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TESIS DOCTORAL

HOSTING THE GHOST: TRANSATLANTIC SPIRITUALISM AND THE RECEPTION OF RACIALIZED OTHERNESS FROM VICTORIAN TO NEO-VICTORIAN GOTHIC LITERATURE

DOCTORANDA:

CLARA CONTRERAS AMEDURI

DIRECTORAS:

DRA. ANA MANZANAS CALVO

DRA. MIRIAM BORHAM PUYAL

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Vº Bº de la Directora

Dra. Ana Manzanas Calvo
Dra. Miriam Borham Puyal

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the extent to which the interracial encounters depicted in Victorian spiritualist literature mirror the period's wavering conceptions of ethnic and geo-cultural difference. More specifically, it proposes that the reception of racialized Otherness in works affected by the nineteenth-century Occult revival does not always echo the allegedly ever-welcoming tenets of the spiritualist movement. In order to delve into the controversies posed by this disparity, it provides a comparative investigation of the influence of spiritualist thought on British an American Gothic texts, observing analogies and variations in the representation of mixed-raced female identity across the Atlantic. It also explores the incorporation of such motifs into Neo-Victorian fiction so as to evaluate contemporary reconfigurations of spiritualist imagery with relation to cross-cultural interactions.

Chapter One considers the transatlantic impact of the spiritualist movement, paying attention to its linkage to the socio-cultural transformations of the long nineteenth century. It takes into account the theoretical implications of spiritualist practices such as mediumship from the point of view of narrative hospitality and feminist criticism, thus laying the ground for the subsequent analysis. Chapter Two examines Pauline Hopkins' adaptation of spiritualist tropes into her Pan-Africanist novel *Of One Blood* (1902-1903). It argues that her use of the Occult in the redefinition of African-American personhood draws on previously established philosophical correlations between spiritualist and abolitionist circles in order to challenge racial discrimination. Chapter Three continues the exploration of racially liminal figures in Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897). It asserts that the spiritualist author endorses a fundamentally hostile approach to the Creole protagonist's heredity, expressed through recurrent allusions to eugenic ideology, thus demonstrating the problematic connections between nineteenth-century bio-determinist theories and the often seemingly

progressive spiritualist community. Lastly, Chapter Four inquires into Essie Fox's inclusion of Spiritualism into her Neo-Victorian novel *The Goddess and the Thief* (2013). It seeks to speculate upon the advantages and limitations of Fox's use of the Occult in her revision of imperialist discourse, proving how the presence of spiritualist elements in contemporary historical fiction does not necessarily guarantee a full recovery of forgotten non-Western voices. The conclusion draws together the main findings of the abovementioned chapters, pondering on the dilemmas encountered throughout this investigation and confirming the paradoxical nature of interracial relations in spiritualist literary culture.

RESUMEN

Esta tesis examina el reflejo de concepciones decimonónicas de diferencia étnica y geo-cultural en la representación de encuentros interraciales en la literatura espiritista victoriana. En concreto, propone cuestionar la recepción de la alteridad racializada en obras influidas por el ocultismo decimonónico, ya que éstas no siempre hacían eco de los aspectos acogedores de la doctrina espiritista. Con el fin de ahondar en las complicaciones planteadas por esta disparidad, se plantea un análisis comparativo de la huella del pensamiento espiritista en textos británicos y americanos, observando analogías y contrastes en la representación de la identidad femenina birracial a ambos lados del Atlántico. También se explora la incorporación de dichos temas a la literatura neo-victoriana para así evaluar reinterpretaciones contemporáneas de elementos espiritistas con relación a interacciones interculturales.

El primer capítulo considera el impacto transatlántico del movimiento espiritista, prestando atención a su vínculo con las transformaciones socioculturales del siglo diecinueve. Toma en cuenta las implicaciones teóricas de prácticas espiritistas como como la mediumnidad desde el punto de vista de la hospitalidad narrativa y la crítica feminista, estableciendo así el marco para el análisis de las novelas. El segundo capítulo examina la adaptación de motivos espiritistas en la obra panafricanista de Pauline Hopkins *Of One Blood* (1902-1903). Se argumenta que su uso del ocultismo en la redefinición de la identidad afroamericana se basa en correlaciones preestablecidas entre los círculos espiritistas y abolicionistas, desafiando así la discriminación racista. El tercer capítulo continúa la exploración de figuras marginales en la novela gótica de Florence Marryat *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897). Afirma que la autora espiritista adopta un acercamiento fundamentalmente hostil a la ascendencia afro-jamaicana de la protagonista, expresado mediante alusiones recurrentes a la ideología eugenésica, mostrando así las conexiones problemáticas entre la comunidad espiritista y teorías bio-deterministas de

la época. Finalmente, el cuarto capítulo investiga la inclusión del espiritismo en la novela neo-victoriana *The Goddess and the Thief* (2013), de Essie Fox. Se especula sobre los límites y ventajas del uso del ocultismo en la revisión del discurso imperialista, demostrando cómo la presencia de elementos espiritistas en la ficción histórica contemporánea no siempre garantiza la recuperación completa de voces no occidentales. Por último, las conclusiones reúnen las deducciones de dichos capítulos, ponderando sobre los dilemas planteados a lo largo de esta investigación para confirmar el carácter paradójico de las relaciones interraciales en la cultura literaria espiritista.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her.
>
> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

