



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree
in
European, American and Postcolonial Language and Literature

Final Thesis

“Recounting Nightmares”:
An Analysis of Five Dickens' Ghost Stories

Supervisor

Prof. Michela Vanon Alliota

Assistant supervisor

Prof. Emma Sdegno

Graduand

Carlotta Sala
987465

Academic Year

2018 / 2019

In loving memory of my grandmother Margherita

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
The Ghost Story: Definition and Pattern.....	2
A Brief History of the Ghost Story	5
The Victorian Ghost Story	11
Charles Dickens and the Ghost Story.....	15
1. The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain	18
2. The Ghost in the Bride's Chamber	36
3. The Haunted House	50
4. The Trial for Murder	65
5. The Signalman.....	75
Conclusions	91
Bibliography	97

Introduction

This dissertation will examine and compare five Dickens's ghost stories: *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848), "The Ghost in the Bride's Chamber" (1857), "The Mortals in the House" and "The Ghost in Master B's Room", both included in *The Haunted House* (1859), "The Trial for Murder" (1865) and "The Signalman" (1866).

The introduction discusses the origins of the *ghost story* – a short story dealing with supernatural elements – born as a folkloric tradition since pre-literate society and initially transmitted orally. It introduces briefly the precursors of this type of narrative until its spread during the Victorian age especially among the middle-class, explaining the interest for this modern taste and the subsequent reasons why Charles Dickens was interested in writing – and publishing – ghost stories at Christmas.

The analysis of these horror tales – divided in chronological order of release – is structured starting from the contexts of their publications, explaining the plots, depicting the settings and the characters, dwelling especially on the apparitions of ghosts and on the relationship between the real and the supernatural elements, thus focusing on the research of the allegories used by the author in each of them.

The first chapter deals with *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*, a novella published in 1848 as the last of the Christmas Books; the second is "The Ghost in the Bride's Chamber", which appeared in the literary magazine *Household Words* in 1857 as a fragment of *The Lazy Tour of Two Little Apprentices*, written in collaboration with Wilkie Collins; the third analyses "The

Mortals in the House” and “The Ghost in Master B’s Room”, the only two tales by Dickens which were collected in *The Haunted House* (1859) and released in his weekly journal *All the Year Round*; the fourth examines “The Trial for Murder”, initially entitled “To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt” in *Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions*, also issued in 1865 in *All the Year Round*; the last focuses on “The Signalman”, published in 1866 as a part of the collection entitled *Mugby Junction*, printed in *All the Year Round* as well.

The conclusions will compare and summarise these five ghost stories’ analogies and differences, explaining the implied significances intended by Dickens for each ghost through the use of allegory.

The Ghost Story: Definition and Pattern

The term “ghost story” is generally adopted to describe some pieces of fiction written with the main common intention of scaring the audience through the use of supernatural elements:

Ghost stories are more usefully defined in term of length, genre or context than according to the particular types of supernatural visitation that they represent: stories of the spirits of the dead are different in subject, but not in kind from stories of ghouls, vampires, zombies and doubles (*doppelgänger*), automata and the golem, or from tales of witch, wizards, werewolves and spells.¹

According to Julia Briggs, the closest definition of the ghost story would depict it as “a story about the spirits of the returning dead”,² albeit this is not

¹ J. Briggs, “The Ghost Story” in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter, Malden (MA): Blackwell (2006), p. 123.

² *Ibid.*

fitting for many of the most popular examples of the genre. In addition to these inducing-fear tales, in fact, there is a special category regarding fairy tales, white magic, good ghosts and fulfilled dreams, it would thus be more appropriate to label all of them “supernatural stories”, although it is less appealing.

The literary critic Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes between two genres into which the fantastic of the literary Gothic can be divided: “that of the supernatural explained (the “uncanny”), [...] and that of the supernatural accepted (the “marvelous”)”.³ Therefore, he asserts that a person who gets in contact with the fantastic has to choose “either he is the victim of an illusion of senses, of a product of the imagination [...]; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality”.⁴

The ghost story is commonly considered a type of narrative deriving from the Gothic but different from it partly because “the supernatural events remain unexplained”.⁵ In these tales there is an alternative structure of cause and effect, which does not give a plausible reason for supernatural phenomena but provides its “pseudo-explanation according to some kind of spiritual law based on some particular law of action and reaction”.⁶ These explanations are not meant to justify or debunk the uncanny events but to suggest a kind of imaginative logic that promotes what Freud defines “animistic” ways of thinking rather than rational laws, since “the ghost story reverts to a world in which imagination can produce physical effects”.⁷

³ T. Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated from the French by Richard Howard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1975), p. 41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵ J. Briggs, “The Ghost Story” in *A Companion to the Gothic*, cit., p. 123.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.124.

The allure of the ghost stories stands in the fact that their authors, since they are talking about an imaginative world, tend to detach themselves from what they are asserting and pretend that it is mere invention, although actually dealing with serious issues in an indirect way.⁸

Gothic novels are more concentrated on the reader's feelings and on the narrative length, while ghost stories are in great number short, focused on the supernatural events with just few main characters and simple action.⁹ However, there are some well-known examples of long-short stories or *novellas*, such as Dickens' Christmas Books – *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Earth* (1845), *The Battle for Life* (1846) and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848)¹⁰ – or the more recent Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).

As regards the settings, according to Nick Freeman ghost story writers deploy realistic places and detailed descriptions, in order to allow readers to recognise themselves in the characters' everyday lives and to be startled when the supernatural occurs. Moreover, the most sophisticated authors, such as Walter Scott and Edgar Allan Poe, link "this attention to exteriority with a corresponding interest in the psychological exposure to the supernatural."¹¹

The ghost story writer and scholar M.R. James labels ghost stories as a "particular sort of short stories";¹² however, Julia Briggs argues that "with the

⁸ J. Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, London: Faber (1977), p.23.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰ A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*. New York: The Viking Press (1972), p. 181.

¹¹ N. Freeman, "Ghost Stories" in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic A-L, vol. 1*, general editors William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith, Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell (2013), p. 277.

¹² M.R. James in the preface to the anthology *Ghosts and Marvels* (ed. V.H. Collins), quoted in J. Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, cit., p. 13.

increasing taste for naturalism, the short story and the ghost story began to diverge, and in the former fantasy became increasingly inward".¹³ Ghost stories were traditionally assimilated to mystery and detective fiction, and more recently, to science fiction, but while the latter continued to evolve, ghost stories remained anchored to their form.

Nowadays, this type of horror literature has become just a means to recollect the past times of Dickens and his contemporaries, since from its decline in the first decades of the twentieth, it had no more potential of growth.

A Brief History of the Ghost Story

Inducing terror is an old practice – spread even among prehistoric men who fought against the terrors of the outside by drawing them inside their caves – and a primary function intended as a way to exorcize fears in collective rituals in order to canalise them into a known structure.¹⁴

Ghost stories were born before literature and transmitted orally in the form of anecdotes as recitals since primitive societies. The American writer H.P. Lovecraft, speaking about the genesis of the horror tale, affirmed that “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown”.¹⁵ Hence, the psychological pattern involved is as deeply rooted in mental experience as any other one of mankind,

¹³ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁵ H. P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, New York: Ben Abramson Publisher (1945), p. 12.

contemporaneous with the religious feeling and closely connected with many aspects of it.

The human response to the environment is inherent in man's first instincts. Thus, definite emotions such as pleasure and pain grow up around the phenomena whose causes and effects men understand, while feelings of fear and awe arise around those they cannot explain rationally:

The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons.¹⁶

Since mankind tends to recollect pain and menace of death rather than pleasure and *joie de vivre* and since these positive aspects of the unknown have already been explained through conventional religious rituals, the negative ones have been attributed to cosmic mystery and popular supernatural folklore.

Considering that secular and religious supernatural powers were hardly kept separate during the Middle Ages, modern historical research has tried to underline the analogies and the progression of the early Christian world with what came before it:

Within the systems of magical belief that include ghosts and witchcraft, man is commonly conceived as inhabiting a world made up of visible and invisible forces, part of a total scheme of physical and spiritual states in which the spirits of the dead, as well as other powers, have vital functions to fulfil.¹⁷

For this reason, encounters between human and non-human were already present in primitive and ancient mythologies, from the Babylonian epic poem *Gilgamesh*, through Homeric poetry and Old Testament to the Icelandic Eddas

¹⁶ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁷ J. Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, cit., p. 25.

and the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. However, the first archetypes of free-standing ghost stories – created in order to scare a critical audience – appeared with the “decadent prose” of late Greek or silver Latin: Lucian’s tale in the satirical sketch “The Liar” and Pliny’s account of a haunted house, Petronius’ *Satyricon* and Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*.¹⁸

Many centuries later, during the late Middle Ages, Geoffrey Chaucer, following Apuleius, wrote a pair of inset ghost stories in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” (included in *The Canterbury Tales*); medieval literature, in fact, was deeply involved with the supernatural, although in forms of simpler fantasy such as fairy tales, animal fables and romances as well as with ballads, that came from popular tradition.¹⁹

A renewed interest in the plays of Seneca during the sixteenth century provoked a brief fashion for “bloodcurdling and purely sensational ghosts in the theatre”:²⁰ though, for more expert dramatists, ghosts brought with them unnatural omens such those to be found in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*.

At the end of the century, however, the Protestants, as a result of the English Reformation, refused to believe in the occurrence of saintly miracles, in the existence of Purgatory – where the walking spirits were supposed to live – and consequently in the presence of ghosts as well; or rather, phantom apparitions were admitted but considered as demonic spirits and mere Catholic

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

superstitions. At that time William Shakespeare, writing *Hamlet*, was the first author to start a philosophical debate on the existence of ghosts.²¹

During the seventeenth century, since the public opinion was changing very slowly, people still believed in ghosts, especially in desolate and remote places reached with folklore and oral tradition such as Ireland and the Scottish highlands, where many of the most famous ghost stories flourished and in which some of the greatest Gothic novelists – Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Walter Scott and for example – grew up.

Phantom apparitions between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries were considered and recognised as phenomena, but ghost stories remained interesting just because people wondered about the reasons why the spirits had come, not whether they really existed. Indeed, this was the case of Daniel Defoe's *A True Relation of the Apparition of Mrs Veal* (1706), considered “the first modern ghost story”,²² albeit different from other ghost stories because of Defoe's use of verisimilitude instead of fiction, provoking in the audience a sense of “religious awe”²³ rather than fear.

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, horror tales and supernatural events were supposed to be superstitions and childish beliefs, confined in the remoter areas of the folklore, which were still untouched by Enlightenment theories.

Towards the end of the century, however, the romantics resumed the enthusiasm for this type of narrative, while some essayists, such as Joseph

²¹ Ibid., p. 29.

²² Ibid., p. 30.

²³ Ibid.

Addison and Richard Steele, sometimes mentioned spirits in their periodicals (*The Spectator* and *The Tatler*).

According to Briggs, it is quite paradoxical that the interest for ghosts increased in a century of rational and sceptical approaches towards uncanny phenomena:

When ghosts ceased to be accepted as a commonplace, ceased indeed to be believed in at all, any evidence of their possible existence aroused intense speculation, and was often subject to earnest and serious scientific investigation of a kind inconceivable in an earlier age.²⁴

In this period Gothic fiction came into being with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a work that marked "a watershed moment in the literary use of supernatural" because it linked the supernatural with Christianity and went against "the restraints of neoclassical literary precepts".²⁵

The Gothic novels, and the ghost stories as well, were thus developed as a response to the "rationalism and growing secularisation of the Enlightenment"²⁶ and to the consequent spreading of theories that explored the inner mind such as mesmerism and spiritualism.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the supernatural was still in vogue both in the novel and in verse drama, following a neo-Jacobean taste for sensation.²⁷ However, not all Gothic novels were contaminated with excessive sensationalism, some of them derived also from naturalistic fiction and included

²⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁵ J. G. Voller, "The Supernatural" in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z*, vol. 2, general editors William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell (2013), p. 661.

²⁶ J. Briggs, "The Ghost Story" in *A Companion to the Gothic*, cit., p. 125.

²⁷ Charles Dickens himself was a novelist of sensation since he noticed that fear was the easiest way to attract his audience, as asserted by D. Punter in *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions, from 1765 to the present day, Volume 1, The Gothic Tradition*, Harlow, England [etc.]: Longman; Pearson Education (1996), p. 189.

sporadically gothic elements, such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847).²⁸

An interest for the supernatural world was present also in the works of the Romantic poets: Samuel Taylor Coleridge gave expression to the nightmares of the inner mind in his ballads "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and in the incomplete "Christabel"; William Wordsworth, Coleridge's co-author of the collection *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), anticipated some aspects of the later ghost stories in *The Prelude, or Growth of the Poet's Mind*; and John Keats provided his narrative poem "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil" (1818), with an "unquestioning acceptance of the events depicted".²⁹

During the early nineteenth century it is also worth mentioning a great novelist, Sir Walter Scott, who grew up in the remote Scottish land where folkloric tradition was still alive. This can be noticed in his essay "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition" (1827) and from his three short ghost stories: two of which, "The Tapestry Chamber" and "My Aunt's Margaret's Mirror", contained in *The Keepsake* (1828) – a literary annual published on Christmas – and "Wandering Willie's Tale", his greatest ghost story published as an inset in his novel *Redgauntlet* (1824).

Since in this period it was common to include short stories in greater works, other writers used to insert self-contained ghost stories in larger frameworks, such as Captain Marryat in his retelling of the Flying Dutchman, *The Phantom Ship* (1839), and later Le Fanu in the *House by the Churchyard*

²⁸ J. Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, cit., p. 33.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

(1863), but it was indeed Charles Dickens who promoted the taste for short ghost stories published in magazines, both as editor and as writer.³⁰

The late nineteenth century represented “the high-water mark of the form”,³¹ since the rise of the middle-class and the expansion of the reading public meant that the ghost story, through the works of Charles Dickens as well as others, developed as a genre and reached its apex giving voice to the sense of alienation of the Victorian man.

The Victorian Ghost Story

The nineteenth century was an age of transition, characterised by the effects of the innovations and the discoveries made during the Industrial Revolution – such as the telegraph and the steam locomotive – and by the coronation of Queen Victoria in 1837, which marked the beginning of the Victorian age and the end of the Georgian – or Augustan – era.

Victorian era was a period of progress but also of uncertainty, which provoked a change in people’s attitude and a kind of nostalgia for the past.³² This age could be divided in three different periods: early, mid (or high) and late.

During the first decades until the middle of the century the consequences of scientific and technological novelties and the economic instability provoked anxiety among the population, though from the late 1830s the emergence of the middle-class improved this climate. The mid-Victorian period, which lasted

³⁰ Ibid., p.15.

³¹ Ibid., p. 14.

³² E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*, New York: Vintage Books (1996), p. 44.

from 1850 to 1870s, was characterised by economic progress, reforms for social improvement, urban and scientific developments (Darwin's theory of evolution) and by the consolidation of the bourgeoisie, which brought a change in the quality of life and in the mentality of the time. Finally, the late Victorian period "inherited this contradictory mix of cultural assurance and self-doubt."³³

This feeling of anxiety which permeated among the Victorians was mitigated in literature through the "sensation fiction",³⁴ the Gothic novel and the ghost stories, considered "a way of anchoring the past to an unsettled present by operating in a continuum of life and death".³⁵

Ghost stories were in vogue among the reading public, as they constituted, together with the novel of social realism, an important cultural and literary heritage. Although their structure and aims were the same as their prototypes, Victorian supernatural tales differed from the previous ones for their innovative power and creativity. Indeed, there was a sort of pact between the author and the reader, who was prepared for the supernatural apparitions but at the same time aware that they would be shocked by them.³⁶

The Victorian ghost stories, as said before, initially developed with the Gothic novels, albeit, from the 1850s onward, they began to diverge because of the more familiar tones and settings used in the former in order to recreate a more comfortable atmosphere:³⁷

³³ M. Moran, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, London [etc.]: Bloomsbury (2013), pp. 2-3.

³⁴ "'Sensation fiction' comprises a range of Victorian novels depicting the disturbance of a contemporary and supposedly normative domestic sphere by individuals whose conduct or presence there is detrimental to its integrity and whose own identity is often ambiguous". M. Bennett, "Sensation Fiction" in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z*, vol. 2, cit., p. 607.

³⁵ M. Cox and R.A. Gilbert, "Introduction" in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1991), p. ix.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. x.

The Victorians “domesticated” their ghosts, setting their tales not in foreign locales but in the urban environments that were increasingly the concern of Victorian culture at large, using their ghosts not to pursue terror for terror’s sake but to affirm many of the same principles and values championed in their realistic fiction.³⁸

Victorian authors contributed to the success of the form fighting against “soulless materialism of the new age”,³⁹ the ghost story in fact was born as a “reaction to the secular, materialist, industrial modernity that animated that animated the dominant progressivist Victorian utilitarian ideology”.⁴⁰

The main means through which the Victorian ghost stories spread among the population and especially in the middle-class society were the literary journals. It was a period characterised by a growing reading public thanks to the abolition of the newspaper tax (1855), the enhancement of education and the advance in technology. These periodicals provided fiction in the form of short stories or as serials, some of the most well-known were *Blackwood’s*, George Smith’s *Cornhill* (which was also edited by William Thackeray), *Temple Bar*, *St. James’s* and many others, though the attention will be focused on *Household Words* (1850-1859) and *All the Year Round* (1859-1895), the two literary magazines edited by Dickens.⁴¹ He succeeded in collecting also other ghost stories by several authors, such as Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell. It is worth noting that many female authors contributed to the development of the Victorian ghost stories collaborating also as editors, among them Amelia

³⁸ J. G. Voller, “The Supernatural”, *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z*, vol. 2, cit., p. 662.

³⁹ R. F. Geary, *The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction: Horror, Belief and Literary Change*, Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press (1992), p. 104.

⁴⁰ D. Jones, quoted in “Ghost Stories”, *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z*, vol. 1, cit., p. 278.

⁴¹ M. Cox and R.A. Gilbert, “Introduction” in *Victorian Ghost Stories*, cit., pp. xii-xiii.

Edwards, Charlotte Riddell and Mary Elizabeth Riddon, maybe because women were more sensitive to the fantastic.⁴²

The first number of *Household Words* came out in March 1850, but as a result of a controversy with his publishers, Bradbury and Evans, Dickens was encouraged to found in April 1859 his own literary weekly journal, *All the Year Round*. He considered these journals a device to express his social views denouncing the problems of the time and to publish all kinds of fiction he considered worthy to be read, rather than a mere way to earn his living.⁴³

Moreover, according to Andrew Smith, behind the ghosts depicted by Dickens there were “allegories”⁴⁴ that he used to speak about several topics relating to political and economic issues. He in fact used to insert in his works constant implied moral for adults that encouraged the use of imagination and goodwill in a period of uncertainty and fear like that of his time, discussed especially in *Hard Times* (1854).⁴⁵

The main aim of the literary magazines was to entertain audience with fiction such as serializations of novels or short stories, in order to suit every type of social rank, in particular “a burgeoning middle-class readership that was educated but relatively unsophisticated in its literary tastes”.⁴⁶ Since many of these journals were meant to be read aloud when the family gathered, ghost stories were “especially suitable for they provided short self-contained episodes which could be printed beside the full-length serials running from issue to

⁴² Ibid., p. xiv.

⁴³ A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, cit., pp. 218-219.

⁴⁴ A. Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840-1920: A Cultural History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press (2011), p. 33.

