious, invoking both the sense of an obscuring, protective barrier and a medium of display and exposure. *Beyond Black* is a novel structured around a series of ‘screening’ processes whose nature is by turns deceptive, protective and revelatory. Within the novel both the degree of transparency and the level of robustness possessed by the screen is seen to fluctuate, sometimes becoming permeable, permitting exchange and communication, while at other times hardening into defensive opacity. So too the objects performing this screening function are various, exceeding the literal computer and television screen to incorporate organic, inorganic and symbolic membranes, formed of flesh, rhetoric and performance. I argue that the heterogeneity of the screening processes and surfaces detailed in *Beyond Black* is tempered by an understanding that they all function, whether by accident or design, to provide a surface upon or against which a variety of spectres and ghosts can become licit and their meanings be discerned. By making available both biological and technological mediums for ghostly inscription Mantel’s novel articulates strikingly how the plethora of ghosts generated by personal trauma, by historical narratives, by technology, and by society satisfy their requirement for a surface upon which to show themselves in the context of millennial dormitory England.

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<sup>3</sup> Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Connor, ‘Integuments: The Scar, the Skin and the Screen’, *New Formations*, 39 (1999), 32-54 (p. 52).

My analysis of *Beyond Black* begins by exploring how the novel acknowledges and subverts a history of spirit mediumship that has privileged both technology and performativity, and reads Alison's spiritualist practice as an ambivalent screening process which recognises the context of contemporary tele-technological advancement. Building on this understanding of mediumship in the novel, I go on to posit this screening process as forming one element of a critique of how the historical and familial dead are situated in millennial England, demonstrating how Alison's ability to mediate between the living and the dead is increasingly unable to accommodate a contemporary disassociation from history. Moreover, I argue that this disassociation is twinned with a growing prostheticisation of memory and affect in the contemporary period facilitated by the proliferation of tele-technologies. In the chapter's third section I return to the question of social ghosting raised in Chapter 3 in order to examine how, in *Beyond Black*, the representation of subjects spectralised by socio-political structures is inflected and developed by the presence in the later novel of 'traditional' ghosts (i.e the manifestations of biologically deceased subjects) and media technologies. Finally, I read *Beyond Black*'s complex intertextual elements as explicitly ventriloquizing the voices of dead authors, situating the novel as addressing the uses to which authors put the dead in contrast to the lack of use *Beyond Black*'s living subjects appear to find for them.

### **Mediums and Media**

'The dead won't be coaxed and they won't be coerced. But the public has paid its money and it wants results.' (*Beyond Black* p. 1)

*Beyond Black* coalesces around the life and work of Alison Hart, 'a sensitive [. . .], a medium [. . .] a clairvoyant' (pp.7-8). The spirit medium, most powerfully associated in Britain with darkened Victorian and inter-war parlours, is a figure which seems incongruous with the contemporary, secular society depicted in *Beyond Black*, and largely incompatible with 'a culture ruled by hypervisibility.'<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the references to previous modes of spiritualist practice which permeate the novel's second chapter on one level charts what Esther Peeren terms 'the medium's transformation' over the course of the twentieth century 'from being closely associated with mainstream scientific, religious and political discourses to being considered little more than

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<sup>5</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 16.

fringe entertainment.’<sup>6</sup> However, despite the spirit medium’s anachronistic status, Alison’s profession signals the novel’s participation in a critical tradition which has drawn a close and complex relationship between mediumship and communications technology. An examination of Alison’s mediumistic practice reveals a confrontation between media and medium which questions and complicates linkages previously taken for granted between technology and clairvoyance, and asks how the evolution of technology shapes our relationship with the dead. Before examining precisely how Mantel nuances Alison’s position in relation to the tele-technologies which provided the metaphorical language in which the work of her forebears was couched, it is useful to trace how the novel more generally acknowledges the history of professional mediumship.

Early descriptions of Alison at work make the archaic roots of her profession explicit, depicting her as ‘soft as an Edwardian, opulent as a showgirl, [. . .] when she moved you could hear (though she did not wear them) the rustle of plumes and silks’ (p. 3). A reference to Alison’s assistant, Colette, performing the role of ‘ladies’ maid’ in the same passage intensifies the effect of the simile ‘soft as an Edwardian’ and insists on a historicised understanding of mediumship which spectrally overlays the contemporary narrative, positioning the medium as a relic of another time. During the ‘Evening of Psychic Arts’, which takes up the second chapter of the novel and gives the reader their first exposure to Alison’s mediumistic practice, she assures her audience that ‘[they’re] not going to see anything that will frighten [them]’, adding that she ‘won’t be going into a trance, and [they] won’t be seeing spooks, or hearing spirit music’ (p. 15). This assurance inserts her into a historic tradition of mediumship in which the hearing of spirit music, the apparition of spirit objects and the apparent materialization of the dead were commonplace,<sup>7</sup> even as she tactfully differentiates herself from that tradition stylistically. Mantel returns to this notion of the evolution of spiritualism in a secular, mediatized and more rampantly capitalist age in the third chapter where Alison observes that, in contrast to her more reticent ghosts, the Victorian dead:

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<sup>6</sup> Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, as Leigh Wilson has pointed out, ‘late nineteenth-century spiritualism was dominated by physical phenomena.’ Leigh Wilson, ‘The Cross-Correspondences, the Nature of Evidence and the Matter of Writing’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. by Sarah Wilburn and Tatiana Kontou (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 97-122 (p. 100).

[. . .] blew trumpets and played portable organs; they moved the furniture; they rapped on the wall, they sang hymns. They offered bouquets to the living, spirit roses bound by scented hands. Sometimes they proffered inconveniently large objects, like a horse. Sometimes they stood at your shoulder, a glowing column made flesh by the eyes of faith. She could see it easily, a picture from the past: herself in a darkened parlour, her superb shoulders rising white out of crimson velvet. (pp. 80-1)

Historical accounts of Victorian spiritualism are consistent with this description, attesting to occurrences of ‘musical instruments play[ing] by themselves’ and ‘flowers fall[ing] in showers from the ceiling’,<sup>8</sup> but the compression of these phenomena into a continuous list renders the image carnivalesque and makes the transition to Alison’s mode of contemporary spiritualism appear less inconsistent: the public face of spiritualism is presented as always having been the preserve of the performer.

If Mantel deliberately evokes an anachronistic spiritualism defined by theatrical flourishes, to which Alison is indebted, even if she does not emulate it, she also recasts Alison’s own theatricality as tailored to the needs and expectations of her audience. Through Colette the reader observes Alison’s ‘public self: a little bit jaunty and a little bit crude, a bit of a schoolmistress and a bit of a flirt’ (p. 24). This persona is bolstered by a burlesque aesthetic with Alison described as ‘a genius with make-up’ (p. 5) and depicted carefully constructing herself for the stage, donning fake opals and vividly coloured clothing in ‘emerald, burnt orange, [and] scarlet’ (p. 4). This invocation of bright colours has a specific purpose. Explaining her choice of costume for her performances Alison states that ‘[t]he last thing you want, when you go out there, [. . .], is to make them think of funerals’ (pp. 4-5). It is this statement that reveals the essentially composite nature of Alison’s performance. Her ‘Evening of Psychic Arts’ is advertised alongside a performance of Faure’s *Requiem* and a Christmas pantomime (p. 7), a pairing which implicitly acknowledges Alison’s synthesizing of death and entertainment. The vibrant costumes and practiced demeanour which characterise what she calls her ‘platform’ work are not merely pantomimic devices designed to amuse the ‘trade’, as Alison refers to her audiences. Rather they are one component of a mediumistic practice constructed to screen off those aspects of death and the dead that are frightening.

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson, p. 100.

This strategy is exemplified in a sustained description of the spirit world as Alison sells it to her customers. This afterlife is one of perfect equilibrium, where everything is in balance and nothing takes place. The temperature is ‘moderate’, the breeze ‘gentle’ and the trees ‘seasonless’ (pp. 43-4). Mantel describes an environment which is free of conflict and contradiction, of painful stimulation of any kind: ‘the children never squabble or cut their knees’, even the bees are ‘stingless’ (p. 43). She then nuances this tensionless vision with a calculated representation of a nostalgia for the ‘Golden Age’ of 1950s Britain:

There’s a certain 1950s air about the dead, or early sixties perhaps, because they’re clean and respectable and they don’t stink of factories: as if they came after white nylon shirts and indoor sanitation, but before satire, certainly before sexual intercourse. (p. 43)

According to Alison’s public account, the afterlife exists in a state of perpetual, post-war propriety in which bodily needs have been eradicated: the dead eat simply for pleasure, never getting hungry, and are immune to sexual desire. Bodily defects possessed in life are corrected in death through a compound process of sanitation; the fiction with which Alison presents her clients is a sanitisation of the ‘reality’ of the existence of the dead and then within this sanitised vision the dead themselves are individually made more appealing than they were in life:

They all have their own teeth: or an expensive set of implants, if their own were unsightly. Their damaged chromosomes are counted and shuffled into good order; [. . .]. Damaged livers have been replaced, so their owners live to drink another day. Blighted lungs now suck at God’s own low-tar blend. Cancerous breasts have been rescued from the surgeons’ bin, and blossom like roses on spirit chests. (p. 44)

These rhetorical manoeuvres are placed alongside the vivid colours Alison selects for her theatrical costumes to render her performance a protective screen, utilising both rhetoric and aesthetics as a barrier designed to shield the general public from the unbearable stimulation of the unpalatable, unsaleable ‘reality’ of death and the afterlife. This protective screening function is implicitly acknowledged in the following exchange between Colette and Alison. Here Colette is questioning Alison on her apparent deception of her customers:

‘You see, I’d have imagined,’ [Colette] said, ‘that sometimes, once in a while, you’d feel the urge to be honest.’

Alison gave a comic little shiver, like a character in a pantomime. 'What, with the punters? They'd run a mile, [. . .]. It'd kill them.' (p. 32)

While this exchange appears to suggest a robust screening, capable of repelling the fatally stimulating knowledge of the reality of existence 'airside', it is undermined at several points in the text. The final sentence of the rich passage quoted above, describing a publicly palatable afterlife, refers to Philip Larkin's famous poem 'Annus Mirabilis' which memorably states that 'sexual intercourse began | in 1963'.<sup>9</sup> In using this allusion here Mantel sets up an intertextual resonance which gives the lie to Alison's construction of an idealised image of airside existence and doubles it with a darker and more troubling alternative since the 'wrangle for a ring | a shame that started at sixteen and spread to everything' which appears later in Larkin's poem sits silently alongside Alison's bucolic rendering of the afterlife in the image of 1950s, early 60s Britain.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the synecdoche in Alison's description of the dead subverts her project of idealisation. In a passage which overtly aims to communicate a wholeness and coherence, the listing of body parts builds to create an opposing image of fragmentation, amputation and disintegration which operates from a cellular level outwards, from 'chromosomes' through 'teeth' to 'spirit chests'. In so doing the consequences of Alison's acts of redaction are implicitly stated: despite her accomplished performance as spin-doctor for the dead, representing them as idealisations of their living selves, the overstimulating and disagreeable elements of the dead and their messages remain as traces, fragments capable of penetrating the protective screen Alison constructs and finding their way into the world of the living.

If Alison's theatrical performance and onstage patter screens off the distasteful reality of the dead rather than providing a surface upon which they can be made manifest, this occlusion takes place in the context of a further screening process which occurs offstage and is rooted in Mantel's troubling of the correlations that have long been drawn between mediums and telecommunications technology. As has been discussed, the spiritualist practice in *Beyond Black* self-consciously references its own Victorian heritage, with the shielding of a rationalist, secular

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Larkin, 'Annus Mirabilis', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 146.

<sup>10</sup> Significantly, the impact of the use of Larkin as intertext here comes not in the overt reference but the later line that it implies. This gesture, which has already been observed with reference to the intertextual material present in *Giving up the Ghost*, is symptomatic of Mantel's treatment of intertextuality as a mode of haunting in itself, a phenomenon I will return to at the close of this chapter.

audience against deeply disturbing supernatural truths mirroring the consolatory fictions doled out by mediums in spiritualism's heyday. However, while Victorian society provided the initial milieu for the growth of spiritualism, the references to historic spiritualist practice woven into this depiction of contemporary mediumship carefully track its evolution. It is widely acknowledged that the rise of spiritualism in the nineteenth century ran parallel to a meteoric rise in wireless telegraphy and telephony,<sup>11</sup> and that the concurrence of these developments led to the drawing of an analogous relationship between communications technologies and spiritualism. Jeffrey Sconce astutely observes the equation of the work of the spirit medium with the function of communications technology in the blending of 'supernatural and technological discourses, a model legitimated by the equally incredible yet incontrovertible evidence of the telegraph.'<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Jill Galvan notes, 'for many [nineteenth-century] spiritualists, psychical researchers, and the writers who depicted their pursuits, mediumistic contacts were of a piece with the communication technology innovations of the day.'<sup>13</sup> That the telegraph and the telephone were considered 'functionally analogous' to séance manifestations<sup>14</sup> has been firmly established. Galvan goes further, stating that, rather than being merely useful similes, adopted by spiritualist adherents and detractors alike, the relationships between technology and medium, the broadcast situation and the séance situation, were coterminous: 'what happened in the séance was not *like* a technology, but an intricate technological event itself.'<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, she identifies in critical writing on spiritualism a lack of engagement with 'theories of mediums [. . .] as complex, at times faulty communications devices, operated by the spirits.'<sup>16</sup> Galvan's model of the medium as transmitter, which picks up on the communications of the dead and relays them verbatim, is nuanced by her argument that Victorian spiritualists made

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<sup>11</sup> The literature on the connection between spiritualism and communications technology is vast. Sarah Willburn and Tatiana Kontou's *Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012) dedicates its entire first section to this critical link. It is also important to note that this connection is not a contemporary critical gesture but was drawn contemporaneously to the rise in nineteenth-century spiritualism. As Jeffrey Sconce puts it 'both spiritualists and their antagonists elaborated the electrical mysteries of the telegraph into a theory of woman as technology.' Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Sconce, p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> Jill Galvan, 'The Victorian Post-Human: Transmission, Information and the Séance', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. Tatiana Kontou & Sarah Willburn (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 79-96 (p. 79).

<sup>14</sup> Galvan, p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



use of the concept which in communication and information studies is now termed ‘noise’, to account for anomalies in séance manifestations.<sup>17</sup> The most provocative element of her proposal is the suggestion that it was ‘the peculiarities of the medium’s own body’ which produced the noise that disrupted the transmissions of the dead.<sup>18</sup> For Galvan the Victorian séance was a technological event in which messages were scrambled, garbled or otherwise interfered with due to the idiosyncrasies of the communications device, i.e the individual physicality of the medium’s body and sound of her voice.

Mantel’s representation of mediumship resembles Galvan’s model to a degree. Yet it also diverges from it in significant ways which allow it to comment upon contemporary, rather than Victorian, technological contexts. Alison herself falls back on tele-technological metaphors in order to offer to her audiences an explanation of what she does, referring to herself as the audience’s ‘answering machine’, and (disingenuously as it will turn out) comparing her access to and delivery of the messages of the dead to the mechanism whereby ‘you press the button and [the answer machine] plays your messages back’ (p. 26). Her recourse to the language of tele-technologies is in keeping with Galvan’s description of communications technologies as ‘useful similes’.<sup>19</sup> Still, there is a crucial distinction to be made here between the technological metaphor employed by nineteenth-century spiritualists and Alison’s spiritualist practice. Rather than the direct real-time transmission of a message, of the kind produced by a telephone line, what Alison is describing is a spiritualist answering service, one that accommodates the idiosyncrasies of contemporary communications technology such as ‘wrong numbers’ and ‘nuisance calls’ (p. 27). Alison’s conception of her function in *Beyond Black*, as answer machine rather than telephone, is suggestive of an evolution of the public conceptualisation of spiritualism which closely corresponds to the evolution of technology itself.

Clearly Alison’s performance of being a medium proposes a technological continuum along which the metaphors available to describe the séance situation have developed. However, the reality of her contact with the dead betrays a wholly

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<sup>17</sup> Galvan, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> Galvan, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Galvan, p. 80.

different technological mechanism, one which chimes with Galvan's discussion of the medium's body as a distorting influence upon the messages of the dead while simultaneously questioning the agency of the medium in controlling or producing that distortion. Prior to relaying the messages she receives during her live stage performances, Alison is depicted sifting through the interference that accompanies it, utilising 'her peculiar form of listening' (p. 19) to tune out the 'background mutter' (p. 19) and 'confused distant chit-chat that comes from the world of the dead' (p. 17) and tune in to individual voices, 'picking out one and letting the others recede' (p. 20). In contrast to the nineteenth-century séance situation, in which the medium's corporeality in and of itself corrupts the communications of the dead, Mantel represents the contemporary séance as a technological event in which the message itself is always already corrupted and subject to interference before it reaches the medium of communication.

This is not to say that the medium in this text is positioned as having no impact upon the messages of the dead but rather that Alison's interventions in the post-mortem messages she receives are both deliberate, as opposed to a by-product of her physicality, and multifaceted in nature. In this sense Mantel's representation of contemporary mediumship refuses the widely acknowledged conception of the medium as passive transmitter, a technological object lacking agency,<sup>20</sup> and proposes a model which reflects a closer and closer synthesis between subject and tele-technological apparatus. On one level Alison is performing a data cleansing function, removing the 'noise' that comes across the frontier between 'airside' and 'earthside', a cacophony of 'something noisy going on in the background' composed of 'whizzes and bangs' (p. 49), 'hissing [. . .], startled wails and whistles' (p. 177), to get at the message beneath. In addition, Alison acts as censor with regard to the post-mortem communications she receives, even as she gives lie to this element of her role and protests that an answering machine 'doesn't wipe some [messages] out, on the grounds you don't need to know them' (p. 26) and stating that '[i]f I get a message I don't censor it. I don't ask, do you need it?' (p. 27). As Colette comes to understand,

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<sup>20</sup> This model of the medium as passive technological object is common to much of the literature on nineteenth-century spiritualism. Sconce describes the voices of the dead 'flow[ing] through' the medium (p. 14) while Anthony Enns describes spirit mediums as 'primarily engaged in the act of taking dictation from disembodied spirits.' Anthony Enns, 'The Undead Author: Spiritualism, Technology and Authorship', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. by Tatiana Kontou & Sarah Wilburn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 55-78 (p. 60).

'[t]here wasn't a necessary tie-up between what [Alison] said on the platform and the true state of affairs. Uncomfortable truths were smoothed over, before Al let them out to the public; when she conveyed soothing messages, Colette saw, they came not from the medium but from the saleswoman, from the part of her that saw the value in pleasing people' (p. 151). Just as the séances in *Beyond Black* provide a sanitised version of the dead and the space they inhabit, the messages that the dead send are similarly sanitised by Alison, who, as mentioned in Chapter 1, reassures a woman who wishes to know if her dead pet would be reunited with her late husband, despite the opposite scenario being true.

Nonetheless, the link between noise and interference, and the body of the medium proposed by Galvan is not absent in this representation of contemporary mediumship. It is in fact extremely potent but the direction of the agency involved in the process is reversed. Rather than the body of the medium acting upon the messages of the dead as a 'faulty communications device',<sup>21</sup> contaminating the original message with noise as in the Victorian model, here the words of the dead infiltrate the words of the living medium, scrambling her own communications just as Alison compromises the voices of the dead with her acts of redaction and censorship. Despite describing herself as 'an answering machine', Alison is to a large extent cut off from modern technology. She tells Colette 'I'm not very good with electrical things' (p. 90) and explains that 'whatever message [she] left on her machine was liable to become corrupted. Other messages, quite different ones, would overlay it' (pp. 90-1). This use of media and communications technology to inscribe the process of contamination and interference to which Alison's communications are subject finds its most powerful expression in the moments where she attempts to record her own voice (though it should be noted that almost all of her communications are represented as potential vehicles for the voices of the dead). Here Alison is recalling her schoolgirl struggle to complete an exam paper:

All during the maths paper there was a man chattering in her ear. [. . .] The man, the spirit, he was talking just below the threshold, retching and sobbing [. . .] He said, look for my cousin John Joseph, tell our Jo that my hands are bound with wire [. . .] that's what he relied on her to pass on to his cousin, the knowledge of his pain [. . .] so that when Miss Adshead came to flick her paper into the pile there was nothing on it but thin pen scrawls, like the traces

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<sup>21</sup> Galvan, p. 79.

and loops of wire with which the hands of this total stranger had been bound.  
(pp. 181-2)

This hijacking of the medium's spoken and written language is paralleled in the relationship of Alison's own body to the dead subjects who speak to and through her. The body of Galvan's Victorian spirit medium was understood to be acting upon the messages of the dead, with the often uncanny resemblance of manifested spirits to the mediums who were channelling them being attributed to the distorting effect of the medium's own materiality on the spirit's appearance.<sup>22</sup> This relationship between mediumistic corporeality and the messages of the dead (and, indeed, the dead as message) is skewed, though not totally reversed in the novel, as Alison's body becomes a physical medium upon which the dead write their messages. In doing so they perform acts of transformation with regard to Alison's own body which have varying degrees of permanence. For example, in the complete version of the passage quoted above Alison is described as physically experiencing the injuries endured by the murdered paramilitary, 'the crushing of the rifle butts and the men's boots seem[ing] to drive her feet through the floor' (p. 182). The recollection of this incident also registers itself corporeally as Alison's toes become hot and swollen and her cry of pain is 'bellowed, in somebody else's voice' (p. 185). In this account of contemporary mediumship, then, the medium *is* the message, though not in philosopher Marshall McLuhan's sense of the medium of delivery impacting so powerfully upon the message as to become the most important thing about it: 'the formative power in the media are the media themselves.'<sup>23</sup> Instead, Mantel's spirit medium becomes the message of the dead, acting as a screen onto which they project themselves.

The situation of communication not only with, but in the presence of, the dead in this novel deliberately cannot be neatly formulated. It is not a straightforward reversal of the traditional understanding of the medium as passive (and possibly, as Galvan argues, faulty) transmitter, though, as we have seen, elements of this formulation find their way into these scenes. The ghost is necessarily a chaotic, disorganising presence and the possessive effect of the phantom paramilitary on Alison's own

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<sup>22</sup> Galvan, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, ed. by W. Terrence Gordon (California: Gingko Press, 2003), p. 34. The Victorian spirit medium's technological mechanism as Galvan articulates it resonates with McLuhan's position in this regard, in that it asserts the significant impact of the medium upon the message.

voice is striking, capturing the frequent difficulty in identifying who is speaking in this narrative. With reference to her own mediumistic experiences Alison states: ‘when famous people pass they attract spirit-impostors, just as on this side you have lookalikes and body doubles’ (p. 150). When Alison is speaking it is often ambiguous as to who is using her voice as this extract demonstrates: “‘At the mercy of shed merchants,” Al said. “Ah dear, ah dear, ah dear.” At first she didn’t recognise who was speaking and then she realised it was Mrs McGibbet’ (p. 283). Ambiguity around who is speaking at any given moment is not restricted to explicit moments in this text but permeates Mantel’s writing. The effect of this vocal slippage in *Beyond Black* specifically is to produce a phantasmic multi-vocality which, as will now be demonstrated, is in part a response to a new, mediatised, relationship with history.

### **Forgetting the Dead: Ancestral Amnesia and Prosthetic Memory**

‘The modern man is he who feels he is free to forget the dead.’<sup>24</sup>

Ferdinand Tönnies’ statement here is expressive of a post-enlightenment divorce from history in which an attempt is made to throw off the sedimented ideas of the past. This rupture is one which has profound implications not only for the status of the ghost but for a whole constellation of attendant notions such as inheritance, legacy and the role of the ancestor. Moreover, this rupture has been contrasted by an emphasis in the contemporary moment on wider and wider spheres of connection facilitated by technological innovation. McLuhan’s statement that, ‘[i]n the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin’,<sup>25</sup> captures strikingly the connectivity brought about by the tele-technological advancements made in the latter part of the twentieth century. McLuhan’s description of a quasi-epidermal connection to mankind at large, facilitated by electronic media, proposes that a key feature of existence in the age of ubiquitous communication technologies is to be brought into intimate contact with humanity on a global scale, and to be placed within a network of relationships that vastly exceeds the familial and social bonds which were possible in the pre-electric age. This hyper-connectivity, whether facilitated through visual media, telephony or computing, has been argued by a number of scholars to bring about artificial

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<sup>24</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies quoted in Juliette Flower MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After Patriarchy* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1994), p. 47.

affective consequences.<sup>26</sup> In the passage above, depicting Alison's reception of the experiences of an Irish paramilitary, the man is described as 'a total stranger.' Yet, through him, she accesses a visceral connection to a past that does not belong to her, obtaining a form of what Alison Landsberg terms 'prosthetic memory': a 'deeply felt memory of a past event through which [she] did not live.'<sup>27</sup> In the chapter's second section I explored how Alison's mediumistic practice involves compound acts of screening whose structures share a vexed relationship with various communications technologies. These technologies permeate the novel and their significance exceeds Alison's mediumship. *Beyond Black* presents the proliferation of screens associated with televisual media as, on the one hand, failing to accommodate the manifestation of a certain class of ghost. On the other hand these screens are seen to provide a medium for the appearance of other mediatized spectres, radically destabilizing the status of the dead and the nature of memory within the communities Alison serves. It is with the forgetting of the familial dead that I will begin.

The dislocated quality of memory in *Beyond Black* is not limited to prosthetic memories of the kind Alison experiences through her mediumship. It is also registered in her audiences who are shown struggling with the act of listening to the dead, whether historical or personal. This profound decay of ancestral memory is crystallised in the minor character of Leanne, one of Alison's audience members, who fails to receive a message from her own grandmother as she doesn't know her relative's name, stating that she 'didn't think she had a granny' (p. 16).<sup>28</sup> This rupture in family memory is not restricted to the 'kids' who 'don't remember back more than eighteen months' and exist in a state of memorial infancy implied by Leanne's depiction with childish 'buttons and bows, her hair in twee little bunches' (p. 16). Rather, it is characteristic of the contemporary population of whom Alison observes that:

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<sup>26</sup> This is particularly true of the work of Bernard Stiegler and Alison Landsberg, both of whom are invoked below. Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) also speaks fruitfully to the connection between memory and technology in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

<sup>27</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Strikingly, in an interview with the *Scottish Review of Books* Mantel recounts how Leanne is based on a real life incident she encountered while watching clairvoyants at work as research for *Beyond Black*. She states 'I saw this girl whose knowledge of her family didn't go back two generations. Perhaps my feeling was exaggerated. But it chilled me. It made the girl seem less human.' 'Hilary Mantel: The SRB Interview', *Scottish Review of Books* 5 (2009) <<http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/index.php/back-issues/volume-five/volume-five-issue-four/295-hilary-mantel-the-srb-interview>> [accessed 11 July 2016].

[I]t was not uncommon to find family memory so short, in these towns nobody comes from, these south-eastern towns with their floating populations and their car parks where the centre should be. Nobody has roots here; and maybe they don't want to acknowledge roots, or recall their grimy places of origin and their illiterate foremothers up north. (pp. 16-7)

The divorce of the subject from ancestral memory renders the inhabitants of the orbital, dormitory towns Alison frequents incapable of receiving the messages of the dead, since the living do not know if, and by whom, they are being addressed. Leanne's inability to name her own grandmother is indicative of Mantel's confirmation in this novel of Landsberg's statement that 'part of the experience of modernity [is] the disruption of family, kinship and community ties.'<sup>29</sup>

Leanne's disconnection from her family history is absolute. Alison's attempts to spur the girl's recognition of her spectral ancestor through empathic means, emphasising Kathleen's physically draining existence ("What about Granny Kathleen walking uphill?") (p. 16)) and her desperation to speak with her granddaughter, are to no avail. Leanne responds not with recognition but incredulity. It is telling that this attempt to foster an empathic connection between a contemporary subject and their dead forebear is couched in an appreciation of the historical. As Alison describes Kathleen's existence she stresses its otherness, wryly observing that Kathleen's struggle to get home with goods purchased at market 'seems to be before you could order your groceries online', adding rhetorically, 'when you think about how we lived in those days' (p. 16). Thinking about 'how we lived in those days', about the past more broadly, proves to be just as problematic for the characters in this novel as connecting with their own individual histories.<sup>30</sup>

Disengagement from personal heritage is paralleled in *Beyond Black* by a disengagement from history itself, one which Mantel couples with the proliferation of tele-technologies and the ubiquity of mediatization. This rejection of the historical is implicitly demonstrated at the outset of the chapter, when Colette accidentally treads on Alison's spirit guide, Morris: 'Morris was on the floor, half sitting and half lying, slumped against the wall. [. . .] When Colette stepped back she trampled

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<sup>29</sup> Landsberg, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> While the novel coalesces around Alison's complicated and partial access to her past, Colette and her ex-husband Gavin also have complex relationships with their own family histories, with Alison revealing to Colette early on in the novel that the man she thought was her uncle was, in fact, her father (p. 83), and Gavin being unable even to find out the time of his birth (p. 58).

straight over him' (p. 5). As the narrative progresses it becomes clear that Colette embodies a contemporary attitude towards history that has its roots in an inability to empathise. In the following extract Colette listens to Alison addressing a member of her audience and contemplates her own empathic incapability:

'On the mike, darling. Talk to the mike. Speak up, speak out, don't be afraid. There isn't anybody here who isn't sharing your pain.'  
Am I? Colette asked herself. I'm not sure I am. (p. 38)

The significance of these statements becomes clear in a later chapter when Colette recalls being asked in school to 'empathise with the sufferings of cotton mill operatives, plantation slaves and the Scots foot soldiers at Flodden; it left her cold' (p. 52). In this light her trampling of Morris is symbolic of an unwitting flattening of the ghosts that actively embody history in this narrative. Alison struggles to contain the ghosts of deceased members of the royal family as the 'Evening of Psychic Arts' progresses: '[r]uthless, she gave the whole tribe the brush-off: Margaret Rose, Princess Di, Prince Albert, and a faint old cove who might be some sort of Plantagenet' (p. 34). This unregulated circulation of history is recognisable from Alison's physically damaging encounter with the ghost of the Irish paramilitary. Her clairvoyant colleagues are similarly depicted as being under constant assault from the historical past:

'Al? Are you back with us, love? Is she pestering you? The princess?  
'No,' Al said. 'It's paramilitaries.'  
[. . .]  
'I get Cossacks,' Mandy said. 'Apologising for, you know. What they used to do. Cleaving. Slashing. Scourging peasants to death. Terrible.' (p. 182)

In this exchange Alison and her counterparts describe the process of 'tak[ing] on memories of events not naturally their own.'<sup>31</sup> Yet whereas for the community of psychics this memorial appropriation is a result of their profession, Landsberg describes it as being facilitated by what she terms 'the technologies of memory', that is film, photography and television, and, to a lesser extent, radio. This parallel is further drawn out in Alison's depiction as a keen consumer of mediatised images. However, her supernatural insight into historical events is carefully positioned as intersecting with the experience of the casual consumer of media images, introducing

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<sup>31</sup> Landsberg, p. 18.



a level of instability into the media image by questioning its accuracy: ‘It was interesting for Al that you got so many history programmes on TV these days. Many a night she’d sat on the sofa, hugging her plump calves, pointing out people she knew. “Is that really Mrs Pankhurst?” she’d say. “I’ve never seen her in that hat”’ (p. 34). Certainly Alison’s ability to pick out discrepancies between mediated versions of the dead and her own ‘lived’ contact with them after death is in contrast to the typical viewer’s uncritical assimilation of those images. However, her acquisition of somatic and affective memories is still ‘prosthetic’ in the same way that Landsberg suggests such memories acquired by viewers through ‘mass cultural technologies of simulation’<sup>32</sup> are prosthetic. This equivalence confirms *Beyond Black* as representing certain screens as capable of producing their own phantasms, phantom memories which, to paraphrase Michel de Certeau, produce places that do not belong to them.<sup>33</sup>

Following Alison’s conversation with her colleagues regarding the intrusive, proximate nature of the historical past for the medium, she and Colette retire to watch the televised highlights of Princess Diana’s funeral in a sardonic textual gesture which directs the reader to one of the most remarkable instances of the prostheticisation of memory and affect of recent times. Diana’s death and the outpouring of public grief that followed it, along with the blanket media coverage of the event, are explicitly alluded to in the novel. This grief, in and of itself, possessed for many critics a profoundly prosthetic quality, as individuals who had no actual connection to the dead princess displayed ‘a collective sense of loss for something the collective never possessed.’<sup>34</sup> Crucially the scenes of mass mourning formed a ‘mediatized epic production’<sup>35</sup> with ‘gigantic television screens erected in Hyde Park and various sites around central London to ensure a fully mediatized spectacle.’<sup>36</sup> Reference is made in the novel to the television coverage of the funeral, through repeated allusions to the ‘highlights’ of the coverage but also through a telling statement on the intersection between mourning and mediation that Diana’s death provokes. On the morning of the funeral Colette and Alison drive to a Psychic Fayre:

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<sup>32</sup> Landsberg, p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Michel de Certeau in Landsberg, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey Richards, Scott Wilson and Linda Woodhead, ‘Introduction’, in *Diana: The Making of a Media Saint* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1999), pp. 1-19 (p. 2).

<sup>35</sup> Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg, ‘Ghost Writing’, in *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture and the Performance of Grief*, ed. by Adrian Kear and Lynn Steinberg (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-14 (p. 3).

<sup>36</sup> Kear and Steinberg, p. 2.

As they turned off the M1 onto the A52, the bells pealed out to mark the end of the National Silence. Curtains were drawn in the Nottingham suburbs. 'That's nice,' Alison said, 'It's respectful, it's old-fashioned.'

'Don't be stupid,' Colette said, 'It's to keep the sun out so that they can see the TV.' (p. 167)

Thus a traditional gesture of respect for the dead instead functions to facilitate the consumption of mediatised images of the dead, with the indirect reference to those images in this passage causing the 'endlessly recycled photographic effigies of [Diana's] famous face', which 'all enshrined Diana in a ritual economy of post-modern mediatization',<sup>37</sup> to haunt the novel. Unsurprisingly, Diana does not only haunt *Beyond Black* through references to the media spectacle which was made of her death. The two occasions on which her ghost manifests serve to nuance the novel's assertion of the spectralising potential of tele-technologies. In the novel's representation of Diana, both in life and in death, is found an articulation of the power of the 'technologies of memory' defined by Landsberg not only to depict images of the historical dead, electronically re-animating them for the living, but to render the living themselves spectral.

As discussed at the outset of the chapter, while the highlights of her own funeral are broadcast next door, the newly deceased Diana appears to Alison in the hallway of her home:

She was wearing her wedding dress, and it hung on her now; she was gaunt, and it looked crumpled and worn, as if dragged through the halls of the hereafter, where the housekeeping, understandably, is never of the best. She had pinned some of her press cuttings to her skirts; they lifted, in some other-worldly breeze, and flapped. (p. 213)

This description of Diana's post-mortem incarnation emphasises her thinness, her 'gaunt' appearance invoking images of the skeletal, of bones beneath skin which, alongside the image of Diana's eyes 'roll[ing] beneath her blue lids' (p. 214), generates an image of translucency. Thus far it would appear that Diana's ghost conforms to a recognisably 'ghostly' aesthetic. However, if read alongside Alison's assertion that, airside, the dead are as they were in life,<sup>38</sup> the appearance of Diana's

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<sup>37</sup> Kear and Steinberg, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> The way in which Alison frames this assertion varies in the novel. During her platform work the dead are described as resembling their living selves but 'healthy and in their prime' (p. 34). Privately Alison acknowledges the darker reality of this continuity between life and death stating that the dead 'don't become decent people because they're dead. [. . .]. If you get people who are bad in life - [. . .],

ghost indicates a pre-mortem spectralisation alongside its status as a materialisation of a dead subject. Furthermore, Diana's costume suggests that this spectralisation results from prolonged exposure to, and representation through, media technologies.

Diana's now tatty and ill-fitting wedding dress, seen by thousands during the televised coverage of her marriage to Prince Charles,<sup>39</sup> is paralleled symbolically in the fluttering press clippings in which Diana has partially clothed herself:

She picked up her skirts, and puzzled over a fan of press cuttings, whipping them aside in her search for the name she wanted. 'So many words,' she moaned, then giggled. The hem of her wedding gown slipped from her fingers. 'No use, lost it.' (p. 214)

In this passage Diana lifts up her skirts in an act of exposure that is congruent with the exposing effect of the broadcast media on the princess in life. The fragments of media coverage themselves are attached precariously to the princess's person, only pinned to her wedding dress they flap and lift 'in some other-worldly breeze' (p. 213). On one level this image of the fluttering newspaper clippings conveys the instability of the relationship between the mediated image and the living referent, an instability which is partly responsible for the spectral quality of media images, as observed in Alison's doubts about the authenticity of the televised Mrs Pankhurst. However, as the passage progresses it becomes clear that the ghost Alison encounters is not merely clothed in media outputs but constructed of them in such a way as to communicate the spectralising potential of media technologies as a whole.

The statements Mantel places in the princess's mouth knowingly chime with Diana's portrayal in the mainstream media. Her outburst of '[y]ou oiky little greasepot, you're just being hideous. Oh fuckerama' (p. 214) blends caricatured aristocratic idiom with profanity, coupling Diana's upper class background to the derision by the

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cruel people, dangerous people – why do you think they are going to be any better after they're dead?' (pp. 193-4).

<sup>39</sup> Diana's wedding dress as a symbol of pre-mortem spectrality brought about through mediatization is an image Mantel returns to in her 'Royal Bodies' essay for the *London Review of Books* in which she talks at length about the life, death and mediatization of Diana. Strikingly Mantel describes Diana Spencer's emergence from the royal coach on the morning of her televised wedding to Prince Charles as follows: 'The extraordinary dress came first, like a flow of liquid, like ectoplasm emerging from the orifices of a medium' (Hilary Mantel, 'Royal Bodies', *London Review of Books*, 35 (2013) 3-7). The description is doubly resonant with reference to the bodily expulsion of a spectre or a ghost also found in *Beyond Black* when Alison recalls the fake psychics of the Victorian age, stating of them that '[i]n those days the dead manifested in the form of muslin, stained and smelly from the psychic's body cavities. The dead were packed within you, so you coughed or vomited them, or drew them out of your generative organs' (p. 80).

press of ‘Diana as a trash icon for our times.’<sup>40</sup> This idea of Diana as contemporary ‘icon’ is cleverly woven into the passages that describe the aftermath of her death, playing on the idea of the icon as both a religious and technological notion.<sup>41</sup> Here Diana’s ‘screen goddess’<sup>42</sup>/‘media saint’ status, which rendered her a quasi-religious icon, is put in dialogue with her flattened, symbolic representation on television and computer screens. Earlier in the novel, as Alison reports Diana’s death (in a way which, as will be made clear, further testifies to electronic media as accommodating a certain class of spectre), Colette is seen turning on her computer in order to ‘prepare a series of invoices that might take advantage of the event’ (p. 146) in a manoeuvre which parallels the actions of the press toward Diana, both in life and death, selling prosthetic affective connections which found their ultimate expression in the mass-mediatized mass-mourning for the princess. While she is engaged in her attempts to monetise Alison’s relationship with the dead, Colette notices that ‘[t]he computer was humming and whirring, making from time to time its little sighs, as if deep within its operating system the Princess was gurgling out her story’ (p. 147). As such, Diana is positioned as a ghost in the media machine, a compound on-screen icon. This fictional representation communicates the notion that ‘[e]ach time [Diana] was shot and captured in the imprint of the image there appeared to be a recognition that this was a repetition of events that were yet to come. Every image seemed to configure and confirm Diana as always already dead, catching her imprisoned in the torturous temporality between two deaths – symbolic and real.’<sup>43</sup>

That mediumship in this novel follows a trajectory paralleled by communications technology has been established, as has the novel’s exploration of the role of tele-technologies in producing a kind of memorial ghosting in which memory is not tied to first person presence at an event but disseminates prosthetically in an unregulated fashion. Just as technology is understood in *Beyond Black* to be shaping the practice of mediumship, philosopher Bernard Stiegler argues that technology or, more

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<sup>40</sup> Fountain in Thomas, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> "icon, n.". OED Online. December 2013. Oxford University Press. 15 January 2014 <<http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/90879?redirectedFrom=icon>>.