Since its early days, the modern spiritualist movement stimulated all sorts of encounters which cut across diverse areas of Victorian life. In addition to famously allowing conversations with the dead in hushed and dimly lit parlours, Spiritualism fuelled significant cultural, political, and literary exchanges across the Atlantic. In agreement with this migrant nature, the controversial contact with the uncanny performed by its practitioners went well beyond the walls of the séance room. Spiritualists transcended not only the veil between this life and the next, but also borders such as those between the private and public spheres, fantasy and reality, Self and Other, or the present and the past. By calling attention to performances like possession, automatic writing, or trance speaking – which allegedly connected the Victorian medium to voices from bygone eras and faraway places – it may be argued that this peculiar set of beliefs enabled its followers to internalize the voice of the Other by breaching the space-time continuum in order to take notice of the erased narratives of the departed.

Such a mediation of suppressed stories across geographic and historical boundaries allows a thorough reading of the dialogue with difference established around the séance table as a possible reflection of the rapid changes which characterized the period. Processes such as archaeological discoveries, colonial expansion, or the emergence of new theories on race and evolution placed the Victorians face to face with the Other in the form of unknown cultures and systems of belief. Among other attractions, Spiritualism offered its adherents the

possibility of processing the anxieties triggered by the aforementioned innovations in this particularly haunted era. Taking all this into account, a careful examination of spiritualist and spiritualist-related literary works through the lens of narrative hospitality may facilitate a broader understanding of the Victorian fear of identification with the invasive Other which permeates the borders between the familiar and the foreign.

This thesis is intended as an exploration of the interplay between the ideology embraced by the Victorian spiritualist movement and the reception of racialized Otherness from other lands and other times. As I hope to prove, the potential of Anglo-American spiritualist circles as a rich site for intercultural and transhistorical dialogue can be appreciated in the copious literary production associated with the movement. Whether on the earthly or the ethereal plane, Spiritualism englobed multiple acts of border crossing. Mediums, for instance, often led an itinerant lifestyle while travelling back and forth across the Atlantic to deliver trance lectures, advocate in favour of women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery, or visit other communities of believers. On the spiritual side, they also floated between "the debatable land between this world and the next".[1] The following study aims to investigate whether this sense of mobility and flexibility could also be applied to hosting the presence of the racial Other through the transgressive narrative strategies of the spiritualist séance.

As a ceremony which involved invoking diverse voices from the Great Unknown, the séance provided a suitable framework for the development of what Marlene Tromp qualifies as "disruptive storytelling" (10), that is to say, it created a context for diverse personalities to share their version of the past in order to challenge the rigid patterns of dominant culture. However, it is crucial to call into question which identities were more likely to be invited at the

[1] *The Debatable Land Between this World and the Next, with Illustrative Narrations* (1872) was written by the Scottish social reformer Robert Dale Owen in defense of spiritualist beliefs within the framework of comparative theology.

séance table, as well as which voices were granted participation in the polyphonic dialogue, and which were bound to fall into oblivion. In order to take into consideration the social and cultural implications of spiritualist mediums being spoken-through, it would be useful to explore what can be inferred in the mediumistic act of speaking for the Other in terms of narrative agency. Questions regarding *when* and *where* these voices came from play a decisive role in understanding the extent to which the body of literature influenced by Spiritualism reflects typically Victorian reactions to this encounter with the unfamiliar in the foreign and the past. As this study intends to show, the replies to these inquiries vary greatly, depending upon multiple factors, such as the contrasting uses of the Occult in Britain and the United States. This difference may also be attributed to aspects such as the authors' political agenda, personal history, ethnic community, intellectual context, or intended audience. By means of a comparative analysis of the diverse ways in which the impact of spiritualist discourse is made apparent in transatlantic novels concerning contrasting encounters with the racialized Other, it is possible to observe how the levels and forms of reception range from accounts of séance communication and the culturally significant act of conversing with ghosts, to less hospitable encounters in the appropriation, adaptation, and reinterpretation of stories and beliefs in spiritualist narrations.

