GOTHIC RETURNS IN COLLINS, DICKENS, ZOLA, AND HITCHCOCK

ELEANOR SALOTTO

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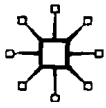

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To my father James Salotto who made all things strange beautiful

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

In *Gothic Returns*, I take as my subject the literal and metaphorical returns of the dead in Wilkie Collins's *The Haunted Hotel* and *The Woman in White*; Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Uncommercial Traveller*, and *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*; Émile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise*; and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. I argue that these returns of the dead are a symptom of and a response to the influence of Darwin on the Victorian Novel, and that they situate plot and multiplot in a new relation. It is my contention that the Victorian novel internalized from Darwin a sense that origins are fundamentally uncertain, and in this way evolved as a field of narration in which multitudes of different stories vie for authority: the novel, if you will, as a survival of the fittest narrative. In this context, the returns of the dead, live burials, and other hauntings that constitute the multiplots of gothic fiction are evidence of the paradoxical survival of stories that have not in fact survived the novel's internal struggles. In *Our Mutual Friend*, The Postscript in lieu of Preface is one such return. In *The Haunted Hotel*, the incineration of a manuscript that reveals the identity of a murderer is another example in which one plot fails to exterminate another and is in turn haunted by it.

That manuscript in *The Haunted Hotel*, whose author is a woman, is also an opportunity to observe that these returns of the dead are typically inflected by gender and by a conspicuous association with categories like home, domesticity, and female subjectivity. In this connection, I argue that the female voice constitutes a particular species of return from the dead, a counter-narrative to a putatively "original" narrative of masculine desire. The Victorian novel performs the ghostly work of superimposition; there is no one identity but rather layers of identities. The multiplot then resembles the labyrinthine byways of gothic narratives. The ghostly dispersal of the female voice haunts the multiplot plenitude of my representative texts. In the interstices of the multiplots are the ghostly remainders of what has been repressed—the figure of woman.

In the penultimate chapter of *Gothic Returns*, I turn to Hitchcock's treatment of the ghostly and superimposition in *Vertigo* as an extension to my arguments about the meaning of the return of the dead in Victorian fiction. I argue that the Victorian novel provides Hitchcock with a formal vocabulary with which to consider gender, narrative, and the return from the dead in film, a twentieth-century repository of spectral narratives. The move that I make from Victorian literature to film links Victorian hauntings to the ghostly effects of projection on the screen, as well as to Hitchcock's obsession with the female body as a locus of masculine anxieties about gender. Through the vertigo shot, the film creates a visual representation of the gothic and the uncanny. Both are linked to Scottie's fear of falling and thus his association with the figure of woman. In *Vertigo* Madeleine becomes the figure for the return from the dead—she is resurrected in Judy and then transformed back into Madeleine. Woman in *Vertigo* embodies the figure of superimposition, covering over and substituting for Scottie's fears and desires.

In the final chapter, "Grave Narrations: Dickens's later writings," I return to Dickens to argue that he creates a gothic writing based on wandering, the multiplot, and double endings in *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Uncommercial Traveller*, and *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*. Dickens's obsession with the dead coming back keeps the impulse of narrative alive. Dickens narrates so as to avoid literal death, and he stages returns from the dead to spark the beginnings of narrative. In these later writings, Dickens obsessed with death, imagines a world peopled by ghosts whom in essence he has willed to return from the dead. Rather than these returns being negative, they inspire Dickens's imaginative vitality. These returns from the dead provide Dickens with an imaginative resource where he can stage death and resurrection.

Gothic Returns makes the claim that Victorian authors created a narrative mode to present repressive social practices and the effects of that repression whether in the form of live burials or spectral returns from the dead. Victorian gothic creates a spectral mode of narrative that depicts psychological studies of haunted characters, along with reproducing the technological. Much like the photograph, Victorian gothic creates a copy, but a copy with a difference. That copy produces multiple layers of hauntings.

Gothic Returns argues that the gothic served as a mode for cultural horror. It contends that specters haunt the so-called mainstream realistic novel. The realistic novel produces a mechanical imitation of character, but in reproducing men and women, there lurks the threat

of a return, invoking the gothic. The mechanical image of representation cannot be put to rest and speaks in its own voice. The model for this return is Frankenstein's monster who embodies mechanical means of reproduction. And surely the Frankenstein monster presents the horror of live burial and a return from the dead in the sense that the true horror of the tale lies in the inability to separate the original, Frankenstein, from the copy or reflection, the Frankenstein creature. In reproducing the figure of woman in the representative texts I discuss, the respective authors and characters experience the created coming back to haunt the creator. The presence of ghosts and the uncanny in the Victorian novel signals an indeterminacy in representation. What is posited cannot rest on any definitive plane; rather, instability of interpretation and meaning undercuts the originary attempt to fix meaning or gender.