<sup>42</sup> Valery Hey, ‘New Labour, New Britain and the “Dianaization” of Politics’, in *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture and the Performance of Grief*, ed. by Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg (London, Routledge, 1999), pp. 60-107 (p. 71).

<sup>43</sup> Adrian Kear, ‘Diana between two Deaths: spectral ethics and the time of mourning’, in *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture and the Performance of Grief*, ed. by Adrian Kear and Lynn Steinberg (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 169-86 (171).

broadly speaking, technics, are constitutive of the human experience generally, radically shaping human behaviour. Stiegler's theory of technics will be put to work at length in Chapter 5 to discuss Mantel's representation of English Reformation print culture. However, presently it suffices to focus on Stiegler's understanding of media technology's effect upon contemporary temporality.

Stiegler conceptualises media technologies, particularly real-time media technologies, as contributing to the dislocated nature of contemporary memory by making it the object of 'a war of speed: from the computer to the programme industries in general, via the cognitive sciences, the technics of virtual reality and telepresence [. . .] the media event to the event of technicized life [. . .] new conditions of event-ization have been put in place.'<sup>44</sup> According to Stiegler, this 'war of speed' has the effect of erasing 'the separation between [one's] lived past and [one's] inherited past',<sup>45</sup> facilitating the kinds of prostheticisations of memory which Landsberg defines. The treatment of the moment of Diana's death in the novel serves to interweave both of these notions. It provides a scene in which the merger between medium and media technology is presented as irrevocably linked with the media's acute prostheticisation of memorial material while simultaneously dramatising the 'war of speed' and 'new conditions of 'event-ization' Stiegler describes, in which the here-and-now is suppressed and Diana's death is 'de-rooted from any spatial specificity.'<sup>46</sup>

The event of Diana's death, as distinct from her spectral reappearance, is related through Alison. What is remarkable about this passage are the decisions Mantel makes regarding the timeline of these events. Alison wakes Colette to tell her the news:

'It's Diana,' Al said. 'Dead.'  
[. . .]  
Al gave a snort of jeering laughter. 'Or as we say, passed.'  
'Suicide?'  
'Or accident. She won't tell me. Teasing to the last,' Al said. 'Though probably not quite the last. From our point of view.' (p. 145)

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<sup>44</sup> Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 276.

<sup>45</sup> Stiegler, *Technics*, p. 268.

<sup>46</sup> Kristina Lebedeva, 'Review Article: Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation* (Stanford University Press, 2008)', *Parrhesia*, 7 (2009), 81-5 (p. 83).

The incident is not only reported as if it has already happened but as if the source for the news is the posthumous Diana herself. However, it quickly becomes apparent that this is a report of an event that is yet to occur as Alison continues: 'I am sure it will be clearer [. . .] when it actually happens' (p. 145). Alison's statement here is reminiscent of the broadcasting of CCTV footage of Diana leaving the Ritz Hotel on the night of her death with both medium and media documenting the moments before the event occurs. Interestingly, the ability of the dead to outstrip the communication networks of the living was a frequently recorded phenomenon when spiritualism was at its peak. This incident echoes the claim made by Reverend Ashahel H. Jervis in 1849 that 'spirits had notified him of the death of a friend's son just hours before the telegram had reached him.'<sup>47</sup> When Colette protests that they should warn somebody, and try to avert the apparently impending accident, Alison does not respond, instead beginning to narrate the events taking place in Paris as if they are happening in real time:

'She's getting in the car. She's putting on her seat belt – no, no she isn't. They're larking about. Not a care in the world. Why are they going that way? Dear, dear, they're all over the road!'

Alison tumbled to the sofa, moaning and holding her chest.

'No use waiting around,' she said, breaking off, and speaking in a surprisingly normal voice. 'We won't hear from her again for a while.' (p. 145)

This passage recalls the relentless inescapability ascribed by Stiegler to the television media of which he states 'one has the feeling that it is impossible to stop',<sup>48</sup> both in the sense that the content delivered by the media possesses a feeling of inevitability, and in the sense that the medium itself has an illusive self-perpetuating quality; switching off the television set does not terminate the broadcast, merely one screening of it. Alison's inability, or refusal, to address Colette's suggestion that they '[w]arn somebody! Call the police!' (p. 145), reinforces this relentlessness, and conveys her implicit understanding that the night's events are indeed impossible to stop.

What is also implied when Alison states that the princess's death has not 'happened' yet is that the event has not been reported on the broadcast media, the channel

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<sup>47</sup> Enns, p. 60.

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 88.

through which major world events are brought into being in the contemporary milieu for those people who were not directly involved. Later in the passage Alison's account of the event is situated alongside the broadcast media's account, directly inviting comparison:

[f]rom Al the news arrived piecemeal, but it was more exciting that way. In time the radio, placed beside her, brought the confirming details. The event, in the real world, had actually taken place; [Colette] stopped typing and sat listening. *Lights, a tunnel, impact, lights, a tunnel, black, and then something beyond it: a hiatus, and one final, blinding light.* (p. 146)

This side by side comparison of medium and media reveals a mirroring in which Alison's clairvoyance allows her access to events which have not yet occurred, while the account of the same event provided by the broadcast media, though delayed temporally, brings the event into being in a crucial way. In the age of ubiquitous tele-technological media, it is implied, the 'presence' of a historical event only becomes fully realised in the event of its publication via such media, the real-world occurrence no longer being sufficient.

In addition to the parallels drawn between Alison's reports of the princess's death and those provided by the radio, a disorienting temporal collapse is produced in the 'death-night' passage in which past, present and future events appear to be taking place at once. Alison provides Colette with updates of an event that is occurring and yet to occur simultaneously: 'We're now waiting for the emergency services. We're slightly beyond the paracetamol stage' (p. 146). The princess is apparently both alive, dying and dead, a Mantelian ghost par excellence through her occupation of multiple states which invoke or preclude presence. However, Alison's statement is indicative of another, related, collapse taking place on a subjective level between herself and Diana, a collapse which sees the spiritualist medium ghost the princess in a process comparable to, but distinct from, the broadcast media's spectralisation of the princess in life. As the 'death-night' sequence wears on Alison begins to equate herself linguistically with the princess, the pronoun 'we', carrying with it connotations of the royal 'we' and setting up a secondary ambiguity regarding whether Alison is speaking as Diana or just experiencing what Diana is experiencing simultaneously. She also begins to exhibit physical symptoms which become progressively worse as the situation unfolds: '[Colette] couldn't stop Al shivering.

Over the next hour Alison's face drained of colour. Her eyes seemed to shrink back in her skull' (p. 147). As the princess apparently gets closer to death Alison appears to display the attributes of a corpse – pallor, shrunken eyes and extremely low body temperature – until eventually she begins to smell of decay. Not until the close of the passage is it suggested that she has not taken on the appearance of any corpse but the corpse of the princess herself. Alison is described emerging from the bathroom 'scored all over with faint pink lines [. . .] the cuts on her thighs flared darkest, as if she had been whipped with wire' (p. 149). The description immediately evokes media accounts of Diana's of self-harm though at this stage in the narrative it is ambiguous as to whether Alison has experienced Diana's own memories in the same bodily, sensuous fashion that she experienced the princess's death or whether the scars were pre-existing, physical inscriptions of an event in Alison's own past.

The physical resemblance Alison comes to bear to Diana in death is not merely a further example of her acquisition of the embodied memories of the dead.<sup>49</sup> Rather, Alison is represented not only as mirroring the mechanism of communications technology but providing an analogue for those subject to that technology, a narrative device which is achieved through a careful twinning of Alison and Princess Diana. The scars on the backs of Alison's legs are first alluded to in the 'death-night' passage analysed above. Later in the same chapter, while Alison is packing to attend the psychic fayre that coincides with the princess's funeral, Colette asks 'Did you do that? [. . .] Like Di, did you cut yourself?' (p. 158). Diana's reported self-harm is thus projected onto Alison's own scars, providing an oblique insight into her screened-off past but also reinforcing the notion that the two women can be equated with one another. This is not the only moment at which parallels are drawn between Alison and Diana's personal lives as well as their public function. Diana's well-documented eating disorders<sup>50</sup> are paralleled in Alison's own obesity and struggle with her weight. The physical structures of both women's bodies appear to oppose one another diametrically, yet their purpose is concurrent on a symbolic level. Valerie Hey argues that Diana's 'quintessential emptiness enabled her image to host

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<sup>49</sup> The imposition of the dead of their sensuous experiences upon Alison's own body is expressed at length early on in the novel: 'By the end of the evening she'll be sick to her stomach from other people's chemotherapy, feverish and short of breath; or twitching and cold, full of their torsions and strains. She'll have a neck spasm or a foot she can barely put on the floor' (p. 29).

<sup>50</sup> Alwyn W. Turner, *A Classless Society: Britain in the 1990s* (London: Aurum, 2013), p. 10.



a multiplicity of contradictory demands.’<sup>51</sup> While Diana’s hollow quality in the cultural imaginary denotes her ability to receive these projections, Alison’s bulk signifies both the host of dead others she is described as physically containing (‘I have to house so many people. My flesh is so capacious. I am a settlement, a place of safety, a bombproof shelter’ (p. 347)) and the physical structure she attempts to put in place to shield herself from them, her padded flesh ‘keep[ing] her from the pinching of the dead, their peevish nipping and needle teeth’ (p. 11). This doubling is continued linguistically. Alison observes that in the weeks following her death ‘Diana is the queen of hearts; every time the card turns up in a spread, [. . .], she will signify the princess’ (p. 191) and in doing so the media’s use of the term is mapped onto the symbology of the tarot, while Alison’s full name, ‘Alison Hart’, invokes not only this public nickname but Diana’s own namesake, Diana the Huntress and the deer she pursues. However, the final and most suggestive element of Mantel’s doubling of media saint and spirit medium is their interaction with the ‘socially dead’.

### **‘Rejects, or Anomalies’: Social Death and Thingly Life**

‘People assume there are hard and fast distinctions between the living and the dead but within the living there is another very important distinction: are you recognised as human by fellow humans.’ – Hilary Mantel, ‘Interview’

Mantel’s suggestion above, that to fail to be designated as human by other humans is to be killed off in some crucial way, subjected to a social death that radically compromises your presence, has already been recognised as a key element in the formation of the Mantelian ghost. While in Chapters 2 and 3, my analysis focussed on the representation of those socially ghosted individuals in isolation, in the case of *Beyond Black* an opportunity arises to read Alison as a character whose profession charges her with acknowledging not only the biologically dead but those assigned, pre-mortem, to the category of the socially dead. Richard Johnson observes that Diana often ‘dealt in “social death” – in recognizing the unrecognizable, touching the untouchable.’<sup>52</sup> This observation is borne out by Diana’s work with homelessness charities, the National AIDS trust and the Leprosy Foundation,

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<sup>51</sup> Hey, p. 172.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Johnson, ‘Exemplary Differences: Mourning (and Not Mourning) a Princess, in *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture and the Performance of Grief* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 15-51 (p. 30).

organisations whose clients, particularly in the 1980s, were frequently, legally or symbolically, excluded from mainstream society. While Alison's primary interactions are with those who are biologically dead, she too characterises her work as an interaction with the rejected or 'excess' material constituted by the dead,<sup>53</sup> an interaction that the majority of the population are unwilling to undertake:

'I'm like –'

'A sewage worker?' Colette suggested?

'Yes! Because the clients won't do their own dirty work. They want it contracted out. They write me a cheque for thirty quid and expect me to clean their drains.' (p. 183)

As Russ Castronovo points out, 'as corporeal fact and political metaphor, death produces bodies' which exist 'at a remove from socio-political life.'<sup>54</sup> Mantel demonstrates a marked awareness of the potentially fatal consequences of marginalisation and, as has become apparent, not all of the dead in Mantel's novels are physically deceased. For Mantel as for Castronovo, one does not have to be deceased to be a spectre.<sup>55</sup> Indeed the opening chapter of the novel focuses sharply on a landscape populated by those spectralised by social bankruptcy. It describes a car journey made by Alison and Colette through a post-industrial landscape on the outskirts of London, a wasteland where the only landmarks are defective technology: '[t]his is marginal land: fields of strung wire, of treadless tyres, fridges dead on their backs' (p. 1). Not only marginal land but the land *of* the marginal, this waste ground is populated with the displaced, the rejected and the dead in all their manifestations, placing refugees and asylum seekers ('Afghans, Turks and Kurds') alongside abandoned animals ('starving ponies, [. . .] cats tipped from speeding cars, and the Heathrow sheep, their fleece clotted with the stench of aviation fuel') and criminals ('Perjured ministers and burnt-out paedophiles'). In its focus on the marginal, the passage seeks to reveal those presences who have fallen, or been located, 'beyond the veil' constructed by mainstream social narratives: 'outcasts and escapees [. . .]

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<sup>53</sup> Peeren recognises this facet of Alison's mediumship when she suggests 'that the medium, besides shifting the border between the visible and the invisible, may also question this very opposition and challenge the association Rancière maintains between, on the one hand, the sensible and the visible, and on the other, the non-sensible (or nonsensical) and the invisible.' Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor*, p. 111.

<sup>54</sup> Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth Century United States* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), p. xiii.

<sup>55</sup> As observed with reference to Mantel's depiction of the psychiatric patients released from Fulmers Moor in *Vacant Possession* and the treatment of women within the Saudi Arabian context of *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*.

rejects, or anomalies.’ (p. 1). Strikingly, even the objects that populate this landscape are rendered not broken but ‘dead’, a description that admits the inanimate into the binary of life and death conventionally reserved for animate beings. In doing so the passage orchestrates a slippage between discrete ontological categories and through its admission of inert objects into the realm of the animate, implies conversely that persons and animals may be capable of joining objects in a state of ‘thingliness’ facilitated by their combined defects and obsolescence. Building on Heidegger’s distinction between an object and a thing, wherein an object becomes a thing when it can no longer perform its designated function, or is put to a use outside of its designated function, Bill Brown comments that ‘[w]e begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us.’<sup>56</sup> Here Mantel is using ‘things and thingness [. . .] to think about the self’,<sup>57</sup> rendering the human and animal subjects in the scene ‘things’ by virtue of their suggested lack of functionality within society; they have stopped, or been stopped, ‘working’ in a significant fashion. In this passage the elision of the boundary between persons and things opens up the possibility of such ‘thingly’ existence being more broadly imposed upon living subjects. As Mantel puts it ‘[a]ll sorts of people at different times and places are elected out of the human condition and made things.’<sup>58</sup> By initially describing a landscape so fractured that people, animals and objects occupy the same linguistic and social spaces, the novel articulates a difficulty with ‘distinguishing the actually dead from social corpses’<sup>59</sup> as one of its primary concerns.

By depicting this scene and lingering upon its outcast inhabitants the screen that obscures the social dead is drawn aside, albeit temporarily. Just as the ghost of Princess Diana constituted a compound phantom, a result of corporeal death and the spectralising effects of mediatisation, the ‘fiends’ that plague Alison, ghosts of individuals from her traumatic childhood, and many of the other ghosts that populate the narrative, were marginal figures in life, subject to ‘social death’: prostitutes, immigrants, drifters and criminals. This focus on the marginalised must be read in the context of the systematic privileging of borderline phenomena in this novel,

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<sup>56</sup> Bill Brown, ‘Thing Theory’, *Critical Inquiry*, 28 (2001), 1-22 (p. 4).

<sup>57</sup> Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 292.

<sup>59</sup> Castronovo, p. xii.

phenomena exemplified by the multiplicity of screens and the host of ghosts and spectres encountered thus far.

Until now pre-mortem spectralisation, whether affected through media technologies or social ghosting, has been read as symbolically mirroring biological death. However, *Beyond Black*'s representation of both forms of death, and the hauntings those subject to them undertake, exceeds mere resemblance and articulates how social death can so easily shade into its biological counterpart. Towards the end of *Beyond Black*, Alison discovers a young homeless man, Mart, living in her shed. Mart is represented as phantasmal from the outset; Colette thinks she dreams his presence in their garden and Alison initially assumes he is a ghost, stating 'I thought you were a spectral form' (p. 293). It is telling that Alison's ability to acknowledge and listen to the corporeal dead is made analogous with the ability to offer the same act of witnessing to the socially dead. Slowly Mart describes to Alison a life involving child abuse, mental illness, unemployment, homelessness and police brutality. From infancy to adulthood Mart exists on the outskirts of society, falling through the cracks at every turn: 'I came through the net' he says, 'the list I was on, I think they lost it' (p. 299). Alison's attempts to help Mart, to negate the deathly impact of the existence society has allotted him, are in vain as she eventually finds he has hanged himself in her shed. When interviewed, Mantel stated that Mart is an 'objective of social policy', 'nothing just happens to [him], he is always in a policy, he is someone's statistic and he is subject to the ultimate nightmare, he's a marginal and spectral person who is actually murdered by ghosts, they come for him and make him frankly one of their company.'<sup>60</sup> His suicide, which constitutes his transformation from necro-citizen into revenant, strikingly parallels the kind of compound spectrality possessed by Diana Spencer in that it is only through his actual death that his pre-mortem spectrality can be fully comprehended. As Mantel's comments confirm, Mart's suicide is assisted by, or possibly at the behest of, Morris and the rest of the spectral 'fiends' from Alison's childhood who protest that '[they] wanted a laugh, that's all' and 'it's not as if [Mart] was doing much good this side' (p. 411). This moment encapsulates the proliferation of ghosts which has been unfolding throughout the narrative, with physical death exposed as just one spectralising force among many and where social exclusion can prove literally fatal.

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<sup>60</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 292.

Indeed, Mart is not the only social spectre to die at the hands of the persecutory fiends from Alison's past, as the persistent and problematic presence in the narrative of a prostitute called Gloria attests. My analysis of Mantel's consideration of mediatization versus mediumship examined the nuanced doubling of Alison with Diana Spencer. However, a crucial element of this doubling remains to be articulated, that is, the trope of the female body as receptacle for the dead and, alternately, death as the only possible container for a certain kind of woman. Certainly these notions were circulating implicitly in the immediate aftermath of Diana's death. In the months leading up to it the press had attacked the princess, dubbing her 'The Queen of England Manqué' and 'a fast woman'.<sup>61</sup> There was a sense in which her death was seen as arresting the 'decay' of the public perception of Diana, enabling the media to transform her from 'a false goddess with loose morals'<sup>62</sup> into a kind of post-modern saint.<sup>63</sup> Mantel voices these moral anxieties through Colette who, upon hearing of the princess's death thinks 'what does she expect? A girl like Diana? There was something so right about it, so *meant*. It had all turned out so beautifully badly' (pp. 146-7). A conversation between Alison and Colette that takes place on the day of Diana's funeral makes explicit the pernicious undercurrents of this media manoeuvre but it also has a sinister resonance within the world of the narrative:

'S'funny,' Colette said. 'It's only a fortnight ago – those pictures of her in the boat with Dodi, in her bikini. And we were all saying, what a slapper.'

[. . .]

'I mean, it's not as if it's exactly a surprise. You didn't expect it to last, did you? Not as if she was exactly stable. If she'd been in real life, she'd have been just the sort of slut who'd end up with her arms and legs in left luggage lockers and her head in a bin bag in Walthamstow.' (p. 161)

If Diana's dismemberment is undertaken symbolically by the press, the 'real life' woman Colette describes is also forcefully present in the narrative. The kind of mutilation Colette imagines is the fate of Gloria who, it is implied, is murdered and dismembered by Morris and his friends. Her appearances in the text are marked by a disorienting ambiguity; as Colette complains '[w]hen you're talking about Gloria [. . .] I can never tell if she is alive or dead' to which Alison replies 'Nor me' (pp.

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<sup>61</sup> Johnson, p. 26.

<sup>62</sup> Morgan, Christopher and David Smith, 'Coggan brands Diana 'a false goddess with loose morals', *Sunday Times*, 26 August 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Richards, Wilson and Woodhead, p. 6.

128-9). This ambiguity allows Mantel to obscure the precise moment at which Gloria's social death becomes corporeal, reinforcing the assertion that the mode of the ghostly and the mode of the spectral are not simply analogous but contiguous, sharing an unstable border. Like Mart, Gloria's presence is symptomatic of what Sara Knox terms Mantel's 'fleshing of the phantoms, living and dead, that people her fiction',<sup>64</sup> and if Alison's public acts of spirit mediumship establish one screen between the living and the physically dead, her private experiences draw back another, socially constructed, screen designed to obscure the 'unsightly' spectres who form a 'haunting reminder of the complex social relations in which we live.'<sup>65</sup>

Unlike Diana, whose spectral form is unmarred by the precise circumstances of her death, Gloria's anatomisation retains a residual presence in her post-mortem existence, as she phases between wholeness and fragmentation:

[Alison] caught a glimpse of a red-haired lady with false eyelashes, standing at the foot of the stairs. Gloria, she thought, at last; she said, 'Hi, are you all right?' but the woman didn't reply. Another day, as she was coming in at the front door, she had glanced down [ . . . ] and didn't she see the red-haired lady looking up at her, with her eyelashes half pulled off, and no body attached to her neck? (p. 119)

Gloria's head is just one of the phantom appendages that are strewn throughout *Beyond Black* and Alison describes how her spirit encounters with the dead began 'at the age of eight, nine, ten' with seeing 'disassembled people lying around, a leg here, an arm there' (p. 122). In the same passage she anxiously recalls being followed to school by a human eye (p. 123). This reading has thus far focused on the ghosts presented as recognisable incarnations of previously living subjects, how these subjects came to be spectralised in the first place and the mechanisms by which they are variously obscured, disguised and revealed. Thus these amputated remains, re-animated in Alison's recollection of their appearance, bring with them questions about their status and their relationship to the various screening processes operating within *Beyond Black*. If ghostly limbs and organs populate Alison's memories of her childhood, this fragmentation is mirrored in the sinister vacancies present within those memories, rendering Alison's past confusingly occluded. I move now to

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<sup>64</sup> Knox, p. 320.

<sup>65</sup> Gordon, p. 25.

examine those occlusions, results of another of the screening processes which attempt to contain or accommodate the dead within *Beyond Black*.

### **Flesh Wounds and Flash Backs: Scars as Spectral Inscription**

‘The modern man has an epidermis rather than a soul.’ – James Joyce<sup>66</sup>

Despite Alison’s clairvoyance and her frequently over proximate connection to the personal histories of strangers and the historical past more generally, she is herself divorced from significant elements of her own personal history. Though not as stark as Leanne’s inability to remember the name of her own grandmother, Alison’s memory of her childhood is compromised by haunting lacunae whose impenetrability is as traumatic as the presence of Morris and his ghostly companions. In this section, I compare the scars whose origins mystify Alison with the messages of the dead which she is charged with ‘cleaning’ and interpreting for her customers and explore how Alison’s acts of protective screening undertaken within the séance situation are reproduced in the intrapsychic screening which occludes her traumatic past. Moreover, taking Joyce’s substitution of internal human essence for external integument as a jumping off point, I demonstrate how this intrapsychic screening process is structured by and articulated through the dual quality of the skin, not only in terms of its protective yet permeable nature but also in terms of the skin’s ability to register both internal and external realities.

Colette saw the backs of her thighs. ‘Christ,’ she said. ‘Did you do that?’  
‘Me?’  
‘Like Di? Did you cut yourself?’

Alison turned back to her packing. She was perplexed. It had never occurred to her that she might have inflicted the damage herself. Perhaps I did, she thought, and I’ve just forgotten; there is so much I’ve forgotten, so much that has slipped away from me. It was a long time since she’d given much thought to the scars. They flared, in a hot bath, and the skin around them itched in hot weather. She avoided seeing them, which was not difficult if she avoided mirrors. But now, she thought, Colette will always be noticing them. I had better have a story because she will want answers. (p. 158)

The above exchange between Colette and Alison illustrates neatly Steven Connor’s statement that the skin is ‘normally invisible except as the bearer of messages written

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<sup>66</sup> James Joyce, ‘The Universal Influence of the Literary Renaissance’, in *James Joyce in Padua*, ed. and trans. by Louis Berron (London: Random House, 1977), p. 21.

upon or displayed through it.’<sup>67</sup> Made painfully visible through its status as surface for spectral inscription, Alison’s skin attests to the way in which the skin as surface is overlooked and taken for granted until it is compromised by the traumatic or scarifying receipt of messages. Colette’s blunt ‘noticing’ of Alison’s scarred flesh articulates the insistence of the marks (‘now [. . .], Colette will always be noticing them’) and prompts in Alison a need to provide them with a narrative, even as she occupies the same situation as her baffled séance audiences, severed from her past not by a contemporary rupture with the historical but by unknowable trauma.

As has been discussed, Alison’s scars first come to light in the text in the aftermath of the death of Princess Diana: ‘[w]hen she came out of the bathroom she was scored all over with faint pink lines, but the cuts on her thighs flared darkest, as if she had been whipped with wire’ (p. 149). The ‘faint pink lines’ that cover Alison’s body, alluding to the self-harm practiced by Diana, overlay older scars, which ‘flare darkest’ in a graphic visual representation of what Freud termed *nachträglichkeit* or as Jean Laplanche has translated the term *après coupe* or ‘afterwardsness.’ This term refers to a specific temporal model of trauma in which ‘what has been described or deposited as excessive or unassimilable in a first scene is either traumatically repeated, or repressed and symptomatically symbolized, or revived and translated into the terms of a new scene.’<sup>68</sup> The hot bath, in which Alison attempts to scrub away the smell of decay provoked by the princess’s death, makes of Alison’s body a palimpsest upon which her own trauma is overlaid with the traumas of others which resonate with Alison’s own. Rather than resembling a symbolic symptom, however, Alison’s scarred flesh forms a ‘de-signified signifier’,<sup>69</sup> which has been ‘stripped of intelligible meaning but [is] nonetheless potent.’<sup>70</sup> As a mode of decayed or residual message, her scars operate to ‘signify [that] something real – something exceeding

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<sup>67</sup> Connor, p. 32.

<sup>68</sup> Fletcher, ‘The Scenography of Trauma: A ‘Copernican’ Reading of Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*’, *Textual Practice* 21(2007), 17-41 (p. 18).

<sup>69</sup> Laplanche, ‘A Short Treatise on the Unconscious’, in *Essays on Otherness*, trans. by Luke Thurston, ed. by John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 84-116 (p. 92).

<sup>70</sup> Mike Davies. ‘Gothic’s Enigmatic Signifier: The Case of J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*’, in *Seductions and Enigmas: Laplanche, Theory, Culture*, ed. by John Fletcher and Nicholas Ray (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2014), pp. 159-175 (p. 172).



mere signification – has taken place<sup>71</sup> not merely on a corporeal but also on an intrapsychic level.

Alison's scars symbolise a past trauma, an inscribed testimony that she lacks the tools to translate. She understands that her scars communicate but does not initially have access to the language that would allow her to comprehend their meaning, stating with reference to her attempts to articulate her experiences: 'I can't think how else to talk. I only have the usual words' (p. 200). For both Freud and Laplanche, the concept of *nachträglichkeit* describes a structure of trauma which consists of two moments; the first, in which an overly stimulating message is 'implanted without being understood' and the second, later moment when it is 'reactivated from within.'<sup>72</sup> This kind of 'reactivation' is embedded textually in the novel through the repetition of oblique or enigmatic images and phrases at a remove from their original context until the point at which they become intelligible. The most obvious manifestation of this motif can be found with reference to Alison's scars and in which Morris's enigmatic assertion is echoed:

She fingered her damaged flesh; the skin felt dead and distant. She remembered Morris saying, we showed you what a blade could do! For the first time she thought, oh, I see now, that was what they taught me; that was the lesson I had. (p. 159)

This moment of realisation, in which Alison is able to translate the semiotic messages of her scars into a coherent narrative of a childhood trauma, possesses a doubleness that characterises the approach to symbolism in this text. If, in her platform work, Alison's skin displays the messages of her ghostly contacts, it also serves to record haunting messages issuing from her own past. Perhaps the most famous example both of the function of the ghost as a message bearer, and the ghost's requirement of a surface, is the return of the ghost of Hamlet's father. While the meaning of the ghostly message he conveys is subject to ongoing critical debate, the fact of there being a message is irrefutable.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Hamlet's immediate response to receiving the ghostly message is to demand a surface upon which it can

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<sup>71</sup> Connor, p. 41.

<sup>72</sup> Laplanche, 'Three Meanings of the Word "Unconscious" in the Framework of the General Theory of Seduction', in *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000-2006*, ed. John Fletcher, trans. John Fletcher, Jonathan House, Nick Ray (New York: International Psychoanalytic Books, 2011), pp. 203-222 (p. 208).

<sup>73</sup> Anzieu, p. 11.

be recorded: 'My tables – Meet it is I set it down.'<sup>74</sup> While, in the case of Hamlet, the message he is required to transcribe is the message of another, in Alison's case, it is her own past which is incomprehensibly 'set down' upon her skin. For Alison, it is only through a concurrent understanding of the message carrying quality of her skin and the quality of the messages born by the literal spectres of her past that she can begin to penetrate the intra-psychic scar tissue that has formed an obscuring screen across her childhood.

To fully understand the significance of the image of the skin within *Beyond Black* it is necessary to acknowledge the intrapsychic significance that image has been granted, particularly within psychoanalytic thought. Didier Anzieu, defines the titular concept of his book, *The Skin Ego*, as being a psychical envelope, the origin for which is the biological skin of the infant which comes to be represented phantasmally in the psyche as a projection of, or metaphor for, the body's surface.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Anzieu argues that 'the skin ego is the original palimpsest, the erased, scratched and written-over outlines of an "original", pre-verbal writing made up of traces upon the skin.'<sup>76</sup> The skin ego surrounds the psychical apparatus and functions in an analogous fashion to the physical skin, providing protection, registering excitation and more broadly facilitating a differentiation between inside and outside. However, in *Beyond Black* the boundaries between inside and outside, whether of a mind, a body, an identity, even of life itself, are continually transgressed and confused. As such the relationship between Alison's physical skin and her psyche is compressed, and both its internal and external surfaces are subject to 'scarifying acts of signification.'<sup>77</sup> These twinned surfaces both come to possess the originary palimpsestic function Anzieu describes, and thus map the 'early encroachments, cumulative traumatism and prosthetic idealisations that gave rise to them.'<sup>78</sup>

If we consider Anzieu's assertion that 'the extent of the damage done to the skin is proportionate to the depth of psychical harm done'<sup>79</sup> the scar tissue on Alison's thighs comes to correspond directly with the inaccessible sites within her psyche. It

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<sup>74</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. by Robert S. Miola (London: W.W. Norton, 2011), p. 31, 1.5.107.

<sup>75</sup> Anzieu, p. 40.

<sup>76</sup> Anzieu, p.105.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Anzieu, p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> Anzieu, p. 34.

is the interpretation of both sets of cryptic traces which drives *Beyond Black*. The trajectory of the novel is revealed in the words of its title which contain, like the tarot cards that are drawn and drawn again throughout the narrative, a multiplicity of meanings simultaneously. Taken literally the title refers to the post-mortem space that Alison refers to as ‘airside’, announcing the novel’s focus on the dead and the space they take up while also wryly alluding to the quality of the novel’s humour. Yet the phrase ‘beyond black’ also implicates symbolically both a series of concealments and repressions, of ‘blacking’ and ‘blanking’ out, and the necessity of seeing these occlusions as open to challenge and capable of reversal. The space ‘beyond black’ towards which the narrative of the novel is inexorably drawn is formed at least in part by the compound blackness that Alison experiences as her own past: ‘[Alison] couldn’t see the past clearly; only an outline, a black bulk against black air’ (p. 317).

Initially only alluded to, Alison’s childhood is recalled in a halting and fragmentary fashion as a confused montage of sexual, physical and emotional abuse of which she is both victim and witness. She describes ‘walk[ing] in on her mum, rolling on the sofa with a squaddie’ (p. 115) and after witnessing this adult sexual behaviour Alison goes on to describe how ‘[a] few nights later she woke suddenly. It was very dark outside, as if they had been able to shut off the street lamp. A number of ill-formed, greasy faces were looking down on her. [. . .] She closed her eyes. She felt herself lifted up. Then there was nothing, nothing that she remembers’ (p. 116). This nothingness, both an absence of memory and a memory of absence, is key. Alison recalls, in detail, multiple instances of abuse but crucially is denied access to specific scenes. As the novel progresses it becomes apparent that her attempts to access her personal history are hampered by a series of embargos, persistent intrapsychic screening processes that take a number of forms. Formally, these are inscribed through Mantel’s use of the tape transcripts that Colette produces, with the intention of using them as a basis of a book about Alison’s work. Often when Alison approaches a particular childhood memory the recordings stop, indicated by a ‘click’ in the text. The gaps in the transcripts often remain blank, concealing what Alison wishes to omit from the recording or alternatively cannot record because she has no conscious access to it. This process of screening or censorship is not only indicated formally. Alison is also warned off speaking about certain material by a series of

literal and metaphorical guard dogs. As she tries to articulate her experiences of being a 'sensitive' she is drowned out:

ALISON: [. . .] Oh Colette, what's that? Can you hear it?

COLETTE: Just carry on.

ALISON: It's snarling. Somebody's let the dogs out? [. . .] I can't carry on over this racket. (p. 98)

When Alison tries to talk directly about her childhood this censorship becomes explicit and she asks Colette 'can we switch the tape off, please? Morris is threatening me. He doesn't like me talking about the early days. He doesn't want it recorded' (p. 124). Morris's statements are deeply enigmatic and repeatedly make inscrutable references to events in Alison's own past. For example, when Alison inquires about the identity of her father, Morris replies:

'Speak the name of MacArthur!' He mimicked her voice: '*I think he's my dad.* Suppose he is? Is that how you treat a dad? Is it? Got to hand it to her, she has some cheek, that girl.'

'How?' She said. 'How did I treat him?'

[. . .]

'I'll tell you something about that bugger' he said. (pp. 127-8)

Initially, it appears that Mantel is establishing Alison as ultimately being haunted by a void in her knowledge, with the spectral 'fiends' functioning to demarcate the limits of this void. Indeed, Morris refuses to reveal who Alison's father is, or her 'treatment' of him. However, he does affirm that Alison suffered some kind of retribution for this 'treatment': 'Still girl, you got paid out. You got a lesson eh? They taught you what a blade could do' (p. 128). Through this statement Mantel creates an incision in the text, an opening which begins to allow both reader and protagonist access to what lies beyond the spectrally supervised intrapsychic screen. The blade's cutting action, implied by Morris, is revealed to be the source of the most intimate inscriptions of the enigmatic events of Alison's childhood: the scars she bears on her thighs. These scars are not simply signifiers of physical injury. Rather they emerge as the unintegrated, unbound remainders of an original trauma which are reproduced intra-psychically, the skin itself standing as a surface upon which the haunting traces of Alison's past are made available for interpretation. This process of interpretation in turn allows Alison to compromise the spectrally supervised intrapsychic screen which obscures the reality of her experiences.

In the final chapter of *Beyond Black* Alison undertakes to remember her past, an undertaking which is framed as an act of self-protection: '[a]t some point on your road you have to turn and start walking back towards yourself. Or the past will pursue you and bite the nape of your neck, leave you bleeding in the ditch' (p. 418). Alison's regression to her childhood is specifically framed as an interaction between psychical and the physical, and elegantly encapsulates the ability of the skin as metaphor to speak to internal and external realities: 'With each step backwards she is pushing at something, light, tensile, clinging. It is a curtain of skin. With each step the body speaks its mind' (p. 419). The metaphor which conveys Alison's breaching of the screen erected between her conscious mind and certain scenes from her childhood relies on the corporeal reality of the skin, giving credence to Anzieu's theorization of the skin as basis for an intrapsychic equivalent. Alison's regression takes her back to the moment at which she received the injuries that originated her scars:

[. . .] back to the hut where she lies and howls. She peeps in, she sees herself, lying bleeding on to newspaper they've put down: it will be hygienic, Aitkenside says, because we can burn them once she's clotted. [. . .] She hears the men saying, we said she'd get a lesson, she's had one now. (pp. 427-8)

Anzieu argues that the skin functions 'as the interface which marks the boundary with the outside and keeps the outside out; it is the barrier which protects against penetration [. . .] from others, whether people or objects'.<sup>80</sup> This function as protective screen against excessive external excitation is acknowledged early on in *Beyond Black* through a discussion of the fabric Alison ritually drapes around her professional portrait during her clairvoyant demonstrations: '[w]ith the silk around her studio portrait, she loses the sensation she is shrinking inside her own skin. It blunts her sensitivity, in a way that is welcome to her; it is an extra synthetic skin she has grown to compensate for the skins the work strips away' (p. 175). Yet, paradoxically, the skin also acts as 'an inscribing surface for the marks left by those others.'<sup>81</sup> The piercing of Alison's skin by her abusers constitutes such an act of inscription, but one in which the skin's ability to receive the messages of others is perversely exploited to such a degree that its quality as mediating interface breaks

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<sup>80</sup> Anzieu, p. 40.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

down. The scars record a sadistic attack not only upon Alison's body but upon her subjective integrity. As Alison puts it '[t]here on the ground they operated on me, took out my will and put in their own' (p. 209). This attack sets a precedent for Alison's adult relationship with the dead which she experiences as invasive, unregulated and over proximate: 'Al talked then about the perfidy of the dead, their partial, penetrative nature, their way of dematerialising and leaving bits of themselves behind or entangling themselves with your inner organs' (p. 153). The notion of the dead as fragment or remainder, whose quality may well be misleading or duplicitous, is given form through the treatment of Alison's own skin. Yet this concept is at work on another level in the novel where the dead are insinuated into the text not thematically but formally.

### **This Sceptred Isle: Spectrality as Intertextuality**

Wagstaffe: This sceptred isle . . .

Morris: My sceptred-

[. . .]

Wagstaffe: This other Eden –

Morris: My sceptred arse. (pp. 214-5)

The kind of intermingling described by Alison as she defines 'the perfidy of the dead' is symptomatic of the failure, or permeability, of boundaries, membranes and surfaces which, appropriately, pervades *Beyond Black*. However, there is a way of positioning this intermingling as a gesture that is broader still, a gesture which has significant implications for understanding Mantel's conception of subjectivity and authorship. As the borders between bodies, selves, even life and death are questioned through Alison's mediumistic practice and *Beyond Black's* representation of social death, also in operation in the novel is a questioning of the boundaries of a text. In my opening chapter I explored the intertextual play that Mantel undertakes within her autobiography, *Giving up the Ghost*, noting how she mines her own texts as sources of intertextual material in order to articulate the synthetic, patchwork nature of life narratives. While the recurrence in *Beyond Black* of the same sentences in a variety of different contexts creates intra-textual resonances, careful attention must be paid to the self-conscious and complex use of intertextuality in the novel. The text's use of a quotation from Philip Larkin's 'Annus Mirabilis' has already pointed to a conventional mode of literary intertextuality. However, this explicit textual reference forms only one facet of *Beyond Black's* intertextual strategy, one of the

most striking elements of which are the recurrent, implicit references to the myth of Oedipus which are woven through the text, creating a sophisticated textual interface.