Over the last two decades, Spiritualism has remained increasingly present in the field of Victorian and Neo-Victorian studies. An unwavering interest in the theme of the nineteenth-century Occult revival and its impact on the literature and society of the period is manifested in the growing body of scholarship marked by the influential work of critics such as Ann Braude, Alex Owen, Diana Basham, Marlene Tromp, and Janet Opphenheim. Their significant publications constitute main examples of a remarkable amount of critical sources which focus upon the role of Victorian women in Spiritualism. Although this fascinating line of inquiry shall be taken into consideration throughout the present thesis, the predominance of this theme

in studies of Victorian Occultism raises questions concerning what other oppressed voices may have participated in spiritualist discourse. In agreement with Christine Ferguson, placing the focus solely on the 'Woman Question' may have shifted scholarly attention from other under-addressed aspects of transatlantic spiritualist literature.[2] Bearing in mind the liminal – though recurrent – presence of ethnic minorities in the spiritualist context, and taking into consideration the influence of interdependent discourses on race and gender in Victorian thought, this thesis envisions the relevance of nineteenth-century conceptions of ethnic difference in the cross-cultural encounters resulting from spiritualist practices in order to decode the twofold invisibilization faced by mixed-raced women in Occult fiction. Issues such as colonial relations or the existence of racial stereotypes in the culture of the Occult remain a less accredited side of Anglo-American Spiritualism and constitute valuable factors to be taken into account when analysing the narrative agency of the foreign or racialized Other in the time and space axis, since the rhetoric of displacement expressed through spiritualist imagery provides a vehicle for verbalizing traumatic histories of genocide and slavery while simultaneously presenting ambivalent racial politics. Among the motivations behind this choice of focus lies Bridget Bennett's illuminative work *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-century American Literature* (2007), which skilfully confirms the need for further scholarly scrutiny on the rich intercultural value of Victorian Spiritualism. This thesis may therefore be read as a response to Bennett's invitation to pursue a transatlantic approach in the reconsideration of the complex dialogues which Spiritualism established across an Ocean brimming with apparitional identities.

[2] In her review "Recent Studies in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism", Ferguson points out the imbalance in favour of a "woman-focused reading of the subject" which presents "serious limitations" due to its "narrow and overly-homogenous presentation" of the varied political landscape of Anglo-American Spiritualism (432).

In her recently republished volume *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing* (2011), Hilary Grimes makes reference to how ghosts were "everywhere invading ways of Victorian thinking . . . about conceptions of traditional societal roles" (86). Their presence was not only made apparent in the immensely popular genre of supernatural fiction, but also in emerging scientific, anthropological, psychological, and philosophical discourses. Most notably, Grimes focuses her analysis on the spectral identities of Victorian women writers and the psychological underpinnings which linked their ghost stories to the invisibilized act of 'ghostwriting'. Originally, 'ghostwriting' was a spiritualist term used to describe the act of channelling written messages from the souls of the deceased through an entranced medium. Following the introduction of this notion as a theoretical concept in Neo-Victorian studies by Hilary Schor, who employs it to compare the abovementioned esoteric practice to the recovery of Victorian literary genres by contemporary novelists (237),[3] spiritualist discourse seems to have infiltrated the sphere of academic research, just as Victorian literary pages were possessed by phantoms. Tatiana Kontou, Diana Wallace, Helen Davies, Rosario Arias, and Patricia Pulham, among other scholars, examine the allegorical possibilities of interpreting mediumship as literary production, the text as a materialized spirit or a haunted entity, and mesmeric trance as a form of transmission of Victorian voices. The following study draws upon this body of theory and shall be carried out through the employment of tropes belonging to spiritualist discourse as tools for literary criticism. While taking into account the aforementioned metaphorical figures, it may be useful to consider further applications of the spiritualist glossary. For instance, what mediums like Andrew Jackson Davis denominated "travelling clairvoyance" encapsulates the time and space breaching which characterizes the intricate dynamics of reception and mediation in Anglo-American spiritualist culture

[3] Arias and Pulham have identified this case as the first study on Neo-Victorian fiction to apply the idea of 'ghostwriting' to literary criticism (20).

(Kuzmeskus 2016). Considering such concepts in the light of necessary contributions from the fields of reception and cultural studies, border theory, and narrative hospitality shall promote an insightful reading of the encounter with the racial and geo-cultural Other in Occult fiction.