⁴⁵ A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, cit., pp. 12-15.

⁴⁶ M. Cox and R.A. Gilbert, “Introduction” in *Victorian Ghost Stories*, cit., p. xii.

issue”.⁴⁷ They used to appear on special Christmas numbers, both because it was the perfect time of the year to reunite the whole family, and for the reason that Christmas is a Christian festivity which has always been associated with magic and spirits of the dead, since in folklore their appearance on Christmas Eve was motivated as “the disturbance of the souls in Purgatory before the advent of the Saviour at midnight brought them peace”.⁴⁸

Although it is difficult to define whether this tradition of publishing ghost stories at Christmas was common before Dickens promoted it, Briggs hypothesised he was inspired by Washington Irving’s tale of “The Christmas Dinner”.⁴⁹

Charles Dickens and the Ghost Story

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born in 1812 at Landport, near Portsmouth, by Elisabeth and John Dickens, who was a clerk in the navy pay office. In 1815, the family had to move to London and two years later to Chatham, in Kent, where Dickens spent the happiest years of his childhood.

The Dickenses returned to London in 1822 but, since their fortune impaired, they sent Charles to work in a blacking-warehouse: this is the reason why Dickens felt betrayed and abandoned by his family. John Dickens was imprisoned for debt in 1824, but when his financial position improved, he allowed Charles to return to school. However, Dickens left school at the age of

⁴⁷ J. Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, cit., p. 14.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.40.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

fifteen to become a solicitor's clerk, and subsequently a shorthand reporter in the law courts.

In 1833 Dickens began contributing stories to literary journals, which would be in 1836 reprinted as *Sketches by 'Boz'*. The same year, he married his editor's daughter, Catherine Hogarth, who bore him ten children until their separation in 1858.

The author of some memorable novels such as *Oliver Twist* (1838), *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861), was indeed the "key figure"⁵⁰ who consolidated the modern taste for the ghost story form and promoted its seasonal association with Christmas.

The reasons why Dickens was so involved with Christmas holidays could be attributed both to his past experiences of isolation as a child and to his strong beliefs in Victorian family values.⁵¹

I LIKE TO COME home at Christmas. We all do, or we all *should*. [...] There is probably a smell of roasted chestnuts and other good comfortable things all the time, for we are telling Winter Stories – Ghost Stories, or more shame for us – round the Christmas fire.⁵²

He started this Christmas fashion with an account entitled "A Christmas Dinner" in *Sketches by 'Boz'* (1836) and then publishing some interpolated tales within *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), in which Dingley Dell during Christmas' celebrations provided the perfect atmosphere to recount around the fireplace tales such as "The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton".

⁵⁰ M. Cox and R.A. Gilbert, "Introduction", in *Victorian Ghost Stories*, cit., p. xiii.

⁵¹ C. Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, London: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 69.

⁵² C. Dickens, "Christmas Ghosts" in *Complete Ghost Stories*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics (1997), p. 272. Henceforth all quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the text in the abbreviated form "CG".

He then strengthened this tradition with his most well-known long-short story *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and his later Christmas Books, all of which are focused on this Christian festivity.

In *Household Words* he continued inserting short ghost stories as special Christmas issues such as “A Christmas Tree” (1850) and “The Ghost’s in the Bride’s Chamber” (1857), though it is in *All the Year Round* that he published the major part of his works, including the collection *The Haunted House* (1859) and the stories “The Trial for Murder” (1865) and “The Signalman” (1866), as will be discussed in the following chapters.

1. The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain

In the mid-1840s Charles Dickens decided to take a break from his novel writing and started composing long-short stories – or *novellas* – known as “Christmas Books”, which were based on fairy-tale and supernatural themes and created for “giving nursery tales a higher form”,⁵³ following the pattern of the interpolated tales of Gabriel Grub in *The Pickwick Papers* (1837).

The first of the five Dickens' Christmas Books was *A Christmas Carol, A Ghost Story of Christmas* (1843), followed by *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Heart* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846), and, last, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain, A Fancy for Christmas-Time*, published in 1848.

The idea of writing this novelette was actually conceived in 1846, but, since Dickens in that period was still working on *Dombey and Son*, he confessed in a letter to Forster in September 1847: “I am very loath to lose the money, [...] and still more so to leave any gap at Christmas firesides”,⁵⁴ and he thus decided to delay its draft until 1848.

During that summer, while Dickens was thinking to complete his long-postponed work, his eldest and beloved sister Fanny, died of consumption; she was about fifteen months older than his brother Charles and they were very fond of each other because they grew up together, especially in the Chatham years from five to ten, since they were the oldest of eight siblings and their

⁵³ Dickens in Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*, quoted in H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making*. London; Basingstoke: The Macmillan (1980), p. 119.

⁵⁴ Dickens in Forster's *Life*, quoted in C. Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, cit., p. 83.

mother, after her first son's birth, had turned her attentions to the new offspring.⁵⁵

Therefore, Dickens set down completing *The Haunted Man* in a period of distress provoked by Fanny's loss, and he would go back to his sister's death when the protagonist, Redlaw, spoke about his past life and his amiable sister who died after having taken care of him till the end:

'My sister, doubly dear, doubly devoted, doubly cheerful in my home, lived on to see me famous, and my old ambition so rewarded when its spring was broken, and then—'

'Then died', he interposed. 'Died, gentle as ever; happy; and with no concern but for her brother. Peace!'⁵⁶

Dickens' intention in writing the Christmas Books, except for the fourth (*The Battle of Life*), was "to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian land";⁵⁷ the four novelettes, which dealt with Christmas and fairy-tale machinery, followed a similar pattern: a protagonist who is dissatisfied with his existence and cynic towards mankind is encouraged, through the intervention of magical forces, to change life style, usually entailing some bad consequences that, at the end, bring the hero to redeem and learn a moral lesson which is the author's implied warning for his readers.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press (1994), pp. 386-388.

⁵⁶ C. Dickens, "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain" in *Complete Ghost Stories*, cit., p. 137. Henceforth all quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the text in the abbreviated form "HM".

⁵⁷ Dickens in the Preface of his Christmas Books, quoted by R. Glancy, "Introduction" in *Christmas Books*, edited with an Introduction by Ruth Glancy, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press (1988), p. ix.

⁵⁸ H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making*, London; Basingstoke: The Macmillan (1980), cit., p. 119.

The last of the series was *The Haunted Man*, because “it effectively concluded the themes which had concerned Dickens for these six crucial years”.⁵⁹



Figure 1: Title page by John Tenniel, in C. Dickens, *Christmas Books*, London: Chapman and Hall (1910), p. 417.

The Haunted Man is the story of a lonely and reclusive chemistry professor, Redlaw, who is tired of remembering his past sufferance. Therefore, a ghost bestows him the gift of forgetting it, but Redlaw discovers at his own expense that the bargain is not beneficial.

The first section, “The Gift Bestowed”, begins on Christmas Eve’s night, when Redlaw is alone in his dwelling in an old institute for students and is interrupted by the arrival of the servants: Mr William Swidger, a loquacious man who tells the professor about his family; his almost-a-hundred-years old father, Philip Swidger, who is the keeper and custodian of the building; and his

⁵⁹ R. Glancy, “Introduction”, cit., p. xxi.

wife Milly, who is another domestic and a very good-hearted person, beloved by all the students.

The professor asserts wistfully that Christmas recollections, which every year are accumulated in human minds, are blotted out by death. Therefore, the old custodian Philip replies that he has spent a lot of 'Merry Christmas' and 'Happy New Year', but Redlaw has some doubts that his memory could be impaired by age.

The old keeper thus illustrates to Redlaw some of his past "merry and happy" (HM, 131) memories, admitting, however, that some of them are bad, such as those of the losses of his dear wife and some of their children. Then, he recalls a portrait hanging in the ex Dinner Hall, which has a scroll below it with the words: "Lord! Keep my memory green!" (HM, 131), and says that this motto has helped him to keep his remembrances vivid throughout the years.

Speaking with Mr William and his wife, the Chemist discovers that Milly is hosting an ill student down in the buildings. Milly confesses to Redlaw that the boy asked her to keep the secret, though she ignores the reason why, and she adds that the day before she heard the student muttering in his sleep: "about someone dead and some great wrong done that could never be forgotten" (HM, 134). Lastly, Mr William praises his good-hearted wife Milly because two hours earlier she found "a creature more like a wild beast than a young child, shivering upon a doorstep" (HM, 134) and decided to bring it home and take care of it too.

As the haunted man remains alone in his chair meditating, the atmosphere gets darker, the holly withers and drops its branches, the gloom and shadow thickens behind him, and it appears "by some unreal, unsubstantial process – not to be traced by any human sense – an awful likeness of himself!" (HM, 135).

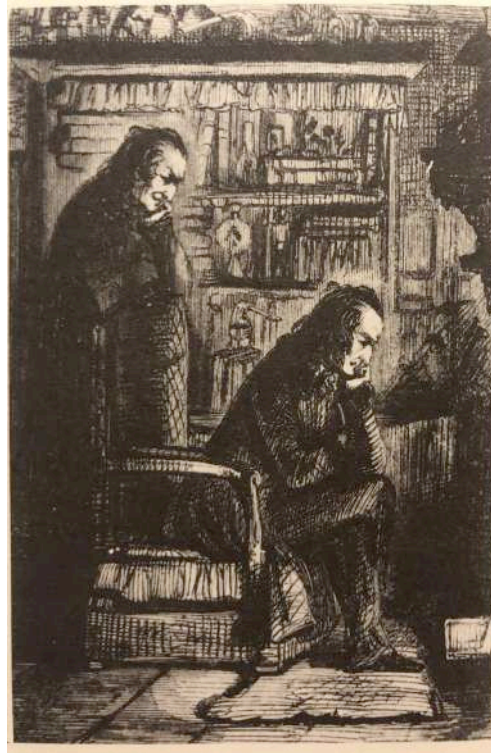


Figure 2: “Redlaw and the Phantom” by John Leech, in C. Dickens, *Christmas Books*, cit., p. 436.

After a while, Redlaw and his ghostly other self recollect their past life: Redlaw initially was poor and achieved success through his knowledge; when he was a child, he never met his father and his mother eloped with another man, not caring about him. In his youth, he had a dear friend, with whom his beloved sister fell in love; and lastly, he loved a girl who he did not marry. He used to fancy a merry life for him and his sister but all those images became “delusions” (HM, 137): in fact, his best friend betrayed him and escaped with the girl he loved, and subsequently his abandoned sister died of a broken heart.

Therefore, the haunted man, asks himself why humankind has to suffer in such a way remembering all their sorrows and wrongs and wishes he could erase all of them from his memory. Finally, the Phantom offers him the chance “to forget the sorrow, wrong, and trouble” (HM, 139) he has endured, and the

Chemist, after some hesitations, accepts the bargain. However, the Spectre adds a rider: "The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will" (HM, 140) and disappears.

While the haunted man is still thinking about the Phantom's words, he suddenly hears a cry and sees a strange creature rushing "like a wildcat" (HM, 140) in his room. This is the child rescued by Milly, who asks Redlaw to bring him to the woman; being still scared by the Phantom's words, the Chemist refuses, indicates the way and locks himself in his chamber.

The second section of the story, entitled "The Gift Diffused", begins with the humorous description of the Tetterbys: a family who lives in the same group of buildings in which the ill student is hosted. They are indeed a happy family, but Mrs Tetterby begins to behave in a strange way after returning from the marketplace, where she encountered Redlaw. The Chemist goes to their house in order to visit the ill student, but while he is speaking with them he realises that he is involuntarily witching them. In fact, after passing their hands over their foreheads, they change their attitude and become jumpy and rude towards their children.

Redlaw then goes to the student's room and questions him about his past. Mr Edmund Denham, the student, confesses to him that his mother's name is Longford and that his family did a wrong to Redlaw. However, the professor, whose mind is turning blinder and blinder, does not remember anything about it. After seeing that also the young man passes the hand over his forehead, he understands he has witched him too. Thus, when Milly arrives at the student's dwelling, he hides himself not to affect her, since there is "a steady quality of goodness in her" (HM, 160).

Listening to Mr Denham and Milly's conversation, he discovers that the ill student is becoming arrogant with her, since he refuses her cares and brusquely drives her away. Therefore, the professor understands that he is infecting people with his gift and he realises that the only person he did not infect is the beast-waif with his unchanged animal attitude.

The professor asks the child to show him the miserable place from which he has come. During the way, Redlaw tries to affect the boy three times: walking by his side, standing near him and glancing at him, but nothing happens. On the contrary, he notes some analogies between himself and the child, though they are different in their intellectual and physical aspects.

In the outskirts, Redlaw decides that he could do no wrong there to make people forget their pains: first, he encounters a forlorn woman who has been hit by someone she loved, probably her father; then, he sees a man of his age who starts recognising him, though Redlaw does not know who he is; lastly, he finds the Swigers at the bedside of George, who is their ill son and brother. In the same room, there is the man who recognised Redlaw, and George asks the professor to help that man because he is a lonely wretch who has lost his money gambling and is thinking of killing himself. In the end it comes out that this man is actually Edmund's father, who admits that he has done a great wrong to Redlaw in the past and wants to beg his pardon: he in fact used to be Redlaw's dearest friend, until he broke his sister's heart and escaped with his first love.

Since Redlaw makes these people forget their sufferance, they pass their hands across their foreheads and change their behaviour, becoming rude and mean towards each other.

When Redlaw understands that his gift is provoking chaos and damaging people, he runs away with the beast-waif and locks himself in his dwelling with him. From outside, Milly insistently begs him to enter, while the child strives to go to her. Redlaw thus invokes the Spectre and asks him to break his curse.

In the third part, "The Gift Reversed", the Chemist knows that his memory has not been restored but he feels a change in himself, since he is moved by listening to the Christmas music outside.

At that moment, the Spectre appears again suggesting Redlaw to seek Milly and then he explains the mystery of why the beast-waif could not be affected by the gift: the child is in fact a "wretched mortal" (HM, 179) who grew up in a "worse condition than the beasts" (HM, 179) and whose entire existence has been a "barren wilderness" (HM, 179). Moreover, the Spectre tells him that he felt similar to the beast-waif because the wretched child has no emotions and no feelings and represents what he could become if he chooses to persist with his gift, since the boy is "the growth of man's indifference", like Redlaw is the "growth of man's presumption" (HM, 180).

On Christmas morning something has changed. The Chemist goes to Milly at sunrise and begs her to accompany him to visit all the people whom he encountered the previous night: from George Swidger's bedside, to the forlorn woman, to the wretched man who wanted to kill himself and to the ill student at Tetterby's. While the Tetterbys are still fighting each other, Milly arrives at their house and brings unexpected serenity and joy in their hearts: they make peace, forgiving one another for their unpleasant behaviour. Moreover, the ill student has recovered and asks Milly to forgive him for mistreating her.

Redlaw knows that his memory is gone but accepts it with submission, since he feels that through Milly, he could redeem the damage he has done.

Even in Swidger's house, of course, peace and good humour return and the old keeper Philip, recovering his past memories, remembers a time when Redlaw's sister came to visit them: she and Philip's wife looked at the picture in the ex Dinner Hall and reading aloud the scroll behind the picture – "Lord! Keep my memory green!" (HM, 191) – wished their dear ones may not forget them. At that point the Chemist bursts into tears because when he renounced his painful remembrance, he erased from his memory also the good one, and he finally realises "how precious to old age such recollections are" (HM, 192).

At that point Milly tells Redlaw that remembering sufferance is helpful to forgive: she has suffered for having lost a child before he or she could be born, but the recollection of it makes her very happy, because the unborn child is her angel.

In the end, Redlaw organises a Christmas dinner and gathers the Swidgers, the Tetterbys, Mr Denham and the child. While they are celebrating they look at the picture hanging on the wall and saw the scroll behind the portrait: "Lord, keep my memory green!" (HM, 198).

In the original single-volume Clarkson Stanfield's illustration represents the Christmas Dinner with the book's last sentence below it. This prayer, which recurs often throughout the story, is Dickens' benediction to his readers: he wishes them to maintain their recollections always vivid.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ C. Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, cit., p. 82.

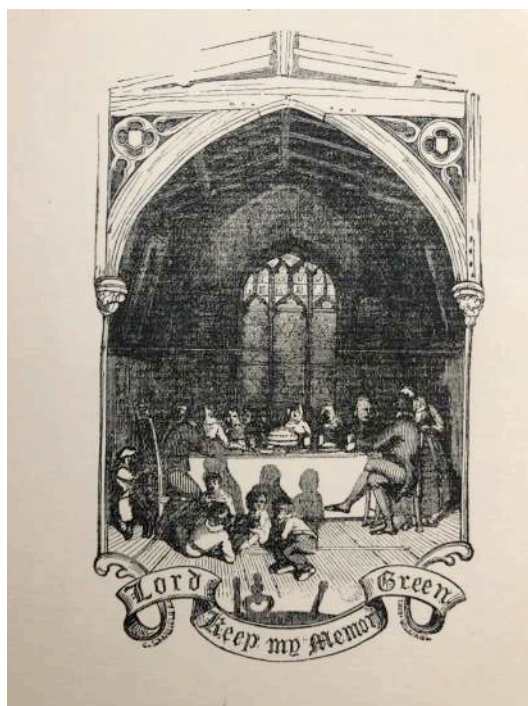


Figure 3: The Christmas Party in the Great Dinner Hall by Clarkson Stanfield in C. Dickens, *Christmas Books*, cit., p. 525.

The Haunted Man's setting and characters are introduced with accurate and detailed depictions, which make the reader inevitably notice that Dickens, by writing this novella, resumed the first of the Christmas Book, *A Christmas Carol*.

First, like the *Carol* takes place in “a gloomy suite of rooms”⁶¹ of an inhabited complex of edifices in the city centre, *The Haunted Man* is set in the “solitary and vaultlike” (HM, 123) Redlaw’s residence, which is part of a group of buildings situated in an ancient college in the middle of the bustling city, in a gloomy atmosphere:

Where no sun had struggled for a hundred years, but where, in compensation for the sun’s neglect, the snow would lie for weeks when it lay nowhere else, and the black east wind would spin like a huge humming-top, when it all other places it was silent and still. (HM, 123)

⁶¹ C. Dickens, “A Christmas Carol” in *Complete Ghost Stories*, cit., p. 63. Henceforth all quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the text in the abbreviated form “CC”.

The haunted man's house, in particular, is depicted, through a series of contrasts which make the place seem haunted, like his tenant: "so lowering and old, so crazy, yet so strong"; "so environed and hemmed in by the pressure of the town, yet so remote in fashion, age, and custom"; "so quiet, yet so thundering with echoes when a distant voice was raised or a door was shut" (HM, 123).

The setting provides "a magical atmosphere", that serves "to reinforce the more central fairy-tale resonances of the story, the witching chords of character and setting."⁶² Moreover, Dickens emphasises, as he did in the *Carol*, the change of weather conditions when the supernatural occurs: the weather outside becomes colder and darker, the clouds thicken and the wind blows.

Concerning the characters, Redlaw, like Scrooge, the *Carol's* protagonist, is depicted as a solitary and demure man. While Scrooge chooses to isolate himself because he hates people and Christmas holidays, Redlaw is avoided because he is supposed to be "haunted" for several reasons:⁶³ because of his ghostly appearance, since he has "hollow cheeks", "sunken brilliant eye" and a "black attired figure, indefinably grim" with "grizzled hair hanging, like tangled seaweed, about his face" (HM, 122); then, for his manner, being "taciturn, thoughtful, gloomy, shadowed by habitual reserve, retiring always and jocund never" (HM, 122); and in short, because "everything about him took this haunted tone and he lived on haunted ground" (HM, 123).