If narrative is predicated on origins and ownership, then the Victorian novel enacts the problems inherent in trying to postulate origins and ownership of the female body. That is, while Victorian women were socially and legally subservient, the narratives I discuss present a more ambiguous status for woman. Spectral presences hover over the attempt to figuratively bury women alive.

Moreover, Victorian gothic presents a parallel universe to the concept of the Victorian angel in the house. The Victorian novel focuses inordinately on the home and domesticity. The home is the site for the exploration of character interiority. But this home is haunted by the figure of woman. This space of the home is also closely aligned to the narrative home of first person narration. That is to say, the home becomes a spectral place for narrative representation. Thus, I am claiming that Victorian gothic actually charts a change in narrative representation focusing on the replica and the threat of the replica speaking back. If there is a ghost haunting the Victorian novel, then that ghost surely is the figure of woman who returns in a different guise from her original conception. The figure of woman was a problematic entity with several, and even contradictory, layers of signification.

The concept of origins obsessed the Victorians. I want to connect origins to narrative origins and the gothic novel's foregrounding of the origins of its narrative. For example, many gothic narratives are found manuscripts that the narrator of the tale unfolds to the reader. This predilection for origins points to fakery at the heart of the gothic. This fakery is founded on a fiction, a fiction that contains multiple layers of signification. Thus, origins are multiple and undefinable. And any attempt to certify the origins of woman is haunted by the return

of a ghostly signifier that pulsates with contradictory layers of signification. What starts out as a live burial shifts to a return from the dead.

All Victorian narrative in a sense entails a return to origins, whether to childhood or to a childhood home. This return is uncanny because it signals a return to the original home, the womb. Therefore, in returning to origins, one is confronted with the ghost of the feminine. The search for an original unity is disrupted by an origin that cannot be attained or fully articulated. The origin of species is indeed uncanny because it is not locatable. Therefore the Victorians' obsession with classification and order belies an original disunity. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* actually prefigures Freud's essay on "The Uncanny." Both are inordinately fixated on origins: the former, with the origins of species, and the latter with the origins of horror that leads back to the originary home, the womb. Darwin argues for indeterminate origins for the species, and this indeterminacy surfaces in the novel in the form of specters that challenge an original model. Darwin posits that "a breed, like a dialect of a language, can hardly be said to have had a definite origin" (40).

Gothic narrative resembles Darwin's entangled bank; this metaphor for life rewrites a model of order and in its place fashions a world of chaos and transgression, a hybrid world. The last lines of Darwin's text present the metaphor of the entangled bank where Darwin imagines that "whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved" (490). This last statement presents a succession of creatures, endless evolving into one another. This concluding image evokes the idea of a superimposed identity; that is to say, the endless forms he speaks of operate as ghosts flickering in and out of existence, presenting the idea that what is dead lives on. In this sense, Darwin's text is a gothic one in that the origins of species posit not one progenitor but a succession of ghostly indeterminate figures. What one considers home or the familiar as a basis of origins turns out to be filled with multiple reconstitutions of beings.

Thus, the home in Victorian gothic fiction bears the weight of a place that is haunted by the ruined structure of the domestic sphere. Home and its association with femininity and tranquility served as the site for the deployment of gender roles. The home turned into a haunted place because the dream of the stable home actually produced the unfamiliar or the monstrous. *Gothic Returns* shows that the domestic sphere in the Victorian period was a problematic concept because it ultimately brought to light multiple and contradictory

layers of signification for the home and woman's place in it. What was supposed to be the locus for a sheltering from the outside world became a place full of ghosts, such as the fantastic home of Miss Havisham in Dickens's *Great Expectations*. The home represented a place of order, but the Victorian home also contained the spectral and haunting obsessions. The house became supernaturalized, and, in turn, I am claiming that narrative embodies the spectral through not only literal ghosts but also through layers of meaning that vie in the text.

In Darwin's text what gets buried alive returns in a new form. This is the claim I am making for Victorian gothic. Victorian gothic announces that what was purportedly dead, either literal or figurative, is always in the process of appearing in a different guise. Therefore, the fixed subject position of the angel in the house evolves through the process of ghostly narration that refuses to locate woman in one particular place. Darwin creates a metaphor for death in life when he writes: "the great Tree of Life . . . fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications" (130). This life in death I am aligning with a system of narratives that return and proliferate.