As John Fletcher astutely observes, the eponymous protagonist of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* 'carries around with him an unknown but still active past, in both his name and wounded body.'<sup>82</sup> Fletcher is referring here to the scars that Oedipus bears on his heels, the 'old pain'<sup>83</sup> caused by the yoking and piercing of the tendons in the infant Oedipus's feet by his parents. Both Alison and Oedipus bear the scars of parental/quasi-parental abuse, deliberate physical damage caused by a piercing or penetration of the skin constituting an enactment of trauma in both its original and contemporary medical sense. Like Alison's injuries, Oedipus' scars signify obliquely for the majority of the text and can only be translated with the input of a third party; in Oedipus' case the messenger who arrives from Corinth with news of his father's death and in Alison's case Colette with her probing questions and desire for a narrative, 'a story' (p. 159). For both of these characters it is their scars that alert them to occulted portions of their past. Multiple elements of the Oedipus narrative are playfully mobilised throughout *Beyond Black*, conflating characters, and reversing directions of agency. Alison is constructed as a hybrid Oedipus, with whom she shares a troubling ambiguity about her parentage and a name that stubbornly links back to her origins and cannot be shaken off. Just as Oedipus's own name refers to both his gift of reason but also to the childhood injury to his feet,<sup>84</sup> linking him irrevocably to his abandonment by his parents, Alison succeeds in changing her surname but cannot shake off her first name, crucially the name given to her by her mother: 'She managed to lose "Cheetham" but her baptismal name kept sliding back into her life' (p. 138). The comparisons continue as the plague on Thebes which drives Sophocles' Oedipus to begin the search for King Laius' murderer is mirrored in the rumours of radioactivity, the 'white worms' and 'seepages' from the drains on Alison and Colette's housing estate which escalate as the narrative moves towards its close (p. 252). Jocasta's suicide by hanging is paralleled in Mart's suicide in Alison's garden shed, while the observation of one of Alison's fellow psychics that 'In antiquity they didn't have tiepins. Brooches, I grant

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<sup>82</sup> Fletcher, 'Scenography of Trauma', p. 36.

<sup>83</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. by David Greene and Richmond Lattimore, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 9-77 (p. 55), l. 1036.

<sup>84</sup> For a more detailed exposition of this see Fletcher, 'The Scenography of Trauma', p. 36.

you' (p. 257) recalls Oedipus's use of his mother's brooches to put out his own eyes. The motifs of blinding and castration are also brought to bear as the implication that Alison castrated one of her abusers and stabbed out the eye of another is made increasingly explicit. Yet this intertextual invocation is not simple or predictable, the analogues are not direct. Rather, the individual tropes are appropriated, dislocated from their original context to re-appear in bizarre situations. For example, Jocasta and Mart do not play equivalent roles in these narratives, it is merely the manner of their suicide, hanging themselves with swathes of fabric, which creates the association. Likewise, *Beyond Black* is not a standard primal scene narrative (as the Oedipus story is put to work for Freud) in that the threat of blinding/castration is actualised and the agent of these punitive acts, which are carried out upon the quasi-parental adults in the scene, is a child. This reversal of the direction of agency and the fact that Mantel draws a symbolic equivalence between the act of blinding and the act of castration necessitates another observation, namely that Mantel conflates the mythical Oedipus, the Sophoclean Oedipus and the Freudian Oedipus. The equating of blinding with castration in this context was a Freudian observation about the original myth that has since become irrevocably associated with the figure of Oedipus in the cultural imaginary. This plastic use of Oedipal imagery serves to reinforce the novel's assertions about the inescapability of the haunting residues of the past. No matter how hard the characters in the Oedipal narrative strive they cannot evade the consequences of their past actions and, importantly, the past actions of their families.

Oedipus is not the only literary figure to haunt this text. On the contrary, the multiple references to his eponymous tragedy are characteristic of a broader intertextual strategy. In addition to Sophocles and Larkin, sustained reference is made to Shakespeare, who appears to speak lines from *Richard II* and *Hamlet* on the recordings of Alison and Colette's conversations and who is repeatedly referenced by Morris who refers to Shakespeare as 'Wagstaffe': 'bloody Bill Wagstaffe, he owes me, I'll give him Swan of bloody Avon' (p. 164). As the novel draws to a close allusions are made to Shelley's poem 'To Edward Williams' and, significantly, to Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade.' Tennyson's poem was a response to the historical events at the Battle of Balaclava and was said to have been written directly after reading an account of the futile charge and subsequent loss of life in a



newspaper. Seen in this context the poem acts to ‘spin’ death in a manner comparable to that undertaken by the media in the wake of the accident that led to the death of Princess Diana and, indeed, undertaken by Alison herself during her platform work. By utilising the poem here Mantel places herself within a tradition of writers whose works put a ‘spin’ on death and put the dead to work for political or patriotic purposes. Yet Mantel’s adaptation of Tennyson’s famous line reveals her as not endeavouring to obscure the contemporary dead, to place them behind a variety of veils composed of consolatory fictions of valour or media beatifications. Rather, the line ‘half a meter, half a meter, half a meter onwards’ (p. 447) of Mantel’s text speaks to a revelation. In Mantel’s re-writing the syllables literally overflow the meter of Tennyson’s original, an overflow which is echoed in images of emergence and inundation in the preceding passage which speaks of ‘fissures [. . .], cracked pipes and breached sea walls, [. . .] outswells [. . .] bubbling[s]’ and ‘seepages’ (p. 447). Such a lack of regulation stands in opposition to the rigid rhythms and predictable rhyme scheme of Tennyson’s original and articulates an excess of meaning that breaks out of containing poetic structures in the same manner as the ghost itself exceeds ontological categories.

These phantasmic literary echoes function in the same fashion as Alison’s mediumistic performances which give voice to familial predecessors. Just as the tapes Colette makes of Alison ‘all [speak] on top of one another [. . .] like a compost heap’ (p.320), the profusion of intertextual material allows Mantel to comment on the act of writing as inherently haunted by one’s literary forebears and to make explicit how a literary lineage must necessarily speak through an author, sometimes without their control and perhaps even without their knowledge.<sup>85</sup> In *The Skin Ego*, Anzieu describes the two modes in which the skin can be marked, with lateral inscriptions upon its surface or vertical penetrations through the dermis.<sup>86</sup> The direct literary references and indirect allusions operate upon the skin of this novel in an analogous fashion, constituting intertextual scars upon ‘the space of [the] writing’ whose texture encourages the reader to ‘range over’ rather than attempt to ‘pierce’

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<sup>85</sup> When I questioned Mantel about her approach to intertextuality she suggested that the intertextual voices that can so often be discerned in her work function in a manner which evokes Alison’s own mediumistic vocalisation of the speech of others. Mantel states that ‘before I became utterly self-conscious about the process, other people’s words were sliding into me and getting minced through my own psychic operations and now they are a natural mode for me and I don’t put quotation marks around them in speech, I don’t think of them as other.’ Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 266.

<sup>86</sup> Anzieu, p. 40.

the text with interpretation.<sup>87</sup> The complex textual veiling and unveiling undertaken in this novel is more than the parlour trick of a sham medium and, ultimately, the literary intertexts under discussion here form one mode of intertextuality among many. Alison's interventions in the messages of the dead, blending her voice with their own, result in a message which is intertextual in nature. Likewise, the numerous surfaces present within the novel, Alison's own skin, the skin-screen which obscures her past, tele-technological screens and the membranous surface of the novel itself, form palimpsestic planes upon which a multiplicity of ghosts and spectres, be they familial, historical, textual or mediatized, can manifest. This sophisticated textual interface develops the kinds of work already analysed in *Giving up the Ghost* and *Learning to Talk* and, as will be discussed in my next chapter, sets the scene for the complex exploration of authorship and authority undertaken in *Wolf Hall*.

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<sup>87</sup> Catherine Belsey, 'The Death of the Reader', *Textual Practice*, 23 (2009), 201-214 (p. 202).

## Chapter 5

### **‘If the Dead Need Translators’: Heresy, Haunting and Intertextuality in *Wolf Hall***

It’s the living that turn and chase the dead. The long bones and skulls are tumbled from their shrouds, and words like stones thrust into their rattling mouths: we edit their writings, we rewrite their lives.<sup>1</sup>

So concludes Thomas Cromwell at the close of *Wolf Hall* in a gesture which acknowledges accusations frequently levelled at writers of historical fiction. Mantel herself ‘hold[s] up [her] hands’ and states ‘you might think that what I am doing in this book is dubious – it might even be thought to be reprehensible.’<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the two Booker prizes awarded to her Tudor novels clearly evidence a positive critical reaction. Certainly, the novel has been received by the popular press as first and foremost a paradigm-shifting example of historical fiction.<sup>3</sup> Writing in the *Guardian* Christopher Taylor describes *Wolf Hall* as ‘a non-frothy historical novel’,<sup>4</sup> situating the text in opposition to a prevalent critical discourse in which the genre is ‘frowned on’ and ‘disapproved of’, dismissed as ‘escapism’ concerned with ‘cloaks, daggers, crinolined ladies, ripped bodices [and] sailing ships in bloody battles’.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the limited academic attention the novel has garnered has focussed on the text as a seminal example of its genre, seeking to use *Wolf Hall* as a vehicle for analysing the tropes of historical fiction.<sup>6</sup> Contrastingly, those studies which depart from this generic approach decry the text for an apparent lack of historical veracity while neglecting its status as literary production. This is exemplified in P.I

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 649. All further references given in parenthesis in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Hilary Mantel, interviewed by Sarah O’Reilly, ‘Making it New’, in *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), pp. 2-9 (p. 6).

<sup>3</sup> Tom Holland, ‘Books of the Year’, *Daily Telegraph*, 6 December 2009, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/6710158/Books-of-the-Year.html>> [accessed 24 June 2015].

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Taylor, ‘*Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel – Review’, *Guardian*, 2 May 2009, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/02/wolf-hall-hilary-mantel>> [accessed 13 April 2015].

<sup>5</sup> A.S Byatt, ‘Fathers’, in *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000), pp. 9-35 (p. 9).

<sup>6</sup> B.D. Stoker, ‘Bygonese: Is this really the authentic language of historical fiction?’ *New Writing*, 9 (2012), 308-318.

Kaufman's 2010 article 'Dis-Manteling More'.<sup>7</sup> Kaufman's piece is symptomatic of what A.S Byatt, in her book on historical fiction *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays*, termed 'the refusal of narrative by contemporary historians'<sup>8</sup> who are 'suspicious of history which concentrates on the fates and motives of individuals.'<sup>9</sup>

The critical landscape outlined above is formed of two profoundly reductive reading strategies. As is apparent, the critical voices engaging in debate around the novel have either attempted to aggressively situate the text as an account of the Tudor period without meaningfully recognising its status as a work of literature, or else used the book as an exemplar through which historical fiction as a genre can be validated. This chapter rejects these two positions in favour of a reading that privileges *Wolf Hall*'s status as primarily a literary text whose project is both more subtle and more expansive than these previous critical viewpoints have allowed. Taking into account two key contextual details arising from the novel's setting within the upheavals of the Protestant Reformation, namely the invention of the printing press and the move within Protestant theology to abolish Purgatory, I argue that *Wolf Hall* is ultimately a book that, rather than displaying the 'complex self-consciousness about the writing of history itself'<sup>10</sup> which Byatt argues has accompanied the renaissance in historical fiction, displays instead a complex self-consciousness about *writing* itself. In this chapter I demonstrate that *Wolf Hall* dramatizes the linkages between textuality and spectrality, foregrounding the spectres that emerge from the evolution of technologies of inscription. Simultaneously I explore the ways in which the written word is capable of producing myriad spectres and facilitating a variety of hauntings that refract the more traditional phantoms with which the narrative is also populated.

The matrix of connections and resonances between writing and haunting which this chapter draws out of *Wolf Hall* is complex, often resisting a schematic

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<sup>7</sup> P.I Kaufman, 'Dis-Manteling More', *Moreana*, 47 (2010), 164-193.

<sup>8</sup> Byatt, 'Fathers', p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> A.S Byatt, 'Forefathers', in *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000), pp. 36-64 (p. 38). Byatt writes vibrantly and lucidly in this collection of essays on the slippery relationship between history and fiction, gesturing towards the positions writers of historical novels might take up with regards to that relationship, and the political and ethical ramifications of those positions.

<sup>10</sup> Byatt, 'Fathers', p. 9.

organisation.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity the following chapter is formed of three distinct sections. The first discusses the presentation in the novel of the book as object, both in the form of manuscript and incunabula, decoupling the physical object from the text it contains and positing a relationship in the novel between corporeal bodies and material books, between corpses and corpuses. In the second section of the chapter I build on this de-coupling in order to analyse how *Wolf Hall* presents a vision of text as spectral and in turn I argue that this spectrality is specifically freighted by the developments in writing technologies which saw the advent and rapid growth of print culture in the period immediately prior to, and during the English Reformation. Finally, I move to demonstrate the significance of this presentation of corpse-like books and ghostly texts for our understanding of intertextuality in *Wolf Hall*, not only as authorial strategy but as object of critique and enquiry.

I posit that to define the text as ‘simply’ (or, as Byatt’s puts it, ‘innocently’<sup>12</sup>) an example of the realist historical novel, whose haunted quality is a given thanks to its resurrections of the historical dead, is to overlook a multiplicity of less traditional spectres which saturate *Wolf Hall*. To do so is to fail to appreciate the subtle and nuanced discussions orchestrated within the text, discussions whose impacts are felt far beyond questions of genre and historical veracity. However, to fully understand the scope of the debates in which *Wolf Hall* is engaged, and to articulate the novel’s contribution to those debates, it is necessary to place the text in conversation with one of Mantel’s earlier works – not its apparent predecessor, Mantel’s first experiment with the historical novel, *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) but the critically neglected and elusive *Fludd* (1989). *Wolf Hall* is not the first of Mantel’s texts to dissect the process of religious reformation, or even the first to represent the conflicts inherent in the Henrician Reformation. Published in 1989, *Fludd* dramatizes and satirises the religious schisms of the 1530s through the microcosm of Catholic practice in a fictional Lancashire village, Fetherhoughton, in the 1950s. That a relationship exists between the two texts has, until now, failed to be recognised and

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in contrast to my approach in previous chapters, I have opted here to take a non-linear path through the text in order to best respond to the critical demands generated by the novel’s own slippery chronology, density and scale.

<sup>12</sup> Byatt, ‘Fathers’, p. 38. Here Byatt holds up Mantel as a writer of historical fiction (in this case *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992)) which appears at first ‘innocently realist’ but which in fact embodies ‘an act of shocking rebellion against current orthodoxies.’

explored, yet the extensive and specific intellectual project undertaken in *Wolf Hall* clearly has its origins in *Fludd's* idiosyncratic exploration of the English Reformation, textuality and spectrality. Both *Wolf Hall* and *Fludd* contain an atmosphere of pervasive haunting. From the rectory in Fetherhoughton, where ghostly presences pace empty rooms and slam doors (p. 23), to the 'aggregated mass' of the dead that Thomas Cromwell senses on All Hallows Eve (p. 154), these are narratives where the hinterland between the dead and the living is permeable. As I will discuss at length in section three, *Fludd* forms one of *Wolf Hall's* most potent intertexts but for the present moment it suffices to say that *Fludd* returns throughout this chapter to inform and complicate the discussion, acting as a phantom forerunner which, through *Wolf Hall*, repeatedly 'arrives' drawing our attention again and again to the textual spectrality and spectral textuality which, I will argue, define the later novel.

The critical neglect of *Fludd's* potential as a textual counterpoint capable of opening up *Wolf Hall* to more expansive and accommodating reading strategies is just one example of how the critical approaches discussed in the opening of this chapter have occluded the statements Mantel is making in the later text about the links between writing and heredity, between history and the imagination, and the position both writer and reader might occupy with regard to the past: that of legatee. Jacques Derrida understands the act of inheritance as 'not essentially to receive something, a *given* that one may then *have*' but 'an active affirmation [which] answers an injunction, but also pre-supposes an initiative, [. . .] presupposes the signature or counter signature of a critical selection. When one inherits, one sorts, one sifts, one reclaims, one reactivates'.<sup>13</sup> With regard to Mantel's historical fiction, it is necessary to add to this inventory of responsibilities: 'one translates'.<sup>14</sup> I argue that *Wolf Hall* is produced through Mantel's occupation of the position of legatee, one who inherits

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<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. by Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> I use 'translate' here not merely in its linguistic sense i.e. 'To turn from one language into another; 'to change into another language retaining the sense' (Johnson); to render; also, to express in other words, to paraphrase', but also to invoke its other subordinate meanings which implicate a movement from one space and orientation to another. The term is also defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as '[t]o bear, convey, or remove from one person, place or condition to another; to transfer, transport' with a specific example of such usage being given as 'to remove the dead body or remains of a saint, or, by extension, a hero or great man, from one place to another.' Given the focus in *Wolf Hall* upon both the complexities of linguistic translation and the status of the dead and of saints, such a multifaceted understanding of 'translation' is appropriate.

the past and then sorts, sifts, reclaims and reactivates, translating the dead into fictive life, translating the material of historical ‘fact’, and its many lacunae where ‘fact’ breaks down, into multiple ghostly potentialities, that make up the ‘shifting shadow-mesh’ (*Wolf Hall*, p. 27) of fiction.<sup>15</sup> By expanding the terms of my reading strategy beyond the genre of ‘historical fiction’ and by reading *Wolf Hall* as nuanced literary product preoccupied with literary production, indeed, as a text in which ‘popular historical fiction dramatizes textual reception itself’,<sup>16</sup> it is possible to understand this novel as coupling imagination and testimony productively without admitting any incompatibility between the two concepts. Mantel insists ‘we can’t help but imagine the past; we have no choice. It is part of us and we must acknowledge that it is *we* who reimagine it.’<sup>17</sup> If the dead need translators then, Mantel suggests, it is the writer who must translate. Before embarking upon a sustained analysis of the more obvious literary and textual works referenced in the novel, and the attendant phantoms through which we see this discharging of responsibility and act of creative heredity, I begin with a moment in *Wolf Hall* that encapsulates the concerns of this chapter through its preoccupation with inheritance.

### **‘To Rafe Sadler his books’: Inheritance, Technology and Textuality**

‘Rafe,’ he says, ‘do you know I haven’t made my will? I said I would but I never did. I think I should go home and draft it.’

‘Why?’ Rafe looks amazed. ‘Why now? The cardinal will want you.’ ‘Come home.’ He takes Rafe’s arm. On his left side, a hand touches his: fingers without flesh. A ghost walks: Arthur, studious and pale. King Henry, he thinks, you raised him; now you put him down. (p. 147)

Early on in *Wolf Hall*, Thomas Cromwell’s apparent encounter with the ‘dead hand’ of King Arthur prompts him to return home and compose a will, a document activated by death and enabling the dead to exert a little post-mortem power over their inheritors. The account given in *Wolf Hall* of the fictionalised Cromwell’s will is fascinating for a variety of reasons.<sup>18</sup> However, the most interesting elements in

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<sup>15</sup> As Jerome de Groot has succinctly put it: ‘the translation and revoicing of history in uncanny and ultimately queer ways: these are what the historical novelist participates in.’ Jerome de Groot, *Remaking History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> De Groot, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Mantel, ‘Making it New’, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Cromwell’s ‘Last Will and Testament’ is painstakingly transcribed in Roger Bigelow Merriman’s *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 56–63. The version found in *Wolf Hall* clearly draws heavily on this document in terms of structure and content, often replicating the historical version. Yet, the fictive document contains a poignant

terms of the present discussion are the final two sentences: ‘To God his Soul. To Rafe Sadler his books’ (p. 148). The first sentence accords with the religious and legal conventions of the time and is present early on in the original historical document. However, the last sentence is buried in the body of the original text, amongst ‘[m]arkes of lawful yngllish money’ and Cromwell’s ‘Seconde gowne Jaquet and Doblet’.<sup>19</sup> Its positioning adjacent to Cromwell’s ‘bequest’ of his soul to God in Mantel’s version gives the two acts of passing-on a powerful equivalence. Cromwell’s legacy to Rafe is particularly notable since the books he bequeaths number among them a copy of William Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament, printed ‘in octavo, [on] nasty cheap paper: on the title page, where the printer’s colophon and address should be, the words “PRINTED IN UTOPIA”’ (p. 40). Two important observations can be made, based on this fictional account of Cromwell’s will.

The first is that writing of all kinds in *Wolf Hall* should be understood as being subject to the logic of inheritance. By structuring the close of Cromwell’s fictional will in this way, Mantel demands an understanding of inheritance which incorporates the notion of the written word as something that can be passed down and, bearing in mind the fact that Rafe Sadler is not a biological heir to Cromwell, that can bypass systems of genetic or familial inheritance. This more expansive understanding of heredity is underscored early on in the book, in a passage where Cromwell conjectures about the reformist leanings of his mother-in-law:

Mercy, he suspects, comes from a family where John Wycliffe’s writings are preserved and quoted, where the scriptures in English have always been known; scraps of writing hoarded, forbidden verses locked in the head. These things come down the generations, as eyes and noses come down, as meekness or the capacity for passion, as muscle power or the need to take a risk. (pp. 41-2)

In this passage, written texts, in both physical and memorial form, are equated with bodily features and characteristics of personality in terms of their ability to be in some way ‘inherited’. Through being understood as heritable these writings, scraps

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reinstatement of a line which is crossed out in the original: ‘And to my litill Doughters Anne and Grace’. Mantel’s version includes ‘marriage portions of [Cromwell’s] daughter Anne, and his little daughter Grace’ (p. 148) and thus brings together the acts of writing, dying, editing and remembering: as Merriman points out, these redacted references to Anne and Grace constitute all of the evidence we have that Cromwell had children other than his son Gregory.

<sup>19</sup> Merriman, p. 60.



and scriptures sit alongside Cromwell's fictionalised will to constitute what Bernard Stiegler would term 'tertiary memory.' As part of his theorisation of technicity, Stiegler insists that, alongside genetic and epigenetic memory, there exists a kind of memory or inheritance which is epiphylogenetic,<sup>20</sup> comprised of the inorganic traces left behind in the form of objects, tools or writings and not dictated by genetic inscription. It is through these traces, Stiegler argues, that each successive generation is able to inherit the historical past of their forebears despite not having lived that past themselves.<sup>21</sup> Cromwell's suspicions about Mercy articulate the idea of epiphylogenesis as the process which 'bestows its identity upon the human individual: the accents of his speech, the style of his approach, the force of his gesture, the unity of his world'.<sup>22</sup> While I would not go so far as to assert that the model of inheritance present in *Wolf Hall* follows Stiegler's exactly or deliberately, the expansive understanding of heredity we see demonstrated, both in the extract above, and in Cromwell's will, can be usefully mobilised alongside Stiegler's thinking to highlight the crucial but overlooked relationship between writing technologies and inheritance at work in the novel. However, the literary legacy included in Cromwell's fictional Last Will and Testament is only one element of a wider questioning of the relationship between writing and dying, between literature and inheritance.

Indeed, the second observation to draw out of *Wolf Hall*'s account of Cromwell's will is the association between death and technologies of writing. The mention of the printed book within the handwritten, autographed document, specifically designed to communicate in the event of the author's death, deftly reminds us that the technologies of inscription during the Reformation were by no means solely defined by the dominance of print. Yet the will also serves as an exemplar of the intrinsically posthumous quality of written words, traces, or 'survivals' as Derrida terms them,<sup>23</sup> which always inscribe the eventual death of their author: 'all the figures of death with which we people the "present", which we inscribe (among ourselves, the living)

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<sup>20</sup> Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 177. 'Epiphylogenesis' refers to the idea that a subject can inherit, not only through the passing down of genetic material, or through epigenesis, that is, inheriting the past experiences of their forebears, but through external, material objects.

<sup>21</sup> Stiegler, *Technics*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Stiegler, *Technics*, p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'The Art of Memoirs', trans. by Jonathan Culler, in *Memoirs for Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 45-88 (p. 59).

in every trace [. . .]: figures we inscribe because they can outlast us, beyond the present of their inscription: signs, words, names, letters'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in *Wolf Hall* and *Fludd*, often all that is left of the dead are their inscribed traces; annotations, dedications, tracts and notes, seemingly confirming Derrida's assertion that '[t]here is no inheritance without technics'.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as was made clear in Chapter 4, to inscribe demands a surface to receive the inscription and it is to the physicality of the books left to Rafe Sadler, and of the multiple other volumes that accompany them, that I turn now, in order to examine how their presence and possession in this novel is specifically freighted.

### **In the Body of the Text: Corpses, Corpora and the Bible in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.**

'We are always dying – I while I write, you while you read' (Petrarch quoted in *Wolf Hall*, p. 648)

In response to the use of printed material within Christian religious practice, the seventeenth-century French oration priest, Bernard Lamy complained that '[t]he words on the page are like a dead body stretched out on the ground'.<sup>26</sup> Lamy argued that the use of typography 'devocalized' and 'desocialized' Christian teaching.<sup>27</sup> Yet Lamy's striking statement provides a powerful formulation of the implication of the posthumous within all acts of writing as the fact of the inscription being reproducible, quotable in our absence, renders us 'haunted by [a] future which brings our own death'.<sup>28</sup> As Derrida succinctly puts it, '[o]ur disappearance is already there'.<sup>29</sup> In this section I argue that this interaction between physical inscription and death is powerfully present in *Wolf Hall*, ultimately positioning the act of writing as involving in a crucial way the passage from subject (the author) to object (the

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<sup>24</sup> Derrida, 'The Art of Memoirs', p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies*, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Lamy quoted in Elizabeth Eisenstein, *Divine Art, Infernal Machine: The Reception of Printing in the West from First Impressions to the Sense of an Ending* (Oxford; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Derrida in Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies*, p. 117.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* It is of course important to note that writing for Derrida does not only refer to physical inscription, though that is the manifestation I choose to focus on here. Rather, Derrida uses the term "writing" or "archi-writing," in tight collaboration with the terms "trace," "difference," and "text", and considers that "writing" [names] properly the functioning of language in general.' Geoffrey Bennington in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans by Geoffrey Bennington (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 49-50.

document they produce), and thus implicating dying and the dead in the process of writing. Specifically, I examine the complex relationship between corporeal bodies and physical books within the novel in order to establish its significance for *Wolf Hall* as a novel about writing, haunting and inheritance.

The historical moment of the Protestant Reformation, rather than limiting the impact of the essential linkages between writing and dying, provides an ideal crucible within which these associations can be complicated and explored within the novel. Before a detailed analysis of the concomitance between books and the dead in *Wolf Hall* can be undertaken it is useful to establish one of the two contextual points which drive the text's intellectual project: the changing status of the dead in Reformation England. As Cromwell confirms early on in the novel, *Wolf Hall* depicts a period in which '[w]ith every month that passes, the corners are knocked off the certainties of this world: and the next world too' (p. 39) as debates around previous theological certainties gathered pace. As Anthony Low observes, while '[m]any things were repudiated at the English Reformation, including Transubstantiation, Confession as a sacrament, the monasteries and the primacy of Peter [ . . . ] [f]ew things were ended as absolutely as Purgatory.'<sup>30</sup> The abolition of Purgatory wrought a drastic change in the relationship between the individuals who made up Reformation society and their dead, as they no longer had recourse to this intermediate space which 'enabled the dead to be not completely dead – not as utterly gone, finished, complete, as those whose souls resided forever in Heaven or Hell'.<sup>31</sup> *Wolf Hall* is concerned with the period immediately antecedent to the official abolition of Purgatory effected by Chantries Act and Royal Injunctions of 1547, a time when the writings of reformist thinkers like Martin Luther were beginning to put pressure on Purgatory as a concept and to bring into question previously 'legitimately sanctioned belief in ghosts'.<sup>32</sup> The cause of this re-location of the dead can on one level be attributed to disputes over interpretations and translations of religious texts. When Cromwell demands '[s]how me where it says, in the Bible, "Purgatory"' (p. 39), he articulates how previously approved religious tenets were stripped away during the Reformation on the basis of their lack of scriptural underpinnings. Thus the fate of the Reformation dead is

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony Low, 'Hamlet and the Ghost of Purgatory: Intimations of Killing the Father', *English Literary Renaissance*, 29 (1999), 443-467 (p. 450).

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Greenblatt, p. 152.

decided, or rather destabilised, through acts of reading. Yet, rather than rendering the division between the living and the dead impenetrable, as they were intended to, these reforms apparently had the effect of increasing rather than decreasing the permeability of the barrier between the living and the dead. In the face of the impending abolition of Purgatory the regulatory structure whereby the dead could appear to the living to specific ends<sup>33</sup> was beginning to give way, not to a ghost-less landscape in which the dead were unable to manifest, but rather to an unregulated ingress of the dead into the world of the living.<sup>34</sup> In *Wolf Hall* this questioning of the location of the dead through religious literature is deftly acknowledged with physical books repeatedly providing the conduits through which the dead are able to infiltrate the world of the living, both symbolically and intellectually. Yet, as we shall see, the object and status of the book was undergoing a similar transformation during this period. It is necessary then for this analysis to remain responsive to the specific effects that the print and manuscript technologies within the novel have upon the dead and the living alike. I begin my exploration of the relationship between the physical book and the dead with an analysis of a haunted moment of reading.

Halloween: the world's edge seeps and bleeds. This is the time when the tally-keepers of Purgatory, its clerks and gaolers, listen in to the living, who are praying for the dead.

At this time of year, with their parish, he and Liz would keep vigil. They would pray for Henry Wykys, her father; for Liz's dead husband, Thomas Williams; for Walter Cromwell, and for distant cousins, for half-forgotten names, long-dead half-sisters and lost step-children. (p. 154)

In this way Mantel introduces the religious practices that surrounded the Catholic feast of All Hallows day, capturing succinctly how Purgatory accommodated the admission of the dead into the world of the living<sup>35</sup> while also facilitating the partial entry of the living, their prayers and pleas, into the world of the dead. Initially it is not the individual dead that trouble Cromwell but rather 'a solid aggregated mass,

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<sup>33</sup> To complain of their ancestors' tardy attitude to mourning them through perpetual prayers and the establishment of chantries for example.

<sup>34</sup> As Anthony Low puts it 'after the English Reformers dispensed with Purgatory, however, it was no longer clear to anyone where ghosts came from. [ . . . ] Instead of doing away with ghosts the abolition caused them to flourish, at the same time that they became theologically inexplicable, vaguer' acknowledging both the persistence and unruly circulation of ghosts in the post-Purgatory period. p. 455.

<sup>35</sup> King Henry himself acknowledges this permeability later in the novel, following the appearance to him in a dream of his dead brother King Arthur. When questioned as to the precise nature of the apparition, Henry asserts that '[d]uring the twelve days, between Christmas Day and Epiphany, God permits the dead to walk. This is well known' (p. 274).

their flesh slapping and jostling together, their texture dense like sea creatures, their faces sick with an undersea sheen' (pp. 154-155). Then comes a moment of transition as Cromwell 'stands in a window embrasure, Liz's prayer book in his hand' (p. 155);<sup>36</sup> the Book of Hours which '[h]is daughter Grace liked to look at' (p. 155). The homogenous dead fall away to leave the individuated phantoms of Elizabeth and Grace Cromwell. In this moment, when the dead stand alongside the living, it is a manuscript book that is placed at the centre of the scene, seemingly as the provocation for the return of Cromwell's familial dead. As he progresses through the various religious offices and their illustrations he 'feel[s] the imprint of [Grace's] small fingers under his own. [. . .] He turns a page. Grace, silent and small, turns the page with him' (p. 155). The materiality of the book produces a post-mortem materiality for Grace, whose fingers seem to combine with the page under Cromwell's hands. This image of merger between flesh and page echoes the prayer book's illustration of the Annunciation mentioned earlier in the passage, in which a scroll 'unfurls from [the angel's] clasped hands, as if his palms were speaking' (p. 155), scroll and flesh appearing as irrevocably conjoined, complicating where one ends and the other begins and reinforcing the link between books and bodies.

When Cromwell is interrupted in his grief by George Cavendish, servant to Cardinal Wolsey, it is remarked that 'Cavendish cannot see his daughter's fingers touching the page, or his wife's hands holding the book' (p. 156), a comment which captures the occlusion, in historical accounts of Thomas Cromwell, of his life outside of the machinations of court politics. Yet, these familial apparitions are not merely devices to aid the humanisation of a figure upon whom history has not, on the whole, looked kindly. Through their invocation alongside the vividly illustrated Book of Hours, whose images were intended to communicate in situations where the vernacular was not permitted, the phantoms of Liz and Grace become symbols of a religious status quo about to be changed forever. The Protestant Reformation's emphasis upon print transformed religion for the laity, performing a 'shift from image towards word.'<sup>37</sup> As Cromwell puts it '[the laity] have seen their religion painted on the walls of

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<sup>36</sup> Two separate sources (P. Waterton, *Pietas Mariana Britannica* (London, 1879) and E. Hoskins, *Horae Beatae Mariae Virginis* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1901)) attest that the scene Mantel depicts here is based on a real event, reporting that a visitor to Esher palace in 1529 did indeed discover Thomas Cromwell 'leaning in a window of the great chamber reading his hours'. John Harthan, *Books of Hours and their Owners* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), pp. 32-3.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. xvi.

churches, or carved in stone, but now God's pen is poised, and he is ready to write his words in the book of their hearts' (p. 516).

Yet if the moment of haunted reading above captures the ambiguous status of Purgatory, and of the relationship of the living to the dead via the object of the book, whose status as surface for inscription and container of scriptural truth unites both issues, there is also something of the manuscript book's uniqueness, its singularity which Mantel is harnessing here.<sup>38</sup> The book's origins as 'a wedding present [. . .] from [Liz's] first husband' who 'wrote her new married name in it' (p. 39) obliquely inscribes the ability not only of texts but of material books to conjure up the dead. Both Elizabeth Cromwell and, through the frontispiece inscription, her dead husband, are invoked through the act of reading the book, which records denotations not of authorship but of ownership through its handwritten annotations.<sup>39</sup> In this moment, as the process of religious reform and its impact upon the relationship between the dead and the living is being refracted through the object of the manuscript prayer book, Mantel is also recognising the manuscript Book of Hours as a literary object that routinely underwent adaptations and personalisations in a way, and on a scale at which, printed volumes did not. This is recognised both in Cromwell's desire to write 'contrarian sentiments' (p. 39) where Liz's first husband had inscribed her married name and later through his acting upon this impulse to adapt and annotate: '[h]e has taken out Liz's book of hours, and on the page where she kept the family listed he has made alterations, additions' (p. 583).

This is not the only moment in *Wolf Hall* when the presence of a material book belonging to a deceased subject provokes or accompanies a spectral apparition of that subject. However, the second extract examined here marks a movement from

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<sup>38</sup> The unique quality possessed by Books of Hours and their powerful connection to their owner is attested to in John Harthan's *Books of Hours and their Owners*, with Harthan asserting that '[m]uch of the charm of Books of Hours comes from the realization that each example was personally commissioned or bought, and decorated with greater or lesser elaboration according to the taste, status and wealth of the owner. Across the centuries they still preserve this connection, intimate and often revealing, with a specific individual.' p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Annotations and marginalia are widely found within medieval Books of Hours. For example, as Eamon Duffy notes '[a]lmost half of the 300 Books of Hours in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris have manuscript annotations and additions of some sort, and it was very common indeed for English owners too to annotate their books'. Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers, 1240-1570* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 38. While, as is apparent from Thomas More's prayer book, printed books too were subject to annotation by their owners, the annotations in Books of Hours most commonly detail history of ownership, family trees and heraldry etc, rather than reflecting on the contents of the volume itself.

manuscript to print productions and concerns another Book of Hours, this time belonging to Thomas More.<sup>40</sup> Displaying the temporal slippages which are characteristic of Mantel's writing, *Wolf Hall's* account of More's execution moves quickly back and forth between the present moment in which Cromwell waits to learn of More's death, and the process of accusation, arrest and trial for treason that led to it. As Cromwell waits 'Thomas More stands before him, more solid in death than he was in life' (p. 644). Yet this apparition has significantly less impact within the text than the approach and appearance of More's book:

The window rattles; it startles him, and he thinks, I shall bolt the shutter. He is rising to do it when Rafe comes in with a book in his hand. 'It is his prayer book, that More had with him at the last.

He examines it. Mercifully, no blood specks. He holds it up by the spine and lets the leaves fan out [ . . . ].

More has written his name in it. There are underlinings in the text: *Remember not the sins of my youth.* [ . . . ]

The whole house is rocking about him; wind in the eaves, wind in the chimneys, a piercing draft under every door. (p. 646)

This instance of pathetic fallacy, stressed almost to the point of cliché, makes manifest the haunting power of books. As the wind creates a classically haunted atmosphere, More's book comes to stand in for him posthumously, the analogue all the more powerful because of the presence of his annotations. These are crucial when we consider that, unlike Liz Cromwell's prayer book, the volume to which the above passage refers is a printed text and thus More's book constitutes an amalgamation of writing technologies: More's process of reading and interpretation is preserved through his manuscript inscriptions which surround and infiltrate the printed text. If we compare the two scenes of haunting, one serene, if poignant, taking place within the contained space of the window embrasure, the other unsettling, disruptive, causing Cromwell to seek to secure his home against the ingress of the disruptive but unseen wind, a contrast can be seen between the kinds of haunting that print and manuscript technologies are able to provoke, even as the presence of annotations in both passages underscore the posthumous quality implicated in all modes of inscription. That these annotated books are accompanied by the apparitions of their dead owners potently underlines the fact of the

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<sup>40</sup> For a facsimile and transcription of More's heavily annotated Book of Hours and Latin Psalter see Louis L. Martz and Richard S. Sylvester's *Thomas More's Prayerbook: A Facsimile Reproduction of the Annotated Pages* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1969).

inscriptions surviving their author. However, it is the printed book whose presence (and by extension Thomas More's) is depicted as capable of causing disruption. The space of Cromwell's house is seemingly destabilised by its presence while the invasive power of the wind, which penetrates ubiquitously, captures the disruptive and uncontainable quality of print. The unruliness of print will be examined in more detail in section two but for the moment I would like to address the corporeality implied by the 'merciful' absence of the blood specks tentatively sought by Cromwell above.

Alongside the linkages already analysed between books and haunting, present in *Wolf Hall* is a persistent analogue between the physical body and the object of the book that usefully articulates the play the novel is engaging with through the various meanings of the word 'corpus' and its innate relationship to the 'corpse.' We saw above how Thomas More's book arrives on Cromwell's desk as evidence of his death, a substitute for More's corpse. An even more striking manifestation of the corpse-like book is found in the account given of the confiscation of Cardinal Wolsey's books in the wake of his fall: '[t]hey are packing [the cardinal's] gospels and taking them for the king's libraries. The texts are heavy to hold in the arms, and awkward as if they breathed; their pages are made of slunk vellum from stillborn calves, reveined by the illuminator in tints of lapis and leaf-green' (pp. 48-9). In this description there is a sense of the books hovering phantasmally between life and death which is made particularly striking by Mantel's description of the vellum or calf's skin in which they are bound being produced from the flesh of 'stillborn' calves, creatures whose entry into the world of the living takes place only in death. The volumes appear to breathe and struggle against their removal, the veins of the original material suggested through the artifice of the illuminator's brush. These books are depicted as being possessed of a quasi-animate life specific to them which underlines their power to haunt. While in the previous two examples the book's owner is deceased, in this passage, the undead quality of the cardinal's library acts as a harbinger of the cardinal's own death, apparently brought about by his ill treatment at the hands of the king; the confiscation of the books only a precursor to the forfeit of the cardinal's body. In the emphasis on the origins of the vellum can be detected a tongue-in-cheek inversion of the notion of 'the word made flesh' as the 'flesh' constituted by the skin used in binding is obscured by the words inked upon it. This



inversion, which implies that flesh can also be reduced to words, that it can offer (or be rendered) a surface of inscription, has profound implications which are realised in *Wolf Hall's* representation of the relationship between an author and their work, as distinct from the relationship between a book and its owner or series of owners.