⁶² H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, cit., p. 134.

⁶³ According to professor Stone, Redlaw is "another metamorphosis of a figure familiar in Dickens, the misanthropic witchlike sorcerer", H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, cit., p. 134.

Similarly, the appearance of Marley's ghost has a "livid colour" (CC, 64), and the haunted man's ghostly other self is introduced as a mysterious shadow with human features:

Ghastly and cold, colourless in its leaden face and hands, but with his features, and his bright eyes, and his grizzled hair, and dressed in the gloomy shadow of his dress, it came into his terrible appearance of existence, motionless, without a sound. As *he* leaned his arm upon the elbow of his chair, ruminating before the fire, *it* leaned upon the chair-back, close above him, with its appalling copy of his face looked, and bearing the expression his face bore. (HM, 135)

In the second section there is a parallelism also between the Tetterbys and the Cratchits, who represent the typical urban lower class families, mirroring Dickens' idea of the domestic heart: a numerous family which lives in a building that is both home and business with a room they rent as income.⁶⁴

Like the Cratchits, in fact, the Tetterbys are depicted in a humorous and ironic way: Mr Tetterby is a "small man sat in a small parlour, partitioned off from a small screen, pasted over with small scraps of newspapers" (HM, 142), with "almost any amount of small children you may please to name – at least it seemed so" (HM, 142). This "small man" has a shop down in the buildings and he has tried many jobs and businesses, which he has always failed; at the moment of the narration, he is a newsman, with a "small fry" (HM, 142) made up by eight children. Mrs Tetterby is the mother of such an offspring and is called by her husband a "little woman", although "the process of the induction by which Mr Tetterby had come to the conclusion that his wife was a little woman, was his own secret" (HM, 147). The eldest son is Adolphus, who works as a

⁶⁴ M. Grogan, "Generosity and the Ghosts of Poor Laws Passed" in *Narrative*, Vol. 20 No. 2 (May, 2004), p. 158.

newspaper seller at the station and has recently found a way to entertain himself by substituting the vowels in the words “Morn-ing Pa-per” depending on the moments of the day. The second-born is Johnny, who is always bringing in his arms his little sister, “a very Moloch of a baby”⁶⁵ (HM, 143), like Bob Cratchit has to lift “Tiny Tim upon his shoulder” (CC, 91).

Lastly, the beast-waif, depicted as “a baby savage, a young monster, a child who had never been a child” (HM, 141), recalls the children of Want and Ignorance (CC, 102-3), who represent the outcome of mankind’s wickedness. The beast-waif, similarly to the children,⁶⁶ is more times compared to an animal: the boy rushes “like a wildcat” (HM, 140); he crawls “as if he were a rat” (HM, 167); and he is “more strange to the ways of childhood than a rough dog” (HM, 198).

In addition, the Phantom’s warning about the beast-waif – “Woe to such a man! Woe, tenfold, to the nation that shall count its monsters such as this, lying here, by hundreds and by thousands” (HM, 179) – is akin to the Ghost of Christmas Present’s admonition to beware of the two children (CC, 103). Anyway, Dickens, through these words, wants to advise his contemporary readers and aims to denounce a society that is creating children who behave like beasts.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Moloch was the biblical name of a deity who was the King of Terrors, associated with child sacrifice. The Tetterbys in fact lived in the complex of the Jerusalem Buildings and Dickens probably chose this nickname because in his library at Gad’s Hill Place he had a book where Moloch was quoted. J. Vogel, *Allegory in Dickens*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press (1977), p. 115.

⁶⁶ For example Dickens compares the children to animals when Scrooge, looking at the children’s feet under the Spirit’s robe, asks: “Is it a foot or a claw?” (CC, 102); and then he depicts them as “wolfish” (CC, 102).

⁶⁷ H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 463.

Comparing the haunted man and Scrooge's lives with Dickens' own biography, it is possible to note that Dickens to some extent recalls it, since there are some undeniable analogies between the fictional characters and his author: both Redlaw and Scrooge are men who live in isolation and have lost their faith in humankind; and in addition, both of them had a sister of whom they were very fond, like Dickens was attached to his sister Fanny.⁶⁸ These protagonists represent in fact two Dickens' alter egos, they are an instrument through which Dickens tries to objectify his contending impulses and a way to understand and absolve himself.

Nevertheless, Dickens' inward and psychological wounds of childhood, which in *A Christmas Carol* are conveyed in the children of Ignorance and Want, in *The Haunted Man* are not depicted in the figure of the beast-waif, but in the character of Redlaw, who has in common with Dickens some of his past life experiences: the neglectful parents, the profound sense of isolation, the ascending career, the ministering sister, the betrayed love and the wounded sensibility.⁶⁹

The crucial difference among Redlaw, Scrooge and Dickens, however, is that while the formers are shriven and saved at the end, Dickens would be haunted throughout his whole existence.⁷⁰

In *The Haunted Man* Dickens uses many symbolical meanings and allegories: evil and good are intertwined since the beginning and respectively represented by the beast-waif and by Milly.

⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, Fanny is also the name of Scrooge's sister in *A Christmas Carol*, who is the only person standing by the protagonist, like Dickens' sister did during the blacking-warehouse period. H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 388.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 465.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 467-68.

The beast-waif has a central role in the narration because he mirrors two things: human nature deprived of its humanity, in fact the child has no identity, he is called a “savage thing” (HM, 166) and “the child who had no name or lineage” (HM, 198); and the evil of the Victorian society which Dickens is denouncing, because it allows that orphaned children grow up alone and consequently makes it possible for them to be misled or abused, transforming them in little savages.⁷¹

Milly, instead, represents the “fairy princess, an embodiment of perfect goodness who will magically effect Redlaw’s salvation”,⁷² since she is too good and too merciful to be affected by the evil of Redlaw’s gift. As a matter of fact, it is Milly that humbly gives Redlaw a moral lesson:

‘I have no learning, and you have much [...] I am not urged to think, and you are always thinking. May I tell you why it seems to me a good for us to remember wrong that has been done to us?’

‘Yes’

‘That we may forgive it.’ (HM, 194)

This is the learning Dickens wants to give his readers: pain and sorrow are feelings that are useful to mankind because they allow people to be “human” and compassionate towards the others.⁷³

The image of Milly who wants to get into Redlaw’s dwelling while the beast-waif is striving to get outside and reach her, is a metaphor to say that she symbolises the goodness that knocks at the locked chambers of Redlaw’s heart

⁷¹ H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, cit., pp. 135-137.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

asking to be let in, whereas the child, who embodies the evil that the society produced, represents the request for love.⁷⁴

The Phantom mirrors Redlaw's mind, which is looking for a break from suffering, and the gift is consequently the outcome of Redlaw's deal with the promptings of his mind: Redlaw, before receiving the gift, is a suffering and sensitive common man; whereas, after the gift, he becomes a dehumanized creature alienated and incapable of feelings, like the beast-waif.⁷⁵

Furthermore, there is a symbolical parallelism, throughout the narration, between Redlaw's inner state and the weather outside, which darkens with the growth of the protagonist's sin and loss. In fact, when the gift is reversed, his temper clears along with the atmosphere:

The distant line on the horizon brightened, the darkness faded, the sun rose red and glorious, and the chimney stacks and gables of the ancient building gleamed in the clear air, which turned the smoke and vapour of the city into a cloud of gold. (HM, 180)

Dickens, by creating a contrast with the setting depicted at the beginning, intensifies the allegory of the haunted man's mind changing along with the weather conditions and the time of the day: when his mind is shadowed by the presence of the spectre, outside it is a dark and freezing night; when he redeems, instead, it is almost sunrise, the snows begin to melt and the sky is about to clear; and finally, when he understands the lesson, the sun is shining.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.137-138.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

The story of *The Haunted Man* is full of supernatural and fairy-tale elements, which Dickens deftly inserts throughout the narration.⁷⁷

First, the “gift” itself and the magical way of transmitting the curse – the recipients pass their hands across their foreheads – is similar to the fairy-tale pattern.⁷⁸

Secondly, the extensive use of repetitions and formulas recall the storybook: the Phantom’s words used to cast the curse – “The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will” (HM, 140) – which are repeated during the narration in Redlaw’s mind; and Redlaw’s refrain “I see you in the fire, and now I hear you in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night” (HM, 135). In addition, there are some expressions recurrently pronounced by the main characters such as the old keeper asserting his age and asking continually where his son is, and William’s stock’s phrases: “That’s what I always say, sir” (HM, 126) and “If you’ll believe me” (HM, 129).

And lastly, like in the fables, there is a moral at the end of the story: although pain and sufferance hurt, they are necessary feelings because they make humans sympathetic and charitable.

At the end of the narration, through the use of preterition, Dickens suggests some ways of interpreting the whole story:⁷⁹

Some people have said since that he only thought what has been herein set down; others, that he read it in the fire, one winter night about the twilight time; others, that the Ghost was but the representation of his gloomy thoughts, and Milly the embodiment of his better wisdom. *I say nothing.* (HM, 198)

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 135-137.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 135-136.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 137.

Therefore, Dickens casts in the reader the doubt that the whole story is an invention and he detaches himself from what he has just told. As a matter of fact, he seems to deny the supernatural implying that ghosts are just an illusion of human mind.

In concluding, Dickens in *The Haunted Man* intertwines fairy-tale and supernatural elements with autobiographical references, psychological aspects and social issues. He indeed creates a story that recalls the *Carol* formula, with an array of more credible fantastic components, overcoming in this sense the previous three Christmas Books.⁸⁰ Although, in the third section of *The Haunted Man's* novella, the excess of melodramatic coincidences and the fairy-tale happy ending jeopardise the earlier realism and plausibility of the story.⁸¹

Compared to the other horror tales, Dickens' last Christmas Book recalls a fairy-tale rather than a ghost story, but the suggestive setting, the exhaustive descriptions of the characters and the dwelling upon their inner states through brilliant dialogues, along with the touch of irony and the symbolical meanings inserted by the author himself, make this long-short story unique and "fabulous".

⁸⁰ H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, cit., p. 140.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

2. The Ghost in the Bride's Chamber

The fourth segment of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* includes the ghost story "The Ghost in the Bride's Chamber," which appeared in October 1857 in one of the weekly magazines edited by Charles Dickens, *Household Words*.

Written in collaboration with his friend and colleague Wilkie Collins, *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* is a travel series in five instalments, which actually was not collected while Dickens was alive and has never been edited. Although it is not easy to say who wrote which parts, from Dickens' letters it is possible to assert that Dickens created the fourth episode entirely on his own.⁸²

The Lazy Tour is the story of the journey, undertaken by Dickens and Collins themselves and lasted about ten or twelve days: they travelled throughout quaint villages and faraway regions of Cumberland and spent their time chatting and discussing, they depicted people and places they met, and trivialised themselves in their fictional roles. The story, however, is told by a third-person narrator who reports the two apprentices' adventures.

The main characters are Francis Goodchild and Thomas Idle, the pseudonyms used respectively for Dickens and Collins: Goodchild is the "energetic, industrious apprentice, whose way of idling [...] is to bustle and to do"; whereas Idle represents the "lazy, slothful apprentice, whose way of idling is to rest and to dream".⁸³

⁸² H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity*, cit., p. 286.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

The idea of choosing two idle apprentices as protagonists was inspired by William Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* (1747), a series of twelve prints representing the rewards of the labour.⁸⁴

In the late fifties Dickens was playing in his melodrama *The Frozen Deep* (1857), and while he was returning from his tour, at Manchester he encountered Ellen Ternan, a young actress with whom he fell deeply in love.⁸⁵ Miss Ternan in fact represented Dickens' perfect ideal of womanhood, the "virginal temptress"; she had a "low-pitch voice, a vulnerable air, a natural manner and an alluring, though modestly comported, physicality".⁸⁶

During those years Dickens was going through a period of domestic crisis, since he felt entrapped by marriage bonds with his wife Catherine Hogarth, the mother of his seven sons and two daughters. It was not clear whether the fault of this marital failure was due to Dickens or to Catherine, the hearsay affirmed that Dickens was attracted by several women, among them he seemed to have loved his youngest sister-in-law Mary Hogarth, who died when she was seventeen in Dickens's arms.⁸⁷

In a letter to his friend John Forster, who wrote the well-known biography *Life of Charles Dickens*, he confessed his first open admission of crisis:

Poor Catherine and I are not made for each other, and there is no help for it. It is not only that she makes me uneasy and unhappy, but that I make her so too – and much more so. She is exactly what you know, in the way of being amiable and complying; but we are strangely ill-assorted for the bond between us. God knows she would have been a thousand times happier if she had married another kind of

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 555-56.

⁸⁵ A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, cit., p. 248.

⁸⁶ H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 281.

⁸⁷ A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, cit., p. 110.

man, and that her avoidance of this destiny would have been at least equally true for us both. [August 1857]⁸⁸

He wrote these words after his meeting with “the large-eyed, pale-faced, golden-haired”⁸⁹ Ellen, though the official separation from his wife occurred in spring 1858.

The coming to an end of his twenty-one-year marriage, marked the watershed in the last decade of Dickens’ life: he preferred living in the country rather than in the city, he wrote fewer novels and changed his style of writing, he started doing public readings for his own profit and ceased reciting in the theatre for charitable purposes.⁹⁰

Hence Dickens, few months after the encounter with Ellen, when he came back to Gad’s Hill, was obsessed with visions of a “lilac-gloved, halo-headed Ellen”⁹¹ and started to write “The Bride’s Chamber” between the end of August and the beginning of September, in order to share with his readers the joy of this meeting, though he also felt a sense of guilt and sin towards his wife and family.

“The Ghost in the Bride’s Chamber” begins with “two idle apprentices”, Mr Francis Goodchild and Mr Thomas Idle, who, after wandering through the English country in their “lazy tour”, arrive at a charming inn in Lancaster.

⁸⁸ The letter written by Dickens to Forster is quoted in H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 279.

⁸⁹ Charles Dickens on April 1857 in the *Era*, a contemporary periodical, quoted in H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 281.

⁹⁰ A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, cit., p. 257.

⁹¹ Charles Dickens’ letter to Mrs Watson, quoted in A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, cit., p. 299.

When the couple of friends enter the hall, they notice “half a dozen noiseless old men in black, all dressed exactly alike”,⁹² but afterwards, as soon as they accommodate in the guest sitting-room, they do not see even one old man. Another strange fact that arouses Mr Goodchild’s curiosity and makes him suspicious about those six strange old men, is that, though they are alone, the sitting-room door is mysteriously and constantly opened while the two guests are spending their time eating, drinking, talking, and writing “a portion of the lazy notes from which these lazy sheets are taken” (BC, 211).⁹³

During the night, while the two friends are smoking and relaxing on the sofa, they ask each other the time and, when Goodchild replies that it is one o’ clock, one of the old men appears. While Goodchild is speaking with this man, he feels uncomfortable and tries to introduce his friend Thomas, who, instead, remains completely silent.

After learning that the man is an old inhabitant of the house, Goodchild questions him about Hanging Corner, the castle wall where the prisoners used to be hanged; surprisingly, he answers with a detailed account of the hanging process, which makes Goodchild suspect he is speaking with a ghost. Goodchild tries again to involve Mr Idle but he is in a sort of trance, whereas the former “writes the present account of his experience” (BC, 213).⁹⁴

⁹² C. Dickens, “The Ghost’s in the Bride’s Chamber”, *Complete Ghost Stories*, cit., p. 211. Henceforth all quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the text in the abbreviated form “BC”.

⁹³ This is a metanarrative device to indicate that the protagonists are writing the story that the lector is reading.

⁹⁴ This affirmation reinforces the idea that Dickens, in the guise of Goodchild, wrote the story by himself, since Collins, in the role of Idle, was not actually present.

The old man, indicating a point, starts telling the story of a “fair, flaxen-haired, large-eyed girl, who had no character, no purpose” (BC, 213),⁹⁵ whose mother cheated him twice: firstly, because she preferred a “flaxen-haired, large-eyed man (or nonentity) with money” (BC, 213); and secondly when, after her husband’s death, she returned to him. The old man seduced her and supported her whims just in order to obtain compensation in money, but she suddenly died without leaving a penny to him. He thus resolved to take revenge on the woman and falsified her Will, nominating himself as legal guardian of the woman’s ten-year-old daughter. He raised his ward with the help of a governess, putting her in a school, teaching her since childhood that she had to marry him and convincing her that this was her destiny and she could not escape from it: “the poor fool was white wax in their hands, and took the impression that they put upon her” (BC, 214).

After eleven years of reclusion this “obdurate Bluebeard”⁹⁶ married the “half-witted, frightened and submissive bride” (BC, 215) of twenty-one years and twenty-one days.⁹⁷ Three weeks later, the old man dismissed the governess and brought his new wife home, where he closed her in a room: the bride’s chamber. Understanding that the man was trying to kill her, the girl implored him repeatedly to forgive her and promised that she would do whatever he wanted. He thus obliged her to write a letter in which she had to declare that in case of death all her possession would go to him.

⁹⁵ There is in the girl’s description a clear resemblance with “the large-eyed, pale-faced, golden-haired” Miss Ternan, H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 324.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, cit., p. 316.

⁹⁷ Ironically, twenty-one years are the duration of Dickens and Catherine’s marriage. H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p., 340.

Since that moment the old man spent all his days and nights repeatedly wishing death to the poor girl, who was turning “paler in pale light, more colourless than ever in the leaden dawn” while he observed her “trailing herself along the floor towards him – a white wreck of hair, and dress, and wild eyes” (BC, 217). One day early in the morning, the bride died of exhaustion, making the old man succeed in his intention.

The girl was buried and he inherited all her fortune, finally obtaining the money compensation he desired for his personal revenge. However, five weeks later, while he was working alone in the garden with a billhook, his dreams of traveling and selling the “accursed house” (BC, 217), whose porch seemed to be “waiting for him like a tomb” (BC, 217), were interrupted by a young man who was standing on the tree in front of the bay window of the bride’s chamber.⁹⁸

The boy accused the old man to be a murderer of the girl he loved. Regretting not having saved her, the young boy threatened the old man to persecute him for the rest of his days until a hangman would execute him. Then, the old man killed the accuser with the billhook and buried his corpse under the tree.

Hence, the old man was entrapped in his own house to control constantly the ground in the garden, as he feared that someone could discover the body and reveal the truth, and felt as if “he had evermore to live with a rope around his neck” (BC, 219). The old man was so scared of being discovered that he did not allow anyone of his labourers to approach the roots of the tree, and he built

⁹⁸ There is a parallelism between the bay window of the bride’s chamber and that of Dickens’ study at Gad’s Hill, from which he completed this ghost story. H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 300.

an arbour there, from which he observed, with the changing of seasons, the branches taking the form of the dead young man.

Ten years after the boy's assassination, during a thunderstorm, lightning hit the tree and split it in two sections, transforming the trunk in an interesting object of research for many scientists who came to study it. One night, while the old man was sleeping, one of the servants allowed them to enter and in a short time they discovered the young man's bones. The old man in few days was captured and sentenced to death, accused even for his bride's murder, a fact that he found ironic since he had let her die by herself precisely because he did not want to be condemned for her death.