The move from British literature to Zola and France is in part influenced by *The Ladies' Paradise*'s insistence on the link between the gothic technologies created by the department store and Britain's fascination with the gothic as an outgrowth of the rise of technology, the rise of capitalism, and the development of the railroads. While Victorian gothic situated the gothic in the domestic sphere, *The Ladies' Paradise* locates the gothic in the new home—the department store. The home then becomes the site for the deployment of capitalism and technology. The home/department store transforms into a public space that incorporates the spectral residues of the private. In other words, the home becomes a space available for public viewing—one can learn to be "at home" by watching other displays of "being at home." Specters inhabit the home, a direct result of the ghostly residue of the spectacle. Interiority, no longer a private space, becomes peopled with others' images, ideas, and things. Interiority thus rests on a succession of images that one cannot claim as one's own. Thus, technology and the corporate structure of the department store form a new identity.

The department store creates a new model for identity, an identity that simply is a succession of ghostly images paraded in front of the spectator for confirmation and consolidation. Identity is no longer consolidated in one body but in a succession of bodies for consumption. Window shopping allows the viewer to enter the space of the display,

encouraging identification with an entity outside oneself. This model for a new technological identity is located in the dummy, the figure who is dead/alive. The body thus becomes the site for the uncanny—is it dead or alive?

Too, the department store encapsulates the rapid technological accelerations provided by the railroad; that is to say, identity not only becomes spectral but it also becomes mechanized by the obsession with time. Identity then is not only transformed by space—the space of the department store—but by time, itself. The acceleration of time continually brought to the forefront the idea of a fragmentation of the self. If time fragments, then the self in time cannot be consolidated producing an uncanny feeling that one moves randomly through time and space.[1]

The uncanniness produced by rapid advances in technology involving space and time consolidates itself in the invention of the cinema. For the cinema is the mode *par excellence* for the spectral. Presenting a succession of images and a replication of character through the screen, the cinema as a mode is the apogee of the Victorian gothic. Fabricating a fabrication through the image and the screen, the cinema plays on presence and absence. Photography represents live burial, that is, it is uncanny in the sense that it recalls a fabricated return from the dead via the technology of the image. A technology of specters and shadows, the cinema embodies the mechanized and corporate self.

The body in cinema is the ghostly presence, and this is nowhere more evident than in the ultimate successor of Victorian gothic, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, where Scottie falls in love with the ghostly Madeleine who mysteriously dies and returns from the dead. *Vertigo* is a meditation on the power of the cinema to coextensively kill the image and raise its ghost from the dead. In this sense, cinema is the perfect technology for live burial in that it is always involved in the in-between space of presence and absence—which is the place of desire. Desire in *Vertigo* becomes uncanny because it reflects a limbo-like space between the spectral and the real.

The lost object must be recuperated through the image—through the apparitional return from the dead. Too, the image guarantees an impersonation; that is, the image presents a ghostly figure with whom one can identify through inhabitation. But this illusionary model cannot hold, and we enter the phantasmagorical space of trickery or fakery. *Vertigo* simultaneously falls in love with the apparition of woman, but also points to her as a phantom illusion of Scottie's. He imaginatively kills her off so he can bring her back to life, but her ghostly presence

also adds another layer of meaning to the film—she remains outside the scope of Scottie's representation of her. *Vertigo*'s true haunting engenders the phantoms of gender. Cinema provides the illusion of woman, but the image is full of ghostly presences that deny a univocal layer of interpretation. Scottie's story is layered over by Elster's, Madeleine's, and Judy's stories, all providing gothic excess. This gothic excess embodies a wish to preserve an originary model of desire, but the spectacle of the image of woman deconstructs that desire, revealing the fakery underlying this desire. Woman as ghostly figure is simply that, a figure of the imagination that haunts Scottie throughout the film. That she materializes so readily before him points to the power of the imagination to believe in the image one has created.

Criticism on the gothic has seen a resurgence in the past twenty years.[2] On the one hand, my study is concerned with social gothic; that is, the repressive social practices that engender the return of the repressed in Victorian fiction. On the other hand, I argue for the conjunction between the narrative and psychological dynamics of the gothic. Thus, the novel becomes the site for live burials; it turns into a ghostly narrative form. As the Victorian period progressed, the novel grew increasingly concerned with aberrant states of mind, such as we see in the portrayal of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* or in Dorian Gray in *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* The gothic, in a sense, becomes internalized, and the novel serves as the repository for obsession, fetishism, and displacement, in which repressed desires are figured. The Victorian novel becomes a phantom-like structure, where the representation of mind turns out to be an uncanny place, full of ghostly signifiers that cannot be articulated directly. Too, gothic narrative is obsessed with returns and the multiplot, which I argue is the narrative form in which to represent specters. That is, narratives proliferate much like an army of ghosts. Thus, the gothic participates in the creation of a new psychological reality where lack, absence, and psychological fragmentation inhere.