The relationship between the doomed Cardinal Wolsey and his strangely undead gospels exemplifies how *Wolf Hall* depicts books and bodies as having a consonant relationship. Considering Rembrandt's painting 'The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicholas Tulp', Derrida observes the how the focus of the figures within the painting is not upon the body being dissected but upon the open book lying at the cadaver's feet. He comments '[t]his book stands up to, and stands in for, the body: a corpse is replaced by a corpus, a corpse yielding its place to the bookish thing'.<sup>41</sup> This form of substitution, of 'standing in', is active within *Wolf Hall's* presentation of the relationship between authors and their texts. An equivalence is repeatedly drawn between an author and their works through the use of the former's name to refer also to their written output, and this effacement builds throughout *Wolf Hall* to form a notion of the object of a book as analogous with the human body. This analogue is confirmed in an extract from the novel's closing chapters: 'I hear they are burning the books from the city libraries. Erasmus has gone into the flames. What kind of devils would burn the gentle Erasmus?' (p. 591). Likewise, giving an account of how Cardinal Wolsey will respond to the influx of heretical texts arriving in England from Germany it is stated that 'Wolsey will burn books, but not men. He did so, only last October, at St Paul's Cross: a holocaust of the English language, and so much rag-rich paper consumed, and so much black printers' ink' (p. 40). This refusal carries within it an acknowledgement that the destruction of the book could stand in for the destruction of its author, an equivalence which has significant consequences as the novel progresses and men are burned in the place of their books.

What are the implications, then, of the embodied life of books, their unique connection to the dead and their shifting status within the economy of inheritance and authority brought about by the advent of print? As I have illustrated above, the effects produced by printed and manuscript books are variously and subtly different but the unifying factor in all of these cases is the presence of annotations and edits by

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<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Sarah Koffman (1934-94)', in *The Work of Mourning*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 165-88 (p. 176).

the owners of the books in question. Alongside making licit and active the posthumous quality of the written word through the representation of the ‘corpse-like’ book, the references to handwritten material found throughout the novel prompt a consideration of the afterlife of reading, graphically charting as they do the processes of interpretation and adaptation undertaken by readers. In so doing, the physical object of the written document in *Wolf Hall* lays the groundwork for an interrogation of the nature and status of the text, both in the historical moment of the Reformation and in Mantel’s work more broadly. It prompts, above all, a consideration of the afterlife of ideas.

As we have seen, *Wolf Hall* does not attempt to impose an irrevocable split between printed texts and their manuscript predecessors, presenting hybrid objects, like that of Thomas More’s heavily annotated printed prayer book. A less direct but nonetheless striking example of the novel’s blurring of the boundaries between manuscript and print can be found in a detail of the description of Protestant reformer James Bainham’s arrest, interrogation, and execution for heresy. The passage describes how Bainham is burned alongside the leather seller, John Tewkesbury, who ‘had possession of Luther’s *Liberty of a Christian Man*, the text copied out in his own hand’ (p. 335). This hand-copied version of a printed text echoes those ‘scraps of writing’ encountered earlier with reference to Cromwell’s mother-in-law, a material representation of the ‘hidden verses locked in the head’ that acknowledges the unstoppable circulation of texts. The ‘pall of human ash’ (p. 335) that Bainham and Tewkesbury are reduced to foreshadows a similar passage twenty pages later in which Cromwell recalls his childhood experience of watching as a Lollard is burned for heresy. The macabre and visceral description of the event is striking but the most pertinent moment of the passage comes in the aftermath of the execution as the Lollard’s remains are disposed of:

[Cromwell] watched the officers strike with their iron bars at the human debris that was left. The chains retained the remnants of flesh, sucking and clinging. [...]

The Loller’s skull was left on the ground, the long bones of her arms and legs. Her broken ribcage was not much bigger than a dog’s. A man took an iron bar and thrust it through the hole where the woman’s left eye had been. He scooped up the skull and positioned it on the stones, so it was looking at him. Then he hefted his bar and brought it down on the crown. Even before the blow landed he knew it was false, skewed. Shattered bone, like a star, flew away into the dirt, but the most part of the skull was intact.

[. . .]

They threw down their iron bars amid what was left of the Loller. It was just splinters of bone now, and thick sludgy ash. [...]

The stink of the woman was still in the air. He wondered if she was in Hell now, or still about the streets, but he was not afraid of ghosts. (pp. 355-6)

I quote this passage at length because it demonstrates a doubleness which is provocative. Even as the passage describes an attempt to utterly obliterate a subject whose body, as the container of her religious beliefs, functions as a threat to religious orthodoxy, it begins to acknowledge that the destruction of ideas is not so simple. The smell of the burned flesh combines with the splinters of bone and ‘sludgy ash’ to resist the officers’ acts of destruction. Likewise, the specificity of the attempted destruction of the woman’s skull, the iron bar inserted through the eye socket which previously housed the organ of (in)sight and the blow that does not destroy the skull which previously housed the organ of belief and thought, is key. The skull persists and the bone fragment ‘like a star’, which the blow creates, becomes symbolic of the transmission of ideas, its trajectory uncertain and unpredictable, impervious to nullification through physical means and capable of being apprehended long after its point of origin has ceased to exist. Far from destroying the Loller, the passage renders her beyond destruction, atomised, dispersed, along with the religious ideas that her body is made to represent. Mantel goes further though, turning the moment of execution into a moment of inscription as the executed woman’s friends and family gather up what is left of her:

He saw now that the men and women were not praying. They were on their hands and knees. They were friends of the Loller, and they were scraping her up. One of the women knelt, her skirts spread, and held out an earthenware pot. His eyes were sharp even in the gloom, and out of the sludge and muck he picked a fragment of bone. [. . .]

When they had got a bowlful, the woman who was holding it said, ‘Give me your hand.’

Trusting, he held it out to her. She dipped her fingers into the bowl. She placed on the back of his hand a smear of mud and grit, fat and ash. ‘Joan Boughton,’ she said. (p. 357)

The smear on the back of Cromwell’s hand acts as a form of inscription that moves beyond the posthumous permanence of the written word to attest to the afterlife of an idea. The marking of Cromwell’s skin with Joan Boughton’s remains produces an

internalisation of the moment, and by association the tenets of Lollardy.<sup>42</sup> Though the mark is not physically indelible it produces a permanent memorial and affective trace for Cromwell; the narrative states that Cromwell ‘ha[d] never forgotten the woman’ (p. 357) and indeed the memory of this instance of religious intolerance ‘floods into his body’ (p. 352), contributing to a sense that this moment of inscription has been internalised, defying physical or corporeal containment or inscription. Above I discussed the material object of the book and its analogous relationship to the body in *Wolf Hall*. Having established this analogue, the harbouring of ideas and beliefs within the body of the subject comes to parallel the inscription of those ideas and beliefs within the pages of the book. The depiction, in the Lollard passage, of an inscription whose ideational content remains though its material form no longer persists points towards the unpredictable circulation of ideas, and more specifically, the texts that express those ideas, whose existence is not predicated upon ‘cheap parchment’ or ‘slunk vellum.’ It is to the unbound or, perhaps, disembodied text that this analysis now moves.

### **Pressing Matters: Technology, Textuality and Ghosts from the Machine**

Thus far I have discussed the undead lives of books and the hauntings those books facilitate. I have also examined how the image of book as corpse articulates the act of writing as negotiating the boundaries between pre- and post- mortem, with the writer producing work that will outlive them, creating a bibliographic cadaver that anticipates and mirrors the physical body in death. Yet, as the analysis of the Lollard passage in conversation with this concept of the corpse-like book indicates, a material book is merely the physical container for a text whose existence is not prescribed by bindings and pages but has a disembodied quality which renders it unregulatable and unruly. What then is the status of the text in *Wolf Hall* and how does it develop the linkage that has already been established between writing and death? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to outline the second contextual element upon which the novel grounds its intellectual and creative project: the advent of print.

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<sup>42</sup> At the opening of the passage Cromwell’s interrogation of one of his fellow onlookers as to the nature of Joan Boughton’s crime, allows the religious convictions associated with the practice of Lollardy, for example the denial of transubstantiation and the refutation of the cult of saints, to be explicated: ‘[s]he is a Loller. That’s one who says the God on the altar is a piece of bread. [...] She says the saints are but wooden posts’ (p. 353).

The Protestant Reformation is a period inextricably linked with the proliferation of print culture, though the nature and strength of that link are subjects of complex and on-going debate.<sup>43</sup> In Germany in the 1500s the rapid expansion of print enabled unprecedented access to education among urban populations, which led to significantly increased levels of functional literacy.<sup>44</sup> This in turn allowed an ‘astonishing wave of religious heterodoxy to sweep across [the country]’,<sup>45</sup> a wave that subsequently broke onto the shores of England. As is observed in *Wolf Hall*,

[w]hen the last treason act was made, no one could circulate their words in a printed book or bill, because printed books were not thought of. [Cromwell] feels a moment of jealousy towards the dead, to those who served kings in slower times than these; nowadays the products of some bought or poisoned brain can be disseminated through Europe in a month. (p. 492)<sup>46</sup>

Cromwell’s frustration and envy of those living in the ‘slower times’ of the pre-print era articulate a broader association between print, heresy and sedition; as Jesse Lander points out ‘[a] printed book cannot be dismissed as the solitary ravings of a singular heretic, disgruntled reader or political dissident’.<sup>47</sup> As Lowenstein notes, the ‘Henrician Reformation of the 1530s’ perceived heresy ‘not simply in terms of evangelical individuals but in terms of proliferating texts [. . .] capable of quickly disseminating dangerous and unorthodox doctrine and seditious opinion to the people’.<sup>48</sup> During Thomas Cromwell’s lifetime, to possess certain publications, such as William Tyndale’s English translation of the New Testament, which was later to go on to form the basis of much of Cromwell’s own officially sanctioned and

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<sup>43</sup> For example, see Elizabeth Eisenstein’s disavowal of the notion that, for the Protestant cause, print was merely an instrumental means to an end, in favour of an understanding of print as a ‘pre-condition for the Protestant Reformation’ for which ‘the new medium was a precipitant’. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), p. 310. Likewise, Alison Shell points out that the large body of printed counter-Reformation material has been ‘unfairly marginalised’ and argues that its presence points to a sustained Catholic engagement with print technology. Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Biller, *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Bob Scribner, ‘Heterodoxy, Literacy and Print in the early German Reformation’, *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 257.

<sup>46</sup> Cromwell’s jealousy has an ironic quality here when considered alongside Eisenstein’s point that ‘The first [. . .] campaign ever mounted by any government in any state in Europe’ to exploit fully the propaganda potential of the press was that conducted by Thomas Cromwell to back up the actions of Henry VIII’. Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, p. 312.

<sup>47</sup> Jesse M Lander, *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print and Literary Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> David Lowenstein, ‘Writing and the persecution of heretics in Henry VIII’s England: *The Examination of Anne Askew*’, in *Heresy, Literature and Politics in Early Modern English Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11-39 (pp. 15-6).

commissioned Bible, was grounds for arrest and prosecution for heresy. Indeed, the flood of reformist literature into England so concerned Henry VIII that in 1538 ‘[he] issued a proclamation banning the importation of any book printed in English’.<sup>49</sup> The strategy failed and, as Richard Rex points out, Protestant texts continued to be printed, imported and circulated ‘by those who were already on the wrong side of the law’.<sup>50</sup>

Circulation, proliferation, dissemination; these words emerge repeatedly in the literature that has grown up around early print culture. Cromwell’s mournful jealousy of his pre-print predecessors articulates all three concepts either implicitly or explicitly but it also captures another common quality attributed to print technology at this time – that of carrying disease, being contagious or else poisonous. The legislation discussed above attests to ‘just how frightening the state found print technology that stubbornly evaded its repeated efforts at control’.<sup>51</sup> Harold Weber observes how ‘[t]he printed word becomes [. . .] a power unhealthy, infectious, subtly and mysteriously contagious [. . .]. A plague has invaded the body of the kingdom fragmenting a unity [. . .], a dark and secret realm of books which mysteriously propagate themselves’.<sup>52</sup> Despite pertaining to the reign of Charles II, Harold Weber’s analysis of various proclamations responding to print culture offers a picture of print that is instantly recognisable within *Wolf Hall* with the novel acknowledging how the press emphasised the disembodied nature of textuality and in so doing ‘gave new vitality to ghosts’.<sup>53</sup> The present reading does not propose that *Wolf Hall* is merely offering a literary rendering of these debates around print. Rather, I argue that the novel presents the printing press and print culture as changing the nature of spectrality and by doing so, generating new forms of haunting.

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<sup>49</sup> Rex, p. 93.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Not only were the products of the press subject to unregulated circulation, the press itself was often equally unstable since ‘dissidents took advantage of the handpress whenever they could – installing it in secret places and moving it around’. Eisenstein, *Divine Art*, p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> Harold Weber, *Paper Bullets: Print and Kingship under Charles II* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1996), p. 137.

<sup>52</sup> Weber, pp. 137-139.

<sup>53</sup> Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 204-205. Raymond argues here that early print productions, and pamphlets in particular, relied upon the ‘summoning’ (p. 27) of dead subjects to give their arguments weight, a technique which continued into the seventeenth century. ‘Ghosts were revived to speak of the past and to incriminate or vindicate the present’ and writers ‘ventriloquized’ ghosts to provide the voice for their own writing. I argue that Raymond’s position should not just be understood in terms of a prosopopeic rhetorical device but hits upon a broader effect of print, that is its relationship with the supernatural and the phantasmal, its ability to conjure a multiplicity of ghosts.

The Castile soap came. And your book from Germany. It was packaged as something else. I almost sent the boy away. (p. 37)

Here Liz Cromwell informs her husband of the delivery to the house of a copy of William Tyndale's testament, printed in English. This seemingly off-hand comment captures Mantel's nuancing of the compromised presence of the material books in *Wolf Hall* through an acknowledgement of how, during the Reformation, banned religious texts were frequently smuggled into the country by Dutch and German textile merchants under false titles, cheaply reprinted and covertly circulated. By examining how these objects are established as only partially present, wavering between visibility and invisibility, it becomes clear how, through compromising the physical forms of the books which contain them, Mantel sets the scene for an understanding within the novel of text as spectral. I have already observed how Cromwell's copy of Tyndale's testament is described through a privileging of its physicality, its size, the poor quality of the paper, the capitalised typesetting of the colophon registered through its uppercase rendering in the novel (p. 40). Yet following this description, it is not these kinds of scholarly descriptions of the printed products of the Reformation which are foregrounded; indeed we never again see a Protestant book being read. Rather, the occult life of Reformation publications is emphasised as Cromwell is described 'keep[ing] up with what's written and with what's smuggled through the Channel ports, and the little East Anglian inlets, the tidal creeks where a small boat with dubious cargo can be beached and pushed out again, by moonlight, to sea' (pp. 39-40). The vernacular religious books that formed the primary drivers for the Protestant Reformation flicker in and out of the novel, spoken of, alluded to, yet hidden and compromised, frequently destroyed by the time they appear within the narrative. This representation is exemplified by the fate of the books belonging to Humphrey Monmouth, the master draper thought to have sheltered William Tyndale before his flight from England:

When Monmouth's house is raided, it is clear of all suspect writings. It's almost as if he was forewarned. There are neither books nor letters that link him to Tyndale and his friends. All the same, he is taken to the Tower. His family is terrified [. . .] They have to let him go, for lack of evidence, because you can't make anything of a heap of ashes in the hearth. (p. 125)

The physical presence which confronts the reader is that of 'a heap of ashes' (foreshadowing the fate of Joan Boughton, and others like her, reduced to 'a pall of

human ash' (p. 335)) rather than a complete book, and is paralleled in a later passage in which the wife of John Peyt, another Protestant Reformer arrested for heresy, recounts the raid upon their house by Thomas More. Lucy Peyt describes her husband 'cast[ing] his Testament under his desk' where it remains for the hour-long search for incriminating publications, 'Tyndale lying there, like a poison stain on the tiles' (p. 300). Ashes, stains; this pre-occupation with remains sits alongside the compromised physical presence of Protestant texts more generally to depict a process of disembodiment with regards to texts and ideas. By occulting the material object of the book, showing it burned, hidden and smuggled, and in doing so creating a parallel with the fates of their readers and writers, Mantel provokes her own reader to ask what is left over when book and body are destroyed? The answer can be found in Protestant reformer Hugh Latimer's explanation of how he evaded his heresy charge: '[b]are walls my library. Fortunately, my brain is furnished with texts' (p. 360).<sup>54</sup> Latimer's description of his mind as 'furnished with texts' underscores the futility of the attacks on Joan Boughton's skull discussed above, reaffirming as it does the immunity of texts and ideas to material destruction. Such a formulation powerfully articulates an understanding of the text as exceeding the physical bounds of the book and possessing a discarnate persistence.<sup>55</sup> The Reformation texts discussed in *Wolf Hall* are possessed of a spectrality which is given potency by their production in print. Unbound, they form the persistent haunting presences which characterise not only the emergent print culture of the Reformation but also Mantel's work more generally.

'He cannot lock us all up.'

'He has prisons enough.'

'For bodies, yes. But what are bodies? He can take our goods, but God will prosper us. He can close the booksellers, but still there will be books. They have their old bones, their glass saints in windows, their candles and shrines, but God has given us the printing press.' (p. 301)

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<sup>54</sup> The historic figure of Hugh Latimer was closely associated with Protestant martyr Robert Barnes whose work was reportedly recommended to Cromwell by his servant Stephen Vaughan. In a letter of 14 November 1531 Vaughan instructed Cromwell to 'look well upon Dr Barnes' book. It is such a piece of work that I have not seen any like it. I think he shall seal it with his blood,' re-confirming the very real linkages already demonstrated between the notion of corpse and corpus. Letter from Stephen Vaughan to Thomas Cromwell, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, vol. 5, 1531-1532 (London: Her Majesties Stationary Office, 1880), p. 245.

<sup>55</sup> It is particularly interesting that Mantel understands the text generally as disembodied and capable of permeating the self without recourse to material inscription, as this comment makes clear: 'You inhale texts, they're your atmosphere'. Hilary Mantel, *Email Interview - Answers*, Appendix 2, p. 254.



The exchange above, which takes place between Thomas Cromwell and Lucy Peyt, captures the shifting relationship between books and bodies, how the former have recourse to evasion and survival in ways that the latter do not. Lucy Peyt is, I suggest, using the term ‘book’ as a synonym for text. Such synonymous usage is supported by the differentiation implied in her question ‘what are bodies?’, suggesting a belief in something beyond the body which cannot be contained, something that is given an equivalence in the books that will survive even if the booksellers are closed. The ‘books’ referred to here are in fact texts of the kind Hugh Latimer’s brain is furnished with, texts which are passed down and ‘locked in the head.’ The idea that a printed text, once read, might be internalised and memorised, capable of being quoted and mis-quoted regardless of the presence of a physical inscription is repeatedly emphasised throughout the novel. Cromwell himself ‘knows the whole of the New Testament by heart’ (p. 104). This distinction is crucial; he is not said to know the Bible by heart only the portion available to him in print, implying that print is somehow more memorable, more persistent, than its manuscript counterparts. Likewise, William Tyndale, whose association with print publication is definitive, is repeatedly quoted in the narrative. That Tyndale is ventriloquized is indicative in itself of *Wolf Hall*’s understanding of text as discarnate and it should be noted that this incorporeality is given a doubly phantasmal gloss thanks to the slippery narrative voice whose identity cannot satisfactorily be located. As a result the reader must constantly ask who is speaking when another is quoted, with the secondary question, of where to locate the author in relation to their text, in close attendance. This reading of *Wolf Hall* is predicated upon an understanding of the author as both testator and legatee, one who inherits and translates the past and in turn leaves a legacy of their own. This troubled position, in which the questions of responsibility and authority are vexed, is played out eloquently in the novel’s treatment of Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament. Indeed, it is Tyndale’s testament that facilitates the second facet of Mantel’s spectralisation of text.

Show me where it says, in the Bible, ‘Purgatory’. Show me where it says relics, monks, nuns. Show me where it says ‘Pope’. (p. 39)

Unsurprisingly, Cromwell forms the mouthpiece for increasingly vocal demands made during the Protestant Reformation for proof of the scriptural validity of certain tenets of Catholicism. If the incorporeal afterlives of a printed text are stressed

throughout *Wolf Hall*, the spectral quality of the texts produced by the printing press is compounded by a repeated return to the discrepancies which arise between various translations and editions of the same publication which are made so readily available through the process of printing. Through exposing the lack of scriptural underpinnings for practices such as indulgences, purgatory, the worship of saints, and the necessity of monks and nuns, Mantel establishes texts as being composed of additions and omissions, gaps and ghosts,<sup>56</sup> depicting them as shifting and unreliable. The unstable quality of a text is remarked upon at various moments in the novel, both in terms of instability caused by the process of interpretation ('[l]eases, writs, statutes, all are written to be read, and each person reads them by the light of self-interest' (p. 228)), and in terms of the process of textual production.<sup>57</sup> Stephen Gardiner's response upon hearing that Cromwell 'antiquated a statue' is to quip, '[s]tatue, statute, not much difference' to which Cromwell answers '[o]ne letter is everything in legislating' (p. 329). This brief exchange captures not only the idea that a text may be 'antiquated', edited in such a way as to imply a historical precedence which is actually non-existent, but also how texts are spectralised through the process of editing which creates the wealth of possibilities composed of omissions, deletions and discrepancies. As has been established, for Mantel, this process, with its emphasis on potentiality is a fertile breeding ground for ghosts.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> It is useful to refer here to the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of a ghost as '[a] shadowy outline or semblance, an unsubstantial image (of something); hence, a slight trace or vestige', a definition which captures the partial, though referential quality of the fragments of a text which appear as additions, without any direct textual predecessor as well as the vestigial quality of textual elements which have been partially removed or compressed. "ghost, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2015. Web. (accessed 4 July 2015).

<sup>57</sup> The instability of a text, instituted either by the editing process or by the process of reading and interpretation, and the potentially stabilising quality of print, is succinctly articulated in *Wolf Hall's* sequel *Bring up the Bodies* in a discussion of Thomas Wyatt's poetry: '[Wyatt] jots a verse on some scrap of paper, and slips it to you, [. . .]. Then he slides a paper to some other person, and it is the same verse, but a word is different. Then that person says to you, did you see what Wyatt wrote? You say yes, but you are talking of different things. Another time you trap him and say, Wyatt, did you really do what you describe in this verse? He smiles and tells you, it is the story of some imaginary gentleman, no one we know; or he will say, this is not my story I write, it is yours, though you do not know it. [. . .] He will declare, you must believe everything and nothing of what you read' to which it is suggested that 'someone should take [Wyatt's] verses to the printer' on the basis that 'that would fix them.' Hilary Mantel, *Bring up the Bodies* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 413.

<sup>58</sup> This understanding of the Mantelian ghost as, on one level, something that never happened, but could have, is perhaps where *Wolf Hall* most closely engages with the notion of haunting: '[b]eneath every history, another history' (p. 66). As we have seen this conceptualisation is fleshed out poignantly in *Giving up the Ghost*: 'When you turn and look back down the years, you glimpse the ghosts of other lives you might have led. All your houses are haunted by the person you might have been. [. . .] You think of the children you might have had but didn't. When the midwife says 'It's a boy,' where does the girl go? When you think you're pregnant, and you're not, what happens to the

A more expansive examination of textuality's inherent play with potentiality, and its resulting spectral quality can be found in the novel's treatment of the translations which generated the texts at the heart of Reformation controversies. This is most specifically undertaken with reference to William Tyndale's New Testament.<sup>59</sup> As Cromwell's demands indicate ('Show me where it says [. . .]), Tyndale's testament is presented as a document in which certain extracts are redacted and certain concepts rejected on the basis of their not possessing any true authority, absent as they are from the Bible as written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and latterly the Latin vulgate.

Tyndale says, now abideth faith, hope, and love, even these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Thomas More thinks it is a wicked mistranslation. He insists on 'charity'. He would chain you up, for a mistranslation. He would, for a difference in your Greek, kill you.

He wonders again if the dead need translators; perhaps in a moment, in a simple twist of unbecoming, they know everything they need to know.

Tyndale says, 'Love never falleth away.' (p. 152)

A number of things are taking place in this depiction of the oppositional relationship between Thomas More and Tyndale which evidence the ghostings inherent in textuality, ghostings which render texts spectral. Firstly, through the controversy over Tyndale's use of the word 'love', the play of potentiality which takes place during the process of translation is exposed. The disagreement between More and Tyndale over the translation of the word *agape* in the Greek translation of 1 Corinthians 13 that Mantel dramatizes similarly enacts the way that, in translation, the choice of one word leaves a host of other possible words in a state of suspension. In this case More is correct to assert that *agape* means charity, just as Tyndale is correct in his translation of it as 'love'. However, it also has the sense of compassion, and affection. *Wolf Hall* adeptly expresses the ghostly existence of these other potential translations, ghosts of meaning which form a 'shifting, shadow-mesh of [. . .] possibilities' (p. 27).

Secondly, attention must be paid to Cromwell's speculation upon whether 'the dead need translators, or if, in a simple twist of unbecoming, they know everything they

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child that has already formed in your mind? You keep it filed in a drawer of your consciousness, like a short story that wouldn't work after the opening lines' (p. 20).

<sup>59</sup> The issue of translation and the vernacular Bible as a text associated with Protestantism is ironically alluded to in *Fludd*, strikingly with reference to the idea of the 'unmarked quotation' as Father Angwin admits that 'he thought it on the whole dangerous to disabuse his flock of the notion that the Bible is a Protestant book, and had tended to leave his quotations unattributed' (*Fludd*, p. 75).

need to know' (p. 152), recalling his hollow speculation, upon the death of his daughter Anne, that 'she was learning Greek: perhaps she knows it now' (p. 152). Cromwell's statement invokes another well-known line from 1 Corinthians 13: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.' This implied affinity between the dead and knowledge,<sup>60</sup> particularly a comprehensive knowledge of languages which would negate the need for translation stands in contrast with the notion of *Wolf Hall* as an inheritance, and translation of, the narratives of the historical dead. If the 'aggregated mass' of the dead are conjectured to exist in a pre-Babel state, the living are represented as having a pressing requirement for an act of translation with regard to the dead, their appearances and messages, which would render them comprehensible. Indeed, when Cromwell is called to attend the king, and to allay his alarm at the oneiric manifestation of his dead brother, the exchange that follows constitutes such a translation of the dead for the living, even if Cromwell's interpretation of Arthur's apparent manifestation is freighted with self-interest (p. 274-5). The process of translation, then, is depicted in *Wolf Hall* as involving not only the creation of ghostly potentialities, but of being a pre-condition of any intercourse between the living and the dead.

By now it is clear that *Wolf Hall* understands print as having facilitated a dramatic spectralisation of textuality. It has also been established that the discarnate quality of print is underscored in the novel's treatment of translation as a play of ghostly potentialities. Subsequently, it has been possible to analyse translation as a process taking place between the living and the dead, not merely with regards to the characters within the novel but with regards to Mantel's writing practice as a process of inheritance that brings with it an attendant responsibility to translate and interpret. Having examined how print allowed for a medium-specific spectralisation of text that amplified questions of authority and authenticity, it is necessary to examine what impact this bibliographic development had upon textual practice, both during the Reformation and within Mantel's contemporary work, and how this spectral quality manifests itself in specific textual hauntings.

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<sup>60</sup> The inability of texts to articulate certain notions, particularly around the dead, is underscored in Cromwell's plaintive plea, following the death of his wife: 'find a text: find a text for this' (p. 104).

### Paratextual Activity: Textiles, (Inter)textuality and Haunting

Suppose within every book there is another book, and within every letter on every page another volume constantly unfolding; but these volumes take no space on the desk. (*Wolf Hall*, p. 482)

These ‘volumes [that] take no space on the desk’ attest to the phantasmal quality given to textuality in *Wolf Hall*, their ‘volume’ seeming to refer more to a billowing and voluminous textual mass rather than to any physical binding. Furthermore, these lines adeptly capture the supposition which drives not only *Wolf Hall* but many of Mantel’s other works, the supposition that all works of literature harbour within them myriad moments where the influence of, or references and allusions to other texts make, or attempt to make themselves known.<sup>61</sup> In short, this scene of discarnate textual multiplication refers to the notion of intertextuality. In the section that follows I lay out the relationship between print technology and intertextual practice, interrogating how this relationship affords Mantel the opportunity to critique intertextuality while establishing the multiplicity of intertextual drivers which exceed marked quotation to encompass allusion, translation, paraphrase, unmarked and misquotation.<sup>62</sup> Having situated intertextuality in a Reformation context I demonstrate how, when read alongside that which appears in *Fludd*, the intertextual material present in *Wolf Hall* establishes intertextuality as an inherent quality of textuality itself.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, I explore how Mantel’s intertextual play constitutes a potent and deliberate mode of haunting, her intertexts acting ‘as ghosts passing through the text’.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> When it is considered that the passage continues ‘[s]uppose the human skull were to become capacious, spaces opening inside it, chambers humming like bee hives’, a striking still-life is created from the objects of skull, books and desk that recalls the contents of Holbein the Younger’s famous painting ‘The Ambassadors’. The significance of Holbein’s work for Mantel’s intertextual strategy is explored fully below but it is useful to note that this reference alludes to a painting which is profoundly intertextual in its own right, including as it does images of Martin Luther’s translation of a hymn book alongside a book of mathematics by Peter Apian.

<sup>62</sup> In her book *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*, Mary Orr usefully identifies how the term intertextuality has come to obscure the myriad of techniques which produce it. Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> As Kristeva puts it ‘the text is [. . .] a productivity [. . .] a permutation of texts’ in the space of which ‘several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect.’ She goes on to state that ‘[a]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations. Any text is the absorption and transformation of another.’ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York, Colombia University Press, 1980), p. 36, p. 66.

<sup>64</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Email Interview – Answers*, Appendix 2, p. 254. It is pertinent for our understanding of Mantel as both legatee and legator that she goes on to state that, among other functions, her use of

Before embarking on an analysis of the various manifestations of intertextual play within *Wolf Hall* it is necessary to understand how the medium of print influenced the message of the texts it produced. One of the most striking elements of this transformation is the variety of ways in which print accommodated and amplified intertextuality. Firstly, it is vital to note that, with the advent of print, the practice of textual quotation was significantly altered. In the pre-print age quoted material was indicated by a change in font,<sup>65</sup> a clear and unavoidable visual indicator of the presence of a voice discrete from that of the putative author of a text. The invention of print brought with it the invention of the quotation mark,<sup>66</sup> and while the symbol's usage differs from contemporary convention, this formal change should be seen as significant, denoting a partial occlusion of quoted material which made it less immediately identifiable. Secondly, the printed material of the Protestant Reformation should be understood as predominantly paratextual: vernacular Bibles were produced but alongside them were printed a wealth of glosses, marginalia and exegesis. As Scribner notes, 'expanding lay-interest in printed works of piety' was satiated by the publication in print of texts 'recycled from the predominantly scribal pre-print era'.<sup>67</sup> These recyclings sat alongside vernacular translations of the Bible which were not unmediated but rather 'increasingly filtered through marginal glosses, sermons, catechisms and devotional literature'.<sup>68</sup> Thus it is important to recognise the printed texts of the Protestant Reformation as being multi-vocal, amalgamating, re-working and blending texts in a way which was neither as pronounced nor as commonplace before the advent of the press.<sup>69</sup> This is not to deny the intertextual play already present in the texts of the pre-print era but rather to acknowledge that the 'borrowings, re-workings and enhancements that manuscript took for granted as

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intertexts 'allows [her] to acknowledge the unseen influence of (mostly) dead writers'. This formulation leads to a positioning of Mantel's literary influences as both mainly deceased but also, perhaps, only 'mostly' dead, suggesting their post-mortem persistence.

<sup>65</sup> Lander, p. 29.

<sup>66</sup> The earliest known use of quotation marks can be found in a copy of Flavius Philostratus's *De Vitae Sophistarum*, printed in 1516, in Strasburg. Unlike contemporary usage, these early quotation marks were set in the margins of printed texts in order to indicate a line which contained a quotation. Douglas McMurtrie, *Concerning Quotation Marks* (New York: Privately Published, 1934), p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Scribner, p. 256.

<sup>68</sup> Scribner, p. 276.

<sup>69</sup> The significance of this historical and literary context for the exploration of textuality as unavoidably intertextual is underlined by Mary Orr's assessment that '[c]ommentary, translation, exegesis, all return pre-modern views on interpretation and interpreting reference texts, including the bible, to the post-modern world of texts and intertextuality.' Orr, p. 17.

its very substance became the problem of intertextuality' following the advent of print.<sup>70</sup>

In what ways, then, is intertextuality, as concept and as technique, at work within *Wolf Hall*? The novel's treatment of translation as productive of intertextuality has already been established. However, as Cromwell captures in his assertion that 'I am always translating, [. . .]: if not language to language, then person to person' (p. 421), translation is a slippery concept. As was demonstrated in the opening of this chapter, the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the term attests to this, revealing that it refers not only to the rendering of one language as another, but also has the sense of the 'removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another' and '[t]he expression or rendering of something in another medium or form, e.g. of a painting by an engraving or etching.' However, the most pertinent definition for the current discussion is translation as meaning '[t]ransformation, alteration, change; changing or adapting to another use; renovation'.<sup>71</sup> An examination of the way in which Mantel uses textile imagery within the novel illuminates how this understanding of translation is at play in *Wolf Hall*, working to elegantly articulate the unavoidably 'textile' nature of text, its availability for alteration, re-purposing and transformation.

October comes, and his sisters and Mercy and Johane take his dead wife's clothes and cut them up carefully into new patterns. Nothing is wasted. Every good bit of cloth is made into something else. (p. 120)<sup>72</sup>

The quotation above, while referring to a poignant act of recycling in the wake of Elizabeth Cromwell's death, also serves as an example of the way in which textiles are predominantly foregrounded in the novel in order to discuss acts of repurposing and remaking. Earlier I noted *Wolf Hall's* acknowledgement of the role played by German and Dutch textile traders in importing banned Reformation texts. This link to the textile industry is expanded throughout the novel from a contextual detail to a significant metaphorical vehicle which allows the reader to think about text as textile, about 'the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual

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<sup>70</sup> Orr, p. 148.

<sup>71</sup> 'translation, n.' OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2015. Web. 6 July 2015.

<sup>72</sup> This passage resonates with Mantel's own description of her approach to her writing process of which she says 'the remnants linger...bob back into another story, or intrude themselves into another medium [. . .] Nothing's wasted. Nothing's gone. Nothing's lost'. Hilary Mantel, *Email Interview – Answers*, Appendix 2, p. 259.

interweaving<sup>73</sup> producing a fabric composed of many strands, capable of possessing flaws, patches, of being re-cut and re-fashioned to fit the taste of the times. The language of the textile industry, the processes of weaving, dying, tailoring and adapting fabrics, saturates the novel as a way of talking about textuality, intertextuality and the signifying power of words. Cromwell returns repeatedly to tapestries which depict Biblical and mythological texts, and identifies flaws in the weave of fabrics which interrupt their ability to signify or signal inauthenticity.<sup>74</sup> Even written dispatches are sewn into their envelopes (p. 239). Yet, the most notable manifestations of this use of the textile metaphor are the discussions of the deceased Cardinal Wolsey's clothes. After the Cardinal's death it is observed:

The cardinal's scarlet clothes now lie folded and empty. They cannot be wasted. They will be cut up and become other garments. Who knows where they will get to over the years? Your eye will be taken by a crimson cushion or a patch of red on a banner or ensign. You will see a glimpse of them in a man's inner sleeve or in the flash of a whore's petticoat.' (p. 265-6)

This brief passage provides an elegant metaphor for the kinds of intertextuality that became recognisable during the explosion of printed texts during the Protestant Reformation, some borrowing obvious and attributed (the banner or ensign), some decorative, like the marked quotation<sup>75</sup> (the 'crimson cushion') while still others are allusive, easy to miss or fail to recognise ('a man's inner sleeve', 'the flash of a whore's petticoat'). This recruitment of the language of textiles is not limited to providing an (albeit nuanced) analogy for intertextual play. It is also found in the way that texts and ideas themselves are spoken about. The following extract describes the strategies used by Cromwell in order to facilitate conversations with Cardinal Wolsey about the so-called 'bad books' imported from Germany:

Heresy – [Cromwell's] brush with it – is a little indulgence that the cardinal allows him. [The cardinal] is always glad to have the latest bad books filleted, and any gossip from the Steelyard, where the German merchants live. He is happy to turn over a text or two, and enjoy an after-supper debate. But for the cardinal, any contentious point must be wrapped around and around again

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<sup>73</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Millar (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 64.

<sup>74</sup> This point is emphasised in his identification of the flaw in a rug belonging to Thomas More: 'he walks forward, puts a tender hand on the flaw, the interruption in the weave, the lozenge slightly distorted, warped out of true. At worst, the carpet is two carpets, pieced together. At best it has been woven by the village's Pattinson, or patched together last year by Venetian slaves in a backstreet workshop' (p. 228).

<sup>75</sup> Orr, p. 130.



with a fine filament of words, fine as split hairs. Any dangerous opinions must be so plumped out with laughing apologies that it is as fat and harmless as the cushions you lean on. (p. 134)

The presence of the word ‘filament’ brings with it the sense of threads amassing to obscure or ‘embroider’ the more ‘dangerous’ content of the Protestant texts. These threads combine with the simile of the plumped cushion to confirm the interwoven relationship between the text and the textile in *Wolf Hall*. The circulation of the dead Cardinal’s clothing in a variety of new forms, then, articulates not merely a description of Tudor household practice but an articulation of how recycled ‘material’, be it textile or textual, possesses a spectral presence for Mantel. In the case of literary productions, the intertextual material has the effect of haunting the primary text, unavoidably drawing past utterances into the present, the intertext acting as ‘the locus of simultaneously magnetic (centripetal) and counter magnetic (centrifugal) force’<sup>76</sup> which refers outward to other texts while concurrently being drawn into the body of the main text, permitting the creation of new meanings and new contexts.

This exploration of text as textile, or rather textile as text, in *Wolf Hall* is valuable in that it makes licit an awareness within the novel not only of the changing nature of Reformation textual practice but also of the structures created through textuality’s intrinsically intertextual quality and the spectral effects of that quality. Yet Mantel’s consideration of intertextuality exceeds an articulation of the phenomenon as a structural property of writing. To more fully appreciate the complexities and idiosyncrasies of her own intertextual strategy, and in turn locate that strategy as symptomatic of her positioning as simultaneous literary legatee and textual testator, it is necessary to examine one of *Wolf Hall*’s most striking intertexts and the site of some of Mantel’s most audacious and overt intertextual play.

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<sup>76</sup> Orr, p. 135.