Ending the account, the old man finally confesses to Goodchild that he was the same man hanged at Lancaster Castle a hundred years before and that he was cursed since that moment:

At one in the morning, I am what you saw me when the clock struck that hour – the old man. At two in the morning, I am two old men. At three, I am three. By twelve noon, I am twelve old men. One for every hundred per cent of old gain. Every one of the twelve, with twelve times my old power of suffering and agony. From that hour until twelve at night, I, twelve old men, in anguish and fearful forebodings, wait for the coming of the executioner. At twelve at night, I, twelve old men turned off, swing invisible outside Lancaster Castle, with twelve faces to the wall! (BC, 222)

Goodchild is still quite shocked by this revelation when the clock strikes two and two men appear, completely alike to the previous old man, and they continue the story speaking in one voice as if they were one person. They tell him that the bride's chamber is haunted by three spirits of the dead: the spectre of the old man himself; the phantom of the bride who persecutes the old man intimating him to "live" (BC, 222); and the youth's ghost, standing over the tree.

Every day of the year, except for the month in which the old man was executed, the girl and the young man's spirits haunt him, while in the thirty days of that month they disappear leaving the bride's chamber quiet and empty.

The old man explains to Goodchild that the only way to break the curse is to tell the story of his life to two living and by then awaken men. He adds that once he already tried to tell his story to two adventurers, but one of them, called "Dick" (BC, 223),⁹⁹ fell asleep; when the old man noted it, he understood that all his effort was useless and that he would be condemned to reappear forever.

At this point in the narration, seeing that Mr Idle fell asleep an hour before, Goodchild realises that he is alone speaking with the ghosts of two old men. He thus forces himself to get rid of this enchantment and, after waking up his friend, brings him downstairs in a hurry.¹⁰⁰

At the end, Idle thinks that Goodchild has invented the story of the old man, whereas Goodchild accuses Idle of having slept. Idle in turn assures his fellow that he has not, asserting that probably Goodchild has dreamt about ghosts.

Therefore, the whole inset story seems to be just the product of a vision made by Goodchild and the ghostly apparition is denied.¹⁰¹

Dickens trivialises the tale by combining horror and comic-grotesque elements, which is finally explained as a "bad dream".¹⁰² In this way, the reader's doubt about the veracity of the ghost story permeates.

⁹⁹ An autobiographical reference made by the author himself to indicate a "Dickens-like doppelgänger", H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 327.

¹⁰⁰ The staircase for Dickens represented a metaphor to indicate the entrance and the exit into the vision, since he mentioned it both at the beginning and at the end. H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 321.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 312.

¹⁰² J. Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, cit., p. 43.

In introducing the old man, Dickens since the beginning casts in the reader the doubt that he could be a ghost:

A chilled, slow, earthy, fixed old man. A cadaverous old man of measured speech. An old man who seemed unable to wink as if his eyelids had been nailed to his foreheads. An old man whose eyes – two spots of fire – had no more motion than if they had been connected with the back of the skull by screw driven through it, and riveted and bolted outside, among his grey hairs. (BC, 212)

Furthermore, another hint which makes the reader suspect the old man's real identity is that Goodchild notices that the old man "did not bend himself to sit as other people do", but "seemed to sink bolt upright, as if in water, until the chair stopped him" (BC, 212). This suspicion is confirmed when he sees in the old man's eyes some "threads of fire" (BC, 213) and he notices that the man's forefinger, immersed in those threads of fire, is emitting sparks in the air.

For what concerns the bride's character, Dickens insists in depicting her as pale and white-clad:

There were spots of ink upon the bosom of her white dress, and they made her face look whiter and her eyes look larger as she nodded her head. There were spots of ink upon the hand with which she stood before him nervously plaiting and folding her white skirts. (BC, 216)

He describes the bride in this way not only to reinforce the idea of a pure and innocent woman, but also because since childhood, he was obsessed by an eccentric white-dressed woman he saw wandering the precincts of Berners Street, Oxford Street. The figure of the "White Woman" will in fact return in many of his characters.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., pp. 335-336.

The whole story is structured in a complex way: there is a present narrative framework, the two idle apprentices' arrival at the inn; a story-within-a-story, the old man's account of the bride's story; and the anecdote of the two adventurers included in the inset story.

The framework includes realistic references such as the King's Arms and the accurate description of Lancaster Castle's Hanging Corner.

The mysterious and dismal place where Goodchild and Idle arrive, provides the perfect setting for a ghost story:

THE HOUSE was a genuine old house of a very quaint description, teeming with old carvings, and beams, and panels, and having an excellent old staircase, with a gallery or upper staircase, cut off from it by a curious fence-work of old oak, or of the Honduras Mahogany wood. It was, and is, and will be, for many a long year to come, a remarkably picturesque house; and a certain grave mystery lurking in the depth of the old mahogany panels, as if they were so many deep pools of dark water – such, indeed, as they had been much among when they were trees – gave it a very mysterious character after nightfall. (BC, 210)

According to Stone, Dickens chose to associate “The Bride's Chamber” with two particular places: first, the Lancaster Castle, where he went for a visit discovering the story of a cruel husband called Hardman, who was hanged at the Hanging Corner for murdering his undesired wife Ellen; and then, the King's Arms, a historic inn where he stayed with Collins, which seemed to have a room similar to the bride's chamber. Moreover, there was a legend of a young girl staying at the inn who was poisoned by her husband, who in turn was then hanged at Lancaster Castle. However, the landlord of King's Arms, Joseph Sly,

never mentioned a “bride’s chamber” in his inn and Dickens himself admitted that this association was a fruit of his fervid imagination.¹⁰⁴

In the framework there is a story-within-a-story told by the ghostly narrator. In addition to recalling *Bluebeard’s* plot,¹⁰⁵ the inset story is full of supernatural elements deriving from the folklore and fairy-tales, such as refrains and repetitive phrases, the haunted house and chamber, the bride’s imprisonment and the magic tree taking the forms of the murdered boy with the changing of seasons.¹⁰⁶ Also the moment of the bride’s death summons up the depiction of a fairy princess:

Her large eyes strained themselves with wonder and fear; wonder and fear changed to reproach; reproach to blank nothing. It was done. He was not at first sure it was done, but that the morning sun was hanging jewels in her hair – he saw the diamond, emerald and ruby, glittering among in the little points, as he stood looking down at her – when he lifted her and laid her on her bed. (BC, 217)

In fact, the imaginary gems the old man sees in the bride’s hair are just an illusion, like the long-desired compensation in money that the old man wanted.¹⁰⁷

The outer framework of the inset story includes some autobiographical references: the two adventurers, like Goodchild and Idle, seem to be other Dickens and Collins’ alter egos. The man called “the leader”, who is the more active and twelve years older, is Dickens; whereas the one called “Dick”, who falls asleep in the narration, is Collins.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., pp. 307-311.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Perrault’s *Bluebeard* (1697) is the story of a cruel man who used to imprison and murder his wives. H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 316.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹⁰⁷ H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, cit., p. 293.

¹⁰⁸ H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., pp. 327-328.

Dickens wants to speak about his domestic dilemma and his inner private crisis inserting into the story some autobiographical references and connecting his characters with his real life.¹⁰⁹

First of all, the author can be associated not only with Goodchild but also with the old man: Dickens accused himself of being an unloving husband for Catherine – since he betrayed her – and a bad lover for Ellen – who was young and innocent and thus easily influenced by him. Moreover, Dickens is mirrored in the young boy, because he always liked to compare himself to an “ogre-slaying fairy-tale hero who saves the princess or dies in the attempt”.¹¹⁰

The bride, instead, can be compared to Miss Ternan, both because she resembles her physically – both of them are fair, pale-faced, large-eyed and flaxen-haired young women – and for the fact that they are homonymous, since once in the narration the old man calls the young girl “Ellen” (BC, 215). However, the bride reflects also Mrs Dickens, since by then she was an undesired and submissive wife, as Catherine was for Dickens, who defined her “complying”.¹¹¹ In fact, the old man wants to get rid of his bride, as Dickens decided to separate from his wife, though he knew that his sense of guilt would have persecuted him for the rest of his life, exactly like the ghost of the bride haunts the cruel husband.¹¹²

From a psychological point of view, the story-within-a-story is full of symbolisms. Dickens with the old man’s account aims to depict his inner conflicts, since he thinks that “the wanton manipulation of a human being by

¹⁰⁹ H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., p. 314.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 322.

¹¹¹ See the letter [August 1857] from Dickens to Forster quoted above.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 323-324.

another was an unpardonable sin":¹¹³ the cruel and vindictive man who is a murderer at the beginning, becomes the victim of an endless punishment.¹¹⁴ The old man, in fact, in order to break his curse has to tell his sins to two living men, since to confess the sins to someone was a way to expiate them. Actually, in the case of "The Bride's Chamber", according to Stone: "it is Dickens (in the person of Goodchild) who needs to hear the story. And by a species of legerdemain, the story is told only to him".¹¹⁵

Therefore, "The Ghost in the Bride's Chamber" is "more than emotional autobiography and topic allusiveness",¹¹⁶ as it is interlaced with realistic and supernatural elements that come from folklore, Gothic romance and fairy-tales.

This ghost story, connecting ideas of sin, punishment and revenge with themes such as imprisonment, isolation and manipulation, sets the stage for Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), where the white-clad bride to be Miss Havisham, who lives in a desolate and crumbling house, is abandoned and cheated for money by her first love, and for this reason she decides to use his ward Estella as a means for taking revenge on men. Both works condemn the fact of valuing money more than human feelings.¹¹⁷

In conclusion, the fascination of this inset story included in the fourth episode of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, defined "a very odd story, with a picturesque fancy in it" and a "grim" story, "a bit of Diablerie" by the author himself,¹¹⁸ is not just in the expression of his emotional state and in the

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 333.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 334.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 322.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 330.

¹¹⁷H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*, cit., pp. 292-93.

¹¹⁸ Two letters by Dickens (2 October 1857; 4 October 1857), quoted in H. Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens*, cit., pp. 331-332.

verisimilitude of the fiction, but also in his ability to intertwine realistic, autobiographical, folkloric and supernatural elements, creating a tension that increases with the developing of the narration.

3. The Haunted House

Published in December 1859 as the first extra Christmas number of Dickens' own weekly journal *All the Year Round*, *The Haunted House* is a collection of ghost stories written by Dickens with contributions from Hesba Stretton (pseudonym of Sarah Smith), George Augustus Sala, Adelaide Anne Procter, Wilkie Collins, and Elizabeth Gaskell.

This compilation of stories is divided in eight parts, three of them written exclusively by Dickens: the Introduction, "The Mortals in the House", provides the framework of the whole narration; the sixth section, "The Ghost in master B's Room", is the tale told by the same first-person narrator who reports the entire story; and the concluding segment, "The Ghost in the Corner Room", though it was not included in any of Dickens' *Collected Works* editions.

The last segment was probably left uncollected because of its similarity to the other parts of the collection, written by the other contributors.¹¹⁹ However, this piece is assuredly composed only by Dickens himself, as it is evidenced by Frederic George Kitton and Dickens' own 1868 Contents page.¹²⁰

In the 1850s and 1860s Dickens used to write composite or collaborative writings where he conceived the framework and created the major part of it, in addition to the introductory, concluding, and transition passages, in order to integrate it with the interpolated tales. These inserted short stories were composed by a group of his regular contributors, who were asked to collaborate

¹¹⁹ H. Stone, "THE UNKNOWN DICKENS: With a Sample of Uncollected Writings" in *Dickens Studies Annual*, Penn State University Press. Vol. 1 (1970), p. 13.

¹²⁰ Frederic G. Kitton was the author of *The Minor Writings of Charles Dickens* (1900), a work in which he collected all the supposedly Dickens' additional solo contributions. See H. Stone, "THE UNKNOWN DICKENS", cit., p. 5.

with him by receiving some identical memos in which the framework situations were explained and the narrators and plots suggested.¹²¹

In the case of *The Haunted House*, he was not completely satisfied with his contributors' works and wanted to make them more coherent with his own pieces. In a letter to his friend Forster by late November 1859 he wrote: "As yet not a story has come to me in the least belonging to the idea (the simplest in the word; which I myself described in writing, in the most elaborate manner)".¹²²

In Dickens' original idea every character in a "Room" of *The Haunted House* would tell a ghost story, written for each section by his contributors. However, he saw that they did not completely embrace the haunting theme, since the stories resulted just as ordinary tales. In addition, each part was composed in a different style and form: Anne Procter's "The Ghost in the Picture Room" was in verse.¹²³ Therefore, he resolved to write introductory and bridging passages at the beginning of every section, in addition to "The Mortals in the House", "The Ghost in Master B's Room" and the uncollected "The Ghost in the Corner Room". He wrote these passages in the guise of the first-person narrator and, to distinguish them from the following interpolated tales, they were typographically inserted in full-page lines instead of double columns and separated from the rest of the text through spacing.¹²⁴

Dickens conceived the idea of writing *The Haunted House* after an argument with William Howitt, an acquaintance of his who was a keen

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 3-6.

¹²² Dickens' letter to Forster (25 November, 1859, *Letters*, III), quoted in R. F. Glancy, "Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes" in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, University of California Press, Vol. 35 No. 1 (Jun. 1980), p.63.

¹²³ H. Stone, "THE UNKNOWN DICKENS, cit., p. 14.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

spiritualist and ghost believer.¹²⁵ The seeds of their conflict were a series of three articles which appeared in *All the Year Round* by August 1859, entitled “A Physician’s Ghost”.

In these articles physic phenomena were accepted as authentic while the matter of the existence of ghosts and spirits was questioned. Howitt wrote Dickens contrasting his positions, and they began a back-and-forth heated discussion during which Howitt provided Dickens with a list of alleged haunted houses and challenged him to disprove it by visiting them.

In November Dickens went to one of them, Chestnut house at Hertfordshire, accompanied by his friends W.H. Wills, Wilkie Collins and John Hollingshead. The following month, Dickens wrote to Howitt that they had found no trace of spirits at Chestnut. However, when he published *The Haunted House* a few weeks later, Howitt protested that he had used Chestnut residence as the setting for *The Haunted House*. They continued their debate for years and, although Dickens denied Howitt’s insinuations, the house stood empty and unrented through the whole period.¹²⁶ Anyway, this controversy about hauntings and the visit to Chestnut residence provided Dickens with the inspiration for conceiving the idea to write a story about a haunted house.

The first section of *The Haunted House*, “The Mortals in the House”, begins with a first-person narrator, John, who tells that the first time he sees the house, it is “under none of the accredited ghostly circumstances, and environed by

¹²⁵ “Spiritualism is generally concerned with the belief that spirits of the dead can communicate with the living”. See: C. O’Keefe, “Spiritualism” in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z*, vol. 2, cit., p. 644.

¹²⁶ H. Stone, “THE UNKNOWN DICKENS, cit., pp. 8-12.

none of the conventional ghostly surroundings”,¹²⁷ since it is on a bright autumn morning and he can see even the trains passing nearby.

The narrator reaches the house by train, and, during the journey, he encounters a “goggled-eyed gentleman of a perplexed aspect” (HH, 226) who is sitting in front of him and has “as that opposite man always has – several legs too many, and all of them too long” (HH, 225). Since this passenger is staring over his head while annotating something on a pocketbook, the narrator gets annoyed with his fellow’s behaviour and thus asks him what he is observing. The strange man replies first “B” (HH, 226) and then “O” (HH, 226). The narrator then begins to suspect that the man may be what is commonly known as a “Rapper: one of a sect for (some of) whom I have the highest respect, but whom I don’t believe in” (HH, 226). This hypothesis is confirmed by the following passenger’s assertion of having spent the night and his present time “in spiritual intercourse” (HH, 226).

This conversation makes the narrator nervous and he decides to get rid of that man. Once he gets off the train he affirms: “the gentleman’s spiritual intercourse seemed to me as poor a piece of journey-work as ever this world saw” (HH, 227). The passenger, who is actually a spiritualist, represents probably Howitt, since Dickens through this framework is denouncing in a satiric mode his disbelief in spiritualism and in its practices.¹²⁸

When the narrator reaches the house it is bright morning. He is not so surprised by the dismal and gloomy state of the house, but rather by the moment of the day, since the narrator finds that the daybreak is the “most

¹²⁷ C. Dickens, “The Haunted House” in *Complete Ghost Stories*, cit., p. 225. Henceforth all quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the text in the abbreviated form “HH”.

¹²⁸ R. F. Glancy, “Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes”, cit., p.64.

ghostly time” (HH, 228) and he thinks that “any house would be more or less haunted [...] in the early morning” (HH, 228).

It was a solitary house; standing in a sadly neglected garden: a pretty even square of some two acres. [...] It was inhabited, but had, within a year or two, been cheaply repaired to render it habitable; I say cheaply, because the work had been done in a surface manner, and was already decaying as to the paint and plaster, though the colour were fresh. [...] It was easy to see it was an avoided house – a house that was shunned by the village, to which my eye was guided by a church spire some half a mile off – a house that nobody would take. And the natural influence was that it had the reputation of being a haunted house. (HH, 227-28)

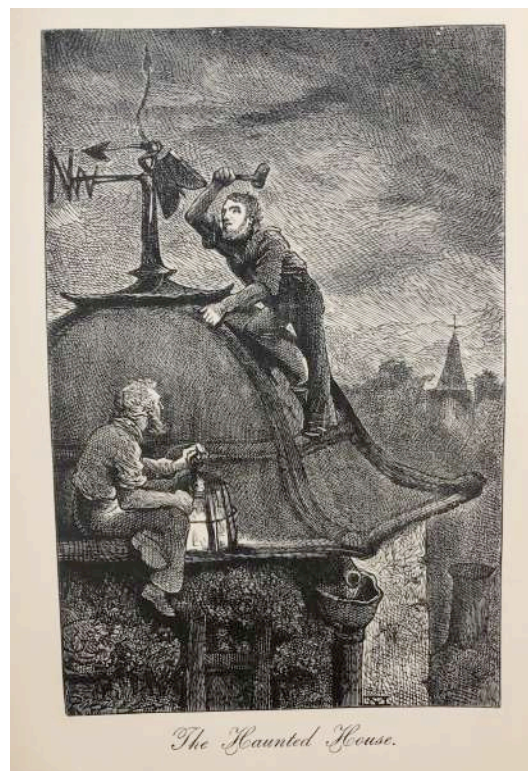


Figure 4: The Haunted House by James Mahony in C. Dickens, *Christmas Stories vol. 1*, London: Chapman and Hall (1911), p. 280.

Resolving to investigate about the house and its ghosts, the narrator enters a small inn in the village and questions the landlord about that place, asking him if it is haunted. The landlord answers that he would not sleep there, unless he wanted “to have all the bells in a house ring, with nobody to ring ’em, all the doors in a house bang, with nobody to bang ’em, and all sorts of feet

treading about, with no feet there” (HH, 229). The landlord also calls his stable boy Ikey to say whether there is something strange at the house; the boy answers that he has once seen there “A ’ooded woman with a howl” (HH, 229), who is said to have been murdered while the owl was hooting.¹²⁹

Despite these accounts, the narrator is not astounded, since he does not believe in such things and he says to his readers that he has already been living in two haunted houses, one of them having “a haunted chamber of the first pretensions” (HH, 230). This explains why it is not particularly shocking for him to hear such things: he thinks it is easy to give a bad name to something or someone and therefore to influence or be influenced by other people.