More specifically, this analysis focuses upon the configuration of mixed-raced female protagonists as embodiments of the blurred barriers between Self and Other in spiritualist-related literature. The three works of fiction which conform the main object of this study provide consistent evidence of the intricate variety of interracial, intercultural, and intertextual interactions within the spiritualist framework. Each narrative is centred around an enigmatic Gothic heroine whose literal or symbolic mediumistic abilities shed light upon the complexities of her biracial and bicultural identity, thus unveiling the phantom of the non-white Other possessing the notion of *fin-de-siècle* British or American personhood. In this way, the female protagonists of Pauline Hopkins' Pan-Africanist Occult romance *Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self* (1902-1903), Florence Marryat's Late Victorian Gothic novel *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), and the relatively recent Neo-Victorian text *The Goddess and the Thief*, by Essie Fox (2013), share a diasporic existence in their marginal conditions. All three are caught between two contrasting worlds, simultaneously haunted by their foreign ancestry while undermining the stability of Victorian conceptions of race, Self, and culture: Hopkins' Dianthe Lusk, an African-American former slave in Reconstruction Boston, experiences entranced visions of her black maternal heritage as she struggles to sort out her erased identity; Marryat's Harriet Brandt channels her Jamaican motherland while attempting to be acknowledged as purely English upon her troubling arrival to the metropolis; and Fox's Alice Willoughby, uprooted from her home in India, voices her South Asian mother's stories and transmits messages from colonized subjects through her mediumship. Furthermore, given the prevalence of supernaturalized cross-ethnic matrilineal connections in these novels, which have never been subjected to a comparative analysis within the scholarly framework of literary Victorian Spiritualism, this

thesis pays attention to the relevance of such cross-generational links in the medium's function as a bridge into the sphere of racialized and gendered difference. Narrative hospitality towards the liminal Other therefore entails, among other aspects, hosting the racial and cultural hybridity encompassed by the mother's voice. By channelling their motherland through their mixed-raced heredity, the trials and tribulations of these three Gothic heroines raise issues concerning Victorian configurations of blood, ethnicity, and traumatic collective and personal histories, manifested through the spiritualist lens in the form of possessed bodies and, by metonymy, invaded territories. For this reason, the blurring of internal and external boundaries triggered by the spiritualist reception of the Other within the Self deserves particular attention in the study of the abovementioned texts, since it serves as an effective tool to decode the socio-cultural transformations of the *fin-de-siècle* transatlantic context, as well as their literary adaptations in the modern day.

The structure of the present work intends to follow the transatlantic and transhistorical trail of Spiritualism, from its origins in nineteenth-century America, moving on to Victorian England, and, lastly, touching upon its contemporary invocation in the Neo-Victorian novel. Accordingly, the first chapter provides an introduction to the Spiritualist movement and its role as a framework for transcultural contact throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, so as to expose the relevance of this pseudo-religion in the period's intellectual background. This initial section builds on the edifying work of previous academics in order to outline the theoretical tools which will allow reading literary Spiritualism through the critical lens of narrative hospitality, thus combining this scholarly interpretation with a discussion of diverse factors which contextualise the representation of spiritualist practices in Victorian texts. Excerpts belonging to newspaper articles, essays, pamphlets, 'non-fictional' accounts of

séances,[4] medical treatises, or investigations in the fields of parapsychology and anthropology are mentioned to document a wide range of public reactions to Spiritualism which shall be taken into consideration in relation to the reception of Otherness in Victorian thought.

Secondly, this study focuses upon Pauline Hopkins' adaptation of spiritualist culture in her portrayal of the quest for a coherent African-American identity in her serialized novel *Of One Blood*. In order to decode the text's intricate connections between the nineteenth-century Occult revival and the transformations in cross-racial relations in postbellum America, this chapter first traces the existence of such encounters, starting with collaborations between spiritualist abolitionists and the African-American community in the early days of the movement, and moving on to the political involvement and literary production of black authors who, like Hopkins, were closely linked to spiritualist circles. With the purpose of evaluating the possible advantages and diverse uses of spiritualist discourse in African-American literature and culture, this section offers examples of non-canonical works in which the Occult is adapted as a means of negotiating racial identity and voicing the repressed history of the African diaspora. Moreover, emphasis is placed on the shifting conceptions of race in the postbellum United States so as to contextualize Hopkins' representation of biracial Americans whose in-betweenness poses a central dilemma in the narrative. Aspects such as esoteric practices in black Atlantic culture or the common points between Anglo-American Spiritualism and African spirituality are taken into account in order to base an analysis of the main characters of *Of One Blood*. Considering the intricate symbolism surrounding the concept of blood in nineteenth-century understandings of racial difference, this second chapter intends to scrutinize

[4] Although the vast majority of spiritualist mediums were sooner or later proven to be completely fraudulent, it is not my point to speculate on the veracity of paranormal phenomena, but rather to concentrate upon the rich narratives surrounding spiritualist cultural production from the perspective of literary analysis. That is to say, the concept of supernatural apparitions will be approached from a theoretical point of view and treated as an important element of Victorian popular belief, independently from the fictional or non-fictional nature of the texts in question.