### **Après Moi, Le Deluge: *Wolf Hall* as the Great *Fludd***

One of the crucial elements that gives the use of intertextuality in Mantel's work its unique quality is the way in which she utilises self-quotation. In accordance with Mercy and Johannes' re-workings of Elizabeth Cromwell's clothes, previous works are 'cut up carefully into new patterns'. *Fludd* was positioned at the outset of this chapter as a precursor to *Wolf Hall*. In turning to look at *Wolf Hall*'s intertexts it is necessary to bring *Fludd* to the fore, not only to demonstrate its powerful influence upon the later novel and its significance for our current reading, but also to map the evolution of Mantel's intertextual play from the earlier book into the present day. I begin by looking at two moments of intertextual resonance in which it is apparent that, if *Fludd* anticipates *Wolf Hall*'s broad intellectual concerns, this anticipation is also registered at the level of textual exposition. Before doing so it is necessary to provide an introduction to what is a little known and idiosyncratic text.

In her review of *Fludd* in the *New York Times* Patricia O'Connor describes the novel as Mantel's 'contribution to a long and worthy line – the English clerical novel'<sup>77</sup> and certainly, the book coalesces around the representation of the life of rural parish priest, Father Angwin, in all of its quotidian detail. More broadly *Fludd* depicts the spiritual upheavals which take place in the lives of various members of the religious communities associated with the Roman Catholic church of St Thomas Aquinas and its associated convent, in which all is not well. The faith of the novel's protagonists is complex and compromised; Father Angwin, the local priest, has lost his faith in God but still believes in the devil (p. 53). Miss Agnes Dempsey, housekeeper to Father Angwin, holds a plethora of superstitious beliefs. To make matters worse, the vicarage in which they both live is seemingly haunted: '[Miss Dempsey] heard footsteps above, in the passage, in the bedroom. It is ghosts, she thought, walking on my mopping. Angelic doctors, virgin martyrs. Doors slammed overhead' (p. 23). Meanwhile Catholic nun, Sister Philomena, has been exiled to the convent of St Thomas Aquinas for being unfortunate enough to have had dermatitis misdiagnosed by an Irish clergyman as stigmata (pp. 96-7). Against this background of lapsed and heretical faith, Mantel orchestrates a parodical playing out of the debates which structured the Protestant Reformation, through pitting the staunchly traditionalist

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<sup>77</sup> Patricia O'Connor, 'Holy Terrors', *New York Times*, 2 July 2000, <<https://www.nytimes.com/books/00/07/02/reviews/000702.02oconnt.html>> [Accessed 24 June 2015].

Father Angwin<sup>78</sup> against the modernising Bishop Aiden Croucher. Introduced into this complex and heterodox scene is the eponymous Fludd. Based on seventeenth-century alchemist and Rosicrucian Robert Fludd,<sup>79</sup> the novel's protagonist provides the catalyst for the disruptions and reformations that take place within the text, complicating the narrative through the fact of his literary resurrection, straddling the scientific and the supernatural, the historical and the fictional.

Following the visit of Bishop Croucher to the vicarage, and the focussing of his reformist zeal upon the sacred statuary of St Thomas Aquinas, Father Angwin is faced with the dilemma of how to dispose of the plaster saints. Unwilling to destroy them completely he opts to 'keep them together', deciding to 'bury them in the church grounds' and stating, 'I shan't have a service,' [. . .]. 'Just an interment' (p. 27). Sister Philomena, assists with the burial and as she does so discusses with Father Angwin the life and death of her aunt, Dymphna (pp. 37-8). Following their conversation the nun and the priest make for the convent and vicarage respectively:

As they left the church, he thought that a hand brushed his arm. Dymphna's bar-parlour laugh came faintly from the terraces; her tipsy, Guinness-sodden breath, stopped by the earth these eleven years, filled the summer night. (p. 39)

This ghostly encounter, partial and indistinct but nonetheless a moment of haunting, is seemingly called forth by Philomena's poignant recollection of her aunt's life and death. We have already encountered the structure of this moment, resurrected in *Wolf Hall*, as Cromwell returns with his ward from a meeting with Cardinal Wolsey and is prompted to write his will.

'Rafe,' he says, 'do you know I haven't made my will? I said I would but I never did. I think I should go home and draft it.'  
'Why?' Rafe looks amazed. 'Why now? The cardinal will want you.'  
'Come home.' He takes Rafe's arm. On his left side, a hand touches his: fingers without flesh. A ghost walks: Arthur, studious and pale. King Henry, he thinks, you raised him; now you put him down. (p. 147)

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<sup>78</sup> It is interesting to note that while Angwin is positioned as a traditionalist, it is his views that are at odds with the Church, not those of Bishop Croucher who appears to subscribe to all of the tenets of the Protestant Reformation. Indeed Angwin's 'heretical' positioning is subtly established by Mantel's narrator who repeatedly describes him as 'foxy' in appearance. This stressing of Angwin's foxiness engages with the description of heretics given in the Song of Songs where they are depicted as being possessed of 'cunning' and of a 'wolf-like or vulpine nature'. Biller, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> For a biography of the historical Robert Fludd see Tita French Baumlin, 'Robert Fludd', *The Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 281: British Rhetoricians and Logicians, 1500-1660*, Second Series (Detroit: Gale, 2003), pp. 85-99.

At first glance the resonance between the two passages might appear circumstantial, yet these *mains mortes* are performing an analogous purpose. In both cases the ghost in question appears not to the individual most closely related to them but to a stranger, their descriptions synecdochical as the ghostly hand comes to stand in for the whole, and their manifestations apparently prompted by discussion of their lives (in particular their sexual relationships) and the manner of their deaths. Even so, this provocative instance of self-quotation could be dismissed as incidental if it were not for a further passage in which the spectre of *Fludd* seems to be attempting to manifest itself within the space of *Wolf Hall*. In the following passage Thomas Cromwell is standing in the house in Chancery Lane, traditionally given to the Master of the Rolls and left all but vacant for years:

He rests his hand on the banister of the great staircase, looks up into the dust-mote glitter from a high window. When did I do this? At Hatfield, early in the year: looking up, listening for the sounds of Morton's household, long ago. If he himself went to Hatfield, must not Thomas More have gone up too? Perhaps it was his light footstep he expected, overhead?

[. . .]

He hesitates, looking up into the light: now gold, now blue as a cloud passes. Whoever will come downstairs and claim him, must do it now. His daughter Anne with her thundering feet [. . .] Grace skimming down like dust, drawn into a spiral, a lively swirl . . . going nowhere, dispersing, gone.

Liz, come down.

But Liz keeps her silence; she neither stays nor goes. (pp. 583-4)

This scene recalls the ghostly footsteps which pace the upper floor of the vicarage, unsettling Agnes Dempsey and interfering with her mopping. When Agnes confesses her experiences of these phantom disturbances to Father Angwin, the priest's response is striking:

'Father – I must alert you. I can hear a person walking about upstairs, when nobody is there.'

[. . .]

'Yes, it happens,' Father Angwin said. He sat on a hard chair at the dining table, huddled into himself, his rust-coloured head bowed. 'I often think it is myself.'

'But you are here.'

'At this moment, yes. Perhaps it is a forerunner. Someone who is to come.'

(p. 26)

Father Angwin attributes these phantom perambulations and door slammings to 'a forerunner. Someone who is to come.' This temporally ambivalent moment, in

which an anonymous ghost's presence is signalled by footsteps from upper stories and their identity is guessed at, finds itself reanimated in the *Wolf Hall* passage, as Cromwell fantasises about the various ghosts who might emerge upon the staircase to 'claim him': his daughters, Anne and Grace, his wife Liz. Mantel's use of self-quotation here, in which a scene of haunting from one novel spectrally erupts through the text of another, generates an uncanny resonance, as *Wolf Hall* takes the place of the 'someone who is to come' in relation to *Fludd's* 'forerunner.'

Derrida famously posited that, '[a] phantom's return is, each time, a different return, on a different stage, in new conditions, to which we must always pay the closest attention, if we don't want to say or do just anything'.<sup>80</sup> Derrida's phantoms are not the 'aggregated dead' of *Wolf Hall*, or the 'discarnate entities' of *Fludd*. Rather they are those from whom we must inherit, actively and responsibly. Working with Derrida's formulation it is necessary to understand the revenant fragments of *Fludd* which haunt *Wolf Hall* as similar spectres, indicative of an active process of inheritance undertaken by Mantel, even with regards to her own work. These moments of self-quotation are composed of miniature ghost stories and, when lifted from their original context and re-animated in *Wolf Hall*, the hauntings they depict become compounded by their status as haunting intertextual fragments. This compound nature prompts us in turn to remain alert to the linkage in Mantel's work, between intertextual material and the concept of haunting. Allowing *Fludd* to manifest fully, I now move to examine the earlier novel's intertexts in order to contrast the strategies at work in both novels, strategies which are predicated upon the formulations of the book as corpse and the text as spectre posited previously. I do so in order to illustrate how *Fludd's* intertexts, and Mantel's treatment of them, demonstrate a schematic playing out of the writer as occupying a position of responsibility and creativity with regards to literary heredity.

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<sup>80</sup> Derrida & Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, p. 24.

## ‘I have come to transform you’: *Fludd* and its Intertexts

There are those, it is said, who have entertained angels unawares; but Miss Dempsey would have liked notice. (*Fludd*, p. 44)

Miss Dempsey’s recollection above, in response to Fludd’s unexpected arrival at the vicarage, invokes the biblical story of Tobias and the angel,<sup>81</sup> one of a host of intertextual references that orbit Fludd as character and permeate *Fludd* as text. From the novel’s first moments the reader is aware of multiple intertextual presences hovering at the text’s peripheries, not only through the complex, quasi-fictional status of *Fludd*’s protagonist but also via Mantel’s description, placed before the opening of the novel’s first chapter, of Sebastiano del Piombo’s painting ‘The Raising of Lazarus’.<sup>82</sup> Before the narrative has gotten underway intertexts are already multiplying with this reference to a painting that itself depicts a Biblical narrative. It is telling that the painting Mantel chooses as one of two bookends for her text presents death as an ambiguous state. The resurrected Lazarus does not wholly appear to have returned to the land of the living, he is jaundiced and ‘in the very act of extricating his right leg from a knot of the shroud.’ The reference to del Piombo’s painting serves as one example among many where, in a doubly haunted gesture, the intertexts invoked throughout *Fludd* frequently re-animate and resurrect narratives concerning the dead. Perhaps one of the most striking manifestations of the density of *Fludd*’s intertextual strategy comes early on in its first chapter when Fetherhoughton, its environs and inhabitants, are initially described:

The people of Fetherhoughton kept their eyes averted from the moors with a singular effort of will. They did not talk about them. Someone – it was the mark of an outsider – might find a wild dignity and grandeur in the landscape. The Fetherhoughtonians did not look at the landscape at all. They were not Emily Brontë, nor were they paid to be, and the very suggestion that

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<sup>81</sup> Book of Tobit, 5.5-6.

<sup>82</sup> It is interesting to note that this use of visual intertexts reappears in *Wolf Hall* as Mantel describes several renowned paintings by Hans Holbein the Younger, including the famous depiction of Cromwell himself and Holbein’s most prominent work, ‘The Ambassadors’ (p. 370) an oblique reference to which was noted earlier. In a gesture which mirrors her reinstatement of Anne and Grace Cromwell in Thomas Cromwell’s fictionalised will, Mantel includes a lengthy passage describing a group portrait of Thomas More and family which is now lost, its existence only indicated by preparatory sketches and copies by other artists. The description includes the narrator’s observation that ‘[t]he painter has grouped them so skilfully that there’s no space between the figures for anyone new. The outsider can only soak himself into the scene, as an unintended blot or stain’ (p. 230). This construction recalls strikingly the anamorphic skull present in ‘The Ambassadors’. For more on Mantel’s treatment of the More family portrait see de Groot, p. 24.

the Brontë-like matter was to hand was enough to make them close their minds and occupy their eyes with their shoelaces. The moors were the vast cemetery of their imaginations. Later, there were notorious murders in the vicinity, and real bodies were buried there. (p. 12)

The central sentence of this passage alone ('they were not Emily Brontë [. . .]') is a mis-quotation of the line 'I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be', taken from T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.<sup>83</sup> Mantel's revision refers to three separate literary texts, taking in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and, through 'Prufrock', Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. These texts, and the associations they bring with them, interact powerfully to inflect *Fludd*'s literary project. Through the allusion to *Wuthering Heights*, the tradition of the gothic novel is implicitly invoked, establishing a relationship between *Fludd* and narratives of haunting from the outset.<sup>84</sup> The adaptation of a key line from 'Prufrock' provides a more complex example of Mantel's strategy of borrowing. The poem is critically recognised for its wealth of overt intertextual references, which include Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the poem's epigraph, the raising of Lazarus (l. 94) and, as we have seen, the character of Hamlet. In choosing to allude to 'Prufrock' Mantel has selected a poem whose intertexts potently intersect with her own literary project. The reference to the *Divine Comedy* implicates a text whose narrative is concerned with a descent into (and escape from) Hell and Purgatory, spaces whose status were increasingly questioned as the Protestant Reformation gathered momentum. Meanwhile the raising of Lazarus chimes with the earlier reference to del Piombo's painting and the notion that the dead may not be as dead as we suspect, that they may be subject to unpredictable resurrections.

The more direct reference to *Hamlet* provides an insight into the broader implications of Mantel's intertextual strategy here. By adapting the original line 'I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be',<sup>85</sup> Mantel not only draws the reader's attention to a text containing one of the most famous hauntings in literature, it is the

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<sup>83</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> Recall Brontë's narrator, Lockwood, and his encounter with the ghost of Catherine Earnshaw shortly after he has been perusing her annotated collection of books. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 23-4. It is also important to note the ambivalence in the reference here which clearly invokes Brontë's novel while simultaneously including a rejection of the notion that 'any Brontë-like matter was to hand'.

<sup>85</sup> Eliot, l. 111.

character and the play of the same name that is first recognised, with an acknowledgement of Eliot's poem following behind. Similarly, the significance of the Eliot poem emerges from the intertexts it contains rather than its status as a cultural product in its own right. In doing so the primacy of the intertextual fragment is signalled. This primacy is born out metaphorically in the full length passage introducing Fetherhoughton and its surrounding moorland. The 'someone', the 'outsider' that identifies the moors' potential 'grandeur' and 'wild dignity' symbolises strikingly the textual effect of intertextual fragments upon their new location, instituting 'a condensed form of paradigm shift, transmuting context, form and meaning.'<sup>86</sup> The ominous final line of the passage draws the reader again to a linkage between textuality and the dead through the reference to the Moors murders,<sup>87</sup> and the 'real bodies' those events generated. In doing so the corpse/corpus relationship is once again activated, and not only in terms of the intertextual reference to a socio-cultural narrative concerned with the dead. The reference also speaks to the idea that extraneous bodies, whose origins are found in other narratives, can come to be buried within other texts, and in certain cases remain unfound, condemned to 'the cemetery of [the] imagination' (*Fludd* p. 12). The intertextual references within the passage act as outsiders whose presence makes possible various reframings of the novel's content, offering new perspectives and contexts, to be recognised and acknowledged, or overlooked, according to the individual reader.

To understand more fully the relationship that Mantel establishes between haunting, intertextuality, and the debates of the English Reformation, it is useful to turn to another of the intertexts of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. Eliot's poem alludes repeatedly to Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' and this scene of unconventional wooing, with one eye on the grave, makes its own coy appearance in *Fludd*. We have already encountered Father Angwin's solution for the removal of

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<sup>86</sup> Orr, p. 133.

<sup>87</sup> Eileen Pollard astutely points out that while the passage 'is suggestive of the Moors Murders [. . .] the vicinity' is Fetherhoughton, which according to the 'Note' is a place 'not to be found on a map' (*Fludd*, p. 90). The text forges an ellipsis from both history and geography here; it orbits (as centre) the infamous British criminal case and the village in the Peak District, but commits to neither as a locus of meaning'. Eileen Pollard, 'What is done and what is declared: origin and ellipsis in the writing of Hilary Mantel' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013), p. 37. Pollard's formulation is useful in that it underlines the contrary and pervasive quality of intertextual references; despite an apparent textual insistence upon these murders being fictional the reader is inevitably drawn to the historical criminal case as a point of reference.



the statues whose presence in the church of St Thomas Aquinas Bishop Croucher decries as idolatrous: the interment of them in the church grounds. Yet, the execution of his plan is not as emotionally or intellectually uncomplicated as Father Angwin's statement appears to suggest. Faced with holes prepared in the churchyard to receive the statues, the priest is gripped with 'a nameless, floating anxiety' as the excavations become 'a graveyard prepared for some coming massacre or atrocity' (p. 34). This comment serves viscerally to connect the removal of the statues and the parodical religious schism in Fetherhoughton to historical accounts of the Reformation and religious reform more generally, the atrocities and associated corpses that these events brought with them, corpses like those of Joan Boughton and John Tewkesbury. Unlike those incinerated bodies, however, these objects are available for resurrection and do not remain interred for long, as Fludd proceeds to the churchyard to reverse this act of iconoclasm by inhumation. As the statues are gradually disinterred and light is shed on the face of the statue of St Agnes, Sister Philomena makes a startling observation:

[. . .] this interval, this suspension, this burial had brought about a change. She did not mention this change to the others; she realised that it might be something only she could see. But the virgin's expression had altered. Blankly sweet, she had become sly; unyielding virtue had yielded; she gazed up, with a conspiratorial smile, into Heaven's icy vault. (p. 137)

The statue Philomena scrutinizes depicts the patron saint of virgins, and when this status is combined with the discussion of worms earlier in the passage and the dark observation from Agnes Dempsey that 'as for worms, we all know where they are coming from and going to', the narrator's deduction that 'unyielding virtue had yielded' completes an oblique textual reference to Marvell's lyric in which the amorous poetic speaker contemplates the possibility of his love dying a virgin, ghoulishly conjecturing 'then worms shall try|That long preserved virginity' (l.27-28). The origins of this reference are present in Mantel's mis-quotation of 'Prufrock' whose line 'there will be time' refers to the opening lines of Marvell's own verse ('Had we but world enough and time' l.1). That the reference persists throughout the novel is indicative of the haunting quality of the intertextual fragment as it insistently re-visits the narrative, even while subject to partial occlusion.

The readings above demonstrate the multi-layered treatment of intertextual material within *Fludd*, a novel which alludes to biblical, alchemical, literary and visual texts, and places historical narratives alongside folk devils within an intertextual crucible. The resulting textual effects are manifold. On the one hand the unmarked quotations which make up the bulk of *Fludd's* intertextual material repeatedly direct the reader's attention beyond the text to a phantasmal network of paratextual sources. In these instances the novel activates what Giovanni Nencioni dubs 'recognition', a term describing '[t]he moment I perceive in a text the unsuspected presence of another text [. . .] intertextuality at the moment of revelation – the moment of recognition [. . .] as if a space suddenly opened up behind the text, and a new face emerged.'<sup>88</sup> These moments serve to disorientate, acting as they do as sudden apparitions, whose appearance disturbs the narrative through their implication of a textual space beyond the primary text. They serve simultaneously to destabilise the reader's assumptions about who is speaking as the narrative voice becomes possessed by the voices of other authors and other texts. The following passage from *Wolf Hall* obliquely speaks to this kind of paratextual activity, introducing characters from other stories, temporarily re-routing the path of the narrative.

In the forest you may find yourself lost, without companions. You may come to a river which is not on a map. You may lose sight of your quarry, and forget why you are there. You may meet a dwarf, or the living Christ, or an old enemy of yours; or a new enemy, one you do not *know until you see his face appear between the rustling leaves*, and see the glint of his dagger. You may find a woman asleep in a bower of leaves. For a moment, before you don't recognise her, you will think she is someone you know. (p. 224, my italics)<sup>89</sup>

In context the passage forms, if not a non-sequitur, then a sharp change of direction, following as it does a discussion of the king's hunting activities, which takes place in the third person, in contrast to this extract's direct address. In doing so it formally produces the effects it self-consciously discusses, disorientating the reader even as

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<sup>88</sup> Ardis Butterfield, 'Introduction' *Citation, Intertextuality and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Yolanda Plumley, Giuliano Di Bacco and Stefano Jossa, 2 vols (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), ii (2011), 1-5 (p. xiii).

<sup>89</sup> This passage appears to allude to the bower scene in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, playing on that scene's use of sleeping women in a forest setting, and the series of mis-recognitions that drive much of the play's action, but also acting as an unsettlingly anachronistic intertext. The play post-dates Cromwell's life and as such the allusion destabilises, albeit on a small scale, the fabric of the text. In doing so it acts as a reminder of *Wolf Hall's* status as literary production rather than historical record, and confirms the disordering spectrality of Mantel's intertextual strategy.

the passage speaks to experiences of confusion, misrecognition, of being lost and of unexpected or inexplicable encounters.

On the other hand, Mantel's frequent use of unmarked quotations has the effect of rendering her work as always populated by these hidden texts, even when they cannot be immediately identified by the reader. The idea of the quotation that is missed, the extract which is not recognised as quotation, is played upon several times within *Fludd*. In this first exchange, Fludd, intertextual referent and revenant, despairs of Sister Philomena's inability to recognise the presence of quoted material within their conversation:

*'My days have passed more swiftly than the web is cut by the weaver, and are consumed without any hope.'*

The girl did not recognise a quotation. 'Have you no hope?' (*Fludd*, p. 95)

This failure to recognise is played out explicitly twice in the novel, and in the second incident it is Fludd who is oblivious:

'I am ill,' [Father Angwin] said. 'My soul chooseth hanging, and my bones death.'

'My dear fellow,' said Fludd, removing his gaze from the fire, and fastening it anxiously on the priest's face.

'Oh, a quotation,' Angwin said. 'A biblical quotation. The Old Testament, you know. Book of somebody-or-other.' (p. 127)

In these two brief extracts we see the kinds of confusions and anxieties provoked in the reader by the unmarked quotation as intertextual technique within *Fludd*. When encountering certain passages the reader senses an intertextual presence whose identity cannot be easily made out and whose borders cannot easily be defined, an absent presence manifesting in an apparently empty room in a moment comparable to that experienced by Father Angwin as he sits and ponders his tea leaves:

Nothing in particular could be seen in the leaves, but for a moment Father Angwin thought that someone had come into the room behind him. He lifted his face, as he did in conversation, but there was no one there. 'Come in, whoever you are,' he said. 'Have some stewed tea.' [. . .] Somewhere else in the house, a door slammed. (p. 8)

## Conclusion

That the intertextual fragments found not only in *Fludd* but in Mantel's work as a whole should be understood as spectres, possessed of a haunting power, is not merely a useful metaphor to enable discussion of her intertextual play, but rather a conscious and central element of her writing practice. This deliberate positioning of intertexts as spectres is indicated through the sources chosen, which frequently allude to narratives of haunting, to spectres, to the dead and the undead, as has been demonstrated. However, this spectrality is also registered in the structure of the intertextual eruptions, which are generally partial, composed of the kinds of unmarked, anonymous or mis-quotations explored with reference to *Fludd* and observed in *Wolf Hall*'s treatment of Reformation print culture. That these intertexts speak of and to the dead, and to the persistence of the dead, and do so most frequently without fully manifesting themselves and declaring their origins, demands an understanding of them as spectres, more specifically the spectres of influence, from which Mantel inherits and, as inheritor, sifts, interprets, translates. From an examination of the extended textile metaphor employed in *Wolf Hall* to talk about textuality itself and to indicate how textuality always already implies intertextuality, through an analysis of self-quotation as a key element of Mantel's intertextual strategy, to understanding the intertexts within her work as functioning as spectres, a conceptualisation emerges of Mantel as a writer whose intertextual play dramatises the dual forces of creativity and responsibility that she understands to be implicated in the process of literary and historical inheritance.

I began this chapter by exploring the affinity between the material book and the corporeal body in *Wolf Hall*, examining how that affinity produced moments of haunting in which not only the key players in the mainstream narrative of Tudor England, but those figures that formed the footnotes and deletions of history – for example Liz, Anne and Grace Cromwell, and Joan Boughton – are resurrected, are given life, friends, interests and preferences. Mantel renders them, as far as is possible, human, and central, if only for a moment. At the same time her depiction of the object of the book as conceptually mirroring the dead body nuances her role as inheritor (interpreter and translator) of the past, recognising that to write is always to inscribe one's own death, to render one's words a phantom that will take possession of the living and speak to and through them in your absence.

Indeed, such absences, their recognition and at least partial amelioration, are what drive *Wolf Hall*'s intellectual project. Just as Tyndale's translation of the New Testament is held up as revealing the power of textual practice to occult certain ideas or alternatively occlude certain absences, Mantel should be understood, through her establishment of the spectralised text, to be producing through *Wolf Hall* the '[o]ccult history of Britain' (p. 65) that is found in knowing précis in the novel's fifth chapter. The novel provides an account of British history 'occulted' by traditional processes of historiography that insist upon one 'approved' translation of the past. The 'buried empire' (p. 575) of hobs and boggarts, ghosts and outlaws, which Cromwell's commissioners cannot reach, captures the material lost to conventional recordings of history, unaccounted for through a drive for veracity. In closing it is useful to turn to this 'buried empire' for in mapping its territory it is possible to re-assert the significance of *Wolf Hall*'s literary project and its multiplicity of hauntings.

[B]eneath the sodden marches of Wales and the rough territory of the Scots border, there is another landscape; there is a buried empire where [Cromwell] fears his commissioners cannot reach. Who will swear the hobs and boggarts who live in the hedges and in hollow trees, and the wild men who hide in the woods? Who will swear the saints in their niches, and the spirits that cluster at holy wells rustling like fallen leaves, and the miscarried infants dug into unconsecrated ground: all those unseen dead who hover in the winter around forges and village hearths, trying to warm their bare bones? For they too are his countrymen: the generations of the uncounted dead, breathing through the living, stealing their light from them, the bloodless ghosts of lord and knave, nun and whore, the ghosts of priest and friar who feed on living England and suck the substance from the future. (*Wolf Hall*, p. 575)

In this passage Cromwell is seen acknowledging the importance of the dead and supernatural to the lives of the living as he considers how this haunting mass are unaccommodated by the process of swearing allegiance to King Henry, and as such form a problematically unaffiliated, unregulatable quantity. The space inaccessible to Cromwell and his commissioners is populated by the hidden, the miscarried, the unseen and the uncounted whose partial and precarious existence is provided only by acts of appropriation from the living. Such appropriation, Cromwell appears to suggest, may be depleting, as these unacknowledged dead 'feed on living England and suck the substance from the future.' Yet simultaneously the passage suggests an alternative mode in which the living might relate to the dead, one not parasitic but

based upon a recognition which would flesh the ‘bare bones’ of the historical dead. Early on in this chapter I demonstrated the importance of notions of heredity and legacy to *Wolf Hall*’s understanding of writing as associated with and generative of ghosts. The various interactions between writing and haunting and between writers and ghosts that I have examined here are produced out of the necessity of literary inheritance, and the responsibilities and possibilities associated with it; to re-animate the dead, to give voice to literary and historical predecessors alike and allow them to speak whilst avoiding the muffling of one’s own voice. They are results of what de Groot has termed ‘an ethical mediation’ and ‘a moral practice’.<sup>90</sup> In producing a new text, in the act of inheriting, Mantel demonstrates a simultaneous awareness that she is producing her own legacy, ghosting her authorial self and acting as legatee and testator in one. This interrogative passage, with its repeated ‘who will?’ prompts an ultimate understanding that the one who will swear the dead, the spectral and the hidden, who has the capacity to do so, is the writer. In *Wolf Hall* Mantel is answering her own question of ‘[w]ho will swear?’

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<sup>90</sup> De Groot, p. 31

## Conclusion

‘There are no endings. If you think so you are deceived as to their nature. They are all beginnings. Here is one.’ – Hilary Mantel, *Bring up the Bodies*

As my epigraph suggests, the work of this thesis acts as an initial intervention into the ‘invisibility’ of Mantel’s work within the academy. It attempts to secure a mode of visibility for these writings which foregrounds the significance and heterogeneity of the Mantelian ghost as a key trope within Mantel’s canon. Before moving on to discuss which future critical gestures this intervention might facilitate it is useful to re-capitulate the ground travelled thus far. In this thesis I have demonstrated that the situation of haunting and the motif of the ghost do not merely form one theme among many within Mantel’s writing, but rather that, both formally and thematically, haunting and spectrality form a principle which has shaped her work, from her experiments with the gothic form through her autobiographical writing to her best known works of historical fiction. My introduction established the profound lack of any sustained critical engagement with Mantel’s work. Where criticism was to be found, only fleeting attention was paid to the significance of haunting and the spectral. Moreover, I identified an omission of Mantel’s work within the academy that paralleled the kinds of hegemonic occlusion which her writing addresses, situating the work of the thesis as, in itself, an acknowledgement and partial removal of that occlusion.

Having outlined the critical impetus for, and significance of, my thesis, in my first chapter I read Mantel’s life-writing alongside her first volume of short stories. In doing so I established how *Giving up the Ghost* self-consciously positions the documents produced through life-writing as unstable and hybrid – engaged in a project of writing the self into being which is perpetual – through a series of formal and thematic hauntings. Alongside demonstrating the presence in the memoir of a spectral ‘I’ speaker who refuses ultimately to fully manifest, the chapter identified a key element of Mantel’s intertextual strategy, that is, her use of self-quotation and explicit interactions between her own texts, as articulating the patchwork and haunted nature of life-narratives. Finally, through invoking Jacques Derrida’s conceptualisation of the secret, and the role it might play in mediating between fiction and testimony, I established the need to accommodate and privilege the

enigmatic gaps and untellable secrets within those texts, phenomena which emerge as key elements of Mantel's narratives of haunting. Finally, I proposed a mode of reading Mantel's work which was predicated on the maintenance of the texts' haunting secrecy rather than an exorcism of their ambiguity.

With this in mind, in my second chapter I explored how *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession* use the situation of haunting within the gothic mode to articulate the complex and potentially deadly shortcomings of Thatcherite social care policy and, more broadly, of the familial domestic milieu. The chapter examined the ghosts of 2 Buckingham Avenue alongside the social spectres which were generated in the 1970s and 80s by the move to a community based model of care. Through this examination I demonstrated how Mantel's duology understands care-giving relationships and environments to incubate both the potential for horrific abuses and collapses, and contains an ethical imperative whose demand is for acts of empathic witnessing. Maintaining a focus on the interaction between the political and the spectral, my third chapter analysed Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* in the context of Jacques Rancière's theory of the 'partition of the sensible'. In so doing I established that Mantel's re-engagement with the gothic mode in this work, alongside a depiction of groups of subjects (women, domestic servants) who are so marginal as to be rendered spectral, results in a novel which is profoundly political in Mantel's terms. The deliberate clash between the Western mode of the gothic and the Saudi Arabian setting of the novel is shown to be orchestrated in order to reveal the profoundly artificial quality of the politico-religious systems in which only certain voices can be heard and certain subjects can be seen and acknowledged as subjects, systems which produce ghostly excesses in the forms of individuals denied the status of being meaningfully visible and audible.

My fourth chapter established the status of the Mantelian ghost within a contemporary moment in which hyper-connective tele-technologies are ubiquitous, and so too is a mode of hyper-visibility seemingly antithetical to the existence of the ghost. My reading of Mantel's 2005 novel *Beyond Black* proposed that the screens boasted by numerous tele-technologies are doubled and re-doubled throughout the novel as surfaces through which, and upon which a multiplicity of familial, memorial, historical and intertextual ghosts could manifest themselves. I argued that the work puts at stake the contemporary subject's relationship with any number of lived and



unlived pasts. Appropriately it was to the historical past that my final chapter turned, moving away from haunting as a pre-requisite for the genre of historical fiction and instead demonstrating Mantel's use of the Tudor milieu to play out the intricate interactions between the textual and the spectral. Through an examination of the novel's treatment of the advent of print culture in Europe and Tudor England the chapter proposed that *Wolf Hall* is at its heart a book about writing and what it means to be an author, a book which recognises the moments of haunting and acts of inheritance which accompany authorship and the responsibilities such acts and moments might bring with them.

This thesis makes a number of unique contributions to current criticism. While Pollard's thesis nimbly and innovatively twinned the work of Mantel with the thinking of Derrida, the dual focus of the thesis necessarily divides critical attention. My thesis is unique in situating Mantel's work as its principle *cynosure*. Secondly, in building on Pollard's work while maintaining Mantel's writing as the central object of analysis I have been able to offer a reading of Mantel's canon which identifies the primary importance of the ghost and the situation of haunting for sensitive and apposite interpretation of her work more broadly. In doing so the thesis moves away from the necessarily piecemeal interpretations made available by the existing article and chapter-length criticism to trace the evolution of these key motifs across a literary career spanning nearly thirty years at the time of writing. Finally, this thesis has made licit how Mantel's literary ghost stories make meaningful ethical interventions into social, historical and political debates, demonstrating how her work acts at numerous points as social theory which, as Janice Radway puts it, 'use[s] imaginative fiction both to diagnose the political *dis*-ease of our historical moments and to envision just what it will take to put things right.'<sup>91</sup>

The emphasis on the open and the unfinished in the epigraph for this conclusion is appropriate for a thesis which has sought to make a contribution to a currently sparse field of criticism. While I have demonstrated that the ghost and the situation of haunting offer the key 'disorganising' principle for Mantel's work, the 'basic metaphor' through which a number of themes and debates are articulated and complicated, such a focus has necessitated the exclusion of a number of important

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<sup>91</sup> Janice Radway, 'Foreword' in Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. vii-xii (p. xi).

questions and considerations which might now provide the impetus for future research projects. The first of these concerns the need for research that would locate Mantel more firmly amongst her forerunners and contemporaries, putting her writing into sustained conversation with that of her peers in order to further nuance and contextualise the understanding, proposed in this thesis, of the Mantelian ghost as a figure with a profound ethical imperative. Reading Mantel's work in conversation with the work of her forebears, particularly the work of Virginia Woolf, would provide numerous opportunities to explore the changing relationship between women, writing and illness as represented in creative work, alongside potential analyses of the ways in which both writers experiment with and destabilise narrative voice. Likewise, this thesis produces an imperative for putting Mantel's work in conversation with the work of other contemporary writers of narratives of haunting and speculative fiction. These might be authors whose texts have been obscured within the academy in a similar way to Mantel's; for example Sarah Waters and Kate Atkinson. Conversely, fruitful insights could be generated through readings of Mantel's narratives of haunting alongside the work of authors whose ample representation in the academy nonetheless occludes their use of spectrality and haunting, for example A.S Byatt and Margaret Atwood.

The second omission from the thesis concerns an issue which at first glance appears antithetical to the focus in the current work upon the ghostly and the spectral, that is, the place of the body and the role of corporeality within Mantel's canon. While Mantel's representation of embodiment, and the potential for precariousness, discomfort and exposure inherent within such embodied existence, has been touched upon in the preceding chapters (particularly with regards to Alison's body in *Beyond Black*), the work done within the thesis opens up a space where an extensive analysis of the body as trope within Mantel's work might take place. Reading the significance of the marginal bodies found in novels such as *A Change of Climate* (1994), *An Experiment in Love* (1995) and *The Giant O'Brien* (1998), in addition to the emphasis on the body as fallible which permeates *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* (2014),<sup>92</sup> would enable an expansive analysis of how fleshly structures

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<sup>92</sup> The fragility of the human body and its potential for breakdown and collapse forms a key motif within Mantel's most recent collection of short stories. The second story in the collection makes reference to a profoundly physically disabled child, while 'The Long QT' and 'The Heart Fails Without Warning' centre around the interruption of family narratives by physical and mental illness:

might interact with spectral or ghostly ones. A further key omission in the thesis as it stands is the absence of any engagement with Mantel's official literary archive, currently held at the Huntington Library in California. Financial constraints made a research trip to consult the material impossible within the duration of this doctoral project. However, such primary source research will be invaluable for the kinds of potential projects outlined here as thus far no significant engagement with this material is evident within Mantel scholarship.

Numerous hauntings have formed the basis for this thesis which tracks myriad ghosts and spectres formed not only of the dead, but the unborn, the marginal, the silenced and the invisible, potentialities, intertexts and secrets. While, in closing, it is important to avoid imposing upon this diverse host an artificial homogeneity, falling into the trap of rendering the Mantelian ghost uselessly ubiquitous, 'the ungrounded ground of representation and key to all forms of story telling [. . .] both unthinkable and the only thing worth thinking about',<sup>93</sup> it is also necessary to articulate what unites the meanings of ghosts within Mantel's corpus. In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery F. Gordon argues that 'following [. . .] ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look.'<sup>94</sup> It is this transformational change that the Mantelian ghost is charged with effecting. During our 2015 interview, when speaking about her research for *Wolf Hall*, Mantel stated that 'once you know that the spaniel keeper was called Humphrey he is going to appear in half a line. I conceive of that as an act of reverence.'<sup>95</sup> Whether the spectralised citizens of a conservative politico-religious regime, as in *Eight Months*, the forgotten historical dead of the Cromwell trilogy, the words of long dead writers, or traumatising personal enigmas, an encounter with the Mantelian ghost is first and foremost an ethical encounter where an act of mourning, reverence or simple recognition has the potential to take place. The hauntings to be found in Mantel's writing are united through their status as situations in which not only are previously occluded people, voices, events and other phenomena revealed,

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heart failure and anorexia respectively, while 'Harley Street', with its self-consciously clinical setting, is a narrative of vampirism.

<sup>93</sup> Colin Davis, 'Etats Present: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms', in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 57-58.

<sup>94</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 22.

<sup>95</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 276.

but the fact and mechanism of their occlusion is also rendered licit and available for dispute and debate. As Mantel puts it, ‘even if you are documented you can vanish from the imagination. But you can be reinstated in the imagination [. . .] the reverence, the need to mourn and do reverence is not a sentimental impulse, it’s a political impulse. It’s about doing justice, no matter how many years that might take.’<sup>96</sup>

In Mantel’s short story ‘Terminus’<sup>97</sup> a rush hour traveller spots her dead father on a passing train. Disembarking at Waterloo, she seeks him throughout the station, growing increasingly distressed and suspicious about what proportion of the commuter crowds around her are ‘connected at all points, how many are completely and utterly what they purport to be: which is alive?’ (p. 198). She questions the status of a ‘lost, objectless, [. . .] man, a foreigner with a bag on his back’ and of a woman ‘whose starved face recalls a plague-pit victim’, of commuters, high-rise inhabitants and suburbanites, asking ‘how many [. . .] are solid, and how many of these assumptions are tricks of the light?’ (p. 198). Alongside the ghost whose appearance provides the story’s catalyst, those figures upon whom the speaker’s suspicion lands all recall the host of ghosts and spectres whose presence and meanings have been traced throughout this thesis, the familial and historical dead, the alien, the lost, the deracinated mass. The protagonist’s demand obliquely acknowledges how to be living is no guarantee of being deemed ‘alive’ while her frantic and ultimately unproductive search for her father among the mundane structures of a modern train station (‘W.H Smith’ and ‘Costa Coffee’ (p. 196), photo booths and bureau de changes (p. 199)) recalls the dormitory inhabitants of *Beyond Black* and their ambivalent quest for contact with the dead. In the image of ‘a court of shadow ambassadors, with shadow portfolios tucked within their silks’ (p. 197) the world of *Wolf Hall* begins to intertextually resonate. I invoke this crowded ghost story here not simply because it holds within its limited space a striking display of the multiplicity accommodated by the Mantelian ghost. After casting doubt upon her fellow citizens’ animate existence the story’s speaker asks:

For distinguish me, will you? Distinguish me ‘the distinguished thing’.  
Render me the texture of flesh. Pick me what it is, in the timbre of the voice

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<sup>96</sup> Hilary Mantel, *Interview*, Appendix 4, p. 276.