The narrator’s opinion mirrors Dickens’ position about the matter of the existence of ghosts: he does not believe in them as spirits which bang doors or ring bells, rather he thinks they exist in people’s psychological inner selves.

At this point, the narrator himself decides to “cut this part of the short story” (HH, 230) and goes to visit the house in question accompanied by the landlord and Ikey. He is, however, more struck by reading Master B’s name on a bell rather than by seeing the gloomy state of the house:

Within, I found it, as I had expected, transcendently dismal. The slowly changing shadows waved on it from the heavy trees, were doleful in the last degree; the house was ill-placed, ill-built, ill-planned and ill-fitted. It was damp, it was not free from dry rot, there was a flavour of rats in it, and it was the gloomy victim of that indescribable decay which settles on all the work of man’s hands whenever it is not turned to man’s account. [...] And there was a mouldy old well with a green growth upon it, hiding like a murderous trap, near the bottom of the back-stairs, under the double row of bells. One of these bells was labelled, on a background in faded white letters, MASTER B. This, they told me, was the bell that rang the most. (HH, 231)

¹²⁹ There is an intentional lexical pun between “howl” and “owl”, as will be explained later.

In the middle of October, the narrator rents the house for six months and moves there with his sister, a deaf stableman, his bloodhound, the housekeeper Streaker, another female servant named the Cook, and a young woman called an "Odd Girl" (HH, 232).

Henceforth, Dickens depicts deftly the sequence of events and the reactions of the abovementioned characters with irony: this experience of cohabitation has become a total disaster right from the first hours.

First, the Odd Girl has "seen Eyes" (HH, 233) and has influenced the servants. Then, Master B's bell has begun to ring incessantly and the dog to howl at it in such a manner that the narrator has thought of "twisting Master B's neck – in other words, breaking his bell short off – and silencing that young gentleman" (HH, 233). In the meanwhile, the Odd Girl has improved "powers of catalepsy" (HH, 233) and has been used to stiffen "like a Guy Fawkes endowed with unreason, on the most irrelevant occasions" (HH, 233); Streaker the housemaid has become a "mere distillery for the production of the largest and most transparent tears" (HH, 233-34), with the peculiarity that her tears "didn't fall, but hung upon her face and nose" (HH, 234); while the Cook repeated that if she died they should send her silver watch to her sister.

Therefore, the "contagion of suspicion and fear" (HH, 234) has been among the tenants of that house: the women have had their noses "in a chronic state of excoriation from smelling-salts" (HH, 234) and have been "always primed and loaded for a swoon, and ready to go off with hair-triggers" (HH, 234). At this point, the narrator understands that it is useless "to be a Rhadamanthus with the bells" (HH, 234) and resolves with his sister to dismiss the servants, except

the deaf stableman Bottles, who, being the only one who could hear nothing, has not been affected by the noises of the house.

After changing the domestic staff three times, the narrator understands that there are some things which have contributed to enhance the ghostly atmosphere and the collective hysteria that have made the house seem haunted: his bloodhound howling at night, probably just because it wants to get out; and Ikey, who is used to throw his fur cap at the bell and make it ring alone for joking. The narrator thus decides to make two small changes: first, he puts his dog outside the house unchained, warning the inhabitants of the village not to approach it; then, he subtly threatens Ikey showing him a rifle and telling him that he sees a figure rather like him in the house, and then he promises him he would shoot the figure if he happens to see it again.

Then, the narrator and his sister decide to live there for three months with a group of trusted friends. They promise each other that if they see anything strange they would say nothing until the Twelfth Night when they would gather and share the accounts of their hauntings. Towards the end of November the new tenants arrive and they divide the rooms and the housework: the narrator gets Master B's Room; his sister Patty keeps her previous room; their cousin John Herschel and his wife occupy the Clock Room; a young man named Alfred Starling goes in the Double Room; a friend of Patty's, the militant feminist Belinda Bates, has the Picture Room; the narrator's old friend and sailor Jack Governor gets the Corner Room; Jack's comrade and captain of a merchantman Nat Beaver finishes in the Garden Room; and the narrator's solicitor Mr Undery keeps the last one left, the Cupboard Room.

At this point of the narrative there should have been a Dickens' uncollected transition passage in order to link the end of "The Mortals in the House" with the first section, Hesba Stretton's "The Ghost in the Clock Room":¹³⁰

Christmas came, and we had noble Christmas fare ("all hands" had been pressed for the pudding) and Twelfth Night came, and our store of mincemeat was ample to hold out to the last day of our time, and our cake was quite a glorious sight. It was then, as well all set round the table and the fire, that I recited the terms of our compact, and called, first, for...¹³¹

According to Dickens' idea, every contributor would write a ghost story in which every guest would be haunted by a ghost in the chamber; and in particular, every phantom would be a spectre of their own making, or better, of their own past.

In the sixth section the same first-person narrator, John, who has to share his ghost story with his friends, tells "The Ghost in Master B's Room".

The narrator has previously depicted Master B's room in "The Mortals in the House" and has already been curious to know who this Master B is:

Following Master B's bell to its source, I found that young gentleman to have had but indifferent third-class accommodation in a triangular cabin under the cockpit, with a corner fireplace which Master B must have been exceedingly small if he were ever able to warm himself at, and a corner chimney piece like a pyramidal staircase to the ceiling for Tom Thumb. The papering of one side of the room had dropped down bodily, with fragments of plaster adhering to it, and almost blocked up the door. It appeared that Master B, in his spiritual condition, always made a point of pulling the paper down. (HH, 231-32)

¹³⁰ H. Stone, "THE UNKNOWN DICKENS", cit., p. 13.

¹³¹ This Dickens' uncollected writing is quoted in H. Stone, "THE UNKNOWN DICKENS", cit., p. 14.

After six nights during which he has been obsessed by those thoughts, he begins to have some visions: while he is shaving, he sees in the mirror not his fifty-year-old face but that of a boy, which he supposes to be Master B's; he looks at the glass again and he sees a boy who is shaving in an effort to make his beard grow; he glances at it another time and there is the reflection of a young man in his mid-twenties. Finally, he recognises in the mirror his dead father and even his unknown grandfather.

One night the narrator wakes up finding that he is sharing his bed with the skeleton of Master B and he perceives the presence of the ghost in the room. The narrator and the spectre start talking to each other and suddenly the ghost calls the narrator "Barber!" (HH, 242) and reveals to him that he is "condemned [...] to shave a constant change of costumers – now, me – now, a young man – now, thyself as thou art – now, thy father – now, thy grandfather; condemned, too, to lie down with a skeleton every night, and to rise with it every morning" (HH, 243).

Then, the ghost orders the narrator to follow him, and, since the latter feels that he is "under the spell to pursue the phantom" (HH, 243), he undertakes fictional journeys with the ghost upon fantastic means of transportation such as a broomstick, a rocking-horse, and a headless donkey.

The narrator, however, decides not to dwell on those events, rather to tell his readers about one particular experience he has gone through:

I was marvellously changed. I was myself; yet not myself. I was conscious of something within me, which has been the same all through my life and which I have always recognised under all its phases and varieties as never altering, and yet I was not the I who had gone to bed in Master B's room. I had the smoothest of faces and the shortest of legs, and I had taken another creature like myself, also

with the smoothest of faces and the shortest of legs, behind a door, and was confiding to him a proposition of the most astounding nature.

This proposition was, that we should have a seraglio. (HH, 243-44)

From this point onward, there is the humorous account of his past memory dating back to the narrator's childhood, when he and nine schoolmates were in Miss Griffin's establishment at Hampstead Ponds. Unknown to Miss Griffin, they used to playact and pretend to be an oriental seraglio made up by the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, played by the narrator as a child; the Grand Vizier who was performed by a friend of his; two young girls, Miss Bule and Miss Pipson, who interpreted the Favourite of the sultan and a "Fair Circassian" (HH, 244); a serving drudge called Tabby in the Role of Mesrour, "the celebrated chief of the Blacks of the Harem" (HH, 245); and finally other girls who acted as the sultan's slaves, one of them being "a young antelope of transcendent beauty from the fruitful plains of Camden Town" (HH, 247).

The child narrator, in the guise of the Caliph, told how his seraglio had some duties to fulfil, such as helping the Caliph in maths, or calling him "Commander of the Faithful" (HH, 245) or giving him the right of kissing his favourites. The child narrator remembered a lot of good memories and anecdotes of those times, until one day, while playing his role of Caliph, a man arrived at the school and informed him that his father had got ill and died.

As a consequence, the narrator tells his readers that "Haroun Alraschid took the flight at the words; the seraglio vanished; from that moment I never again saw one of the eight of the fairest of the daughters of men" (HH, 249). The child's family ended up in debt and had a sale in which their goods "went for a song" (HH, 249); the child was sent to a "cold, bare school of big boys" (HH,

249), where everyone mocked him for being poor and where he could not reveal that once he “had been Haroun and had had a seraglio” (HH, 249).

The adult narrator concludes the story of “The Ghost in Master B’s Room” exclaiming:

Ah me, ah me! No other ghost has haunted the boy’s room, my friends, since I have occupied it, than the ghost of my childhood, the ghost of my own innocence, the ghost of my airy belief. [...] And here you see me working out, as cheerfully and thankfully as I may, my doom of shaving in the glass a constant change of customers, and of lying down and rising up with the skeleton allotted to me for my mortal companion. (HH, 249)

Therefore, at the end of “The Ghost in Master B’s Room”, Dickens, through the “undisguised narrator”,¹³² reveals his readers the identity of that spectre, which represents the ghost of his infancy and of his memory.

There are autobiographical references and analogies between Dickens and the narrator’s childhoods: first, the narrator is called John, which was both Charles’ middle name and his father’s first one; then, there is a parallelism between John Dickens’ imprisonment for debt which here is represented by the death of the narrator’s father and the subsequent family’s auction;¹³³ lastly, the inspiration to *The Arabian Nights* for the Caliph’s story, which was one of Dickens’ favourite books in his childhood.¹³⁴

In addition to the oriental folkloric influence of *The Arabian Nights*, there are many references and fictional characters taken from fairy-tales and from fantastic literature such as “Tom Thumb” (HH, 231), “Wolf and Red-Riding-Hood” (HH, 238), “Sinbad the Sailor” (HH, 243).

¹³² R. F. Glancy, “Dickens’s Framed-Tale Themes”, cit., p.63.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 64-65.

¹³⁴ A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, cit., p. 24.

Throughout the narrative Dickens uses technical and stylistic devices in order to involve his audience and he addresses directly his readers many times, sharing with them his narrative choices: “To cut this part of the story” (HH, 231); “I leave a discerning public to judge of my feelings” (HH, 233); “It is not necessary for me, here, to account [...] I content myself with remarking that is familiarly known to every intelligent man” (HH, 237); “In this, I appeal to previous generations to confirm or refute me” (HH, 243); “Not to trouble you with a detailed account of all my travels in pursuit of the ghost of Master B” (HH, 243).

Dickens fills the text with subtle irony and lexical puns: he makes fun of the “Rapper” at the beginning by reporting his wrong way of saying “A bird in the hand [...] is worth two in the bosh” (HH, 226), playing with the vowels “O” and “U”; and then inserts a play of words between “owl” and “howl” in the ambiguous conversation between the narrator and Ikey, since the boy means the bird but pronounces it as “cry”.

Furthermore, the narrator depicts and mocks the characters with phrases he inserts into parentheses, for example he says that the Odd Girl, being hysterical, applies on her body “as much vinegar [...] as would pickle a handsome salmon” (HH, 233); or he adds humorous comments about what he is telling, such as when the child narrator says that his family fortune “went for a song” (HH, 249), and exclaims: “So I heard mentioned, and I wondered what song, and thought what a dismal song it must have been to me!”(HH, 249).

Moreover, the narrator's obsession for the letter B is "a matrix of enjoyable textual *excess*, a device for generating an endless comic proliferation of additional signifiers":¹³⁵

Whether his Christian name was Benjamin, Bissextile (from his having been born in Leap Year), Bartholomew or Bill. Whether the initial letter belonged to his family name, and that was Baxter, Black, Brown, Barker, Buggins, Baker, or Bird. Whether he was a foundling, and had been baptised B. Whether he was a lion-hearted boy, and B was short for Briton or for bull. [...] Whether he dressed in blue, wore boots (he couldn't have been bald), was a boy of brains, liked books, was good at bowling, had any skill at boxer, even in his buoyant boyhood bathed from a bathing-machine at Bognor, Bangor, Bournemouth, Brighton or Broadstairs, like a bounding billiard ball? So, from the first, I was haunted by the letter B. (HH, 241)

At the same time, however, Dickens has to handle carefully these puns: "what is non-original about the literary ghost—all of its traditional textual paraphernalia—entails the constant possibility of a formal collapse into parody".¹³⁶

Both "The Mortals in the House" and "The Ghost in Master B's Room" are structured in a way that actually make them independent from the rest of *The Haunted House*: the introduction provides the framework for the interpolated tale, and the latter in turn includes a story-within-a-story, which is told through a narrator's flashback to his childhood.¹³⁷

In these ghost stories Dickens mixes autobiographical references with fairy-tale and folkloric elements, he uses technical and stylistic devices to involve his readers and makes several lexical puns, all laced with a lot of irony.

¹³⁵ L. Thurston, "Zigzag: The Signalman" in *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: the Haunting Interval*, New York: Routledge (2012), p. 51.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹³⁷ R. F. Glancy, "Dickens's Framed-Tale Themes", *cit.*, p. 65.

He expresses, through the narrator's dialogue with the strange train passenger, his ideas about spiritualism and his disbelief in "rappings".¹³⁸

In the end, Dickens in *The Haunted House* "seems to address modern skepticism about the irrational and the supernatural and to unsettle it", since his houses "are haunted not by ghosts but by crime, by active moral and social evil practiced daily [...] by *ourselves*".¹³⁹ As a matter of fact, with the narrator's concluding revelation that the ghost in the room is actually a phantom of his own past, Dickens wants to deny the existence of haunted houses and claim that the only real spectres which haunt mankind are the ghosts of their own making.

¹³⁸ O'Keefe' gives as example for "rappings": "Knocking sounds of no apparent natural origin", C. O'Keefe, "Spiritualism" in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z*, vol. 2, cit., p. 644.

¹³⁹ M. Hollington, "Charles Dickens" in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic A-K*, vol. 1, cit., p. 180.

4. The Trial for Murder

“The Trial for Murder” appeared initially under the heading “To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt” in the collection *Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions* for the special Christmas number of 1865 in Dickens’ weekly journal *All the Year Round*.

Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions is a collection of stories written by Dickens and some of his contributors, such as Miss Mulholland, Charles Collins (Wilkie Collins’s son), Hesba Stretton, Mr Thornbury and Mrs Gascoyne. Dickens provided the framework by writing the introductory and closing parts, “To Be Taken Immediately” and “To Be Taken for Life”, in addition to the sixth section, “To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt”. These interpolated stories, however, could be thought of as self-contained works with no particular thematic or structural purpose, except to exemplify Dickens’ Christmas themes, in which Dickens developed the relationship between the narrator and the reader through the use of first-person monologues.¹⁴⁰

Dickens decided to compose *Doctor Marigold* at a time when he felt tired and overworked with the drafting of *Our Mutual Friend*. As he wrote to his friend Forster:

If people at large understand a Cheap Jack, my part of the Christmas number will do well. It is wonderfully like the real thing, of course a little refined and humoured. [...] I do hope that in the beginning and end of this Christmas number you will find something that will strike you as being fresh, forcible, and full of spirits.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ R. F. Glancy, “Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes”, cit., p. 67.

¹⁴¹ Letter “London; 1865” from Dickens to Forster, in J. Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, with Introduction & Notes by Andrew Lang. London: Chapman & Hall; New York: Charles Scribner’s (1904), Vol. 2, p. 368.

The fictional narrator of *Doctor Marigold's* framework is a Cheap Jack who is called Doctor in honour of a medical practitioner who delivered him. He has a violent wife who uses to attack him verbally and even to hit their daughter Sophy. When Sophy gets ill, he hawks his goods in order to heal her, but in the end she dies of a fever, while the wife redeems and for the grieve drowns herself, leaving Doctor Marigold alone. Surprisingly, at this point the plot continues and changes its tone from misery to charity: Doctor Marigold in a circus encounters a deaf and mute girl whose dead mother used to beat her. Since the little girl makes him think of his daughter, he decides to adopt and to raise her. He thus teaches her to speak and to write, sends her to school and provides for her education by writing and collecting books for her. In the evening he tells her tales, which are actually the inserted ghost stories by Dickens and his contributors.¹⁴² Therefore, in the collection *Doctor Marigold*, Dickens kept the storytelling form inspired by a book of which he was very fond, *The Arabian Nights*.

Dickens' ghost stories were underestimated by his contemporaries inasmuch as his use of ghosts was different from that of his colleagues: as a matter of fact, his ghosts "are always about something other than just being ghosts in any conventionally, Gothically, understood way",¹⁴³ since there are some allegories behind them. However, "The Trial for Murder", is considered atypical and more similar to other conventional ghost stories since it is not allegorical.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, unlike in other Dickens' ghost stories, this tale is not

¹⁴² For a detailed plot of *Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions* see M. Stoddard Holmes, "'Happy and Pitying Tears': Deafness and Affective Disjuncture in Dickens's 'Doctor Marigold'" in *Victorian Review*, Vol. 35, No. 2 Victorian Disability (Fall 2009), pp. 55-56.

¹⁴³ A. Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840-1920: A Cultural History*, cit., p. 33.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

autobiographical, or rather there are no references to his past life or childhood in the characters and the ghost is not a Dickens' alter ego.¹⁴⁵

"The Trial for Murder" begins with a reflection made by the first-person narrator who thinks about how difficult it is for men to tell their experiences when they deal with some supernatural facts, while, they find it easier to share what occurs to them when it is an objective and realistic event:

A truthful traveller, who should have seen something extraordinary creature in the likeness of a sea-serpent, would have no fear of mentioning it; but the same traveller, having had some singular presentiment, impulse, vagary, of thought, vision (so-called), dream, or other remarkable mental impression, would hesitate considerably before he would own it. [...] The consequence is that the general stock of experience in this regard appears exceptional, and really is so, in respect of being miserably imperfect.¹⁴⁶

With the sea-serpent metaphor the narrator wants to say that often people tend to tell what they want and not the facts as they are, in order to appear stronger in the eyes of the others. This is the reason why the title of the story is "To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt", it means that people should not take too seriously what other people say, and this represents Dickens' position on the supernatural: ghosts do not exist, with the exception of those living in the human mind.¹⁴⁷

In this story, Dickens, however, does not examine the psychological aspect relating to the emotions and the feelings of the characters, but rather he just

¹⁴⁵ R. F. Glancy, "Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes", cit., p. 68.

¹⁴⁶ C. Dickens, "The Trial for Murder" in *Complete Ghost Stories*, cit., p. 250. Henceforth all quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the text in the abbreviated form "TM".

¹⁴⁷ L. Henson, "Investigations and Fictions: Charles Dickens and Ghosts" in *The Victorian Supernatural*, edited by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2004), pp. 60-61.

focuses on the development of the events: he wants to tell the facts as they are and he transforms the figure of the narrator into a reporter rather than a storyteller.

The first-person narrator is a bachelor and a bank manager, an ordinary man who is going through a particular period in his life: "I was not ill, but I was not well. My reader is to make the most that can be reasonably made of my feeling jaded, having a depressing sense upon me of a monotonous life, and being lightly dyspeptic" (TM, 252).