Hopkins' use of this typically Gothic element within the framework of the Occult, which plays a central role in the empowering reinterpretation of black blood through the characters' diverse reactions to the self-discovery of their African heredity. In accordance with the multiple acts of trespassing manifested through spiritualist imagery in the text, such unveilings of ancestry blur the subtle boundaries between Self and Other, thus reshaping nineteenth-century readings of what it meant to be simultaneously African and American. Lastly, particular attention is paid to the central mediumistic role of Dianthe Lusk in Hopkins' textual internalization and acceptance of the African Other within the American Self through the medium's participation in a spectral matrilineal discourse which eventually guides the three main characters across the African diaspora, back to their ancestral motherland.

Crossing over to the other side of the Atlantic, the subsequent chapter explores the much less hospitable reception of racial Otherness in *The Blood of the Vampire,* a turn-of-the-century Gothic tale by the spiritualist author and medium Florence Marryat which reflects how the problematic connections between Britain and its colonial territories led to questionable representations of non-white imperial subjects as simultaneously threatening and mystifying entities in spiritualist texts and further branches of supernatural literature. Following the comparative analysis proposed in this thesis, this section begins with an evaluation of the possible similarities and contrasts between American and British forms of Occultism, taking into account the transatlantic impact of Spiritualism, and considering how the Late Victorian context into which the movement was received may account for certain differences between Hopkins' and Marryat's approaches to the unfamiliar.

Next, in pursuance of a thorough examination of configurations of the foreign Other as an intrusive presence in the collective imaginary, the present work proceeds to discuss crucial historical changes whose haunting impact is made apparent in Marryat's novel, which, like *Of One Blood,* responds to a swiftly changing sociocultural background, projected onto the text's

West Indian protagonist. For this reason, events such as the loss of colonial possessions, and, particularly, the decay of British imperial hegemony in Jamaica, are described in relation to consequent alterations in Victorian attitudes to race. Moreover, chapter three supplies a series of examples of the way in which the dialogue between Britain and its colonized cultures adopted diverse shapes throughout the development of Occult fiction. Before commenting on the influence of such transformations on diverse intersections between imperialism and the Occult in the cultural landscape of Victorian England, this study moves on to exploring equally unwelcoming responses to colonized Otherness among pages of British Occult fiction, particularly in the form of what Patrick Brantlinger identifies as 'imperial Gothic'. Keeping in mind Stephen D. Arata's notion of reverse colonization within this literary genre, subsequent sections of this third chapter concentrate on analysing recurrent themes of degeneracy, barbarism, and miscegenation as support for Marryat's characterization of the West Indian protagonist, Harriet Brandt, as a phantasmal presence whose interracial parentage evokes a much-feared blurring of the boundaries between Self and Other. Part of this argumentation is dedicated to the relevance of nineteenth-century theories of eugenics and pangenesis in *The Blood of the Vampire,* thus exposing the paradoxes posed by the extent to which such strictly hereditarian views on racial difference were shared by members of the allegedly hospitable spiritualist community.

Maintaining a comparison with Hopkins' mixed-raced Gothic heroine, the second part of this chapter delves into the multifaceted transgressive attributes which contribute to Harriet Brandt's liminal position as simultaneously haunted by her Creole heredity – which manifests itself in trancelike relapses into her matrilineal 'savage' nature – and haunting the borders of British national identity by her multicultural and multiracial background. Finally, this section comments upon how, despite Marryat's close involvement with the apparently hospitable context of Spiritualism, and, in contrast with Dianthe Lusk's acceptance of her black

matrilineal heritage, the reception of Otherness in *The Blood of the Vampire* reveals a clear discomfort towards African ancestry and Britain's troubling colonial past, manifested in the protagonist's rejection of the maternal figure.

The final chapter of this thesis concentrates on the function of spiritualist practices in the reception and reinterpretation of invisibilized colonized voices in Essie Fox's exoticized Gothic tale *The Goddess and the Thief*. Through the flexible boundaries of Alice Willoughby's mediumistic mind and mixed-raced body, this Neo-Victorian narrative offers diverse levels of interaction between Spiritualism and the reception of the colonized Other. In order to delve into Fox's recycling of Victorian spiritualist imagery to channel the untold narratives of Indian colonial subjects, the first section draws on previous academic commentaries on the similarities between the spiritualist medium and the writer of contemporary historical fiction to focus upon the advantageous resources which the nineteenth-century Occult revival provides for the recurrent trope of recovering the lost voices of oppressed minorities in Neo-Victorian literature.