<sup>97</sup> Hilary Mantel, ‘Terminus’, in *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 193-202.

that marks out the living from the dead. Show me a bone that you know to be a living bone. Flourish it, will you? Find one, and show me. (p. 198)

This rhetorical demand inscribes both the richness and the difficulty of Mantel's literary project, its double aspect in which the reader, though presented with traditional ghosts, those formed of the speaker's father, *Wolf Hall*'s Anne and Grace Cromwell, Morris and his fellow 'fiends from Aldershot' who populate *Beyond Black*, Jack Mantel's 'baffled spirit' (*Giving up the Ghost* p. 429) and countless others, are required to acknowledge that these narratives are not intended to 'give up' their ghosts so easily, to simply mark a dividing line between the living and the dead. Rather the Mantelian ghost acts to disavow the possibility of such a line, to insist, in myriad ways, that the meaning of ghosts cannot be 'rendered' and 'shown' and 'flourish[ed]'. Rather such meaning as can be gleaned must be allowed to manifest in the ethical encounters the Mantelian ghost prompts: acts of literary, personal and moral reverence to that which 'shivers between the lines', that which isn't quite, which never was, or is no more.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Questions submitted by Email

1. 'A house with a ghost in it'

You have consistently emphasised the importance of recognising and representing, as far as is possible, the world that 'lies beyond the visible' and your novels are populated by ghosts and devils of many kinds. Could you outline what you perceive to be the various functions of the overt manifestations of the supernatural in your work?

2. 'The Devil can cite scripture for his purpose'

From the beginning of your writing career your novels have displayed a complex and playful approach to intertextuality. The intertextual strategies at work in your novels are manifold and draw upon an eclectic range of sources exceeding the traditionally literary, taking in your own biography, folk history, and visual art to name a few sources. How would you characterise the effects of these intertextual eruptions within your writing?

3. 'Beyond lay the slumbering Moors, unseen but always present, like the life of the mind.'

Another thread that runs consistently from your earliest texts through to *Bring up the Bodies* is the privileging of the intra-psychic and the representation of the permeable relationship between the internal and external worlds of your characters. This permeability at times inspires creation and at times terror, in a way that could be interpreted as displaying a psychoanalytic sensitivity to the function of symbol and metaphor. What influence, if any, has psychotherapeutic/psychoanalytic thought or, more practically, the contact you have had with psychiatric theory and practice had upon the ways in which you conceive of and represent subjectivity?

4. 'Homesick in this place that is not home for another place that is not home.'

Your sensitivity to internal, psychological, landscapes and the foreign bodies that might occupy them is matched by a sensitivity to geographical landscapes and architectural structures. Conversely, you have frequently spoken about the way your own geographical location has influenced your chosen modes of representation. Could you speak a little about the role of place and in particular the structure of the house and the notion of the home in your work?

5. 'Beneath every history, another history'

Multiple critics have observed that with your Cromwell trilogy you have returned to the form which began your writing career with *A Place of Greater Safety*, that of the historical novel. The historical novel, with its literary reanimations of those long dead, is a genre which has the potential to be haunted by allowing the past to permeate the present. The Thomas Cromwell of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* is a particularly ghost ridden figure and likewise, *Beyond Black's* Alison exemplifies a discomfiting, over proximate relationship with the historical, whether that history is constituted by a personal, ancestral past or

otherwise. Bearing this in mind, what do you understand the relationship between history and the ghostly to be?

6.

The reliance of your historical novels on other, non-fictional, sources and supplementary texts prompts a consideration of your writing process more generally; any recorded history relies upon a process of editing and omission just as any literary text must necessarily be submitted to a process of editing and refinement which leaves in its wake gaps and ghosts of excised images, phrases and moments. How would you describe your drafting process and what, if any, is your relationship to the spectral textual remnants that it produces?

7. Assassinating Margaret Thatcher

Your first two published novels, *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession*, engaged overtly with the figure of the ghost and the situation of haunting. However, it can also be argued to offer an incisive critique of a highly specific political and social moment in which the systems that marginalise and disenfranchise groups and individuals. Do you understand there to be a connection with these peripheral individuals and the questions they provoke about the visible and the invisible and the more traditional spectres that populate your texts?

## Appendix 2: Lucy Arnold and Hilary Mantel, Email Interview - Answers

### 1. 'A house with a ghost in it'

You have consistently emphasised the importance of recognising and representing, as far as is possible, the world that 'lies beyond the visible' and your novels are populated by ghosts and devils of many kinds. Could you outline what you perceive to be the various functions of the overt manifestations of the supernatural in your work?

### 2. 'The Devil can cite scripture for his purpose'

From the beginning of your writing career your novels have displayed a complex and playful approach to intertextuality. The intertextual strategies at work in your novels are manifold and draw upon an eclectic range of sources exceeding the traditionally literary, taking in your own biography, folk history, and visual art to name a few sources. How would you characterise the effects of these intertextual eruptions within your writing?

*HM: I think of them as ghosts passing through the text. They allow me to acknowledge the unseen influence of (mostly) dead writers. When you begin to form yourself as a reader (a serious reader who will become a writer) you are making a second self, invisible to the world. I did not want to become a writer as a child, I didn't think about it, but I know now that I was 'forming' myself.*

*A person in the religious life, with a vocation, passes through a training period of 'formation.' At least, that's what they used to call it. It happens at a conscious level when you join your seminary or convent, but it is possible to pursue it, as an individual, from early childhood. I think I became a 'vocational' reader at about the age of nine, when I was able to judge the success of a book, not merely consume story. This may sound precocious and unlikely, but I think other writers might say the same. By that age, a talent for music will have blossomed, or dance, or visual art, so we shouldn't presume a small child is incapable of that kind of discrimination.*

*Books were quite rare in my childhood. There was an inadequate public library (really, one bookcase for all from ages 5-14.) No books at home but old schoolbooks and Victorian Sunday School prizes found in odd corners. I didn't know anybody with a bookcase. Even when I was at secondary school I couldn't get all the books I wanted. Between the ages of 9 and 14, I could have read 6 times the number if I'd had access to them. So I couldn't move on, restless. I had to think about the books that came my way, so I knew them intimately. You inhale texts, they're your atmosphere. I never thought of books as a means of escape, or as incidental pleasures. I thought of them as guidance, and as central to the business of life. So as I was seeking information and not entertainment, maybe my range of inner reference is a bit wider than average. Also, I'm interested in everything, in keeping all possibilities open. I think I've always been more interested in psychology and politics than in literature per se.*

### 3. 'Beyond lay the slumbering Moors, unseen but always present, like the life of the mind.'

Another thread that runs consistently from your earliest texts through to *Bring up the Bodies* is the privileging of the intra-psychic and the representation of the permeable relationship between the internal and external worlds of your characters. This permeability at times inspires creation and at times terror, in a way that could be interpreted as displaying a psychoanalytic sensitivity to the function of symbol and metaphor. What influence, if any, has psychotherapeutic/psychoanalytic thought or, more practically, the contact you have had with psychiatric theory and practice had upon the ways in which you conceive of and represent subjectivity?

*HM: It's not that I read psychoanalytic texts and then used them to form my work; it's more that the texts gave form to what I intuited. They provided a vocabulary from which to choose what is useful from time to time. The business of handling symbol and metaphor is crucial, central to art; it's what art is, I think, the interplay between the literal and its penumbra, the event and its meaning, the overt meaning and the shadow meanings that lie behind. The epigraph of my first published book was from Pascal: 'two errors: one to take everything literally: two, to take everything spiritually.' This is the cautionary word (to myself) to guide me when I look at life and ask, 'what is this? And what else is it?' It's also a friendly caution to my reader: just to put her on the qui vive. I keep up with the field of psychiatry, social policy, public health and health in general, not just because I briefly had contact with psychiatrists but also because I worked in a geriatric hospital after graduating.*

*One of the most important books in my life is *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, by RD Laing and Aaron Esterson, pub 1969, encountered by me 1973. I still have my original copy. I will attach a paper to be published in a journal next year. It was important in reinforcing my decision not to accept attributions of mental illness, and also in my decision to begin writing. Many of my generation were influenced by Laing's *The Divided Self*, which I read before I came across SMF, but for my tastes it was too abstract and too romantic. I don't have any great faculty for abstraction. I tend to want facts (though of course one must turn them upside down and shake them and scrutinise them and never trust them: not give way to spurious authority). So I imagine the case history as a perfect form. Oliver Sacks is a guiding light to me: as I see it, he has a perfect mind, full of concrete and specific knowledge, but able to see around and beneath it.*

4. 'Homesick in this place that is not home for another place that is not home.'

Your sensitivity to internal, psychological, landscapes and the foreign bodies that might occupy them is matched by a sensitivity to geographical landscapes and architectural structures. Conversely, you have frequently spoken about the way your own geographical location has influenced your chosen modes of representation. Could you speak a little about the role of place and in particular the structure of the house and the notion of the home in your work?

*HM: Houses in my books are stage sets. Arenas of conflict. Not places of safety.*

*A good deal of action, I notice, takes place in hallways. In the house I lived in as a child (and every house I entered was the same) there was no hall, passage, and porch. You stepped straight in from the street to the main room.*



*When I was eleven and we moved house and started our new life under a new name, we had a 3 bed semi instead of a '3 up 2 down' terrace. All houses now had halls. All the houses of my friends had them too. I was in adolescence, in a transitional stage. I was waiting in the hall, for my life to start.*

*Staircases are important too. In the first house, the staircase was steep and boxed in. You could only see the step in front. It was one of the most frightening places in the (haunted) house at Brosscroft. But the terror was limited in scope. Something could come down. Nothing could come sideways.*

*In the semi, the stairs ran upwards from the hall. You could look through the spindles, and hear through them. The stairs are a place where you can 'accidentally' overhear. The centre of the house is open; in Hadfield, you could not see or hear from one storey to the other.*

*The areas of conflict are the stairs (shouting up, shouting down) and the space in the hall inside the front door. At best you can stand here, when you come in, and take the temperature of the family home. At worse, a row erupts as someone steps over the threshold.*

*I was born into a singular landscape: a gritty street, a treeless part of a mill village. At the top of the village, a big walk for a small child, there was a park. Going there was like going to another dimension. And it was a singular park: the regulation flowerbeds, and then wildness encroaching. The flowerbeds felt like a futile gesture. There was something perfunctory about the set up. As if the village was lying to itself.*

*Everywhere you looked, every time you looked up, moorland. It was cold and it rained almost every day. The mills were closing and yet the economy of the place and its way of life was shaped by them, for generations back. It was a sectarian village even in my lifetime. I used to look carefully at the house/possessions/habits of neighbours to try to work out what was the difference between Protestants and Catholics. This was before I understood about religious doctrine. I was an anthropologist who only had to pop a few doors down to find the exotic.*

*There was a profound disjunction in my life when I was eleven: new name, new school, new landscape, new social class, and new accent. Middle class Cheshire. Pebble-dash and striped lawns. As an anthropologist I was at this stage frantically busy, overstretched. I had to learn the shibboleths, to get by. It was a practical matter. These communities, the childhood one and the new one could have been a world apart. They were only 8 miles away. Notoriously, spring came earlier on the Cheshire side.*

*I felt an imposter in the Cheshire landscape. (Though in fact, by other people, I was made to feel an imposter in the Derbyshire village. I stood out, in the wrong way. My name first of all: why was I not called Anne, Kathleen, Susan? Why did I use such long words? A child is stricken, not flattered, if told she is different. Also by the age of 9, 10, the peculiar situation in my parents' home was isolating.)*

*Oddly, I was more easily accepted in the Cheshire world, after an uneasy year or two. I could have felt 'at home,' but I didn't. My secret affinity was with my early childhood. The division that had created itself, within, made me liable to shy away from involvement with people, because I didn't know where to be or how to be.*

*I am not really good at looking at landscape. I tend to concentrate on details. One of my tasks now is to get my head up and see the big picture. I can do this with history, but not with a vista. I can see the shape of the social landscape, the community, but not the contours of the fields. I'm learning to look.*

*I'm less concerned with how I fit into the picture. It's isn't crucial to fit anywhere, now. So I can indulge my fascination with the marginal, which is mixed with dread. The urban-rural fringe. Railways sidings. Embankments of motorways. Abandoned industrial sites. 'Business parks.' Every place that is in transition, or that says it is one thing, but is actually another.*

*Buildings are also important to me, in that I am physically sensitive to wrong proportions, and can feel quite ill in certain buildings and cityscapes. But I also like to visit them; it's like taking a drug that's bad for you but has interesting effects; or it's like a dare, an ordeal. How much stained concrete can you take, before you disintegrate spiritually? I say, if I can survive this multi-storey car park, I can survive anything. I am dedicated to finding beauty and order in ugliness. It's as if you had a tatty lost dog at the door. You'd have to take it in and try to love it, rather than have it whining and scraping for days.*

*I dream (night-dream, I mean) of airy and perfectly -proportioned buildings. I am interested in how little perfection people can take. Go into a cathedral and you will find corners of deranged, wilful ugliness: parish tat, plastic chairs, visitors' books in which people with bad handwriting leave their details, as if they were urinating to leave their mark.*

*I came to Devon three years ago to find a place to be. To ground and locate myself. It's not working, because I keep looking at the screen and at my inner landscape. I wanted to recover the concrete knowledge of the world I had as a child, with a small area intensively noticed: a crack in a wall, a new flower, every tiny quotidian change registered. This seems to me an authentic way to live. However.*

##### 5. 'Beneath every history, another history'

Multiple critics have observed that with your Cromwell trilogy you have returned to the form which began your writing career with *A Place of Greater Safety*, that of the historical novel. The historical novel, with its literary reanimations of those long dead, is a genre which has the potential to be haunted by allowing the past to permeate the present. The Thomas Cromwell of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* is a particularly ghost ridden figure and likewise, *Beyond Black's* Alison exemplifies a discomfiting, over proximate relationship with the historical, whether that history is constituted by a personal, ancestral past or otherwise. Bearing this in mind, what do you understand the relationship between history and the ghostly to be?

*HM: Beyond Black was (I now see) a sort of service book for what came next. I had to dwell on techniques of talking to the dead and work out the economics of it. I didn't know if I could afford to write the Cromwell novels. It means a decade invested. I could, as it turned out. It was a risk, though, as it meant I couldn't deliver a book for a long time. You notice Alison is very much preoccupied with making a living.*

*BB dwells on ersatz history, history put on sale, 'heritage.' It is set among deracinated people in 'dormitory towns,' where they sleep and dream. (Not in the suburbs, as people sometimes say.) It is about the falsity of instant tradition. About historical confusion; to the mediums, the eras are all mixed up. It's about how the dead refuse to learn, or get a good character. Alison is in the midst of them, frantic to distance herself so she can see what's going on. In the same way we are in the midst of history, breathing in falsification like poisoned gas, invisible and odourless. You have to keep faith with yourself, believe it's there, believe it will poison you, and scramble to higher ground.*

*This means, go back to the sources and do your research. There are no unpolluted sources but some are cleaner than others.*

*The ghosts in Thomas Cromwell's life not only reflect the understanding of an era where religious faith is strong and the invisible is privileged, but act as personality fragments, sub-selves. The past penetrates our flesh, it's not 'out there.' So when I say his house is haunted, I mean his self is haunted. This is nothing to do with TC per se, though his life, more than most lives and even by the standards of his time, is a history of loss. But the losses could be traced, I think, in any character with whom one lived closely. Character, or person.*

*I am more aware of Cromwell and Co living, than dead. I don't like to call them 'characters', but 'people.' They are as real as me, they just happen to be dead.*

*I think a lot about history and memory, without any resounding conclusions drawn. The phrase 'living memory.' I am interested in how the past changes behind us. Nothing is less fixed. It's more playful and free than the future, because the future is shaped by the practicalities of technology, fed by the available resources: but as the past changes chiefly in our minds, there are no limits to how we make it over. This seems true of both the public and the personal past.*

6. The reliance of your historical novels on other, non-fictional, sources and supplementary texts prompts a consideration of your writing process more generally; any recorded history relies upon a process of editing and omission just as any literary text must necessarily be submitted to a process of editing and refinement which leaves in its wake gaps and ghosts of excised images, phrases and moments. How would you describe your drafting process and what, if any, is your relationship to the spectral textual remnants that it produces?

*HM: White out. Write over. Ghosts remain in the machine, but not on paper, except for big, major drafts, worth a print-out. The chance is that you will erase*

*the best version. But you can't be too precious. I say to myself, you're not a poet. You're not in your artisan workshop carving a head on a cherry stone. You're in industrial production here. Practicalities hold sway. There's only so much paper a house can cope with.*

*But the remnants linger...bob back into another story, or intrude themselves into another medium; a discarded storyline might be wrong for a novel but right for the theatre. Nothing's wasted. Nothing's gone. Nothing's lost, though you may think it is. Most of my ideas exist on scraps of paper, hand written scrawls, before I carry them to the desk and screen. These are the grubby primitive forerunners. They carry the taint of time and place. It's hard to throw them away. (I don't, I keep them). The text on the screen is antiseptic and disembodied compared to these, and perhaps the bits that slip away, that are excised and discarded, are ghosts of ghosts.*

## 7. Assassinating Margaret Thatcher

Your first two published novels, *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession*, engaged overtly with the figure of the ghost and the situation of haunting. However, it can also be argued to offer an incisive critique of a highly specific political and social moment in which the systems that marginalise and disenfranchise groups and individuals. Do you understand there to be a connection with these peripheral individuals and the questions they provoke about the visible and the invisible and the more traditional spectres that populate your texts?

These phantoms, who carry an ethical weight and pose significant questions about our responsibilities towards spectres of all kinds, the dead, the marginalised, the not yet born, reappear in multiple texts. Do you feel that your writing posits the ghost as a political figure? In what ways, if any, does your writing trace a relationship between the ethical and the spectral?

*Ghosts have many functions. They can advise and warn, like Wolsey in the Cromwell books. Like Prince Arthur in Wolf Hall, they can animate the living towards action; to put in crudely, Prince Arthur comes back and causes the English Reformation. They can induce guilt and fear, of course, that is their classic function. But the point is that they insist on being seen. We'd rather not; we avert our eyes; we pretend we didn't see; but we did.*

*So they are like the sights we turn away from: beggars, sick people, the 'economically inactive,' those outcasts like paedophiles who carry the burden of the forbidden desires of respectable people. Not all of them are dead but some will be if we don't take notice. I used to think ghosts came back to appeal for justice but now I think their function is more modest. It's just to be seen. It's the right anterior to all others.*

**Appendix 3: Lucy Arnold and Hilary Mantel, 'Interview', 16<sup>th</sup> October 2015, Budleigh Salterton, Devon, UK - Questions**

- 1.) Having studied your work in depth, the potency of the self-referentiality, both within your fictional texts and between these and your 'autobiographical' work has become more and more apparent. From this two questions emerge:
  - a) Firstly, what status do these moments of self-quotation have within your writing? I think particularly of *Fludd's* status as a possible forerunner to *Wolf Hall*, and the moments, astutely recognised by Dr Eileen Pollard, in which phantom hands pluck at the clothing of both Ralph Eldred in *A Change of Climate* and Isabel in *Every Day is Mother's Day*?
  - b) Secondly, what do you feel happens to a work when you make the choice to call it 'autobiography' what opportunities do you feel it offers you and, perhaps, what risks does it involve? Could you speak to the way that these 'autobiographical' fragments circulate within your fiction?
- 2) The presence of figure of the ghost in your writing is often remarked upon, yet your novels demonstrate a similarly consistent yet possibly contrasting pre-occupation with the bodily and embodiment. In what ways do you conceive of the body within your writing?
- 3) As a reader your books at moments seem to be working to produce a hallucinatory quality, when the ambivalences within the text seem to coalesce into a moment of dizzying visual and intellectual uncertainty. Indeed this 'uncertainty' registers frequently through your description of the sensory more generally.
  - a) How important to you is the notion of 'uncertainty' as an affect to create within the reader?
  - b) What significance does the hallucinatory, and one of its associated phenomena, synaesthesia, have for you as a writer?
- 4) Your writing has attracted commentary from a number of your contemporaries, notably A.S Byatt and Fay Weldon.
  - a) How do you, if you do at all, locate yourself among your contemporaries, particularly in terms of those that produce what might be termed 'narratives of haunting'?
  - b) On a related note in a conversation with you at Bath Spa University in 2013 the latter proposed that an effect of success upon a writer is that '[I]n a way one becomes an object and one must withstand that in order to get on with the work.' How far do you recognise this 'objectification' of the writer and do you find this movement of subject to object paralleled within your work? I think particularly here of Muriel Axons' oscillation between hollow object and partial subject in the *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession* novels, and also of your conception of the veiled women who populate *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*.

5) Though critical responses to your work have deservedly proliferated in recent years, your short fiction has not been as closely analysed as your full length novels.

a) What do you feel the short form offers you as a writer? There is a sense, in *Learning to Talk* that there is a knowing 'working through' taking place that proves fruitfully interminable. Could you speak to the emphasis upon the enigma and the secret which is so potently present in these works and which infiltrates your full length works in often subtle and duplicitous ways?

6) In your memoir *Giving up the Ghost* you speak of the ghost as that which might have happened but did not, giving a notable example of 'the short story that did not work after the first lines.' Do you feel this understanding of haunting as resulting from potentiality informs your work more widely?

7) How do you understand the process of mourning, personally and in your work?

8) The figure of the child within your work perhaps rivals that of the ghost for variety of representation and slipperiness of purpose. What would you understand as some of the various functions of the child within your work? What is the state of childhood capable of producing in the context of storytelling?

**Appendix 4: Lucy Arnold and Hilary Mantel, ‘Interview’, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2015,  
Budleigh Salterton, Devon, UK**

LA: [ . . . ] That’s fine, it was, it was more of an observation

HM: Do you know about it?

LA: Yes, it’s, it’s very early on in the novel, which I was reading on the plane, and Ralph’s talking about his work and suddenly having a sense of hands plucking at his clothing. It was that very specific kind of the hands plucking at the clothing which appears previously in *Every Day is Mother’s Day* with reference to Isabel.

HM: Do you mind if I try and look it up?

LA: Of course! Absolutely

HM: I’ve got a copy here . . . (HM fetches a copy of *A Change of Climate* from the book shelf)

HM: Well, I don’t know where to look for it but, I shall look it up, I will check it for you. My sense of it is that the feeling those two people are having is a very different feeling in that Ralph’s experience is . . . I can’t really say without checking the text, but I would imagine that this is his imagination filtering a motif to him, whereas Isabelle’s feeling is the physical.

LA: A very real feeling.

HM: I would imagine, because Ralph’s world is one of religion that is literalising and takes the devil very literally even though he himself is too sophisticated to subscribe to that religion that is actually his background and I think that because he has pushed that fundamentalist Protestantism away from him he would tend to reach, when he’s scared, he would tend to reach for the expressions of unease that are part of the common culture. He is aware always of being followed by something that he doesn’t know what it is. And that is Isabel’s situation as well but she’s in a far more classic gothic situation where she is in the presence of something that might be about to manifest as physical. I’m always interested in those moments and those two novels are in two very different modes.

LA: Yes, absolutely.

HM: I think that Isabel’s moment. [*pause*] The scariest thing always, and this applies to *Beyond Black* as well I think, is the question of can these things take fleshly form? Morris in *Beyond Black* is always on the cusp of taking becoming real. Your dread is that you might see him and that would be the end of your universe as you knew it, if you did because what would happen.

LA: Nothing could be the same after that.

HM: Yes, yes exactly, and I think that anyone who deals with the fringes of the natural/supernatural is always the whole time reformulating their ideas of

what the laws of nature are and having arrived at a certain position you don't want to be pushed off it. If those laws were broken, again, you are flung into complete moral and intellectual chaos and you have to start over again. Isabel as far as we know has got no supernatural beliefs or connections to the supernatural. She's beset by her own demons and living in the house with her father in this very peculiar situation whereby, in an inversion of the usual gothic, she is trying to act as his jailor, the young woman keeping the older man in prison. But then he keeps escaping and, to this realm of the public park which turns up now I speak of it, I hadn't realised, to be quite a motif in more than one book because in *Beyond Black* Alison talks about her audience's concept of the dead.

LA: Yes! As a sort of 1950s/60s municipal park.

HM: That's right, yes, and they're all sitting side by side on a perfectly regulated English summer day, not too hot.

LA: Absolutely.

HM: And everything is decorous.

LA: Yes, even the bees have no stings, I thought that was wonderful, they're purely decorative.

HM: Yes, yes and it hadn't occurred to me you know, to have this image of regulated nature, it's a public space and its one that has an affinity to nature but its fiercely regulated by by-laws and manicured and contained. But Mr Field manages to make these municipal spaces and the streets quite unsafe. I think there is something truncated about the *Mother's Day* experiment in that I made Evelyn a medium but she gives up her trade a few pages into the book. I think my feeling must have been then that it was too much to handle and the plot was going in a certain satirical direction and it was just enough to implant that, because I always had a feeling of Evelyn waiting to resume that trade. In fact death cuts her short but I picked up that stitch in *Beyond Black*. It definitely was something unfinished.

LA: It felt like she could almost have been, kind of, a sister to Mrs Etchells in *Beyond Black*.

HM: Exactly, yes although she's got a bit more class than Mrs Etchells

LA: Yes, absolutely.

HM: Mrs Etchells would be her cleaning woman, wouldn't she!

LA: Yes, certainly, I thought it was fascinating actually how you do bring that kind of spiritualist motif in and then it gets shut down, as Evelyn says rather dismissively to a lady in the butchers: "you don't know who, the house gets very crowded, you don't know who's going to come in" and I thought that it was a wonderful way that those kind of tenants were allowed into the house and remained, there was that sense of being out of control of who you are communing with and who might speak when you open your mouth, not knowing that.



HM: It's interesting to consider it as a housekeeping job, you want certain rooms tidy and they manage in *Vacant Possession* to have the evil influences shut up into the boy's room, and all the turmoil of adolescence is going on behind that door. I was just interested to mention this business of novels as preparation and precursor to other novels because I feel a trail was laid there in *Mothers Day* for *Beyond Black* but also a trail was laid in *Beyond Black* for *Wolf Hall* because I feel that to have been very much a service novel for the prolonged business of talking to the dead which was going to occupy a decade. So I just really just wanted to make that link because yes you mention *Fludd* as a forerunner to *Wolf Hall* but I think in my mind it, it's very much *Beyond Black*.

LA: Ah that's interesting.

HM: That its tied to the novel, it's not that you consciously know, obviously, what you're doing there but I think that some of the things that are explored in *Beyond Black* I was beginning to feel my way towards more historical fiction in the concept of the past layered beneath the soil and also the falsification of the past in the imagination which very much links *Fludd* and *Beyond Black* because in *Fludd* the church is about, well its less than a hundred years old but the people believe it to be ancient and to be an ancient site. I talk about its music hall medievalism and that, in a phrase is what I am trying to express a good deal in *Beyond Black* with people's notion of history as . . . comic strip really

LA: Yes, I think there's a fascinating moment when Alison is watching, she likes to watch historical programmes on television, kind of safely boxed away, and she says 'oh is that Mrs Pankhurst, I've never seen her in that hat'.

HM: Yes!

LA: And this idea of the notion of history that we have and then this other shifting multi-layered notion of history that you can only really have access to partially in a kind of prismic fashion. Then also conversely Alison's audiences and their relationship with history on a grand scale but also personal history, family history and the idea of the contemporary subject and that kind of flatness and lack, potential lack of a relationship to those that have come before you.

HM: Yes I think Alison understands it in herself, it's just that the dead are so easy and familiar to her. It's not that she knows Mrs Pankhurst it's just that Mrs Pankhurst has a new hat is the amazing thing. But Alison's subjects are resistant because they want to be put in touch with the dead but they've no idea what they're asking for, they don't know their own grandmothers. I think that comes from my experience of going to watch mediums at work and perspiring with effort as they try to put over the fact that someone is here from two generations back but the person's imagination doesn't really stretch back further than last week, but that's probably being unkind. I'm interested in these towns where nobody comes from and towns which exist so that you can get out of them. If you are buying a house in Woking people stress its nearness to the motorway and to Heathrow.

LA: 'It's very commutable'

HM: Yes, that's right exactly. And I get very irate when people describe my locations as suburban because . . .

LA: No, it's a different thing.

HM: A quite different thing and what, the towns in *Beyond Black* are dormitory suburbs – literally – people go there they sleep and what do they dream? Their relation with the city is quite different from that of the suburban dweller I think. Satellite towns is another word for them, on the M25. It just fascinates me and it's interesting, I mean I think of *Wolf Hall* and the people I'm talking about there, I said to an audience at one point 'you see if you were a Tudor grandee, you were a rich London merchant, so when you wanted to build yourself a country house you wanted to build it within the M25.'

LA: [laughs]

HM: And they looked at me. [laughs] What I'm talking of is a day, a day's travel from London. In those days you want to be there with your household within the day, and your baggage. We mustn't get too much off track, that really was what I wanted to tell you about that first question, because you said moments of self-quotation and I have a sense that a whole book can be a self-quotation with this idea of one book being preparation for another. You become afraid, quite literally, of quoting yourself when you don't mean to.

LA: This is something I wanted to ask . . .

HM: I don't know how much the phantom hands do correspond, we'll have to look, but sometimes a phrase comes easily and you think why and you think 'have I read that before' and then you think 'have I written that before?' That's inevitable I suppose, you never know if something is within or without your published work.

LA: I think what I find most interesting about moments when specific phrases for example like the one we were talking about come up is as you say they can occur in completely different contexts, often in very different modes and doing different things, but that sense of transplantation that your reader has does something very special, I think, to the relationship between those two books. Taking something from one context and placing it in another allows it to do something very different and very special, and produces a kind of textual disturbance, of the kind that I feel a lot of your intertextual references might provoke, sort of little ripples, moments when you're reading a text and suddenly [it's] almost as if somebody else is speaking, particularly in the unmarked quotations. You find yourself going off and going 'but I know that from somewhere' and in that way I think your work is very subtly and multi-layeredly haunted by other writers, in a very deliberate way. Would that be how you would understand it?

HM: I think so, and I think I probably take a perverse pleasure in throwing in the least likely reference and creating the big disjuncture, so that the words themselves are appropriate but you've wrenched them violently out of

context so that it can be quite funny for the reader who knows. Some of my characters are made up of quotations. I think the person whose most made up of quotations is Carmel probably. I consider that to be true of myself actually, that I'm made of bits of books and texts, I can hardly speak without quoting and this is deeply worrying to people who don't realising that you're quoting.

LA: Yes!

HM: [*pause*] I have a sense, I don't know if it's true or not, though it would be natural for a writer to be like that, I think it's probably more true of me than most people and I don't, I don't really know why. I think its possibly because I had read so much so early and so before I became utterly self-conscious about the process other people's words were sliding into me and getting minced through my own psychic operations and now they are a natural mode for me and I don't put quotation marks around them in speech, I don't think of them as other.

LA: No, no and you really do get that sense from the work and having seen you interviewed and heard you talking about the work, it feels like the approach to quoted material is very much contingent and potential because obviously you don't know if your reader is going to recognise your reference or not which makes it a very shifting textual ground to work with. In that way again it felt quite spectral, in that many of your characters have an awareness of this kind of hinterland between the natural and the supernatural and many of your characters don't, either they simply don't or, for example Colette, is very deliberately trying to keep a line between the natural world and the supernatural world. I almost feel like that about the intertextual material that is woven within your novels, you might get some readers who are sort of attuned to it and hear those voices and some readers who might not be and I think the idea of those two readers reading those novels so differently is very exciting.

HM: It becomes very manifest when you have a translation because translators tend to be very well read and very diligent and they try sometimes to source things in quotations when in fact you are not quoting and you're not conscious, but they obviously realise that they have a tremendous job to do here and they really pursue it and then you think if someone actually asks you it's with a sense of failure. [*laughs*]

LA: 'I couldn't track it down'.

HM: They've not run it to ground, so sometimes they're trying to unpick convoluted metaphors that strike suddenly into the text thinking it must be a quotation, but sometimes it's just not! Yes sorry, Colette trying to impose that division, well it doesn't work does it, it doesn't work even for Colette. And I think she is the one who dreads her sense of the universe might be overset by seeing Morris. It's going to be interesting because there is a T.V production in the offing, I mean not imminently but it's being written. There have been several attempts to bring it to the screen but they have all faltered. I think this time we'll succeed but this is always the problem, or two problems really, is how do you deal with this frontier between what you can see and what you can't and when you move into another medium you really

have to search your heart about that, you can't fudge it anymore. Well I mean you can, in the sense that a thing can be half-seen on television, but you have to make your mind up about how you think the world works for Alison. The other thing has been, the tendency of the writers to make it safe, to put it into sitcom territory.

LA: Oh, oh dear, yes.

HM: And so it's very rare that people can handle funny and scary. Jack Thorne is writing it, who is the co-writer on *This is England* and he's wonderful, he's got a really big track record, he gets it I think,. I think he can walk that line.

LA: Yes, having seen *This is England* I think that's a wonderful match.

HM: [refers to questions] Shall I just go on?

LA: Is that ok?

HM: You might want to come back to things because you know I may be going off on a tangent with some of these. You talk about autobiography and memoir and autobiographical fragments and . . . I think that one of the most fascinating things about the whole practice of writing is how fragments of your own experience, transmuted out of all recognition, flash into a text. I once heard Salman Rushdie talking and he said a very true thing that the best way to interview a writer was to open a book and show them a sentence, a paragraph and ask them 'how did that get there?' The answer is the key to their whole process because it will exist on so many levels. Of course nobody's work is ever explored in this way, people just don't think of doing it and I think [Rushdie is] right because sometimes its agonising when you hear people making theories about why something is on the page and you want to just say 'because my aunt used to say it' or because 'it's something I saw out of the car window the week before' and I put it into the text. Sometimes what is needed to bridge the gap is a simple bit of information – because it's real. What's interesting is why certain fragments of experience adhere, things that may be quite insignificant in themselves but years later appear in a text. I think that takes us to the autobiographical process because I think in my short fiction particularly I've got a sense that what it's for is an attempt to address mysteries. A great deal of it is about childhood and puzzles left over from my childhood which I'm trying to work on in fiction. I think there's a big difference between what I have been doing in short fiction and the longer form. A lot of the short fiction is first person and this has given me a certain amount of trouble over the years because I've obviously I've written a memoir as well about childhood and what I've noticed is that when people read my memoir they tend to simplify my situation and they tend to describe my step father as being a lodger. Now that's transported in from the short stories where the man does come as a lodger and becomes something else.

LA: Yes, there's a very interesting kind of critical false memory that goes on I think with regards to *Giving up the Ghost* and in a lot of the journalistic responses I have seen to it. There are a lot of statements of bald fact that are

either simply not true or kind of refuse the ambiguity that that text seems to rely on to function.

HM: I came across a good example, I will show you actually, but just coming back to the figure of the lodger/step-father, I think that's a prime example because the situation where the lodger becomes the mother's lover would be far more usual than the situation that actually was the case in our house but in stories that situation comes up because you have to opt for the more usual and more easily understood explanation for that man because otherwise the whole story will become about that, and story after story will become about it. So making him the lodger is a way of saying look there's this man, he's suddenly appeared, he's not a father but this is what he is, he's a lodger, and then he's a lover and that makes it one element in a story so then you can get on. But never do I say in the memoir that he comes as a lodger, that was never the arrangement, it's not something people can take in. The other example in that book, again it takes us back to the supernatural, that just for ease of reference I call the 'devil in the garden' but, if you'll just excuse me for a minute I just want to find a book.

[HM retrieves Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013) from a bookshelf]

HM: Do you know this?

LA: Ah I've come across it but I've not managed to get my hands on a copy yet.

HM: Right its, there's just a small part about my fiction and she deals with the fiction very well but she's completely overthrown when it comes to life because she says 'Fludd is not to be confused with the devil, he's not the great rough thing that sister Philomena heard breathing outside her door or even the one Mantel herself claims to have seen at the same age in the family garden.' That of course is so literalising and reductive and yet the way she explicates *Fludd* and draws out the themes is absolutely fine. That is to say, it all makes sense to me, I'm not sort of sitting there like a school mistress marking it out of ten. I mean it makes good sense, but that then gives you to wonder when someone makes over something so complex and ambiguous into 'she claims she saw the devil.'

LA: Yes I think it's a very troubling reaction and I think the reaction is provoked by the fact that the episode is troubling, ambiguity is troubling, and I think sometimes there is a knee jerk critical response to hunt out the ambiguity, to chase it down and exorcise it from the text, without realising that's actually what drives the text perhaps, that those spaces that are opened up, that can't be pinned down are how the text breathes and works as a product.

HM: Yes, yes you raise the image in my mind of people scurrying with nets to trap the meaning but the meaning obviously can go right through the net, it's not the right instrument.

LA: No, precisely, exactly you're not choosing the right tools to examine the artefact in front of you!

HM: And what else did I want to say about that? Yes, you see if people did what Rushdie said the phantoms would come flashing out of the text but it's a very labour intensive way to work and I think the reason an interviewer would never do it is that they don't know what they'll get. They might choose the wrong bit and then the response will be thin and they can't do anything with it and they might have to be there for days. But I don't think mostly that people do perceive how much is embedded, in every line, of that day's experience when you're actually writing it and all the past you carry with you and why some of the past is foregrounded in that moment. All those sensory clues whereby, you know, it might be simple, you might have burnt the toast that morning or something, and carry that to your desk, and then it carries you back to wherever, but you don't know it, its creeping in subliminally.

LA: Yes absolutely, absolutely.

HM: I think that is all very unsatisfactory to analysts because that is something you can't trap and bottle and label but it is nevertheless it is just as real a part of the process as the overt content. Yes, so autobiographical fragments circulating and recirculating. You ask in what ways do you conceive of the body within your writing. My first spontaneous response to that was I conceive of it lightly because there are a number of characters who exist on the point of body and spirit parting – you feel they would do so quite easily. The two characters of whom I think that is most true are Carmel in an *Experiment in Love* and Robespierre in a *Place of Greater Safety*, those two are actually the same person I think.

LA: That's fascinating.

HM: I imagine them as having the same set up in there, I think the passage that's a bit of a clue to Carmel's character is her conversation with – I almost said one of her cell mates.

LA: That's an interesting Freudian slip.

HM: Her friend is talking about her pregnancy and Carmel doesn't push she just waits for the answers then says she never gives advice, she's very withheld as a character and very tenacious. It was only after the book was done that I realised that I had re-written Robespierre. I think that I am fascinated by the business of how the writer enters another body, and lives within it, and establishes a comfortable space inside it. This is why you see I have always been fascinated by theatre and now that I have been working in the theatre for the first time it's as if this preoccupation of mine: I've found a way to use it because it is so interesting when the actor takes on the form you have imagined. It seems to me that when you write you have to put your body at the surface of your characters'. You have to be able to ignore your needs in a way, and think about theirs, and sometimes trying to make over your whole way of experiencing the world. I think it operates within a writer at a very deep level. I remember when I started writing *Wolf Hall* I suddenly got tremendously well, I got this huge sort of surge of energy. I had stopped occupying the flaky, conditional, barely-there bodies that I had often lived in and I had gone to live inside this extremely robust man. It isn't a real thing, it depends upon your imagination being so strong that it lays siege to reality,

and so for a while that kept me going but I was underlyingly quite ill. Between the two books, the two Cromwell books, I had a lot of surgery and I had virtually a year out of things, so it only sustains you so far, but it's a lesson in what the imagination can do. I imagine my own body as actually very unimportant in the process. I am always trying to escape it and go and live in a character's body. You need to undergo a total transformation especially to write historical fiction because the world to which your character is looking out is a very different one and yet the difference of course is not something they're conscious of to them it's their reality

LA: Yes, you have to naturalise that lived experience for yourself.