This figure represents Dickens' idea of an alienated and bored man, who narrates about his repetitive existence in a way that at first sight seems unemotional and detached.¹⁴⁸ However, the narrator specifies that he does not aim at "setting up, opposing, or supporting, any theory whatever" (TM, 250), he just wants to tell about a strange experience he has gone through: "it is to that, and not to a page of the Newgate Calendar, that I beg attention" (TM, 255).

One morning, while the narrator is leafing through the newspaper, he is attracted by the notice of a murder, for which there is still not any suspect. When he reads that the crime took place in a bedroom, suddenly he has a fleeting vision of the bed but without the corpse upon it. Since this fact makes him shudder, he goes to the window to calm himself down and to take a breath, but while he is watching outside he notes two men walking down Piccadilly: one is proceeding while looking at the man behind him, the other follows him with his hand menacingly raised. The narrator realises that, although this is happening in a main street and in broad daylight, nobody seems to notice them; anyway, he sees them clearly and remembers distinctively their faces: one of

¹⁴⁸ D. J. Greenman, "The Alienation of Dickens's Haunted Businessmen", in *Dickens Quarterly* (December 1990), p. 388.

them has “an unusually lowering appearance” (TM, 252) and the other one is “of the colour of impure wax” (TM, 252).

One night, while he is speaking with his valet, he sees the figure of the man with the wax-coloured face peering from the dressing-room door and beckoning at him. However, when the narrator checks the closet he finds out that there is nobody inside; in the meanwhile, the servant does not notice anything until the moment in which his master touches him with his hand, and he involuntarily makes the servant start, exclaiming that even he sees a man beckoning.

At this moment of the story, however, the narrator ignores both the identity of the wax-coloured-faced man, and the exact reason why this figure appears to him:

Comparing its expression when beckoning at the door with its expression when it had stared up at me as I stood at my window, I came to the conclusion that on the first occasion it had sought to fasten itself upon my memory, and that on the second occasion it had made sure of being immediately remembered. (TM, 253)

The next day, the narrator is summoned to take part, as a member of the jury, in the forthcoming Sessions of the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey. Since he has never participated in such an experience, he decides to accept, also because he wants to take a break from his monotonous life. On the first day of the trial, the narrator discovers that the defendant at the bar is actually the first man he saw in Piccadilly. When the prisoner looks at the narrator, he begins to panic and whispers to his attorney asking him to challenge that man from the jury, without giving any reason why.

The narrator is chosen as foreman of the jury of the trial, which would last ten days. On the second day, while he is gathered with his eleven brother

jurymen, he finds difficult to count how many they are and he thinks they are thirteen rather than twelve, since he feels the presence of the wax-coloured-faced man's apparition; what strikes him the most, however, is to discover that when he touches someone, as one of the fellows among the jury or the officer Mr Harker, they too have the impression of counting one man more. Moreover, the narrator sees the wax-faced figure at the bedsides of the other jurymen and in the morning he discovers that everybody, except he and Mr Harker, has dreamt of that man.

On the fifth day of the trial, a miniature of the murdered man is shown to the jury and the narrator realises what he has already suspected: the murdered man is actually the second man he saw in Piccadilly, the one with the face of the colour of the impure wax; the figure, without anyone noticing it, appears in court and gives to the foreman of the jury the miniature, whispering in his ear: "I was younger then, and my face was not then drained of blood" (TM, 256).

From that moment onward, the narrator notes three differences in the spectre's appearances: first, he materialises in court continually; then, when he appears, he does not look at the narrator's face, but he gazes at the people who are speaking at that moment; lastly, when the ghostly figure stands near someone, the person in question has shivers and convulsions and is about to swoon.

This "monotony" (TM, 258) continues until the last day of the trial, when the figure appears with a grey veil on his arm. Finally, as the foreman of the jury declares the prisoner guilty, the spectre of the murdered man, who is evidently pleased with the verdict, feels that he has now fulfilled his purpose and, staring

at the narrator's eyes for the last time, suddenly covers himself with the veil, dissolves into nothing and disappears.

At the end, the defendant is given the chance to say his last words before his death sentence, and he mutters in a confused way:

My Lord, I knew I was a doomed man when the foreman of the jury came into the box. My Lord, I knew he would never let me off, because before I was taken, he somehow got to my bedside in the night, woke me, and put the rope round my neck. (TM, 259)

This is the final twist of the story: discovering that, in addition to the narrator, also the murderer has being haunted by the vision. Therefore, the particularity of this ghost story is that the haunting has not been singular, as it usually is in other horror tales, but rather "mutual".¹⁴⁹

The spectre here is the spirit of a murdered man who is looking for revenge and justice towards the man who killed him. He strives to ensure that his murderer is punished with a death sentence, and, for reaching this purpose, the spectre haunts, with visions and apparitions, the foreman of the jury – the narrator of the story – who has to proclaim the verdict against the defendant. This spirit has a strong supernatural power through which he can provoke visions and physical effects – such as trepidations, shudders and fainting – on the persons he wants to influence. By inserting a spectre who is not confident in the jury and who decides to obtain justice by himself intimating the jury to make the right choice, Dickens seems to denounce the judicial system, since law-breaking and crime were some of the major issues during the Victorian age.

¹⁴⁹ J. Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, cit., p. 42.

Unlike in other Dickens' ghost stories, in "The Trial for Murder" there are no long descriptions: the narrator says that the events take place in London, probably in order to give authenticity and plausibility to the facts. He mentions some really existing places, though he does not dwell on depicting them: Piccadilly and St James' Street (TM, 251); the renowned Newgate Jail (TM, 251), where all criminals were committed; the Central Criminal Court of the Old Bailey (TM, 253); and the Temple Bar (TM, 254), which was the old entrance to the City of London. However, the narrator provides a brief account of the setting and of the timing of the narration, in addition to the weather conditions and the atmosphere, when he introduces the court:

The appointed morning was a raw morning in the month of November. There was a dense brown fog in Piccadilly, and it became positively black and in the last degree oppressive east of Temple Bar. I found the passages and staircases of the courthouse flaringly lighted with gas, and the court itself similarly illuminated. [...]

I took my seat in the place appropriated to jurors in waiting, and I looked about the court as well as I could through the cloud of fog and breath that was heavy in it. I noticed the black vapour hanging like a murky curtain outside the great windows, and I noticed the stifled sound of wheels on the straw or tan that was littered in the street; also, the hum of the people gathered there, which a shrill whistle, or a louder song or hail than the rest, occasionally pierced. (TM, 254)

Therefore, also the setting is atypical: instead of a solitary and dismal place, here there is a crowded and stifling court, where the effect of inducing fear is provoked by the feeling of claustrophobia in the alienated narrator.¹⁵⁰

On the other hand, as in many of his stories, Dickens keeps the technique of the changing weather conditions when the supernatural occurs: he makes the

¹⁵⁰ D. J. Greenman, "The Alienation of Dickens's Haunted Businessmen", cit., p. 389.

atmosphere darken along with the development of the events, increasing the suspense in the reader, who feels that something uncanny is going to happen.

“The Trial for Murder” is one of Dickens’ latest ghost stories: he, in fact, in writing them, shows a great “mastery of the form, being tightly and economically constructed so that every element contributes to the final effect”.¹⁵¹ In order to reach this final twist, he inserts uncanny and supernatural elements throughout the narration, focusing on the apparitions and on the powers of the phantom. At the same time, however, he gives plausibility to the entire story, by linking them to realistic events, to the names of the places in London and to the development of the Victorian criminal trial. Dickens, with the complicity of the audience, aims to stimulate thought and curiosity by inserting just the minimum required to tell the story without giving too many details.

If compared to other Dickens’ ghost stories, the narrative structure is simpler: after the premise the narrator starts reporting the facts and inside the main chronicle there are no other characters who tell a story-within-a-story. Dickens also lowers the power of the form and style of his writing, in order to concentrate on the reader’s reaction: in the dialogues there are no repetitions or fairy-tale formulas; the descriptions are limited, the facts are narrated just in an objective way, and the characters’ inner states are not deepened.¹⁵²

As in “The Signalman” (1866), Dickens in “The Trial for Murder” returns to the traditional ghost story pattern, which implies that “an author is able to work closely within the limited conventions of the form whilst at the same time

¹⁵¹ J. Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, cit., p. 42.

¹⁵² D. Seed, “Mystery in Everyday Things: Charles Dickens’ ‘Signalman’” in *Criticism* 23 (1981), p. 57.

reassembling familiar components into something that can still engage and surprise".¹⁵³

In conclusion, it is possible to affirm that Dickens' penultimate work is a great example of how much he has improved in creating ghost stories and how he has finally reached perfection in this form, since he is now an accomplished ghost stories' author, who, like the phantom, is satisfied with his labour and can finally have a rest.

¹⁵³ M. Cox and R. A. Gilbert "Introduction" in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, cit., p. xi.

5. The Signalman

“The Signalman” is one of the most well-known and often anthologised Dickens’s ghost story,¹⁵⁴ appeared for the first time on 10 December 1866 under the heading “NO.1 Branch Line” as the fourth chapter of an extra Christmas number published for the weekly literary journal directed by Dickens himself, *All the Year Round*.

This story was inserted in a collection entitled *Mugby Junction* that was a pun for Rugby Junction – at that time one of the most important railway station in England – used “as both an organising device and a metaphor, naming a place where multiple narratives cross and interact”.¹⁵⁵

During the nineteenth century Victorian Britain was marked by the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, which brought many important technological innovations and developments in different fields, such as the telegraph – mentioned also in “The Signalman”¹⁵⁶ – voice recording and the telephone, which “gave an uncanny presence to the invisible and absent”.¹⁵⁷

However, the novelty worthiest of attention was the invention of the steam locomotive by George Stevenson in 1829, which developed the railway system and brought to the high-speed railway travel, an innovation that provoked contradictory feelings among the Victorians and “altered perceptions

¹⁵⁴ D. Seed, “Mystery in Everyday Things: Charles Dickens’ ‘Signalman’, cit., p. 42.

¹⁵⁵ N. Pope, “Dickens’s ‘The Signalman and Information Problems in the Railway Age”, *Technology and Culture*, vol. 42 No. 3 (Jul., 2001), p. 436.

¹⁵⁶ “A telegraphic instrument with its dial, face and needles”, C. Dickens, “The Signalman” in *Complete Ghost Stories*, cit., pp. 262-263. Henceforth all quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the text in the abbreviated form “SM”.

¹⁵⁷ M. Moran, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, cit., p. 62.

of time and space”.¹⁵⁸ On the one hand, railways contributed to industrialise Britain creating a tourist industry, on the other hand, train transportation unfortunately caused many “technological accidents” and concerns among the mid-Victorian passengers: signalling failure and railway safety were indeed constant issues also for Dickens himself, who was used to commuting for his public reading tours and depended upon the railway system.¹⁵⁹

Dickens was interested in railway revolution and spoke about its novelties and consequences throughout his life and in his weekly journals – *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* – especially from the mid 1840-s onward.¹⁶⁰ As David Seed suggests, “from the very first the railway was for Dickens associated with violence and mystery”.¹⁶¹ He denounced the railway system and its aftermath on the Victorian society especially in *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), but it is in his ghost story “The Signalman” that he expressed in an indirect way all his concerns about how “the dehumanizing effects of technological progress on man and the dangers of the Industrial Revolution take the form of images that have the quality and suggestiveness of a nightmare”.¹⁶²

The tale was probably in part inspired by a personal experience of the author himself, since Dickens wrote this short story after he escaped death in a terrible accident occurred little more than a year before, which traumatised him

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁵⁹ N. Pope, “Dickens’s ‘The Signalman and Information Problems in the Railway Age”, cit., p. 446.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 438-439.

¹⁶¹ D. Seed, “Mystery in Everyday Things” cit., p. 47.

¹⁶² E. Mengel, “Structure and Meaning in Dickens’s ‘The Signalman’” in *Studies in Short Fiction* 20 (1983), p. 271.

for the rest of his life.¹⁶³ By a twist of fate, Dickens happened to die on the same day of that tragedy five years later.¹⁶⁴

On 9 June 1865, Dickens was returning from France on the Folkestone Boat Express with his mistress Ellen Ternan and her mother when suddenly the train derailed falling into a gap – caused by some repair work on a viaduct near Staplehurst, in Kent – and landing in a ravine. The central and rear carriages fell off plunging onto the riverbed below, while the frontal ones escaped the fall. Dickens got Ellen and her mother to safety and then helped other passengers, without forgetting to rescue *Our Mutual Friend* manuscript, where he gave an account of the fact in the postscript:

I can never be much nearer parting company with my readers for ever, than I was then, until there shall be written against my life, the two words with which I have this day closed this book: —The End.¹⁶⁵

The “memorable accident” (SM, 266) mentioned by Dickens’s signalman, however, resembles the worst railway collision in nineteenth English history which occurred on 25 August 1861 and was known as Clayton Tunnel disaster; the crash, caused by a misunderstanding between two signalmen and a consequent signalling failure, happened between two trains that were erroneously at the same time inside the tunnel and provoked 23 killed and 176 injured people.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ A detailed account of Staplehurst accident can be found in E. Johnson, *Dickens: his Tragedy and Triumph*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd (1953), pp. 1018-1020.

¹⁶⁴ J. L. Matus, “Trauma Memory and Railway Disaster: The Dickensian Connection” in *Victorian Studies*, vol. 43, No. 3 (Spring, 2001), p. 414.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in N. Pope, “Dickens’s ‘The Signalman’ and Information Problems in the Railway Age”, cit., p. 445.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 441-444.

The short story of the “The Signalman” – labelled as a “Tale of Presentiment” by Charles Kent in a December 1866 review¹⁶⁷ – begins with the narrator hailing the unknown signalman by unconsciously using the same words – “HALLOA! BELOW THERE!” (SM, 260) – and involuntarily imitating the gesture – covering his eyes with his hand – of the apparition that occasionally persecutes the latter.

This unusual incipit resembles the way of answering a telephonic call and draws immediately the reader into the mystery of the story.¹⁶⁸ However, the signalman does not reply to the narrator at first sight, forcing him to repeat his greetings. From this point starts the “double-talk” of the narrator who throughout the whole narration will be constricted to ask twice his questions to his interlocutor, who seems not to care about him:¹⁶⁹

‘Halloa! Below!’

From looking down the line, he turned himself about again, and raising his eyes, saw my figure high above him.

‘Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you?’

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. (SM, 260)

The signalman and the narrator are standing at two different vertical levels, one in the dark and the other in the light, since the former is “foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench”, while the latter is “high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset” (SM, 260): it is quite strange that the narrator needs to shade his eyes to see a figure that stands in

¹⁶⁷ P. Collins, *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1971), p. 420.

¹⁶⁸ L. Thurston, “Zigzag: The Signalman” in *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: the Haunting Interval*, cit., pp. 34-35.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

the darkness, and not the contrary: this makes the reader doubt about the credibility of the narrator's account, who in turn is perplexed by the signalman's attitude.¹⁷⁰

The narrator is looking for a path in order to reach him and to speak in a horizontal way, while the signalman replies just through signs and gestures. This metaphor is used to imply that when the narrator goes down the rail cutting to reach the signalman, it is not only a physical descent but also a social and rational one. In fact, the two differ from each other both for the rank – underlined by the frequent use of prepositions as “up/above” and “down/below” and by the signalman calling the narrator “sir”¹⁷¹ – as well as for the protagonist's prevalence of instinctive attitude over rational one, inasmuch as he had once been a “student of natural philosophy” and then, abandoning his lectures, he had “run wild” (SM, 263).¹⁷²

The setting is a gloomy and otherworldly railway cutting in the middle of nowhere where the narrator finds himself while he is wandering after he got off his train at the fictional junction of Mugby:

His post was in as solitary and dismal place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-well wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose architecture there was a barbarous, depressing and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthly, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world. (SM, 261)

¹⁷⁰ G. Day, "Figuring Out the Signalman: Dickens and the Ghost Story", in *Nineteenth-Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle*, Eds. Clive Bloom et al., London: Macmillan (1998), p. 29.

¹⁷¹ G. Tytler, "Dickens's THE SIGNALMAN" in *The Explicator*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Fall 1994), pp. 26-27.

¹⁷² G. Day, "Figuring Out the Signalman", cit., pp. 33-34.

Modern critics identify different symbolic meanings in the description of this “chthonic environment” where every detail seems to evoke a sense of “entrapment”:¹⁷³ Michael Cook considers it as a metaphor representing not only the physical but also the psychological enclosure of the signalman; for Ewald Mengel the setting provides a “fitting place for the gloomy and sinister events to come”,¹⁷⁴ while the narrator’s descent represents the entering in a sort of Hades, an initiation towards the world of spirits.¹⁷⁵ According to David Seed, there is a contrast between the cold black tunnel seen as a “great dungeon” – which invokes a sense of mystery from the opening scene, and the warm comfortable signal box interior where they, later, have their conversation.¹⁷⁶

The first-person narrator in “The Signalman” represents an altered form of the anonymous traveller present in the first chapter of *Mugby Junction*; his main function is to recount the story mirroring through his eyes the course of the events and influencing the reader with his own – rational – perspective.¹⁷⁷

Like the signalman who, spending his existence in the signal box down in the rail cutting, “had made up his bed, and he lay upon it” (SM, 263),¹⁷⁸ the narrator is “a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life” (SM, 261). According to John Stahl, there are several analogies in the text between him and the signalman – “His manner cleared, like my own” (SM, 262) – which

¹⁷³ M. Cook, “The Locked Compartment: Charles Dickens’s ‘The Signalman’ and Enclosure in the Railway Mystery Story” in *Narrative of Enclosure in Detective Fiction*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2011), p. 24.

¹⁷⁴ E. Mengel, “Structure and Meaning in Dickens’s ‘The Signalman’”, cit., p. 272.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁷⁶ D. Seed, “Mystery in Everyday Things”, cit., p. 48.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Mengel underlines that this “bed” (SM, 263) and the “little low hut [...] made of some wooden supports of tarpaulin” which “looked no bigger than a bed” (SM, 270), are synonyms for “coffin”. See: E. Mengel in “Structure and Meaning in Dickens’s ‘The Signalman’”, cit., p. 275.

make the readers suppose he is the “signalman’s ghostly alter ego”.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, he probably sees in the signalman someone with whom he has something in common and he is interested in learning more about the hero and “these great works” (SM, 261), being in fact the only character interacting with the lonely and mysterious protagonist.

On their first meeting, the narrator acts unintentionally anticipating later events and notes some “remarkable” (SM, 260) details in the signalman’s attitude connected in some way with the supernatural:¹⁸⁰ his looking towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel and not in the direction of the voice calling him; his apparently waiting for the narrator when he arrives at his signal box; his impression of having already seen the narrator, which for a moment makes the latter suspect that “this was a spirit, not a man” (SM, 261).

Once the two reassure each other to be men in the flesh, they close themselves in the signal box where the curious narrator questions the custodian about his past life and duties. Dickens reveals, through the narrator’s interviewing the protagonist, the bad work conditions in which the signalmen were employed during the railway age, providing also a brief description of their job:

Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual work – manual labour – he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head. (SM, 262)

¹⁷⁹ J. Stahl, “The Sources and Significance of the Revenant in Dickens’s ‘The Signalman’” in *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 11 (1980), pp. 99.

¹⁸⁰ D. Seed, “Mystery in Everyday Things”, cit., pp. 48-51.