Subsequently, the present works deals with present-day rewritings which not only convey new forms of welcoming the Victorian past into the text, but also summon the figurative ghosts of non-white imperial subjects, thus generating revisionist reinterpretations that challenge the supremacist grand narratives of Western culture. Moreover, this section takes notice of how, in contrast with its Victorian predecessors, the Neo-Victorian novel presents a relative absence of the intersection between Spiritualism and matters concerning race, imperialism, and border-crossing. Such disparities enhance the significance of *The Goddess and the Thief* in relation to its insightful combination of Victorian Spiritualism and Orientalism, a rare blending in Neo-Victorian fiction which offers a window into the intricate connections between both spheres of nineteenth-century culture. This section also intends to take into account postcolonial considerations which in order to discern the extent to which Fox's adaptation and appropriation of Hindu mysticism to emphasize the culturally syncretic aspects

of Anglo-American Spiritualism may be read, on the one hand, as a fully anti-imperialist visibilization of the medium's Indian side, or if, on the other hand, such a narrative constitutes a limited act of speaking for the Other.

Given the absence of scholarly publications on *The Goddess and the Thief*, the abovementioned observations constitute the bases of my subsequent analysis of the protagonist's ambivalent reception of her Indian heredity throughout Fox's polyphonic narrative. In order to trace her mediumistic internalization of the Other within the Self, such an interpretation focuses upon Alice Willoughby's role as a bridge between colonizer and colonized, as well as on her potential to fall into trance states and channel, for instance, the forgotten voice of the dethroned Maharaja Duleep Singh, thus challenging the silencing policies of British imperial hegemony.

Further sections of the present study expose how the mixed-raced protagonist's mediumship disrupts the binary dichotomies separating the Eastern Other from the Western Self by opening her consciousness to flashbacks, telepathic accounts, and mystical visions connected to her beloved and exoticized homeland. Lastly, mirroring the structure followed in the two previous chapters, the final part of this analysis is dedicated to the Alice's esoteric and diasporic reconstruction of her Indian mother's stories in what can be read as a subversive reversion of Western representations of South Asian spiritualities. In this way, Fox's syncretic adaptation of Victorian Spiritualism may be shaped by contemporary postcolonial concerns, as it conforms a favourable device in the heroine's quest for her matrilineal heritage and possible reconciliation with her inherent Otherness.

As I hope to prove, evidence gained through a careful evaluation of literary works influenced by the nineteenth-century Occult revival may be used as support to challenge the widespread conception of Spiritualism as a homogenously progressive ideology. Instead of consistently mirroring the apparently welcoming policies of the spiritualist séance, Pauline

Hopkins', Florence Marryat's, and Essie Fox's novels present a rich and diverse spectrum involving varying degrees of narrative hospitality towards the racialized Other across time and space. Despite being separated by transatlantic, transcultural, and transhistorical boundaries, the works of these New Women and Neo-Victorian novelists provide insight into a less accredited side of spiritualist discourse, one that encompasses numerous, significant nineteenth-century concerns, and through which the séance table may function as a window (or, perhaps, a mirror) into the Victorians' conceptions of their past and their place in a rapidly shifting world.

I. Communing with the Other(ed) Side: Dealing with Difference in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism

1.1 The Politics of Table-Turning: A Brief Overview of Anglo-American Spiritualism

1.1.1 Origins and Transatlantic Impact

On the first page of his acclaimed novel *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Nathaniel Hawthorne categorized mediumship, mesmerism, and clairvoyance as either the "birth of a new science, or the revival of an old humbug" (9), thus englobing the main opposing approaches to the spiritualist craze which was spreading across American society. Two centuries after the first monographs on this peculiar phenomenon,[5] Victorian Spiritualism continues to elude classification and cause scholarly dissent. As noted by Molly McGarry, the significant cultural impact of the spiritualist movement on the second half of the nineteenth century has long been neglected by historians as a footnote in most studies on the period (4). Its peculiar combination of obscure pseudo-sciences, superstition, faith, and theatrical performance complicates its simultaneous allocation among the areas of popular culture, psychology, and theology. Furthermore, the movement's refusal of orthodoxy and hierarchical organization led to a vastly heterogeneous spectrum of ideologies and practices among which it is difficult to draw sharp boundaries.[6] A third aspect which contributes to the invisibility of spiritualist beliefs in official accounts of the Victorian era is the overlooked role of the supernatural in social sciences. Yet, in agreement with Paul Christopher Johnson, examining the ways in which the population thinks and writes about otherworldly agents such as ghosts in a specific historical period can

[5] Spiritualist history and autobiography were an essential part of the movement's literary production. Emma Hardinge Britten's *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of Spirits* (1869), Simon Byron Brittan's *A Discussion of the Facts and Philosophy of Ancient and Modern Spiritualism* (1853), and Robert Dale Owen's *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860) constitute a few examples.