HM: Yes, that's a very good way of putting it, naturalise it, because they have nothing to compare it with, none of us have anything to compare it with unless we undergo this very self-conscious project of trying to look through someone else's eyes. What I say to people about historical fiction is that you're not there until you can feel their clothes on your back but I only say that so as not to scare them because that's actually only the half way point.

LA: Oh yes?

HM: Because really you have to do something more than that, you really have to be to be inside that person as far as imagination can possibly carry you there. I think you have to ask yourself whether their senses were differently arranged. Certainly the world they were experiencing was very different, but Thomas Cromwell in particular is a great challenge because he is a sensory creature and he's always looking at texture, colour, weight, fabric in particular, and he's always pricing everything. It is a pleasure and a relief to occupy someone else's frame of reference for a time.

LA: It sounds like quite a risky business as well, I think, you have to make sure you can get back.

HM: I don't really think of it as risky it's just developing a part of yourself that's under developed because I'm always very conscious that I'm not very good at looking. I find it very difficult to make sense of a landscape because my focal length is that [indicates the distance between the eye and the page] and I live so intensely with the printed page that I forget to experience and so to go into another kind of set up is enormously pleasurable because it gives you licence to develop yourself and almost, in a way, indulge yourself. It's the reverse of the intellectual life and the reverse of the puritanism that you've imposed on your own senses. It creeps into you to the extent that, we moved house between the two books, and I bought a whole lot of bed linen for different sized beds and, whereas my inclination for my whole life had been for those crisp light cottons, there is another side of me that's always craved richness and deep colour and for a while I couldn't live with any fabric that didn't look like it could be worn by Henry VIII.

LA: How wonderful!

HM: And suddenly all of this brocade arrived in our lives, and those kinds of damask weaves that you would see in portraits. It's like a holiday, it really is,

and the other thing about that is to say writing about Thomas Cromwell, it's a holiday because he lives to a large extent in the present moment, he's not introverted, and we follow him through his actions and what he says, rather than my describing his psychological processes. I do describe his memories and his sensory input but there aren't huge passages where he thinks 'on the one hand I could and on the other hand I could' so of course that's a particular challenge trying to write from the inside of the head of someone who does not continually examine their own process but is a man of action and who is also paradoxically completely un-self-revealing in a historical sense. The hundreds of letters he wrote tell us nothing, or very little, about the feeling that actuated them or the motives that actuated them, so yes it's a very hard thing to do. He is about the most challenging person you could try to enter into but he is a totally embodied creature.

LA: Yes, well when you first encounter him, it is such a physical description of what is happening to him as a body, and his understanding of that physical experience, and I think that sense of him as a man as a physical presence carries all the way through the novel.

HM: Yes and you do need, if you are to stretch your imagination and your abilities as a writer, I think you do need to have the sort of release and the challenge of occupying these other bodies. Being embodied, I'm conscious that I'm talking on and you probably have questions you want to have questions you want to come in with.

LA: Oh no, no, I am interjecting when I feel I need to but I'm just very conscious that I don't want to do all the talking. No, that's very helpful. I'm thinking particularly in terms of your female characters. Their relationships with their own bodies are very unique to me in terms of those relationships I have found rendered in contemporary literature I'm thinking particularly of Carmel and Alison and the way their experiences are inscribed on their bodies. Particularly Alison, who is so invested in the supernatural and the intangible, but finds her way back to her story, fragmented as it is, through her body, through the way it has been physically inscribed on her body. Then conversely you've got Carmel trying to reduce herself to essence, to just pure subject rather than being an embodied subject. I was wondering if that was something that you had traced throughout your work or if those two particular characters stick in your mind. I would be particularly interested to hear about the writing of them from your point of view bearing in mind what you have just said about being in those bodies and how a lot of the bodies that you create are so uncomfortable in terms of their physical existence in the world.

HM: I'm very interested in saints, those medieval saints, and modern ones particularly, the modern ones who experienced the stigmata and I might write about that at some point. I'm very interested in the female body as inscribed with the male story, the experience of Christ on the cross inscribing itself on the woman's body. I'm interested in saints, many of whom reduce themselves through the practice of voluntary fasting of course. It's very interesting the way that *An Experiment in Love* was read. Even though Carmel says 'this is not a story about anorexia', there's been enough about



that, nobody believes her – well, the more perceptive people do of course. She tells you directly ‘this is about appetite’ and its very perverse of people to then insist, no, it’s a novel about the modern problem of anorexia and, again, extremely reductive. I mean, an interesting figure that keeps coming up again: Margaret Thatcher obviously. When she goes to Carmel’s guest night special food is provided for the top table, Mrs Thatcher is at that point minister for education, so that’s her Maggie Thatcher milk snatcher incarnation, and Carmel sees her as, I’m not sure how to fully stretch out this metaphor, but the moment when she opens her mouth and shards of glass fall out: it’s a kind of violent way of cutting up your food.

LA: Yes!

HM: Like, bypass the cutlery. We don’t actually see her eat but she’s a figure of fascination because of what she achieved and the methods that she used to do it, the way she operated on her own personality and the fierce control she exercised over her own body in order to walk a line and avoid criticism. In my view, to avoid being destroyed by projections. She was very armoured. For some people the only way to do that is to shrink yourself down to bone. It’s always the flesh that is the site of injury and I often get from reading about anorexia that is certainly one thread. What I think is that the experiences of women that are anorexic are very interesting though they are not entirely what the book is about, there is a sense that one becomes more powerful by shrinking, that bone is more confrontational and less easily damaged than flesh.

LA: But of course in Alison’s case she takes the opposite approach and talks about the need to bolster oneself against the invasions of others.

HM: That’s what she says to people, but I’m not sure, that’s her spiel.

LA: Ah ok.

HM: I think that she has to have something to say but I think that actually she feels vulnerable because she feels that with all that flesh she can contain multitudes.

LA: Yes, it’s very hard to keep track of your tenants.

HM: Yes that’s right, and the fact that she offers this bulk means that they can occupy different bits of her and she won’t necessarily know.

LA: Mmm, a very troubling notion.

HM: Yes, well its actually rooted in reality because I had the unfortunate experience of gaining weight very, very quickly on a drug regime so that I went from an underweight person to an obese person within a matter of months and there does come a point where literally you do not know how to negotiate your body because you try to walk through a gap and you don’t fit and in that sense you lose a sense of where your boundaries are. And it is intensely humiliating but it feeds, well its quite interesting at the same time, it’s the Alice in Wonderland experience; parts of you become strange to yourself. Now I think that estrangement is very much part of Alison, there’s

this scene where she goes to the doctors and says she can't control which direction her feet are walking any more. Of course domestically they move to this tidy house and they don't put anything in the garden so they think they have control but then they make the mistake of getting a shed and what's happening in the shed is out of control and unknown and the body, the house: these are the same obviously. I don't think that these people, like Carmel and Alison, I don't think they're opposites at all, I think they are in the same problematic relationship with their own flesh and they're trying to work it out in different ways. Carmel is so ambitious she's burning up through her own appetite, she's aflame, she has neither time nor money to eat and would live no doubt without eating if that could be managed

LA: If that were possible.

HM: Yes, and the sphere she is put into in the hall of residence is one where female appetite is acknowledged in a rather ceremonial way at their dinners but it's reduced and reduced all the time, they're simply not being fed enough.

LA: I think the presence of the medical student's skeleton in her room is very wry and [the medical student] makes the comment that it's a woman's skeleton because women's bones are more interesting.

HM: Yes Julianne, yes. I actually remember that being said to me by my roommate.

LA: Oh wow.

HM: That is a book where lots of the externals are actually literal. The family configuration isn't the same, Carmel's an only child, the parents are very different from mine. The town is the one where Gerald grew up, the school is the one his father went to, the university hall of residence is absolutely based on where I lived, the year is the same, the year I went to university. It's a simplification process. You think well 1970 will do that makes it easy for me, it means I naturally keep track of things. It's just a little strategy but the reality is all in place in that novel, the dinners where there isn't quite enough.

LA: And they are all politely waiting for the scrap.

HM: Yes the shred monitor!

LA: The shred, yes!

HM: So this code of manners is imposed and of course I think that is the way that women had to negotiate the world then. They couldn't be rude, they couldn't be thrusting, they had to wait to be passed their plate or politely to help themselves and, if invited to help yourself, you take a little less than you think are entitled to. This is the whole paradox of the new freedoms given to women that they are taking a little less than they need.

LA: Yes, still.

HM: Yes, yes. How long it will take for that to work itself out in culture, it may have already done so, I don't know.

- LA: I don't know. I think in some areas maybe but I think certainly professionally women are still inclined to take a little less, or it is seen as vulgar or a little bit craven to be ambitious, to want your fair share. So even if you do achieve it you need not to be seen to be wanting to achieve it, to sidle up to it.
- HM: Yes, you can say it is for the welfare of the community or something like that.
- LA: Oh absolutely.
- HM: You can't say it's for me.
- LA: Yes 'I want it'.
- HM: You can say 'I want to fulfil myself intellectually' but you can't say 'give me money please'
- LA: Yes, absolutely.
- HM: Women are worse at negotiating pay for themselves.
- LA: That's definitely true.
- HM: And so this business of 'what am I worth' still resonates through the whole body really. Carmel doesn't find a way of negotiating it there and then but she does find a way of living. She escapes with her life. I think the other thing about the reading [of] that book has been that people have perceived the ending as very downbeat and miserablist and that is not really at all the way I meant it. You see they say that at the end she's very lonely but who do they think wrote the book and how's she going to do that except by being on her own. The key I think at the end of the book is that when she wants to eat she takes out a linen napkin just for herself. I read that as success for Carmel.
- LA: Yes that struck me as empowering rather than isolating 'I shall have things the way that I like them because I like them that way and for no other reason', that show of pure autonomy particularly in the field of eating and feeding and the domestic, I found that quite a positive image rather than a lonely one.
- HM: I certainly meant it so and she does say I'm the one who's going to wash and iron it but I'm willing to do that for the pleasure of having it, so in a very literal sense the act of eating has become a positive and pleasurable one for her. I don't see any reason to suppose she's having a miserable life unless you posit that all writers' lives are miserable.
- LA: Ha, yes.
- HM: But that solitude has to go along with it to a certain extent, so I imagine the end of that book as positive. Did I have any more to say on that? Ah, well, embodiment. Oh I mentioned you know, a little about the theatre and people. I suppose the most frequently asked question in the last couple of years has been 'isn't it very difficult for you when the forms of your imagination are embodied in actors?' No is the answer. It is just part of a range of possibilities that your imagination has come up with and therefore a very positive thing.

LA: Which is surely the rationale behind historical fiction as a whole its one possibility out of myriad possibilities?

HM: That's right. I think people often have a misperception about how characters are made by a novelist. They imagine it to be a mechanical process in which you think of a number of character traits put them on a card index and you can mix and match, and that you make a character physically by something like painting by numbers. Actually it can be very hard to see your main character, I have found, or there might be a group of main characters who you, when you try to call them to mind there are many, many overlapping images, in other words you don't see a portrait on legs and so the way I have tried to explain it to people is that your characters exist to you as an energy and that energy can go into different forms and you live with them as you live with your friends. When someone very familiar to you comes into the room you don't say 'they've got a small nose and black hair so it must be x', you just know it is so the way in which you recognise your characters is not disturbed by their embodiment within someone else. The experience is just enhanced and more possibilities are open and, of course, because I am myself in the practice of trying to get into my character's bodies it is wonderful to see actors do it because they are so much more fluent in the language of the body.

LA: Yes I suppose it is just a different language isn't it.

HM: Yes. There is in the book, in *Wolf Hall*, there's a character called Christophe who is a servant. He's as close as the book comes to an invented character though based on a real one, a person who just exists on the margin of history but has no name so I have given him this name, which isn't his real name he has several, do you remember? He's a French boy Cromwell finds him at Calais and he brings him back, and then . . . actually, can I speak about Christophe for a moment?

LA: Of course he is such a wonderful creation!

HM: He is wonderful on many levels to me because he exemplifies this phantom within the text. In George Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* he describes how he and the Cardinal were in France and the Cardinal as per custom had taken all of his gold and silver plate with him to put on a show for the French. A little boy was going up and down the stairs to the Cardinal's suite and systematically smuggling it out to a great robber who was controlling the operation and that's it, it's just that little boy on the stairs in this transitional zone and I didn't actually know myself but I wrote the figure of Christophe into the book, inventing him, and then decided, no, he will go back to London. Then later Cromwell says to Christophe 'but you didn't know the Cardinal' and he says 'I did because I was the little boy who robbed him, in those days my name was Fabrice' and it was almost a surprise to me when he spoke up and volunteered this information. It gave him a reality, a half reality, somewhere he was placed between fact and fiction in a very interesting way. Mostly the characters are not invented, even if it's a servant kid, its somebody's real name. You might not know anything about the members of Cromwell's household but you have a name.

LA: I think this emphasis on naming is really fascinating, not only in *Wolf Hall* with the endless Thomases and the different permutations of the Cromwell name, and how what people call you matters and having a name for people to call you by matters, but in all of the books. I'm thinking particularly of Alison's attempts to rename herself and how she can slip away from her family name with ease but she has to keep her first name, or she feels she can't slip the bonds of that name as easily.

HM: Well I think there's a great pleasure when you are writing historical fiction in having real name to play with. Once you know the spaniel keeper was called Humphrey he is going to appear in half a line. I conceive of that as a sort of act of reverence.

LA: That's really interesting.

HM: No one has mentioned these people for hundreds of years now I am mentioning him. So, Christophe, with his changes of name and his different incarnations and his strange status between fiction and non-fiction. The wonderful young actor who played him was someone who, on stage, embodied Christophe's whole biography because there were long periods in which he was on stage as a servant but he was silent, he was watching, and what he would do, nobody told him, nobody directed him he just got it, he would lean against something and he would sink down on his heels and he would be like a tennis player waiting to receive service, he would be ready to go at any minute, and there would be something huddled in his posture. He would be that little thug at the end of an alley, waiting and watching, a robbery is taking place; he's the look out. Every fibre of his body would embody that posture of vigilance and yet weariness because that is what his life consisted of, waiting for an outbreak of violence, and when he ate on stage he ate like someone who had been hungry.

LA: And didn't know when he was going to get to eat again.

HM: Yes, exactly, and it was amazing to see how a few postures can tell a life story. Wonderful for an author to see that done, you have to struggle so hard on the page and he just spontaneously and naturally has done it and you carry that away and you hope it makes you a better writer because you are more conscious of the ways that the past can be embodied. You were asking about Alison's names. Yes, she changes herself from Cheetham to Hart which is a good commercial ploy. [Long pause] A ghost in my life is myself and I started to wonder recently where has Hilary Thompson gone because my change of name at the age of 11. I remember everything about the day, when, before I began to go to my new school, my mother asked me if I would change my name and it appeared she was giving me a choice. In fact if I had said I won't do it I cannot imagine what would have ensued.

LA: That illusion of agency that adults give children sometimes.

HM: Yes! But from that day I adopted a new name and yet I've started just to think a lot about Hilary Thompson because I do feel complete continuity with her on one level and yet I think that, at that time, at that very definable transitional moment, she began a career in pretending and representing and

something genuine was left behind. So I'm quite interested now in trying to think what she had that was lost, what Hilary Thompson had that Hilary Mantel lost. I haven't worked that through but she is, she is a ghost, of sorts. She stopped. Just after my eleventh birthday, August 1963. She stopped existing. But she still existed in documentary form.

LA: And the space she could have occupied as well I suppose still existed. And one has to think about what moves into that space when something stops before its time. Other things perhaps come and occupy the space that that opens up.

HM: Yes, it's very interesting, and then the business of changing one's name, you can just do it but, when I went, when I was preparing to go to university, then I had to go to Manchester, to a firm of solicitors who were notary public and make a statutory declaration that I would be known as Hilary Mantel. And a little bit of that day, I wrapped it up and I carried it away, the atmosphere of the solicitors' office off Albert Square, and then it popped up in my story 'Offenses against the Person'. It's always a great pleasure to unwrap these little parcels because I think that that story: you just go into a new milieu for a moment and your senses are so sharp and I don't think I could have been in there for more than fifteen minutes. It was very like the moment that I think I describe in my memoir when I went into the convent on the day of my brother's christening, penetrating into a back room of the convent, going into the convent and having to suck in voraciously everything you saw, so that unknown to me, it would be there for me when I came to write *Fludd* all those years later. I think it's those moments that takes us back to your life penetrating the fiction, very like a stiletto, that's how memory operates in those cases, your memory is so sharp edged that it can penetrate all the fog of the years. And they might not be visual things, it might be temperature or just a sense of dust in the air. I am rather fascinated by the girl in 'Offenses against the Person' and I have written more about her but I haven't found a form for it yet. She's, I think she's a kind of droll version of Carmel, she doesn't explain much but I'm quite interested in what seems to be her capacity for destruction.

LA: Yes I think that must be fascinating when you have to be so controlled in your work as a writer everything must be precise if you are going to express what you wish to express, to create a character or a situation in which destruction is the focus.

HM: Well I think it's an incidental feature of the character but I think she's sort of attached to a poltergeist: that moment when the pencil sharpener comes apart in her hand and that sets in train consequences. She's very much the observer of her family life falling apart but she's a disturbing character. I like her, I think she's got potential, I think she is far from being as innocent as she appears. She's a subversive character whereas Carmel is probably more overtly against the grain of things.

[HM refers to question 3a) How important to you is the notion of 'uncertainty' as an affect to create within the reader?]

HM: I think of uncertainty as a kind of service I provide to the reader, there is a kind of nudging of the reader going on, always, through all my books, right from the beginning, a sense of saying to the reader, are you alert? Are you aware and are you aware of the multiple levels of reality that are unfolding here? Are you aware that this is a novel? I'm always reminding them of that and then saying 'are you aware of the metaphorical side of this as well as the literal side and not privileging one or the other too much?' Of course you can't and wouldn't want to control the reader's perceptions in that way but I suppose you are trying to infect them with your own uncertainty and jitteriness so they don't settle within the text and assume they know what they're getting. I value, I suppose, myself, anything like a book or a film that tells me, that stops me settling it. As soon as I think I understand, basically I don't understand so I suppose I just try to reproduce what I admire. And that's why I was very interested to work with Peter Kosminsky on *Wolf Hall* because for me as a director he engages with big issues and he also puts very sympathetic human beings into situations of great difficulty and ambiguity like Middle Eastern politics. As soon as you think you have settled your sympathies and you know who you're with and that you understand the problem, he blows the pavement from under you.

LA: Nothing is simple, nothing is black and white.

HM: Yes, yes and it was very interesting when you think of reader and viewer response, the response to the shadows in *Wolf Hall* because he made this brave decision to shoot by natural light or candle light.

LA: Which I thought was wonderful, absolutely beautiful.

HM: It was beautiful wasn't it? And of course you do get the impression, well we did get the feedback from people, that not everyone was happy because 'we can't see what's going on' they said.

LA: Well, indeed!

HM: Yes, welcome to the world of the Tudors and to the world of this fiction. It's very important that those shadows contain possibilities. If you are frightened by them, you're frightening yourself so it's very revealing of the way people are orientated, the way they respond to those ambiguities.

LA: Yes, it's fascinating isn't it because if you find shadows of whatever kind intolerable on some level one has to wonder what you are placing in them to make them so intolerable.

HM: Yes that's generated by you. And of course I suppose that's the whole fictional project isn't it, to get the reader's imagination working hard so you do a little and they do a lot.

LA: Absolutely. I often think of Henry James in that respect and *The Turn of the Screw* and the critical response to the fact that he had written an obscene book and his thinking of 'show me what is obscene in my book, show me.'

HM: 'What have you projected?'

LA: Yes, exactly.

HM: Yes, when people require of authors that they provide a clear plot line, a clear ending and solutions, I think that that speaks to their own fear and it's not so much the sign of an impoverished imagination but of an imagination that fears what it might do. Its saying 'you tell me so I don't have to think about it, tie up all the loose ends so I don't trip on them in my real life.' And I'm momentarily impatient of a world of response like 'I can't see' and 'I don't know who's speaking'. On the other hand I think that it's a valid response but it tells more about the reader or viewer than the work itself.

LA: I felt that very much in terms of the responses to the narrative voice in *Wolf Hall*, the deliberate slipperiness, which I felt was clearly a deliberate decision and which added formally to the sense of what is a very slippery milieu, in the sense that you don't always know who's speaking and whose words are coming out of whose mouth and that's vital. I don't know, maybe as a PhD student you demand rigour from readers.

HM: Yes, it's very interesting when they're thrown, and the way that the reductiveness, which can apply to critics as well, it's not always a sign of a lack of intelligence as I say, is also a kind of wish to make the text safe, I think, and to clamp down on your own imaginative response, to keep yourself safe. I think with Cromwell and the ambiguities its interesting about the business of 'he'. It had to be so because when your view point is so close to the first person, yet it's not the first person, it would be quite wrong for me to keep mentioning Thomas Cromwell as if he were other to himself.

LA: And also a discrete subject that you can delineate and say 'here is Thomas Cromwell' when it's so much more complicated and multifaceted than that.

HM: Yes, yes exactly. And there is an ambiguity that well, how can I put it, I want to say to the reader, 'don't you think I have a plan?' I'm not doing this unthinkingly. Because in the third book, you see, it becomes different. In *Bring up the Bodies* I often say there 'he, Thomas Cromwell' and I sometimes say jokingly to people 'oh it was a response to criticism but then when I did it the other way people didn't like that either so in the third book I am going to please myself', but that's just something to say. I think what's happening at a deeper level is that in the second book he sometimes stands back and looks at himself, amazed at what he's managing to do.

LA: And I suppose there is a sense in which he is becoming a public figure and the public figure of Thomas Cromwell is one that people could look at and delineate.

HM: Exactly yes, his objectivity is more defined now in the eyes of the world and the space his body takes up is different. There is a passage I write about how, when he walks through a public space, people clear it for him and the way people respond to him is different. When the book says 'he, Thomas Cromwell', he's looking at it from the point of view of a planet in its orbit regarding the sun, he's almost witnessing himself, this phenomenon that is called Master Secretary Thomas Cromwell. He gets, you see, more and more names as the book goes on, and then in the third book he becomes Lord



Cromwell, so there's another change because Lord Cromwell is someone he regards with an almost satirical eye. It's very interesting how they do name each other in real life, out of the scrupulous politeness they always observed when planning to murder each other. You would have a room full of people all 'my lording' each other and that plunges me into deep waters because it's rather like the Thomases earlier in the book where everybody is 'my lord' so I have been finding more and more creative solutions to this. I am conscious of the fact that he is becoming distanced all the time from that little boy in Putney and he has any number of titles any of which one might properly use. To go back to this question of ambiguity, it's interesting to see that readers rush prematurely to judgement not only in the short term, over the length of a book, but in the single line. You would be writing very badly if you made everything overt within the line and yet, in a way, that restlessness and hunger you create in the reader and that sense of unease wants to be satisfied straight away.

LA: Yes, I think there is something about your work which privileges the over determined and when you read something it feels apt to say 'what is this and what else is it and what else is it?' and all of those things are true and accurate at the same time. It's almost like when Alison is talking about the tarot and all of the various different things those images can signify to at the same time and the unwillingness of her clients sometimes to accept that multiplicity, I found that very interesting.

HM: Yes, I think the tarot provides a very good way of thinking about this in that the depth of interpretation depends entirely on the skills of the reader. You can get a handbook that will tell you this card means this but the skilled reader brings so much more to it, just as the skilled reader brings to a novel. I think that with the Thomas Cromwell books I can understand the reader impatient for resolution in every line, and then within the book, but of course that's not the point because it will all become greater than its parts. And it is interesting when, there's been comment to the effect that my reading of Cromwell is unduly sympathetic, and I think, well shall we wait and see? It's interesting how people want to close it down. This is a work in progress and so on the level of the line and the whole book you want the reader to be demanding tell me, tell me, show me, show me, but at the same time you are involved in a game of holding the reader off and saying 'can you just suspend your judgement?' It's a very intricate negotiation. What were you saying a minute ago about Alison?

LA: Yes, about Alison's clients not being able to hold multiple possibilities at the same time, or not being willing to do that, and using the example of the tarot as something very over determined.

HM: Often I was very interested in watching people at work in these public demonstrations and what a bundle of contradictions the psychics themselves were because a number of them are not very bright, their own world is quite shallow you feel, so they will go on insisting to a person in the audience that they have a hearing problem and you are sitting in your seat thinking for 'god's sake you are talking about a communication problem that you have just created'!

LA: It's mutual!

HM: Yes! But they won't make that jump and that makes you very sorry for them because they do believe in their powers, they are not bright enough, frankly, to invent all this and I think they do believe in it, but it makes them helpless, they are just the sport of whatever they think they are hearing.

LA: It feels very much like Alison has access to the world of metaphor and it's almost that that saves her in the end, she has access to metaphor and metaphor's ability to substitute things for other things.

HM: Yes, exactly, she's an artist, not the helpless prey of her subject matter, and Alison and the Giant O'Brian . . . and me, we are kins folk, that's the way I think of it. The giant because he has to be put on exhibition and Alison also has to, she's very conscious of having to 'serve my public', produce a certain image that they expect.

LA: It is interesting you say that because the connection that I had made between those two characters and yourself is that they tell stories and they produce narratives, but for you the connection is the idea of that public persona or public exhibiting of one's self and one's abilities.

HM: I think there are multiple connections really. One is certainly that all of us appreciate the metaphorical layers beneath the literal, but I think this is very much to the fore in my mind that Alison certainly was a figure of the writer and I do think that there is a disposition to regard writers as freaks. People are nice about it, they don't actually poke you with a long stick, well, they do it's just that it's not visible. I think you experience yourself when people ask you about how you produce your work and you try and try to give a good answer but you are conscious that you are confabulating. You are reluctant to say this 'lies beyond language', so you try and try and yet you only ever arrive at some peripheral acquaintance with the real thing. Alison I think cannot ever really explain how she does what she does but is under pressure to explain herself to a sceptical world. Then she brings Colette into the world, as if that would drive the process. She has to constantly explain herself to Colette, so I was very conscious of creating Alison as a sort of surrogate figure of the writer but also the giant. What validates us, as I have said before, is the making of money. The giant is not just a freak he is an economically active freak. And whilst he is desirable as a commodity he has a place in society and he has tea sets and all the appurtenances of civilisation. But then when demand for him falls he begins to sink back into the world of the freaks and Alison's trade, the difference between her and someone who's hospitalised because they hear voices or drugged because they hear voices, is that Alison makes it pay.

LA: Yes there is a wonderful moment in *Giving up the Ghost* where you talk about that in relation to Virginia Woolf, that if you are making money from your writing then it's perfectly respectable and you can slot into society but if you're not then that's a problem

HM: Well when somebody makes a decent living it goes against social norms to write them off as mad. In other words the making of money purchases respect and validates what otherwise would be written off as pathology.

LA: It buys you a certain subjective place?

HM: Yes, it gives you latitude. People just say 'it's only her imagination'. I am very interested in the way that what would be a symptom in a certain context, to be fixed or cured, in another context is something to be rewarded and made the subject of a publishing contract. Because my life is just a prolonged exercise in talking to the dead at the moment and very little different from Alison's, in that trying to midwife your trade to the public is now such an essential part of the writing life. When I wrote *The Giant*, I'm not one of the authors who suffers from being put on show as it were, I am fine with an audience and in fact in some ways I feel more myself with an audience but that makes me one of the lucky ones because a lot of writers really don't. It's not native to them and requires huge effort that could be better spent on their work so I am lucky in that respect but I do remember an incident when I was a published writer, but not very well known, being pointed out by a neighbour as 'she's the one who's the writer' and the person to whom I was pointed out staring at me just as if I was a thing and not conscious.

LA: You become the object that is the writer rather than a person?

HM: Yes, it was just as if she thought I wouldn't see her staring at me even though she was just as far away as that [points at the wall behind LA] and it was a very singular moment in my life. That night I said to Gerald 'we have to move from here, we have to move house I can't do it here anymore'. I would have been working on *Fludd* at that time and it was a very strong feeling of being made alien, that's what it was, and I thought right well if I'm an alien I will have to go to another planet then. I think the seeds of *The Giant O'Brian* were there in that woman's look. And it was very like the way I looked at the Queen when I saw her and I feel quite guilty about staring at her so hard.

LA: Well . . . it comes with the job.

HM: Well that was the puzzling thing, that she looked so hurt and I wanted to say 'I'm only doing my job you know and you're only doing your job'.

LA: You'd think she'd be used to it by now.

HM: Yes, it seemed like a very, very personal moment. I wrote about it in that LRB essay, all the writers were marched off to the palace and no one wanted to talk to her or be trapped with her and everyone kept eddying away and then this strange space opened up and I looked at her and she became aware of that and that's exactly what the woman in Burnham did to me. The Queen, as you say, is used to being looked at and I wasn't used to that kind of scrutiny that makes an object of you and not a very nice object either, something very obtrusive in the landscape.

LA: It makes me think very much of the power of the gaze and how that manifests itself in *Every Day is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession*. The significance of being looked at. In a lot of my work on those books I have talked about the

notion of the evil eye as something that can extract an essence, something that can take all the good that you feel is in you, and can take it away just by looking, rather than the reverse of the object or subject or landscape being presented to you, it is something you extract from. Those two incidents recall that very strongly to mind for me.

HM: Yes, it's interesting, I started writing *Every Day is Mother's Day* before I went to Saudi Arabia but that is where I finished it and where I wrote *Vacant Possession*. Of course you can almost think of nothing else in Saudi except for the business of looking and being looked at because there's not only the veil but there is the virtual veil which is accorded as a sign of respect to women who are not wearing it but are deemed, in the context, to be respectable women and this respect takes the form of looking through one.

LA: As if you weren't even there at all?

HM: Yes, yes. These were my encounters with the man who lived upstairs, the Saudi man who lived upstairs who, on the occasions I encountered him in the hall, negotiated around me without a word or glance. At those times you feel like a ghost because the ghost tends to pop up where it is not wanted and where it is not meant to be. The whole point about it is it is an anomaly. Or, you could say that the person who sees it is at fault, as it were, because they are in the wrong time in the wrong place looking in the wrong way. There should be the world of ghosts and the world of real people passing each other seamlessly but then oops, there's an encounter, so his reaction to my anomalous presence was to pretend it didn't exist and glide around me. After a while though with that, and people in shops looking through you, you do actually feel depersonalised.

LA: Yes, well it denies you presence in a very crucial way, if you can't be present in a public space I would imagine it makes one question what mode of citizenship you have, what mode of existence you have. You might be corporeally present but if you are not socially politically present what does that mean.

HM: Well it means that you are an anomaly, an inconvenience something that must be born with, but not welcome and not assimilated. And I think that's the same for the men in the kingdom, expatriate men. Their presence is reckoned necessary but not welcome, but at least they have the right to occupy the space they occupy. They must at all times carry large quantities of documents to say who they are and in that way be proving, be ready to prove, their identity at any moment. The fact that names function differently is also interesting because the surname is not really understood so Gerald is not Mr McEwan but Mr Gerald. So it puts one into the world of many, many possible Gerald's but this is a world in which every second person is Mohammed so it's like the Thomases again. But women, they don't have names, they don't have spaces, they don't have anything. It's a blankness and this motif, I suppose, Saudi Arabia and I were made for each other. In a way I had to go there to see it operating, you see it so seldom that these metaphors, these tropes, become literal as they do in the Kingdom. It is as if so much has

agreed to come out of the texts and enact itself for you. Wonderful in its way but unfortunately you have to go through that ghosting experience.

LA: I am reminded of the moment in *Eight Months of Ghazzah Street* where you describe the women wearing the full veil crossing the road together and the uncertainty of their movement which is obviously on a physical level caused by the clothing that they are wearing but that uncertainty also speaking to an uncertainty about occupying the public sphere, just occupying that space. I found it quite a difficult book to read in terms of, I hesitate to say the injustice, that tentativeness of occupation that all of the characters seem to have and that sense of claustrophobia. It's very challenging to a reader, particularly one from a Western background, in a very positive way, it is certainly difficult to engage with initially

HM: What is also interesting is the prohibition on you looking as a woman because in a lot of dwellings they're built with windows that are either above the eye line or they're frosted glass so they can't see you but neither can you see out. But what would you want with 'out' because that's the public sphere. And then for the women going from their house into the back of a car with tinted windows and curtains. So to get to go out my upstairs neighbour would be totally veiled, into the car and then in the car draw the curtain so its layer upon layer of enclosure.

LA: It struck me as a very gothic novel in a strange way because obviously the gothic is a very western framework, a very western, Catholic framework and to have it operating in Saudi Arabia like that was really fascinating, that sense of domestic enclosure as you say literalised in that you are locked in

HM: Yes, I mean it functions perfectly, on all levels. I mean your even in the fifteenth century as far as the calendar is concerned, the domestic isolation, the lack of light, the removal from one's familiar circumstances to live among strangers, the fact that the male figures, well they become menacing but also the figures to whom you are closest seem to become complicit in the grand design. Plus the attribution of unsound judgement, then of madness, to any negative comment on the situation, the implication that the fault is in you not in the world, they are classic gothic hallmarks. The only thing I can say is that when I lived through it I lived through it innocently. It wasn't until I had written the novel, indeed months afterwards, after it had been published and reviewed, that I thought 'I've written a gothic novel!' and then it all fell perfectly into place but it's just as well I wasn't thinking about that. I was conscious at every point from the moment of my arrival of how deeply worrying and fascinating the whole thing was, I could not wait to get my notebook out. I wasn't a published writer when I went out there, my first novel was accepted while I was actually in Saudi Arabia but I knew 'I've got to be able to do something' as soon as I landed at the airport. But I lived it very forward, you know, being very conscious that I couldn't start the novel until it was all over because I couldn't truncate the experience, I couldn't rush to judgement, which is what the reader is always trying to do. Whereas the writer's professional obligation is to suspend judgement until a novel's worth of pattern emerges and I felt 'this won't be over til it's over'.

LA: I think that's one of the fascinating things about the novel is that it finishes still with so many enigmas present, and again, that's the point. For me anyway it spoke to a kind of the difficulty in translating one culture into another and back: you can get so far, but there will always be remainders that are stubborn and refuse translation and assimilation and understanding, and that's how it signified to me; those mysteries that you're left with. There will be things that are beyond language, beyond translation, beyond your understanding, and those are the things that open up the spaces and let the novel do its work.

HM: Yes. Also I think that the Kingdom serves as a crucible, for so many aspects of experience are there heightened and it's as if a chemical reaction is happening very quickly and showing everything in a pure form because you have a society where that disinformation is almost a duty. Elucidation which might allow the public to have an opinion on political affairs is not a virtue. Secrecy, obfuscation, is an art and concealment a virtue, and the Saudis are very indignant when people comment on what they call 'our internal affairs' because they think people should not comment, favourably, unfavourably, they just should not comment: 'this is our private thing behind the curtains'. What really interested me about the Kingdom and interests me even more in retrospect was the way that you never got a story straight, not the simplest thing, and people would tell you versions of public affairs in perfectly good faith and then somebody else would tell you a different version. I used to want to get everyone in a room, let's at least lay them all side by side so that we can all acknowledge that none of us are in possession of any useful information at all.

LA: It is a fiction that we tell ourselves that we are.

HM: But of course people don't want to believe that, this clinging to my version my certainty. So later, when I returned to the historical novel more recently, I see this reaction in people going on all the time. They have an idea that the novelist's world is distinct from that of the historian's world, the historian is in possession of the truth and its untainted, it's a set of incontrovertible facts.

LA: Uncrafted, unedited.

HM: Yes, yes, and even quite sophisticated readers can't help their minds sliding back to this idea by constantly asking you which bits have you made up.

LA: Like there is a clear dividing line.

HM: Yes, exactly, and I just always want to say to people, 'look, there is no clean data' and if you have been in the Kingdom you really know that and it teaches you lessons about the communication of information that you never ever forget. I think that it is something that is very central to the project of writing historical fiction that you should almost be reminding the reader of the status of what they are reading: 'this is a novel and I am not ashamed of that fact I am not apologising for it.' But it is, again, somewhat frustrating that the public sees you as someone who addresses history by telling lies about it. It is one of these projections you have to live with and say 'we can't have certainty much as we may desire it.' Certain things like names and dates

we can verify but we all live together, novelists and historians, in the country of interpretation and there are very few footholds. What I didn't realise when I wrote that novel is that it would almost become a sort of manifesto and the gothic is another way of looking at it. It's very seldom that anyone born when I was born has the privilege of being translated into the reality that gave birth to the gothic novel but you go and live where power is absolute and communication is censored and women are truly oppressed and then you understand the gothic from the inside.

LA: I was wondering before we move on if we could speak about the significance of the hallucinatory as a kind of tangential concern around 'uncertainty'?

HM: I think when we speak of hallucinations people are pretty free with the word. I've written in one of my hospital pieces about the influence of morphine. People are, again they've read that piece in an interesting way: 'why did you have these visions?' Well simply because I was having a reaction to the pain relief. People want to make something more of it but I have distinguished very carefully between what I saw as a hallucination, which was the strong man, the circus strong man jumping on my bed, and what I later saw in my imagination in my powerful morphine dreams, which was the assassin from the Mrs Thatcher story which moved the story on because I had a very clear sense of his physical presence. But that was not a hallucination and I find that people are not really very good at working this out. But it may also naturally be a question of how are senses are arranged: what to you is a hallucination might be my object of reality.

LA: Yes, indeed!

HM: And I was interested in people not making the divisions I make in my mind between what is seen out there and what is seen in here and that's a difficulty that runs through ones whole life. I was once teaching on an Arvon course a long time ago now: this is a lovely example of how stories go through transformations. I thought I was going to write a novel, another novel, about the French revolution, about Jean Paul Marat and his assassin, Charlotte Corday. And as often happens I found at Arvon I had very powerful dreams and I had a dream about Charlotte and speaking of it the next day to someone I said 'and I see her, her face turned away and her hand stretched out and I can't help but think she's stretching it out to me.' Within a short time this had become 'she saw the ghost of Charlotte Corday' and then many years later when somebody wrote about the Arvon foundation I was asked is it true that you saw the ghost of Charlotte Colbert.

LA: That's the most literary game of Chinese whispers I have ever heard.

HM: It's wonderful isn't it? But that's all because I said 'I see' meaning 'I see in my head' and the person heard it as 'I have seen a ghost'. So you're moving all of the time along that continuum. An important thing here though is migraine which I have written about in *Giving up the Ghost* but does intrude into other books. I think particularly in an *Experiment in Love*, when Carmel walks down Drury Lane, and everything dissolves around her, I think what I was describing there was actually the aura of migraine attacks. It can put one in a very strange state. I have to ask you if you suffer from migraine?

LA: I do, yes.

HM: Do you experience migraines with aura?

LA: Yes, generally just little flickering lights then just big gaps out of the world.

HM: And do you have any other kind of aura other than a visual one?

LA: No, no, I've never had anything aural or anything else other than seeing or not seeing things.