Although there is a strong difference between the fictional “exact and vigilant” (SM, 263) signalman and the real one who worked at Staplehurst, it is clear that this was a job in which “exactness and watchfulness” with “enough responsibility to bear” were required, and it thus provoked a lot of stress in its employees who were alone in isolated places and had heavy night shifts.¹⁸¹ Mengel notices that this depiction of the signalman at work in this solitary and mysterious signal box answering the calls of the railway bell is – on the realistic level of the narrative – “a powerful and suggestive image of man’s alienation by technological progress”.¹⁸² The bell ringing in fact has a symbolic meaning to indicate the omnipresence of the railway system that persecutes the life of this man, his job being his own identity since he is called throughout the whole narrative with the role he held.¹⁸³

The signalman’s sense of responsibility for his duties resembles Dickens’ one when he worked at Warren’s blacking factory¹⁸⁴ but in an inverted way: while the former had “gone down and never risen again” (SM, 263), the latter started from the bottom and rose until he achieved success.¹⁸⁵ In addition, according to Gary Day, “The Signalman” is a “twice-told tale”¹⁸⁶ since the work duties enunciated by the eponymous character are the same that the narrator had had to respect in reporting the facts with precision and coherence in order

¹⁸¹ Ibid., cit., p. 52.

¹⁸² E. Mengel, "Structure and Meaning in Dickens's 'The Signalman'", cit., p. 274.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. 274-75.

¹⁸⁴ Gary Day underlines that Dickens wrote about his experience at Warren’s in his *Fragment of Autobiography*, appeared after his death in Forster’s biography about Dickens: he in fact found impossible to write an autobiography and preferred to speak about his life through his characters. G. Day in “Figuring Out the Signalman”, cit., p. 36.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

to catch the attention of his readers.¹⁸⁷ The alert narrator in fact, listening to the signalman's account, cannot but note that his fellow twice interrupts himself to look at the little bell, which was not ringing, going outside to check the red light and returning both times "with the inexplicable air" (SM, 263) that the narrator himself cannot describe.

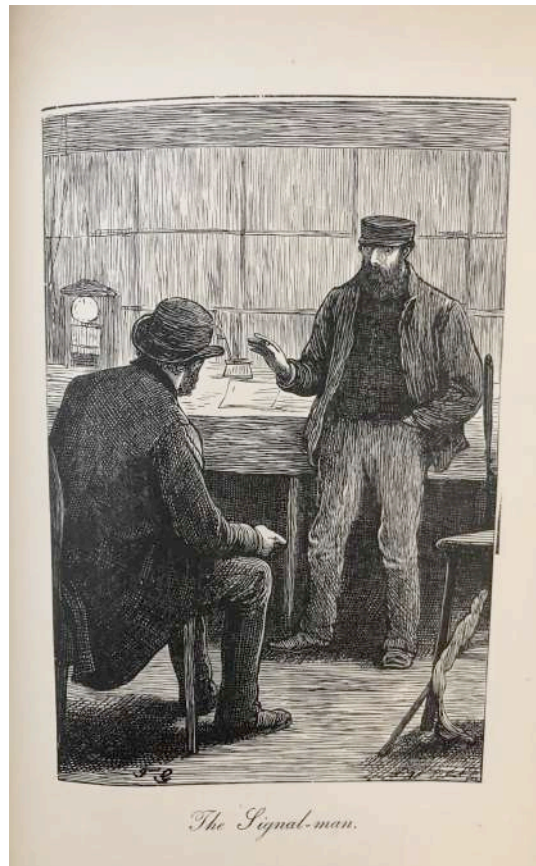


Figure 5: "The Signal-man" by Townley Green in C. Dickens, *Christmas Stories vol. 2*, cit., p. 190.

On their second encounter, the signalman confesses to his new companion that he is troubled because the previous year a strange figure standing by the red light appeared to him for the first time, crying out the words "Halloa! Below there! Look out! Look out!" (SM, 265) and covering its face with the left arm while waving the other one – like the narrator himself did the first time they met. However, when the signalman ran towards it, the spectre disappeared and

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

a few hours after the vision, a terrible accident – similar to Clayton Tunnel disaster – occurred on that line. Subsequently, about six or seven months later, the spectre materialised again, this time without shouting but shielding its face with both hands in an “action of mourning” (SM, 266), as the listener thought to himself; that same day the signalman noticed turmoil among the passengers in a train passing on that railway cutting and discovered that a young woman suddenly died in a carriage.

The spectre’s appearances are therefore premonitions, predicting looming deaths, since they seem to preannounce something happening in the imminent future, unlike the more traditional ghosts connected to the past.¹⁸⁸ The latter apparition dated the previous week and since that moment the spectre sporadically haunts the signalman calling out the same old words, ringing the little bell in the signal box and gesticulating as if to indicate to “clear the way” (SM, 267). Unfortunately, the signalman is the only one who sees the ghost and the fact that the figure stood near the danger light, which is a piece of the railway communication system, means symbolically that this apparition is something that goes beyond any rational explanation.¹⁸⁹

Dickens slowly introduces the coincidences that draw the reader to the acknowledgement of the protagonist’s imminent death, while the signalman ignores it; thus the irony of the whole story stands in the fact that a man who works decoding signals is unable to understand the ones given to him by the mysterious figure.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, the main character is reduced to be “just a toy

¹⁸⁸ D. Seed, “Mystery in Everyday Things”, cit., p. 51.

¹⁸⁹ E. Mengel, “Structure and Meaning in Dickens’s ‘The Signalman’”, cit., pp. 275-276.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

in the hands of mysterious powers that play a cruel game with him, enjoy his mental agony, and indulge in his destruction".¹⁹¹

The spectre is probably the fruit of the signalman's mental disorder provoked by his heavy work conditions, it is a hallucination, like many of Dickens' ghosts, originated from the self, from the unconscious mind.¹⁹² In fact, many Victorians, including the author himself, felt deeply touched by the railway accidents and the ghost stories were the perfect means for him to express his neurosis, since being traumatised is similar to being persecuted by a ghost.¹⁹³

The narrator is unable to spot any spectre, though there are interesting similarities between him and the ghostly figure which persecutes the signalman: first of all, the words he used at the beginning to hail the signalman are the same used by the apparition. Moreover, he seems to resemble the mysterious figure, since at the outset they acted and gesticulated in the same way. Then, the narrator interrupts his interlocutor twice, like the times the bell seemed to ring for the signalman; and he visits the signalman thrice, similarly the spectre appears to him three times. Lastly, there is a kind of pun between the words "spectre" and "spectator", the role played by the narrator who listens to the signalman's story.¹⁹⁴

At this point, there is a crash between rational and supernatural narratives, between what is really seen and what is not: the narrator, though

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 276.

¹⁹² In particular, Tytler affirms that the signalman seems to suffer from a disease called "lypemia" or "monomania", a form of partial insanity diagnosed commonly in the nineteenth century. The symptoms resemble the strange attitudes of the signalman, including hallucinations, fixed look and his diligent precision in carrying on his duties. G. Tytler in "Dickens's THE SIGNALMAN", cit., p. 26.

¹⁹³ J. L. Matus, "Trauma, Memory, and Railway Disaster", cit., p. 428.

¹⁹⁴ G. Day, "Figuring Out the Signalman", cit., p. 38.

feeling a “disagreeable shudder” (SM, 266) running through his back every time the signalman mentions the spirit, pretends not to be shocked and tries to give logical explanations of the remarkable coincidences also in order to calm down his companion, who is convinced instead that another impending death is going to occur.¹⁹⁵ The narrator attributes the causes of this vision to a “deception of his sense of sight” (SM, 265), to his “imagination” misleading him (SM, 267) and to “the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life” (SM, 268). The two have a back and forth discussion ending with the narrator refusing to trust the signalman and deciding, for his sake, to take him to “the wisest medical practitioner” (SM, 269). However, by denying any supernatural implication in what the signalman sees and by attributing all the apparitions to his imagination, the narrator refuses to admit the trauma of the protagonist.¹⁹⁶

This trauma provokes in the hero a sense of guilt since he thinks that he could have avoided the catastrophe and feels a murderer for this reason, although he will later become the victim.¹⁹⁷ The feeling of powerlessness felt by the “mere poor signalman” (SM, 269) who does not know how to act in order to avoid that something terrible occurs without being considered mad, is the same shared with the impotence of the narrator who has become “the recipient of this disclosure” (SM, 269). As a matter of fact, both the narrator and the signalman feel responsible without having any fault, like Dickens who “saw himself as a

¹⁹⁵ D. Seed, “Mystery in Everyday Things”, cit., pp. 51-53.

¹⁹⁶ J. L. Matus, “Trauma Memory and Railway Disaster”, cit., p. 430.

¹⁹⁷ M. Cook, “The Locked Compartment”, cit., p. 32.

victim, a gift and sensitive child abandoned by his parents”,¹⁹⁸ but also considered himself as a “small Cain”.¹⁹⁹

The day after, while the narrator is approaching his friend’s signal box, he flinches seeing a figure covering his eyes with his left sleeve and waving his right arm; that figure is a policeman, telling him that an accident had happened that morning and a signalman died, although it is very weird since “no man in England knew his work better” (SM, 270). The engine driver illustrates the facts, swearing that he tried to save the victim beckoning him to move away by covering his eyes with an arm – not to see the dreadful imminent crash – while waving the other one and ceaselessly shouting: “Below there! Look out! Look out! For God’s sake, clear the way!”(SM, 271).

The narrator, dismayed by what had occurred, is shocked because of a coincidence that he himself cannot rationally explain:

The warning of the engine-driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate signalman had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself – not he – had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated. (SM, 271)

The entire short story is structured in two parts: a narrative frame provided by the narrator himself who goes visiting this mysterious man, and a story-within-a-story that is the signalman’s account of his experience.

The narrator, by furnishing the entire account of the signalman’s story, has a double function: to filter it giving plausibility to what he is saying and to involve readers with the story, since they can recognise themselves in the

¹⁹⁸ G. Day, “Figuring Out the Signalman”, cit., pp. 35-36.

¹⁹⁹ Dickens in J. Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, quoted in G. Day, “Figuring Out the Signalman”, cit., p. 36.

narrator who is sceptical and tries to give rational and scientific explanations of the supernatural events.²⁰⁰

The author uses three simple structural devices in order to allow his audience to accept the supernatural elements of the tale: first, he introduces the spectre in an indirect way, since the readers come to know about the ghost through the story-within-a-story told by the signalman and reported by the narrator. Thus, the anecdote of the manifestation of this uncanny figure is twice filtered before arriving at its real audience, allowing them to choose whether to believe it or to think it is just an illusion provoked by the deranged mind of the protagonist. Secondly, the use of repetition throughout the signalman's narration contributes to intensify the reader's suspense insofar as the ghostly apparitions increased and occurred more frequently towards the end. The three narrator's visits mark the development of the story and have three different purposes: the first time he meets the signalman is to introduce the facts and begin the narration; the second occasion, when he comes back to the signal box, serves to provide the frame for the signalman's account; and the last one, with the discovery of the signalman's death, aims to unravel the mystery which stood behind the incomprehensible signs. The third expedient adopted is to create the impression that the story-within-a-story told by the signalman coincides with the reality of the narrative frame where the narrator operates, inasmuch as the signalman is dead and his bad suppositions come true.²⁰¹

In making the story short Dickens wants to concentrate on the tension provoked by the impelling ghostly appearances and bring readers to believe in the existence of the supernatural since the disappearance of the protagonist

²⁰⁰ E. Mengel, "Structure and Meaning in Dickens's 'The Signalman'", cit., pp. 277-278.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 279.

does not have to be seen as a casual train accident but “as the inevitable result of a fatal pattern of predestined events, as the works of forces beyond the grasp of human control”.²⁰²

In conclusion, “The Signalman” is a “deftly-told tale of supernatural coincidences”²⁰³ mixed up with realistic elements of social realism to denounce the problems that stood behind the railway revolution.

The narrator, who is at the beginning just an external and sceptical voice in the story, at the end plays an active role and is deeply involved with the supernatural world of the signalman, feeling responsible for not having saved him. The signalman, with his torments and his deranged mind, represents the alienation of a man victim of technological progress and industrial revolution. The figure of the spectre that persecutes him, covering itself and giving incomprehensible signals is a metaphor for the whole story since Dickens wanted to express the concerns of mid-Victorian society in an indirect way and with implied significances.²⁰⁴

The abrupt open ending and the unexplained mystery are perfectly in harmony with Todorov’s definition of fantastic:

The fantastic, [...] lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from “reality” as it exists in the common opinion. At the story’s end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Ibid., p. 278.

²⁰³ J. Stahl, “The Sources and Significance of the Revenant in Dickens’s ‘The Signalman’”, cit., p. 98.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

²⁰⁵ T. Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, cit., p. 41.

Dickens in "The Signalman" in fact, masterfully leaves the reader free to choose whether the uncanny events were just coincidences or there were some marvellous omens behind them, and to decide what was true and what imaginary in a story intertwined with supernatural and realistic elements.

Conclusions

Charles Dickens' ghosts open a window onto the supernatural and project readers into an unearthly dimension where ghosts and humans interact and where the spirits can result not only evil but also helpful.

As already mentioned, horror tales were born in pre-literate society and were considered a way to exorcise the fear of the unknown, recounting them aloud when people gathered around the fire.

The ghost story evolved throughout the centuries but it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that it was recognised as a particular type of narrative deriving from the Gothic.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, through the spread of literary magazines and the expansion of the reading public among the middle-class, ghost stories reached their modern form, which differs both from the Gothic novels and from the short stories.

In the Victorian age ghost stories were in vogue and Dickens was considered the key figure who promoted the form by publishing them first as interpolated tales in *The Pickwick Papers*, then as novellas in the *Christmas Books* and subsequently as self-contained segments of collaborative works which appeared at the beginning in *Household Words* and, later, in *All The Year Round*.

Dickens used to edit and publish his ghost stories as special Christmas numbers, since he considered this festivity very important: it was the occasion

in which Victorian families gathered for celebrating and thus represented the perfect moment for telling and reading aloud stories around the fireside.²⁰⁶

Dickens considered his ghost stories as a means, in addition to his novels of social realism, to denounce some of the contemporary issues of his time such as the condition of the poor and the orphan children in *The Haunted Man*; the mistreatment of women in “The Ghost of the Bride’s Chamber”; spiritualism and the existence of ghosts in *The Haunted House*; the judicial system and criminal punishment in “The Trial for Murder”; the dangers of the railway revolution and the bad working conditions of its employees in “The Signalman”.

Most of the time, Dickens expressed his opinions through the words of the first or third person narrator’s monologues in the guise of the protagonist, who could be a solitary and unfriendly man as in *The Haunted Man*, or a lonely and curious traveller as in “The Signalman”. Moreover, he also explored all the upsides and downsides of Victorian society through his characters’ portraits and dialogues, as the depiction of the Tetterbys in *The Haunted Man* or the signalman’s account of his job.

Many of his stories contain autobiographical references to Dickens’ past life and childhood. Indeed some of his characters seem his own alter egos: professor Redlaw in the *Haunted Man*; Mr Francis Goodchild in “The Ghost in the Bride’s Chamber”; the protagonist and Master B in *The Haunted House*. Furthermore, there are other characters who recall some of Dickens’ closest relatives: his eldest sister Fanny, who was the only relative who took care of him and stood by his side until she died, is recalled especially in *The Haunted*

²⁰⁶ Among the five Dickens’ ghost stories which have been analysed in this dissertation, only “The Ghost in the Bride’s Chamber” appeared in October because Dickens composed it after the encounter with Ellen Ternan.

Man; the figure of the bride in the “The Ghost in the Bride’s Chamber”, which was written in a period in which Dickens’ marital life was undergoing a crisis, mirrors both his wife Catherine and the young woman with whom he fell in love, Miss Ternan.

In addition, in the three abovementioned ghost stories, there are traces of Dickens’ childhood passion for reading fairy-tales and storybooks, especially *The Arabian Nights*, from which he drew inspiration for creating the frameworks of his self-contained tales. However, in his latest ghost stories, “The Trial for Murder” and “The Signalman”, he abandoned the autobiographical pattern, though he probably was inspired in writing the latter by the train accident he experienced in 1865.

As regards the settings of his ghost stories, Dickens first deployed three different types of isolated and dismal buildings: from the “solitary and vaultlike”²⁰⁷ Redlaw’s dwelling; to the “genuine old house of a very quaint description” (BC, 210); to the haunted house in the eponymous story which was “a solitary house; standing in a sadly neglected garden” (HH, 227). Finally, Dickens left the abandoned-house setting and opted for a crowded and stifling court “flaringly lighted with gas” (TM, 254) in the “Trial for Murder” and for a “solitary and dismal” (SM, 261) railway cutting which had an “earthly, deadly smell” (SM, 261).

As to the temporal setting, where it is specified, it is often around autumn or winter, especially at Christmas: *The Haunted Man*’s story begins “at twilight, in the dead wintertime” (HM, 124), and continues in the night between Christmas Eve and Christmas; *The Haunted House*’s narrator has rented the

²⁰⁷ C. Dickens, *Complete Ghost Stories*, cit., p. 123. Henceforth all quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the body of the text in the abbreviated forms indicated before.

building since October when he sees it in “a fine autumn morning” (HH, 225) until the Twelfth Night when the tenants of the house tell each other of their hauntings; “The Trial for Murder”, instead, takes place in November and begins in “a bright autumn morning” (TM, 251).

Moreover, there are some metaphors between the climate outside and the protagonists’ inner psychological states: especially in *The Haunted Man* and in “The Trial for Murder”, is underlined the change of weather conditions and atmosphere (the sky darkens, the clouds thicken, the wind blows and it is colder) when something supernatural is going to happen. Whereas, in “The Ghost in the Bride’s Chamber” the old man feels threatened by the tree which changes its shape along with the seasons: “as the seasons changed, and the tree changed, his mind perceived dangers that were always changing” (BC, 219). Lastly, in *The Haunted House* the narrator considers the early morning “the most ghostly time” (HH, 228).

It is worth noting some differences in the structures of the five ghost stories which have been taken into consideration: in the early three stories (*The Haunted Man*, “The Ghost’s in the Bride’s Chamber” and *The Haunted House*) there is a more complex outline of frameworks and stories-within-a-story; while, in the latter two tales, the narratives are more linear and there are only the narrators’ accounts of the events.

Also the style of writing has changed from the three previous stories to the most recent ones: in his earlier works Dickens used to insert many fairy-tale elements such as repetitions, formulas, and puns; whereas, in the other two tales, he kept on making ironic comments but diminished the recurring phrases and the fabulous references.

Therefore, when comparing these five tales, one can observe the ways in which Dickens changed and improved his style of writing ghost stories from the Christmas Books, to the interpolated tales in the novels, to the self-contained works included in the collections, until he reached “perfection”²⁰⁸.

In conclusion, Dickens’ use of ghosts is quite different from that of his contemporaries, since in most cases it is allegorical: these ghosts are not ordinary spirits of the dead coming from the underworld in order to terrify their victims, but rather they result to be phantoms who haunt the human mind.

In *The Haunted Man* the ghost is a reflection of the protagonist’s self who comes to visit the haunted man in order to make a bargain with him; in the “The Ghost of the Bride’s Chamber” there is an old man’s ghost who says to be haunted by the spirit of his bride in search of vengeance after he had let her die; in *The Haunted House* the supposed spectre of Master B’s Room at the end of the narration results to be the ghost of the protagonist’s own making.