[6] Ann Braude clarifies that Spiritualism presents "certain problems for the researcher", since it "had no orthodoxy because it had no governing body or power that could label a subgroup as heterodox", for which it "never gave rise to permanent institutions of any consequence" (7).

certainly enrich our understanding of its society (394). As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, contemporary historiography is usually based on the assumption of an "empty, secular, and homogenous time . . . bereft of gods and spirits" ("Pasts" 113), and thus excludes what the study of the supernatural can teach historians, anthropologists, cultural theorists, and literary critics about the communal practices and beliefs that shaped the culture in question.[7] A parallel inquiry is posed by Molly McGarry in her introduction to *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America*. Challenging the widespread interpretation of the nineteenth century as an age of materialism and scientific inquiry during which religious beliefs were being replaced by cultural values and institutions (Walker Howe 13),[8] McGarry reveals a contrasting side of Antebellum and Reconstruction America by calling attention to the public presence of Spiritualism and its active role in political reforms:

> Scholars have long contended that in the last half of the nineteenth century, Americans shifted their faith to science and placed their belief in an ordered public sphere . . . In contrast to this narrative of religious decline . . . I have found that Spiritualism not only thrived but also continued to engage with social questions through the 1870's and beyond (McGarry 4).

Therefore, far from being a marginal trend in Victorian popular literature, spiritualist texts constituted a significant cultural and, even, political product, and can therefore be

[7] Chakrabarty convincingly highlights the relevance of the theoretical and practical uses of the supernatural in cultural studies: "as we social scientists often forget, gods and spirits are not dependent on human beliefs for their own existence; what brings them to presence are our practices" ("Pasts" 112).

[8] This view is also manifested in the general agreement on identifying the mid-nineteenth-century crisis of faith as the main cause behind the birth of Spiritualism: "Based on the view that contact with the spirits of the dead provided empirical proof of the immortality of the soul, American Spiritualism appealed to people in search of new justification for a wavering faith" (Braude 4). Although the reevaluation of traditional beliefs was certainly an immensely relevant factor in the emergence of the movement, it is also necessary to bear in mind that American Spiritualism itself was "the late-blooming child of the Second Great Awakening" (Gutierrez 768), a period characterized by its Protestant religious revivals. Despite its unorthodox tenets, the spiritualist congregation originated in relative syncretism with Christian groups such as the Quakers, Shakers, Unitarians, and Universalists (Cox 16), as a clergyman argued in 1900: "Indeed, Spiritualism fitted very nicely into Christianity . . . [it] had rehabilitated the Bible . . . [we] were asked to believe in miracles and at the same time taught that, outside the Bible records, nothing supernatural ever happened . . . But . . . people now believed in the Bible because of Spiritualism" (qtd. in Dickerson 22). This by no means implies that the intricate sources behind the rise of the spiritualist movement relied exclusively on Christian roots, but observing such interreligious connections reveals a wide spectrum of aspects which often remain unjustified in more secularized accounts of nineteenth-century Spiritualism.

appreciated as a valuable source of information on the era's dilemmas concerning issues such as the "Woman Question". Further evidence of the considerable relevance of Spiritualism in the Anglo-American mid-nineteenth century can be appreciated in its remarkable and swiftly growing amount of adherents. In fact, by 1856 the movement had become so popular that the Transcendentalist theologian Theodore Parker speculated: "it seems more likely that Spiritualism would become the religion of America than in 156 that Christianity would become the religion of the Roman Empire" (qtd. in Moore 4). Spiritualism's most fervent advocates certainly fancied there existed chances of their movement becoming "the religion of America". In 1869, the British spiritualist medium Emma Hardinge Britten proudly declared that "according to the last statistical accounts of this movement . . . Spiritualism now numbers eleven millions of persons on the American continent!" (13); and claimed the presence of one hundred million believers worldwide. According to Catherine Albanese's more recent report, the authentic number of spiritualists was possibly closer to the modest sum of one million.[9] However, as Albanese points out, this figure was nonetheless outstanding in the twenty-eight million American population of the period (221).

Yet the question remains of how a series of eccentric gatherings around turning tables became a new religion, spreading to possess followers even today.[10] Scholars have sought to solve this mystery through ongoing debates concerning the cultural influences behind the emergence of the movement. Most interpretations generally agree on locating its genesis in what McGarry denominates "the ghost story of the long nineteenth century" (1), that is to say,

[9] In order to provide an accurate representation of the history of Spiritualism, one must keep in mind Ann Braude's comments on the unreliability of such calculations: "Unfortunately, any attempt to estimate the numerical scope of the movement is rendered questionable at best by Spiritualists' aversion to organization . . . The 1890 census reported forti-five thousand Spiritualists in thirty-nine states . . . but this included only those formally affiliated with an organized society . . . In any case, Spiritualism's influence was hardly limited to its adherents" (25-26).