While this may seem to suggest a gloomy forecast, actually the live burials I am arguing about effect a reconstitution of identity where the subject encounters contradictory layers of signification. Out of this chaos arises indeterminacy—with the potential to challenge binary modes of thinking, particularly about gender. The ghost, populating the Victorian novel, in a sense, becomes the leftover, the excess in meaning. The ghost has a positive political role—in the Foucauldian sense that change can be effected through resisting the status quo. In making the domestic the source for the gothic,

Victorian novelists uncovered the form of oppression centered in the home. Part of the positive force of Victorian gothic is that in the home things never appear quite what they seem. Thus, the home for Lucy Snowe in *Villette* is inhabited by ghostly presences. Superimposition serves as the trope then for Victorian gothic; what appears on the surface is also subject to what lies beneath, and the two in the texts I discuss are always in conflict with one another. Victorian gothic replaces the haunted castle with a network of meanings, and live burial always suggests a story within a story.

Wilkie Collins's two texts *The Haunted Hotel* and *The Woman in White* both deal with the suppression of the female voice and the ghostly remainders of the narratives being haunted by that repression. Thus, while women's voices are buried in the text, they are resurrected by other forms of narration, such as the play text in *The Haunted Hotel* and Anne Catherick's dream text in *The Woman in White*. Thus, both narratives suggest that live burial of one's story in the text proper resurfaces in another text that then rewrites the main text. While the main text seems to have survived, actually the subtext through its terror and horror presents a struggle involving voices that will not die. Both texts capitalize on women's stories that lie just beyond the purported supremacy of the text proper. The true haunting in *The Haunted Hotel* entails the Countess's ghostly attempts to narrate her story in the form of a play. Her animated corpse reveals her difficulties in narrating her story; the dead-alive body becomes the symbol for the dead-alive story that she narrates. The ruin or fragment is important here; the text suggests that woman's story cannot be articulated fully in a narrative system that privileges survival of the fittest. But here the story articulates that survival of the fittest is simply a social construct to authorize a certain kind of power. The specter though undercuts the idea that what is killed off is dead. In fact, the specter and spectral narration continue to live on, in a sense more powerful than what has survived in the text.

"Gothic Fragments: Wordless Narration in *The Woman in White*" engenders a subtext to the logical detection posited by the legal discourse of Walter Hartright. This logical textual apparatus is haunted by the figure of woman in several ways. Anne Catherick presents the most unruly figure because literally her text cannot be interpreted under a survival of the fittest narrative—that is the fittest being the most rational. Laura's text is a graven image in the sense that Hartright writes her story, over her dead inert figurative body, literally while gazing at her portrait. Memorialization or narrative fixes women, but the text evokes specters that refuse to stay put.

"Phantasmagorical Narration in *Bleak House*" in effect presents the idea that the survival of the fittest narrative is a red herring; that is to say, each narrative cannot derive from clear-cut origins. Esther Summerson's narration is haunted precisely because in assuming her voice, Dickens comes face to face with the feminine. Whereas the two earlier texts present a descriptive view of woman's social position, in *Bleak House* Dickens channels the figure of woman in his portrayal of Esther Summerson. Now one could argue that authors do this all the time; they write in different voices and assume different identities. In *Bleak House* however, inhabitation of character produces a ghostly effect both in the narration of the story and in the text's obsession with ghosts, namely the ghost's walk. The confrontation with the feminine is particularly uncanny for Dickens in that he confronts a lack of difference. He goes home in this text to the domestic, but the domestic turns out to be a haunted place full of voices that have no definite origins.

"Shadowing the Dead: First Person Narration in *Our Mutual Friend*" links the figure of the corpse to first person narration and representation through the narrative mode of the multiplot. Thus, *Our Mutual Friend* brings to the forefront the uncanniness residing in figuring identity and telling the story of identity. This uneasiness is represented in the form of the novel—the multiplot that presents the structural hauntings of stories that proliferate. The multiplot calls forth the embedded story—in other words, something is being elided in the story. What lies behind the so-called plenitude of the multiplot is the figure of the corpse, the corpse of first-person narration that cannot be articulated until the middle of the text; and this story, full of confusion and meanderings, suggests the limits of representation of self and identity.

If the self is figured as a story told through third-person narration, then it operates as a form of the modern technology of narration at a step removed. Significantly, the text begins with the dispersal of the voice through the presentation of the corpse and third-person narration, and ends with the railroad in Dickens's Postscript in Lieu of Preface in which he recounts his near death by railway accident. This frame positions the novel as a kind of labyrinthine structure encased between two structures of dispersal.

"Shopping for an 'I:' *The Ladies' Paradise* and the Spectacle of Identity" moves the argument to France and shifts the focus somewhat to argue that technology and capitalism create a new form of identity centered on display and the copy. All of the items in the department store suggest fecundity, but they also summon the corpse