The last two ghosts are rather atypical: in “The Trial for Murder”, the spectre does not have an allegorical value, it is just the vengeful spirit of a murdered man who aims at doing himself justice; whereas, in “The Signalman”, the apparition is not a spirit of the past, but it is a warning ghost who predicts looming deaths in the future.

At the end of each story, nevertheless, Dickens finds a way to deny the supernatural and explains the ghosts as deceptions of the senses: a reflection of the self, a bad dream, a memory of the past, an induced vision or a hallucination of the protagonist’s mind. It seems indeed that Dickens wants to go against what

²⁰⁸ D. J. Greenman, "Dickens' Ultimate Achievements in the Ghost Story: 'To be Taken with a Grain of Salt' and 'The Signalman'", in *The Dickensian* 85 (Spring 1989), p. 40.

he tells in his stories, and especially against spiritualism, in order to show that in the end it is all the result of a fancy. In the reader, however, the sense of doubt about the existence of ghosts still remains, and the idea of an afterlife works as a deterrent in order to stimulate people to behave better in their present.

Bibliography

Primary sources

- Dickens, Charles. *Complete Ghost Stories*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics (1997).

Secondary sources

- Bennett, Mark. "Sensation Fiction". *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z, vol. 2*, general editors William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell (2013), pp. 607-611.
- Briggs, Julia. *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*. London: Faber (1977).
- Briggs, Julia. 'The Ghost Story' in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter. Malden (MA): Blackwell (2006), pp. 122-131.
- Cook, Michael. "The Locked Compartment: Charles Dickens's 'The Signalman' and Enclosure in the Railway Mystery Story" in *Narrative of Enclosure in Detective Fiction*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2011), pp. 21-42.
- Collins, Peter. *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1971).
- Cox, Michael and Gilbert R.A. "Introduction", in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1991), pp. ix-xx.
- Day, Gary. "Figuring Out the Signalman: Dickens and the Ghost Story", *Nineteenth-Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle*, editors Clive Bloom et al. London: Macmillan, (1998), pp. 26-45.
- Dickens, Charles. "Introduction" in *Christmas Books*, edited with an introduction by Ruth Glancy. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press (1988), pp. ix-xxii.

- Forster, John. *The Life of Charles Dickens*, with Introduction & Notes by Andrew Lang. London: Chapman & Hall; New York: Charles Scribner's (1904).
- Freeman, Nick. "Ghost Stories". *Encyclopedia of the Gothic A-L, vol. 1*, general editors William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell (2013), pp. 277-281.
- Geary, Robert F. *The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction: Horror, Belief and Literary Change*. Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press (1992).
- Glancy, Ruth F. "Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes". *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. University of California Press, Vol. 35. No. 1 (Jun. 1980), pp. 53-72.
- Greenman, David J. "Dickens' Ultimate Achievements in the Ghost Story: 'To be Taken with a Grain of Salt' and 'The Signalman.'" *The Dickensian* 85 (Spring 1989), pp. 40-48.
- Greenman, David J. "The Alienation of Dickens's Haunted Businessmen". *Dickens Quarterly* (December 1990), pp. 384-391.
- Grogan, Michael. "Generosity and the Ghosts of Poor Laws Passed". *Narrative*, Vol. 20 No. 2 (May, 2004), pp. 151-166.
- Henson, Louise. "Investigations and Fictions: Charles Dickens and Ghosts". *The Victorian Supernatural*. Edited by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2004), pp. 44-61.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*. New York: Vintage Books (1996).
- Hollington, Michael. "Charles Dickens" in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic A-K, vol. 1*, general editors William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell (2013), pp. 176-181.
- Johnson, Edgar. *Charles Dickens: his Tragedy and Triumph*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd (1953).

- Lovecraft, Howard Philips. *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, New York: Ben Abramson Publisher (1945).
- Matus, Jill L. "Trauma Memory and Railway Disaster: The Dickensian Connection". *Victorian Studies* Vol. 43, No. 3 (Spring, 2001), pp. 413-446.
- Mengel, Ewald. "Structure and Meaning in Dickens's 'The Signalman'". *Studies in Short Fiction* 20 (1983), pp. 271-80.
- Moran, Maureen. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. London [etc.]: Bloomsbury (2013).
- Morley, Henry. "Need Railway Travellers Be Smashed?" *Household Words* Volume IV, Magazine No. 88 (29 November 1851), pp. 217-221. Available on DJO: Dickens Journals Online « <http://www.djo.org.uk> »
- O'Keefe, Ciarán. "Spiritualism". *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z, vol. 2*, general editors William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell (2013), pp. 644-646.
- Pope, Norris. "Dickens's 'The Signalman' and Information Problems in the Railway Age". *Technology and Culture* Vol. 42, No. 3 (Jul. 2001), pp. 436-461.
- Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions, from 1765 to the present day, Volume 1, The Gothic Tradition*. Harlow, England [etc.]: Longman; Pearson Education (1996).
- Punter, David. "Victorian Gothic". *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z, vol. 2*, general editors William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell (2013), pp. 711-718.
- Seed, David. "Mystery in Everyday Things: Charles Dickens' 'Signalman'". *Criticism* 23 (1981), pp. 42-57.
- Smith, Andrew. *The Ghost Story 1840-1920: A Cultural History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press (2011).
- Stahl, John. "The Sources and Significance of the Revenant in Dickens's 'The Signalman.'" *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 11 (1980), pp. 98-101.

- Stoddard Holmes, Martha. "Happy and Pitying Tears': Deafness and Affective Disjuncture in Dickens's 'Doctor Marigold'". *Victorian Review*, Vol. 35, No. 2 Victorian Disability (Fall 2009), pp. 53-64.
- Stone, Harry. *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making*. London; Basingstoke: The Macmillan (1980).
- Stone, Harry. *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press (1994).
- Stone, Harry. "THE UNKNOWN DICKENS: With a Sample of Uncollected Writings". *Dickens Studies Annual*. Penn State University Press. Vol. 1 (1970), pp. 1-22.
- Thurston, Luke. "Zigzag: The Signalmán." *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: the Haunting Interval*. New York: Routledge (2012), pp. 34-53.
- Tytler, Graeme. "Dickens's THE SIGNALMAN". *The Explicator*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Fall 1994), pp. 26-29.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated from the French by Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1975).
- Vanon Alliata, Michela. *Haunted Minds: Studies in the Gothic and Fantastic Imagination*, with a preface by David Punter. Verona: Ombre Corte (2017).
- Vogel, Jane. *Allegory in Dickens*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press (1977).
- Voller, Jack G. "The Supernatural". *Encyclopedia of the Gothic L-Z, vol. 2*, general editors William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell (2013), pp. 660-664.
- Waters, Catherine. *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*. London: Cambridge University Press (1997).
- Wilson, Angus. *The World of Charles Dickens*. New York: The Viking Press (1972).

Ringraziamenti

Ci terrei a ringraziare tutte le persone che mi sono state vicine in questo percorso.

Come sapete, non è stato facile raggiungere il traguardo, ci sono stati vari imprevisti e momenti decisamente brutti che mi hanno messa a dura prova, ma grazie a tutti voi e ad altre persone che non citerò per ragioni di spazio, oggi sono qui a festeggiare questa vittoria.

A mia madre Cristina, la mia musa ispiratrice, la donna a cui devo tutto, che mi ha insegnato a non arrendermi e mi ha dato la forza per affrontare e superare tanti momenti difficili. Grazie mamma per aver creduto in me e per aver sacrificato la tua vita per me, mettendomi sempre al primo posto. Scusa se non sono una figlia perfetta e se a volte non ti tratto come meriti, se ti dò per scontata e se non ti ringrazio mai abbastanza. Non so cosa avrei fatto e cosa farei senza di te.

A mio padre Tito, l'unico uomo che mi sta accanto da sempre, che mi ha supportata in tutto, il mio Dottore preferito che mi ha dimostrato di essere la persona più importante della sua vita, oltre che la paziente più "impaziente". Grazie papà per tutto quello che hai fatto e che fai per me, per esserci stato sempre nonostante tutto e per avermi consolata in ogni momento no e per avermi insegnato ad affrontare le difficoltà con la tua forza d'animo.

Al mio cane Alvin, che più di tutti mi è stato fisicamente vicino in questo percorso universitario, che ha rinunciato al parco e alle lunghe passeggiate per dormire a fianco a me e "fare la guardia al mio lavoro". Grazie Alvin perché anche se sei "solo un cane", per me sei molto di più: sei il mio migliore amico, il mio compagno di avventure, l'unico che mi tira su il morale ogni giorno con il suo musetto buffo e mi fa sentire sempre amata.

Ai miei nonni Margherita e Luciano, che sono venuti a mancare quest'anno e che mancheranno sempre. Grazie nonni per avermi insegnato cosa sia il vero amore, quello che va oltre la malattia, per essere stati sempre presenti in tutti i momenti importanti della mia vita. Mi dispiace non aver fatto in tempo a celebrare con voi anche questo traguardo, soprattutto con te, nonna.

A mia zia Luciana, a mio cugino Stefano e a mio zio Massimo. Grazie zia per essere la persona più generosa che conosca, per esserci sempre, per le consulenze astrologiche e tutti i messaggi di incoraggiamento in cui mi hai spronata a dare il meglio di me. Grazie Ste per farmi sentire saggia quando mi chiedi consigli, per ricordarmi cosa significhi essere "teen", per tutte le volte in

cui hai avuto bisogno di me, è un onore averti visto crescere ed essere stata un punto di riferimento costante per te. Grazie Massimo per tutte le cose buone che hai preparato per me e per tutti i pranzi e le cene di famiglia, sei il mio chef preferito.

Ai miei zii Susanna e Roberto e ai miei cugini Gabriele e Marco. Grazie per tutte le volte in cui mi avete accolta a pranzo da voi a Venezia, grazie zia per le lunghe chiacchierate, grazie zio per le risate e grazie Gabri e Marco per le partite alla PlayStation.

Ai miei zii Annalisa ed Emilio e a mia cugina Alessia, le mie radici padovane. Grazie zii per esserci sempre stati e per tutti i bei ricordi che ho con voi, con i nonni Maria e Oscar, con la Rosetta e la zia Lalla. Grazie Ale perché siamo cresciute insieme e abbiamo condiviso tutti i momenti importanti delle nostre vite parallele, credo che il nonno sarebbe fiero di noi e dei traguardi che abbiamo raggiunto. Anche se riusciamo a vederci poco, so che ci saremo sempre l'una per l'altra.

Ad Elisabetta, la sorella che non ho mai avuto e che avrei sempre desiderato, la mia migliore amica, colei che più di tutti mi è stata vicina, nonostante la distanza, in questo percorso universitario e in tutta la vita. Grazie tesoro per l'appoggio che mi hai dato, per avermi incoraggiata a non mollare mai, per credere in me più di quanto lo faccia io, per essere così speciale, per farmi ridere anche quando sento che il mondo mi sta crollando addosso, per esserti sorbita tutti i miei sfoghi e i miei scleri, per conoscere i lati più oscuri del mio carattere e apprezzare anche quelli. Davvero, grazie, non ce l'avrei fatta senza di te.

Grazie a Francesca, Silvia, Gaia, Lavinia, Chiara, Agnese e Benedetta, pezzi del mio cuore che mi hanno accompagnata dal liceo e che ci saranno per sempre. Grazie Perry per essere la mia partner in crime, per tutti i selfie insieme, per le fotine "acchiappa-like", per i venerdì sera "forever alone", per le serate disagio, per le abbuffate di sushi, per accompagnarmi dappertutto e per esserci sempre quando ho bisogno.

Grazie Silvia per essere la mia Dottoressa di fiducia, la mia mamma surrogata quando andiamo in vacanza, per tutte le prelibatezze che mi hai preparato dalle superiori ad oggi, per preoccuparti sempre per me e per essere come sei (un po' speciale, in senso buono).

Grazie Gaiu per il supporto che mi hai dato e che mi dai, per esserci sempre senza mai apparire, per la parola giusta al momento giusto, e per tutti i consigli saggi che elargisci.

Grazie Lavi per il supporto che ci siamo sempre date nello studio e non, per i nostri "non classificabili" in storia dell'arte, per capirmi e consolarmi sempre, e per truccarmi in tutte le occasioni importanti.

Grazie Chiaretta per essere la più timidina delle mie amiche e anche quella che tira pacco più spesso ma sulla quale so di poter contare sempre.

Grazie Agne per tutti i festini indimenticabili a casa tua, per essere così buffa (sempre in senso buono) eppure così brava, per aver dimostrato che i 76/100 erano solo un numero e che siamo in grado non solo di metterci il pugno in bocca e di dire che piove quando sta piovendo.

Grazie Benni per essere la mia bionda preferita con gli occhiali bianchi, per esserci anche stando a Milano, per tutti i ricordi belli che abbiamo insieme dalle elementari ad oggi.

A Federica, l'amica che ero abituata a vedere ogni mattina dalla finestra e che ormai vive a Milano, quella che c'è sempre per qualsiasi cosa anche se sta lontano. Grazie cicci per avermi guidata e per avermi fatto strada dalle superiori, per le canzoni cantate sul tetto del condominio, per gli shooting in piscina, per le serate memorabili, per tutte le risate anche quando non c'era niente da ridere, per essere così razionale da farmi ragionare quando mi agito e così allegra da consolarmi quando sono triste.

A Carlotta e Valentina, le mie "sisterine", compagne di palestra, di cinema, di concerti, di mostre e di eventi. Grazie ragazze per essermi state tanto vicine sia fisicamente sia moralmente in questi anni, per capirmi al volo e condividere le mie passioni, per consigliarmi e accompagnarmi sempre ovunque (anche con Jordan e la Peggy).

A Romina, l'amica più cara dai tempi delle medie, colei che mi chiama nel cuore della notte per farmi gli auguri di compleanno al momento giusto, quella che c'è sempre stata e ci sarà sempre. Grazie tesoro perché anche se ci vediamo poco a causa delle nostre vite super impegnate e della nostra innata pigrizia, so che potremo sempre contare l'una sull'altra.

A Chloé, Federica, Virginia, Marta e Michela, le mie amate compagne della triennale, le mie studentesse disperate con cui ho condiviso degli anni bellissimi. Grazie ragazze per le serate, per l'appoggio morale, per le mille risate, per i viaggi che abbiamo insieme fatto e per quelli che spero faremo. Non sarebbero stati lo stesso questi anni senza di voi.

A Giorgia, Cristina, Gianmarco, Veronica e a tutte le belle persone che ho conosciuto durante la magistrale. Grazie ragazzi per avermi accompagnata in questo percorso, per il supporto morale, per le risate e le chiacchierate insieme, mi mancherete molto ma so che non ci perderemo di vista.

A Carlo e Camilla, due amici speciali che da un decennio mi sono stati sempre vicini anche stando distanti, che mi hanno incoraggiata a non mollare, che mi

hanno coccolata e consolata in tutti i momenti no. Grazie Carlo per essere l'Amico su cui posso sempre contare per tutto, e grazie Camilla perché ogni volta che ci vediamo è come se ci fossimo viste il giorno prima.

A Iaddu, Cesi, Lori, Dechi, Guli, Gale e Milli, i miei ex compagni di liceo, pezzi indelebili del mio passato che conservo nel cuore. Grazie ragazzi per essere come siete, per le meme di Iaddu, per le canzoni di Cesi, per il Cuore D'oro di Lori, per il "Dolce Stil Novo" di Dechi, per il "mostro della palude" di Guli, per le battute di Gale e per l'altezza (?!) di Milli.

A Lorena, mi amiga española que fue un apoyo constante desde la primera vez que la conocí. Gracias Lorena por estar siempre ahí para mí, por ayudarme y animarme aunque estés lejos, por los mensajes de estímulo y las numerosas invitaciones a Madrid, ahora en serio tengo que venir!

A Tubi, Fela, Manuel, Veggio, Carpi e Jacopo, i miei amici di sempre, compagni di tante avventure. Grazie ragazzi perché mi siete stati vicini in questi lunghi anni, perché mi avete sopportata e mi avete trattata come una "princess". Grazie Tubi in particolare per tutte le serate e le feste che mi hai organizzato ma anche per avermi sempre tirata su nei numerosi momenti no.

A Prando, Pollo, Lack, Vita, Bisca, Piero e tutti gli altri che mi hanno supportata in questi anni. Grazie specialmente a te, Prando, per tutte le passeggiate con Alvin, le chiacchierate sotto casa e gli spritz offerti. E a te, Pollo, per avermi mandato meme tutti i giorni strappandomi un sorriso e per avermi sempre aiutata nella mia relazione complicata con la tecnologia.

A Bullo, Ronfa, Pag, Massimo, Brando e tutto il gruppo di Treviso, compagni di capodanni in montagna, di festini in casetta e di serate disagio. Grazie specialmente a te, Bullo, non solo per tutte le risate e le partite a Quiz Duello, ma anche per quei rari momenti di serietà in cui sei stato in grado di darmi buoni consigli.

Ad Alessandro e Carlo, due amici conosciuti di recente, che mi sono stati vicini nell'ultimo anno e mi hanno incoraggiata a raggiungere il traguardo. Grazie ragazzi per avermi dato tanto in poco tempo, sono stata fortunata ad incontrarvi.

Ad Alvise, un amico speciale da un po' di anni, che nel bene e nel male c'è sempre stato anche quando non c'era. Grazie Alvi per non essere mai sparito, per scherzare sempre ma saper essere serio quando c'è bisogno, per avermi confortata in alcuni momenti davvero brutti, per aver creduto in me e per avermi risollevato l'autostima quando era sotto zero.

A Sanya, Asia, Vieri e Francesco, una seconda famiglia da quando sono nata. Grazie Sanya per tutti i manicaretti che mi hai preparato, per le mille risate e per i consigli su Alvin. Grazie Asia e Vieri per l'appoggio che mi avete sempre dato, per esserci stati in tutti i momenti importanti, per essere cresciuti con me.

A Debora, una persona speciale e una cara amica di famiglia. Grazie Debby per tutti i messaggi di incoraggiamento, per il supporto morale e per tutti i tortellini che mi hai mandato.

Ad Elisa e alle mie tate Guerrina e Bruna, che si sono prese cura di me quando ero piccola. Grazie tate per essermi state sempre a fianco e per avermi cresciuta, e grazie soprattutto a te, Elisa, che mi hai sopportata in questi mesi.

A Maria, la mia vicina di casa, che ogni giorno mi ha incoraggiata. Grazie Maria per aver creduto in me e per essermi stata vicina non solo in questo periodo ma anche in tutti i momenti difficili degli ultimi anni.

A Judith, la mia insegnante di inglese. Grazie Judith per avermi aiutata a correggere gli errori e la pronuncia e per essere stata così gentile e disponibile con me.

A Claudia, un'insegnante speciale che mi ha dato il coraggio di cominciare a scrivere questa tesi. Grazie Claudia per avermi ascoltata e per essere riuscita a farmi superare le mie paure e le mie insicurezze insegnandomi a non mollare.

Alla Professoressa Vanon, la mia relatrice, una docente che stimo moltissimo. Grazie Professoressa per avermi dato fiducia e avermi guidata e consigliata nello scrivere la tesi.

A me stessa, che con l'aiuto di tutte le persone citate, sono riuscita a raggiungere questo traguardo per me davvero importante senza arrendermi. È stato molto faticoso, ma ne è valsa decisamente la pena.