HM: I get the lot and it's very much a work in progress. Just when I think I've plumbed the depths of it something else will come up and nowadays I often experience the aura without the headache which means it can go on for days so I'm subject to all sorts of weirdness like *déjà vu*. I have even had instances of autoscapy, not usually seeing a whole double beside me but having a sense of dissolving boundaries which is one of the things you ask about, and again with the business of hallucination: where are your boundaries, where does your body end? A very powerful sense of a presence . . . on my left hand side, and it is at such times it seems to me that the walls crack a bit, your normal perceptions are somewhat enhanced or distorted. I would say enhanced, some people would say distorted. It depends, are you going to pathologise it or are you going to use it creatively? I think that's very interesting. I'm in contact with a couple of people at the moment, and in fact working with one of them, that has an interest in the sorts of migraines that bear on the supernatural, I suppose in the sense that some people are very sensitive to atmospheres and what some people think of as earth energies. There's obviously something to do with, well I mean who knows what, it may be some kind of electrical or magnetic phenomenon, there's obviously something going on here. I don't believe its supernatural in the sense of 'ooh it's spooky' but it is a little bit outside of the normal experience.

LA: Yes, reading Oliver Sack's book on migraine, that's very clearly how he describes it as something that's outside the realm of what's perceived to be normal perceptual reality. I was also very interested in what he said about observing the physical body of the patient while having a migraine and that the systems of the body are all in complete disarray, almost on a cellular level, and that spoke to me almost on a metaphorical level about the things that can happen, that can be allowed to happen when you bring the hallucinatory into a creative context, you can in useful fruitful ways throw things into uproar temporarily.

HM: Yes! You have to be resilient psychologically to allow that uproar to take place, to allow chaos to break out so that sense may emerge eventually, just as you have to have a resilient body to withstand that cellular disarray. I think also, speaking more medically, what he has to say in that book about the borderline migraine-epilepsy states are really fascinating. I found that really helpful because, as I have said in print, until I read that book I used to think I was going mad, sometimes I did not know what to make of these strange experiences and its very reassuring to know that other people have gone through that and to know that they are, not explicable, but they are containable. And then the next question arises: are they usable? So you try to



be open to that and I have come to a place where I don't have many headaches now, it's not a big factor, but I do still experience a lot of aura. I think there is a patient who asks Oliver Sacks, maybe it's not in the book, I've just been reading his book about his life, the second one, a patient says, if you take away my migraine what else do I have to have instead?

LA: Yes that is in the migraine book! I think he has a patient where he cures their migraine attacks and they develop awful asthma attacks so they decide to cease treatment for the migraines because they were preferable to the asthma attacks.

HM: Yes, yes. I think I'd like to have the disagreeable aspects of it taken away, but it's amazing that so many writers and artists do suffer from migraine. It seems like one of these rather dull questions to be asking people but actually it opens up a world of wonders if they will just bear with you. So, hallucinations, where does that get us, more?

LA: No that's wonderful, I was just interested to see, because so many of your books offer, even in small ways, an alternative perceptual reality, even if it's for just a moment and the 'flicker in the tail of the eye' made me think very much (when I first read the books) 'that's how my migraines feel when they start, that little flicker' and you feel something is about to happen. Almost before I am aware that it's going to be a migraine I have that sense of 'something's going to happen now' and then it starts happening and I think 'oh, it's a migraine' but every time I don't realise, and then I do.

HM: Yes! That is exactly what I experience and I think to myself, do you never learn. And something new does come up from time to time but I feel that I should have enough experience by now to read these perceptual disorders. I do remember years and years ago saying to Gerald 'the door handle has fallen off' not realising that it was intact of course but that was where my hole in the world was. Well that's an extreme example but that kind of stupidity of oneself does go on. So I suppose the question we can't solve is 'is the world a stranger place than most people will allow or is it you who is the freak?' That brings us straight back to the Giant.

LA: Yes absolutely. If you wouldn't mind I'd like to move on to think about how you, or if you do, position yourself among your contemporaries particularly in terms of writers who write narratives of haunting whatever you take that to mean, how you position yourself within the milieu?

HM: Mmm I don't think about it in a very literalist sense I suppose. Part of your anxiety as a person, not just as a writer, is to have your experience validated and at least some of the time to feel like you're not a freak so I consider my position vis-a-vis Oliver Sacks. The William James book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is very important to me, again it is the varieties you are eager to know about so as not to be alone with this thing. You feel a sense of kinship and of being accompanied when reading those books which I don't think you get when reading a fictional narrative of haunting, because you simply cannot tell what is the author's experience and what has been arranged for the sake of art, so you there are just in the position of another reader. I don't tend to feel more than a rather cold technical interest therefore.

The mechanics of frightening your reader are intricate, that's a coarse way of putting it, disturbing your reader, so it is a very big technical question as to how you arrange the material to accomplish the best effect. I think that the people who work on haunting narratives are hyperconscious of technique and yet at the same time it doesn't work unless you can let your personal ghosts well through between the lines. I am very interested in what Sarah Waters does, but of course in *A Little Stranger* she does have the subject foregrounded so you have the people who are experiencing the supernatural while discussing it at the same time, and trying to cast it, to approach it through different disciplines. I am rather averse to that, I would rather, as a writer or a reader, I would rather, my characters experience naively without bringing the critical apparatus into the book itself. Therefore Alison is self-aware but she is not her own subject, she has a facility with metaphor as you say, but there is no writer/psychoanalyst/scientist figure in that book. So I suppose I am more drawn to books where, as I say, the criticism of the phenomenon is left separate. There's a kind of anxiety manifested when it's not, that you as a writer will not yield to the material, you are still trying to keep a critical distance from it by locating yourself in the person of the doctor, or whoever it is who is fetched in to the situation. It is probably more creative to just yield to the material.

LA: I think it makes it very difficult for the reader to then yield themselves up as well; if they have a suggested interpretative framework in the form of one character it's almost as if the work has been done and they need not offer themselves up to it.

HM: Yes, even, if that interpretative framework is shown to be invalid, and successive interpretations are shown to be insufficient, still the suggestion is there that the phenomenon can hardly happen before you subject it to the different filters of interpretation. That brings me back to the devil in the garden which I have tried to report phenomenologically: let the thing happen before we go to work on it. Then, is there a question here simply about narratives of haunting or about positioning oneself more generally as a writer, I don't want to go off track.

LA: Oh no, no, to speak briefly about that would be very helpful.

HM: I got rather hung up on the Muriel Spark business. What it was, in my first review of my first book, it was Auberon Waugh, it was the best first review one could ever hope for and it was he who brought up Muriel Spark and it then stuck because people are a bit lazy. I got to the point where I made an exasperated joke about it in *An Experiment in Love* but it still stuck in fact people thought I was owning up to it. I do appreciate her as a writer but I haven't actually read a great deal of her. I think again there is a certain point about Roman Catholicism here, the world of Graham Greene and Muriel Spark and Evelyn Waugh, all those posh converts is very, very different from the one in which I grew up as a cradle Catholic: I really don't make any identification with them at all. And then looking at the question of how conscious are you about status. I have observed it with some amusement over the years. I do think it's true that male writers are a lot more conscious of it, and I say that shrinkingly because it sounds so obvious, but people betray

themselves unconsciously in conversation and you know they've got a league table in their head. I've not felt that to be quite so true among women writers I think we tend to be more in competition with ourselves. A little less conscious of where we are placed. I know I came to a point round about when I was writing *Beyond Black* when I said to myself 'What division am I in?' which I think I talked about in Manchester. It's a desolating question because you really don't know where your limits are but you are afraid to bump into them because that could be a very abrupt and nasty thing to happen. Then I decided to take courage and launch out into the big project, which I think is really the central project of my life, and since then I haven't really had to ask myself the question about where I am placed because the world has told me they have decided for me. It doesn't change anything day by day for me. The experience of writing is exactly the same as it ever was. All I am considering is this moment this paragraph and the rest all drops back. I am impressed by how much the experience is always the same, that there is this continuous self inside that remembers first selecting this word not that word and that person is always waiting inside you no matter what happens in the outside world, that consciousness of style. Content is perhaps something different, there you do see phases, but just as I can remember beginning to read critically I can remember beginning to write fastidiously and I have to keep faith with that person so that that to me is the project rather than league tables in the head. Though people misunderstand the business of influence I think. There are writers that give you courage but you are not necessarily trying to imitate them.

LA: No, no, they perhaps facilitate in certain crucial ways rather than provide a template?

HM: Yes I think that's absolutely true. Influence is not a question of style, its one mind or even personality connecting with another I think. I'm about to prove myself wrong, I think it can be style as well. I think about Beryl Bainbridge a lot because when I started to write I read her early books and I just recognised it all, not just her world but the sensibility that she was bringing to it and it gave me courage. Well, simply, I used to think that if she can get away with it. . . It's to do with black comedy and one of the most exasperating questions I find is when people ask 'why are your books funny?'

LA: What a strange question!

HM: They do they sort of say 'how is it that you see everything as funny' and I find it, well I want to say, on the one hand 'well have you got a week and I will try and unfold this business of how humour heightens tragedy' but on the other hand I want to say 'it's the north west!' It's where I come from.

LA: We live in a blend of horror and humour, it's how we exist!

HM: Yes, that's right! I want to say it would be odd if that way of looking at the world weren't implanted in me, because it's common, it's usual. But this is the provincialism of the metropolitan, they think it's all working men's' clubs and low comedians. It's not, it's an orientation and you know you find it somebody like Beryl Bainbridge, simply hearing the provincial voice is refreshing, particularly since I was in Africa when I began reading her. Then

again there are people, well, like Oliver Sacks, who is a sort of secular saint to me I suppose, because of that perfect balance of his mind. You know, I love facts, I really do, insofar as I can get any good ones. I love data and I can sort of crunch it and I have a mind for that. What I love about his work is the balance of the factual and the imaginative. I love the case history as a format and so its people like that who influence you, rather than novelists perhaps. And then there does come a certain stage when you are a writer who is continuously working when it's hard to make space for other people's novels because you can't go into them imaginatively and it's a bit unfair. If somebody I really like has a new novel I know I have to save it up because it's unfair to their effort not to yield to it and go into their world but you come to a certain febrile state in writing where everything you read reminds you of something in your own book so you put it down and go away and write it. I'm experiencing myself the reading of fewer and fewer novels and when I am writing hard I want to read poetry or I want to read non-fiction or look at things rather than other people's novels.

LA: I was wondering if we might talk about the very specific way in which you conceptualise the ghost as something that might have happened but didn't. In *Giving up the Ghost* you give the example of the short story that didn't work after the opening lines. I was wondering if you could speak a little more about that understanding of haunting and how that informs your work.

HM: I think, the ghost has just become the basic metaphor for me I think. It's the capacious container for every expression of writerly discontent and every failure to resolve a mystery in your own life, every willed ambiguity, every unwilled ambiguity. It's as if some commercial instinct in you realised early that you could hook the reader by the word 'ghost'. What I have noticed about it is how productive it is as an idea, because, particularly I experienced this when I was writing *Beyond Black* which is the one which is most literally about ghosts, if they can ever be literal, the wonderful harvest they yield. Because as soon as you told people 'I'm writing a book about a medium' then they would pour forth their stories.

LA: Yes everyone's got a ghost story, this is what I have noticed writing the PhD, so you must have been inundated.

HM: Yes, and also what is very interesting to a writer, it's not only their stories but a story which begins 'this happened to a friend of mine' and 'it was always said in my family' so you are uncapping a well and it just goes on gushing and gushing and you are moving into a stream of common narrative. And yet for most of our lives it goes totally unspoken so it is very fertile. It is to me the image that operates on all levels, the rarefied ghost of possibilities that we are talking about, the un-lived lives, the decisions you didn't take. Obviously it also has some resonances in particle physics. But it's also to me a very specific and physical thing. You know I can remember an occasion when I was a child of maybe seven when for the first time I literally felt the hairs rise on the back of my neck and therefore, you know, the idea of ghosts cannot be so easily dismissed as metaphor because on the one hand it has that very observable almost physical effect, I suppose I have adopted it because it is the most giving of all the images I know. You have never exhausted it

because for obvious reasons it never dies, it's never done the endless return is analogous to, well, the ghosts are intertextual with our lives. Just as all those old dead writers are breathing again when you quote them, those quotations are the ghosts of previous texts running through the texts, and I think for me that it all flows together beautifully. They always may be lurking in another form.

LM: I think one of the most interesting parts of this project was uncovering the more idiosyncratic ghosts, and the ghosts in your fiction that aren't dead, they have just been so denied and circumscribed by society that they are existing as if they are dead. I am thinking particularly of Muriel's fellow patients at Fulmers More after they are released into the community under the dubiously named 'care in the community' regime, the ways in which they are made to live spectrally and the ways in which they keep coming back to haunt the places from which they were taken when they went into hospital, and to haunt the society they occupy without ever really truly being able to make an impression of it, apart from Muriel who seems to operate more as a poltergeist than a more traditional ghost. But I also think of Mart.

HM: Yes, in the shed.

LA: Yes, and how he makes the transfer from social ghost to traditional ghost. I think that's one of the very interesting things that you seem to use the figure of the ghost to do is to ask questions about ethics and how we recognise people as fully human, as fully having subjectivity, and the awful things that can happen when that doesn't happen for whatever reason, the terrible kind of cruelties and effacements that happen.

HM: I think that's right. People assume there are hard and fast distinctions between the living and the dead but within the living there is another very important distinction: are you recognised as human by fellow humans. All sorts of people at different times and places are elected out of the human condition and made things and objectives of social policy. You know, nothing just happens to Mart he is always in a policy, he is someone's statistic and he is subject to the ultimate nightmare: he's a marginal and spectral person who is actually murdered by ghosts, they come for him and make him frankly one of their company. So, here I must say a thing about the company of ghosts in *Beyond Black*. I am very interested in companies of people amongst the living. I tend to write about groups of men in the collective and they exist on both sides of the grave. They are there in *The Giant O'Brian* and they are there in *Beyond Black* in the most malign form because one's always a little afraid of the collective in that it debases what might be the ethical discrimination of the individual. Rightly or wrongly, we are afraid that the collective is what coarsens us. The ultimate expression of that is the ghosts in *Beyond Black*: they pass over to the other side and they get worse. What is debased in them is confirmed then and solidified. They ape the processes of the living, getting sent on management courses to be better evil. It is another strand in my work which crosses over with the spectral which is not entirely the same, the companies of men, and I think this started probably with my early reading of Shakespeare because I always feel like Nim and Bardolf and Ancient Pistol are marauding right through my

work. You don't seem to get clusters of women operating in the same way in life or in my books. The nearest thing is the women psychics in *Beyond Black*. They're not very sisterly, there is a kind of rough camaraderie among the fiends that you don't get among those women. This question of marginality again comes up powerfully in *The Giant O'Brian*, because that in a way is a little bookend to my French Revolution book. You are looking at the defining question of who is human, what is human and what rights therefore adhere. The other bookend hasn't arrived yet and it may never do so, but I think those people pass easily into the condition of social ghosts. They may simply be excluded by a political decision. The ghost is a fiercely political entity because ghosts can be someone's decision or they can be a collective decision, ghosts are not necessarily accidents or made ghosts by misfortune. You can elect people ghosts by excluding them.

LA: Absolutely, I think that it's particularly sharply drawn when Morris comes back from his training and talks about how the purpose of their training is to kick out 'spooks with no papers', illegal immigrants, that nature of person. When I read that recently I thought that was so current, so painfully current this idea that you can rename human subjects to make them not human anymore and then your responsibilities seem to be absolved. So to have a ghost who was a marginal subject in life then enacting that re-ghosting really struck me.

HM: Yes its quite a time ago now isn't it that book, 2005? Yes, because I was thinking of the bit when, it's Morris isn't it, in the lorry park, he rolls up the tarpaulin and there are eyes looking out, and sometimes they're living and sometimes they're dead. All that was just on the horizon, already that huge intolerance was making itself felt, of anything that was other and might impose on our way of life. Again you go back to those public spaces, the way, I think there's something in *Beyond Black* about the council putting notices on the benches, spikes?

LA: Yes, putting spikes on the benches so homeless people couldn't sleep on them, but of course no one could sit on them.

HM: Yes and its sort of come true hasn't it because you've got those devices to stop beggars [ . . . ]

[Moves to avoid sun]

HM: Again you're back to the public park, the public space you're trying to control. So not only people can be made ghosts, I'm very interested in ghost landscapes as well, marginal land that no one is quite sure of its use or status. I'm always very interested in the subtext beneath people's discussions of town planning when they talk about green field and brown field and what that means to them. And I think, you know, landscape is so important in *Beyond Black*, that wasteland England. In a country so densely populated and worked over there are lots of spaces that no one really owns. Possibly someone does, in the sense of land tenure, but their function seems to be only to be barren and only to discomfort us. You know the creation of the motorway involves the creation of the wasteland either side of it, the good for nothing and the

good for nobody land, and that is the price of progress, getting there fast, is the off cuts the margins

LA: The liminal spaces.

HM: Yes, yes, and I think that I have paid a lot of attention to the psycho-geography of the book. I think to me a passage I quite value and like writing is about the townscape that lies beneath the townscape Alison is driving through, where the road system is slightly different and every morning the ghosts are going to work and they have a different set of roads and then they let themselves in or they're queueing up waiting for somebody to let them into a factory that doesn't exist anymore. And I suppose there is a whole socio-economic critique in there which is about the loss of manufacturing in this country. They were purposive and had useful work and knew what they made and now they're unemployed ghosts with no access to benefits and they've got no papers so they are cousins to their living brethren who are adrift in the same way. In other words I suppose it isn't the borderline between the living or the dead which is the definitive or important one. There are all sorts of ways one might cross that space.

LA: Yes, absolutely, and I think what a lot of your books seem to work towards is aiming at a recognition that one's subjectivity and one's status as citizen is not locked down, it's not secure, and it can be compromised in often surprising ways.

HM: [It's] a very potent issue for historical novelists who work, like me, on the lives of real people, because to them reputation, and what will be left of them is a major concern. There is a borderline you cross when you step into the light of history and know yourself to be a person of possible enduring influence. 'But are you?' is one sort of question. And then I am interested in what happens when that self-consciousness descends on people and they realise they have stepped into a different frame of reference.

LA: You suddenly see yourself as part of the vast sweep of history.

HM: Yes, but you also see yourself as a kind of hinge. You perceive your own significance suddenly. The perception may be false and it may be overblown but nevertheless it does condition your response to what will follow. You see I'm not sure my Tudor people were conscious in this way but I know that my French revolutionaries were. They were extraordinarily adept in that era at making over life into legend. So we think that this is a modern phenomenon but within months, within weeks, of the bastille falling, it had been made into a theatrical spectacle in London and if you were to say you were situated in this break of 1594 you could go and see a play about the making of the constitution of 1593. You're looking back a few months: this is what we were doing last summer, and you could go and sit in the stalls and see an actor playing you. Its mind boggling. I am interested in what happens to people psychologically when they yield part of themselves to the collective, in other words, heroes. Heroes are fascinating, once a man has been carried on the shoulders of the crowd they own him and inside there is just a protesting being saying 'yes but I used to be nobody.' Part of him possibly wants to go back there. It's interesting to me, in *A Place of Greater Safety*,

how Camille, who is a journalist and self-mythologiser par excellence, only feels himself to be real when he steps onto the public stage. And it's this absolute division in his life, in his own mind, the before and after. It's so quantifiable, its 12<sup>th</sup> of July three o'clock.

LA: When he becomes what he is going to be

HM: Yes, that's right. And all your life until then is just in potential and then it suddenly: 'Now I'm real'. And if you contrast that with someone like Robespierre who is excruciatingly conscious, inwardly, of destiny and yet is self-effacing and is convinced that he will be overwritten, that his name will not be known because he can't win this and history is written by the winners. So again I think this is interesting the way in which people try to write their name on water.

LA: Yes that's a lovely way to put it. Moving on from ghosts tangentially, I was curious as to what the place of mourning might be in your work, so much of which is concerned with the dead.

HM: Did you have my little essay on C.S Lewis?

LA: No.

HM: Hold on and I can . . . I have almost an embarrassment of copies.

[HM fetches a copy of 'On Mourning']

HM: It's just a set of essays sparked off by *A Grief Observed* so please take that. I think above all I understand mourning as work. And in a bigger sense I might say mourning *is* my work because I think almost everything I do is driven by an impulse to hold onto the past until I make some shape out of it and therefore can recognise it and name it. This impulse of reverence and commemoration to people who were just as real as me and you but just happen to be dead. I almost can't bear the silence into which people go unless they have made a huge impact on history and we speak their names. One of the most moving things that I have experienced recently, as the *Wolf Hall* books have gone into a different media, is the speaking out on the public stage of names that no one has perhaps spoken aloud for hundreds of years

LA: There is a passage in *Wolf Hall* that I still can't read without bursting into tears, which is the deaths of Grace and Anne Cromwell, and when I did more research into them and realised how little they are documented . . .

HM: There's nothing.

LA: There is nothing and it made that passage even more potent for me, that there is that tribute to those girls that wasn't there before, and they are known to people now in a way that they never would have been without that text. It seemed a very particular act of imagining.

HM: Yes I have given them a life by imagining them but in other cases and I myself find this more touching really, there's a, in *Bring up the Bodies*, there are the men who are executed with Anne Boleyn and in one case, and it



comes out much more strongly in the stage production, there's a point where the four men are sitting in four corners of the stage and Cromwell goes to each of them in turn and Cromwell tells them why he is doing this to them and how they have fallen into his hands. And he goes to William Brereton and says, you know, 'well this is how it's going to be William' and of course he protests there is no evidence against him, there is nothing to link him to the Queen, and then Cromwell says to him 'cast your mind back William, remember a man called Ap Eyton' and Brereton is astonished and he says what has that got to do with this. And [Cromwell] says 'now just bear with me' and he unfolds the injustice. A gentleman of Cheshire, very obscure, done to death by Brereton's thugs. Its justice, its retrospective justice. He's saying I'm nailing you for this, it's nothing to do with the Queen. You know and I know this is why, and I'm doing this as an example so that people like you understand it's the King's writ that runs not yours. No private laws no private kingdoms. To me the moment you're in Manhattan and Ben [Miles] is saying 'cast your mind back William' and the man's name is spoken out and then there's a sort of audible click in my mind. You can't exactly say justice is being done but I find it profoundly moving that you can take this name so long unspoken and blast it out to Manhattan. It's that even if you are documented you can vanish from the imagination. But you can be reinstated in the imagination and I think that the reverence, the need to mourn and do reverence, is not a sentimental impulse, it's a political impulse. It's about doing justice, no matter how many years that might take and how feeble a form it might, how feeble our efforts might be but the point is we are making them. While we are making them we are serving the project of justice. We know we will never make a just world, we will never arrive but as long as we are marching in the right direction. So I think that is, now I have forgotten which question sparked this, the work of mourning, yes. I think that therefore it is not simply a negative process

LA: No

HM: It's a question of going into the dark and emerging into the light finally, finally. Sometimes you have to pass the work on, it goes down the generations, it may take centuries for a person, or a whole people, a vanished people, to be properly mourned. So to me I think it's a very creative work. But at a lesser level, on a day-to-day personal level, I am always struck by what hard work it is, how ill people are when they are mourning, how weak. I remember when my stepfather died and I went over to Norfolk to the funeral and a Jewish friend of mine came and she said that in the classic tradition, when you would all be sitting in mourning then for those days after the death, the widow, two friends sit either side of her and if she stands up they help her stand and making support literal like that is often what's needed, that person is so weak. And I also experienced at that time the business of not being able to look into my mother's face and I understood for the first time why people who mourn wear veils because it's too hard to confront. It is as if there is something dazzling about mourning.

LA: I think it's when somebody is occupying a space which is so raw and unnegotiable and you are not occupying that space it can only be occupied by them, that does become a very uncomfortable interaction to negotiate.

HM: Yes, the rules have gone, so when normally you look at someone's face their expression is regulated by unspoken laws. In these extreme states, and pain is another analogy, you might see anything and so you cannot look and that's why widows wear veils and put screens around the bed.

LA: And cover up the mirrors

HM: Yes, it's not the person inside who is being spared it's the people outside. I think physical pain is interesting in this respect and I have been thinking about it in a couple of ways through many books, the way that even people who are paid to deal with it can't actually face it.

LA: I think it's partially, I suppose, in the fact that pain has no language of its own, one has to lay claim to metaphor to try and express it because it is so embodied

HM: Yes interestingly that's what Virginia Woolf said but I said in one of my hospital pieces there is a huge vocabulary available for pain. It does depend on really translating the human body into being a thing. If you think of the twisting, the boring, the grating - these things are metaphors but only in a very narrow sense. I think pain can be described very well. I don't think the world is ready to listen.

LA: Yes I think that's probably very astute

HM: Yes and then I had a go at Virginia because she only had genteel ailments

LA: Also true. I think that's one of my favourite things you have ever written: 'Virginia Woolf was a wuss because when her doctors told her not to write she obeyed them'.

HM: [laughs] Oh that's ghastly isn't it? That confiscation.

LA: It's unthinkable. I find it, to think that people had that much control over someone's autonomy to say not only physically what you can do but how you can occupy your mind, it's quite repulsive.

HM: Yes in hospital at that time I felt very keenly the analogy between writing and stitches because I felt that just making marks on the paper was all that was holding me together. And the thing I jealously guarded was my notebook and pens; the exasperating business of your pen rolling away when you can't stretch for it and trying to exercise this thought control to roll it back towards you

LA: Hospital telekinesis.

HM: Yes that's right! So I learned to have lots and lots of pens and I think at that time I became a sort of writing addict because I kept my journals almost breath to breath and the iller I was the more I wrote because it was all that was connecting me. Ever since then my journals have got denser and denser in content. And oddly I feel maybe it's not a good thing because stuff that should be going out there is just going into my journals, as if I have just become obsessed with tabulating my life. There are my big journals and my

five year diaries which I have kept for a long time and recently I've lost one, a five year diary where I was three years in. I have mislaid it and its one of the most distressing things. I've now more or less decided that I'm not going to find it again and begun a new one at the date when I decided this is the cut-off date but I need in some way to reconstruct it because I was amazed to find how much it did upset me. It's not as if I had lost all my big journals but the day to day patterns of your life were there in the five year diaries. I've got twenty five years of them. I wish I had always kept them but since this one's gone I've felt unstrung. I suppose particularly because it has been a time in which life has gone by very fast, an awful lot crammed into the last couple of years and so you cannot make assumptions about what you were doing on a particular day but that's by the by. I called that hospital piece *Ink in the Blood* and I have never felt that analogy so close and real as at that time.

LA: That's fascinating, I feel so sad for your diary.

HM: Yes, it's weird, it is a total mystery to me and I can't quite abandon the notion that it will turn up. July it went missing. But we are subject to a certain amount of weirdness so it might pop up.

LA: It may be returned to you. I would just quickly like to look at the figure of the child in your work. This has only really come out to me in the latter stages of my project the prevalence and importance of that figure or of childlike characters in your work.

HM: Yes I think you are right that the child is an uncanny figure, rather like the ghost, and the fragments of childhood that persist into adult life are ghosts of a kind. I think it was thinking around this question which led me to thinking about Hilary Thompson and what reality she might still have. I think I see the child as a kind of ghost because of its unrealised potential and also being alien, being out there. Have you seen that film *Let the Right One In*?

LA: Yes, I read the book first.

HM: I haven't read it.

LA: The film is wonderful but the book is definitely worth a read. It's quite a lot more ambiguous than the film.

HM: Yes that's the problem with films isn't it, they start off very well but then they literalise it.

LA: Yes there are moments in the book where it would have taken a very brave film maker to interpret them and so instead of doing that they just opted not to include those elements.

HM: I would like to read it, who is the author can you remember?

LA: I used to know, I wrote a paper on it not long ago.

HM: Not to worry, it just came to me as I was thinking of the child as an alien. Children are so dangerous to adults because of what they have witnessed unseen. You know sometimes you don't even notice the child is there and the

child not only sees and witnesses but makes an interpretation which may be subversive to the adults and their purpose. As a child myself, and even more particularly as I went through my teens, I felt myself being treated like a very dangerous object, like dynamite which might go off because I was in possession of the family secrets and I was persecuted in advance because of my potential to speak of them which I didn't ever do. But I was thought to be in an oscillating, unstable situation where my formula couldn't be quite accounted for. As if I was chemically unstable in some way and as if I might ignite.

LA: Essentially reactive.

HM: Yes but unpredictably so. This wasn't my inner reality but I was aware that it was how I was treated. I do think in general children are upsetting to the adult notion of the world and in so much as they don't have the power to express what they feel it's all the more dangerous because its being buried somewhere and the adult knows it's going to transmute under the ground. Did you ever play as a child the game of making yourself alien by looking in at the window? I've never asked anyone else that.

LA: Yes, I recognise that impulse, I did as a very little one. Feeling what it would be like not to belong on the other side but I think for any child that is too scary a game to play for any length of time.

HM: It is. Yes it's a rather maudlin game because it's like the orphan game isn't it. Its Dickensian urchin with a tear on your cheek. So the game is that you are yourself but you've been away for many years and you look at the people going about their lives and it's important that they don't see you, it's painful as you say, and it's a prime way to unsettle yourself. And it's the closest you can come to play at being a ghost but it's not a ghost. It's *the* ghost, it's your own ghost and I think nostalgia and homesickness are more dangerous states sometimes than people realise, more grave certainly. . . That was an interesting choice of word. The ghost's nostalgia for life. But the idea that one might play at being a ghost, though I don't think you quite conceptualise it like that.

LA: But that is what you are doing.

HM: Yes, they can't see you, that is the convention of the game, and you would observe the changes that have taken place.

LA: It reminds me of the Emily Dickinson poem from the point of view of the dead child observing the family going on in their absence

HM: And actually, speaking of Bostonians, so much of that flavour is there in *Turn of the Screw* isn't it, as you mentioned. I am very interested in the feral child, the layers of meaning in that word, in the original sense of the savage found in the forest and bought back to civilisation, and the modern use, the gang member out of control. It's one of these terms that journalists grab from time to time and it means a whole world. You know, just what I was saying about the danger of the child to the adult, and again you are pushing that child to the margins of what's human. I'm interested in the fact that until very

recently the idea persisted that new born babies didn't feel pain so therefore you could do anything clinically, because their nervous systems were not developed enough was the theory, so you could do all sorts of procedures that you wouldn't do on adults and their crying was merely a reflex.

LA: Oh god!

HM: Yes and it's only comparatively recently that this theory has been exploded and it bears on animals and animal rights and so on. Again, it's that shifting frontier isn't it. So, is a child human is a question which certainly has been raised from time to time and very present in Catholicism as well: when you come to the age of reason, which in my day had fallen as low as seven. Though I find that going back pre-Reformation it was a much more flexible concept, so just as the whole of education was you weren't fixed in a year group it was 'are you ready', the age of reason shifted too, but in my era at seven you became a moral or reasoning creature and responsible for your own sins.

LA: Gosh, at seven?

HM: Yes well if you go to confession and take communion you can only do that if you understand what it all means and the concept of sin and eternity and so on. It's quite good really and at the same time farcical but it brings you on.

LA: Yes it's a lot of responsibility to step up to!

HM: Yes, but I think again that's that question of you pass over a certain frontier into being a moral being by virtue of the sacraments. And then there is that lovely thing, well I'm thinking back to the Tudor era, the male foetus becomes ensouled at 56 days, the female foetus at 112 days.

LA: Wow that's very specific.

HM: Yes but it meant that before that if you aborted a child it was nothing, so the earlier church was not as rigid, there was no business of the soul entering at conception, you had lea way.

LA: That's fascinating.

HM: Isn't it.

LA: So we've another shifting frontier I suppose about the child's status.

HM: I want to say something about Muriel, it may be to do with the child. I was just talking about thinking about short fiction and my fiction about childhood and the move from my grandmother's house to Brosscroft where the ghosts were and how my stepfather and the ghosts arrived in my life at more or less the same time, so then there are two kinds of thing that must then not be spoken of. And in fact you have no vocabulary to speak of because nobody really has for ghosts, and I did not have for sex, so there are things that you are not being told. And you urgently need to know about what's going on in that house. There are things that are happening, and you can see them happening but you have no way of talking about it. Always what you need is

to know what is happening in the next room or behind the closed door and nobody is going to tell you, so you must speculate. And you know that some of your guesses will be wrong and it could take you years to find out which of your guesses is right. And my own experience is you might need to write a novel or a story to get a little bit closer to the truth and that brings me back to that weirdly suspended potential in the first novel where I broke off the medium theme and returned to it. It's true actually that in 1979 I finished *A Place of Greater Safety* and I was in a race because I knew, I was in Botswana. I knew I was coming back to London and I knew I had to go and turn myself over to doctors but I had to finish the book. Though it might seem very exaggerated, I was actually in a very bad way and I had a theory about what was wrong with me but I could have been wrong about it and I was extremely grey and hollow looking. And I did in fact look as if I was dying. When I went to hospital Gerald was told, but not me, that they thought I had cancer and if I did it was terminal and it was weeks. So it was not some kind of idle morbid fantasy I was entertaining, that was their first impression and part of me thought, this book is what I've got to leave behind. If that is true I have to leave this book behind and once that was done and confronted all that and I got to the other side of it, I'd come out, it was then that I realised I was not going to sell *A Place of Greater Safety* and at that point started writing *Every Day is Mother's Day*. And it was interesting that having got to the other side of that imaginative dying I think began my engagement on the page with the world of ghosts. Because what I recovered into was a rather inward looking narrative in a way. It was the opposite of what you might expect. *A Place of Greater Safety* was all about the big world and then I went in to recover myself in a way. I think that what I wanted to say about being suspended in childhood, and having to guess, is that you are trying to make a story and you know that story might not work, its success is predicated on does it help you, does it help you live. A lot of stories are broken backed and they don't actually go anywhere but you keep trying and I think that is just the same really with your novels, you have a go at the story and then a few years later you go back and pick it up so I think it's a natural process that began way, way back there. I wanted to say about how quick you are to hear a false note in the stories you make up about your life, you know, like you hear a false note in your novel. You don't necessarily know how to put it right but you know it's wrong so you just have to have another go until it makes more sense, more harmony. Muriel is a very strange creature. Again, reductively, people have demanded to know what is wrong with Muriel.

LA: Yes I have encountered this a lot in terms of people I have given the book to and said 'read this what do you think of it' and have seemingly entered into an endless process of diagnosis and I'm kind of like, that's not the point of her. But I'm not surprised that people have that reaction because I think she is so discomfiting, her ability in the first book in particular to absent herself from herself and observe, to hollow herself out in quite a disturbing way

HM: Yes and the word I wanted to throw in is reification. She thinks at one point 'I might be the wall' and she says at one point that she is a thing that is put. For some reason I was slower than other children to realise that your thoughts were private and for a long time I wasn't sure where the boundaries lay between my thoughts and what adults knew. And I thought that perhaps they

communicated in ways literally above my head, which of course they often do, but I invested it with greater importance and power. And so for a long time after I went to school I thought that the adults knew what went on there because almost there was an adult freemasonry that would inform them of it and therefore experienced not just myself but all children as very disempowered in this game. I believed this, I think, because of my mother's habit of telling me what I thought and with a reinforcing tendency to make her predictions correct because the world is arranged for you. So I remembered all of that when I started to make Muriel because in a sense she is stuck in that place and she doesn't understand where the boundaries are and later this enables her to do enormous damage because she can pass into other bodies and take on their reality and vampirise a whole life.

LA: Exactly, this notion that you can study people and glean enough and then just reproduce, press the right buttons and out come reactions, that very machine-like way of interacting with other humans that she has.

HM: So you see the authorly unease there: you're Muriel all your life, the barriers aren't as hard and fast for you as for other people, you are more permeable and penetrable but you grow up and you learn to use that to your advantage you can only use it really by occupying other bodies. But then you get it so precisely what you've said is true, you know how to press the buttons, you know how to arrange the text on the page so here the reader will cry, here the reader will laugh. It doesn't always work like that but it's an attempt that infuses you with unease at the whole process. So although I didn't quite realise it at the time I think Muriel is the first writer figure to appear.

LA: Yes that's fascinating! She's a creator isn't she? She creates her own life.

HM: These sublime scenarios.

LA: Yes mad, mad scenarios! The conclusions that she draws and her interactions with the material world, and how she uses that as evidence to form her strategies seemingly on the one hand so wild and out of touch with conventional reality but on the other hand conveyed with such conviction that you find part of yourself going yes, of course, she could have a . . . what's the beetle she tries to order as a pet?

HM: Ah the Colorado Beetle!

LA: Yes she tries to order the Colorado beetle as a pet and gets a cage for it and it doesn't arrive and she feels sad and you think 'oh I'm quite sad for her as well' and I was like 'no, hang on, no that's not how it works!' But yes, she is creative in that way and creates her own reality and obviously events in the novel contrive to make her reality so, particularly with regard to the skeleton in the box by the end of the novel.

HM: You see the other people, the rational people, they have to come to terms with the invasion of awful coincidences into their live and they are helpless against it, you know when Colin finds the teeth in the garden. They are like novices, innocents in this world which Muriel treads with such sureness, because the laws of the universe are different for her. And of course I think it

is so contrived that every time you start feeling sorry for Muriel she does something to make sure you don't. I long to see her on screen but despite several attempts nobody has dared.

LA: If it were to succeed it would be an astonishing piece of television but I worry that the nuance and shadows would be lost.

HM: I think it is very strong material and nobody's got hold of it yet. But if they can do *Beyond Black* then they might be able to do that. You know when I was, my Mrs Thatcher stories were originally going to be called *Ten Transgressive Tales* and then I wrote the Mrs Thatcher story and that was so obvious as a title. But it made me think. I had quite a lot of difficulty scraping them together because I set the bar so high for transgression.

LA: Yes, which is no bad thing!

HM: Because if you look at *Mother's Day* its almost every page breaks some kind of taboo. Even in its lighter moments when Muriel is being charitable and tossing coins around and saying 'there you are you poor cripple'.

LA: They are wonderful moments when you think oh so close to passing in society. She's unique, I have never encountered a character like her and so fruitful and yet resistant to analysis. She produces lots of wonderful questions.

HM: I was reading a lot about autism at one stage actually, long before I wrote the book, but it did feed into it because in those days nobody was discussing autism in the way they are now. It was very interesting to go back to the Bruno Bettelheim, whose name is mud now.

LA: Yes, I've read *The Uses of Enchantment* it is a really interesting book.

HM: Yes it's as a therapist he has become reviled because of what are certainly perceived as malpractices at his institute. But his work on autism, at least in the early days, he made this analogy with people in concentration camps. He had been in a camp and he said that you would get people who passed into a state where they behaved like automata and the people in the camps called them Mosel men, which is a corruption of Muslim, because they were thought to have accepted their fate and once someone passed into that state then they would be dead within days because they would fall foul of some regulation and be shot or they would just die because the impetus for survival would just have vanished from them. And he said with some of the very damaged children he saw that same blankness and inability to fend for themselves and then he got the interesting idea that they might be living in a world of complete blank terror like people in the camps because they didn't understand the rules and whatever they did they couldn't catch on to them so things like patterning and repetitive behaviours were an attempt to hold onto some thread.

LA: To create some kind of structure?

HM: Because they didn't understand cause and effect so their sense of time was not as for other people and I think that was very valuable really. You can't throw out the baby with the bath water really, even if as a practitioner



something was lacking. I think that is still full of insight and in a way that's where Muriel started, trying to create her out of my memories of being a child and not understanding the system. So it's a continuum for me but then later in the books I suppose they do become something else. When one of them can pose the question are you mad or are you bad, it's just so fundamental.

LA: Yes, I love how that comes back later and Sholto says to her 'you drive them mad' and she says 'I don't drive they go themselves'.

HM: 'they go themselves'. Yes.