[10] Nowadays, there still exist some spiritualist communities such as the Church of the Comforter in Summerland (Santa Barbara, California), named after the spiritualist afterlife in 1891; or the Spiritualists' National Union in the United Kingdom, founded in 1902.

the then famous "Rochester rappings", which conform, as Bennett clarifies, the founding myth of the spiritualist religion (28).

In 1848, two sisters named Catherine and Margaret Fox sparked their fellow citizens' curiosity when they announced they could speak to the dead (Lewis 1850). These twelve and fourteen-year-old girls assured they had established communication with the spirit of a murdered peddler by responding to the mysterious raps and bumps produced in their family home in Hydesville, New York. Neighbours soon started gathering around the Fox household to witness further conversations with ghosts through what quickly came to be known as the 'spiritual telegraph'.[11] The young mediums and their followers claimed to have developed a system by means of which the spirits would either rap in response to yes-no questions, or spell out messages by rapping to a recited alphabet (Braude 11). A year later, they made their first public appearance in Rochester's Corinthian Hall to display their mediumistic powers before moving on to similar demonstrations in New York City, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Ohio.[12]

At the same time skeptics were being convinced by Catherine and Margaret's performances, further mediums began appearing across the country (and across the Ocean), and an increasing number of families and religious communities started welcoming voices from the Other Side into their parlours. As the American novelist William Dean Howells recalled, Spiritualism was "rife in every second house in the village, with manifestations by rappings, table-tippings, and oral and written messages from another world through psychics of either sex, but oftenest . . . young girls" (106). It was not until 1888 that the Fox sisters eventually

[11] The Fox sisters began to transmit messages from the Otherworld only four years after Samuel Morse sent the first electric telegraph message. Among other references to scientific and technological innovations, spiritualists frequently used the image of the telegraph as a metaphor for spirit communication, thus illustrating how the latter could travel across space. Its use was so recurrent that it gave name to one of the earliest spiritualist newspapers: *The Spiritual Telegraph* (1852 - 1860).

[12] Catherine Fox to John Fox, 26 October 1850. *Amy and Isaac Post Family Papers*, qtd. in Braude 17.

confessed their fraud and admitted they had produced the ghostly raps by cracking their knee and toe joints (Davenport 84, 90). Certainly damaged by this revelation, Anglo-American Spiritualism fell into decline and was gradually replaced by Theosophy, its successor in the Occult revival (Leonard 129).

The above summary constitutes what can be considered the very basic history of modern Spiritualism. However, as scholars such as Ferguson note, this simple narration is misleading, "like most myths of origin and decline" (*Determined Spirits* 6). Logie Barrow was among the first academics to challenge the widespread interpretation of the "Rochester rappings" as the exclusive source of Anglo-American Spiritualism. In his monograph *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910,* he takes into account various social, political, and economic factors which anticipated the rise of the movement, thus exposing the common misinterpretation of its heterogeneous roots: "very broadly, we should talk less in terms of lines of descent than of points of blur and tension, between, say, Owenism, herbalism, Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Methodism, Chartism and other isms" (10). It would therefore be more convenient, for instance, to consider how the interconnected cultural backgrounds of Britain and the United States contributed to the success experienced by the Fox sisters.

Spirit communication had been present in certain Anglo-American intellectual circles long before the "Rochester rappings". By observing what Bennett calls the "prehistory of spiritualism" ("Sacred Theatres" 119), it is possible to appreciate how the development of disciplines like Mesmerism or Swedenborgianism during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was mirrored in spiritualist beliefs.[13] Swedenborgians were among the alternative

[13] As an example, only a year before the "Rochester rappings", Andrew Jackson Davis claimed to experience mystical visions in *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations and a Voice to Mankind* (1847), a text with clear Swedenborgian influences (Tryphonopoulos 43).

religious groups which were familiar with spirit communion, along with the Quaker and Shaker traditions.[14] Moreover, the spiritualist movement was heavily influenced by its interaction with the American Second Great Awakening (1800-1858).[15] As a site of rich religious plurality during this revival, the "Burned-over District" where the Fox sisters resided was clearly a fertile ground for Spiritualism to prosper in.[16]

Other scholars have pointed out a much more overlooked side of the history of Spiritualism by emphasizing the need for a transatlantic approach in order to grasp the full elaboration and expansion of the movement:

> A number of historians have argued that spiritualism emerged in America as a discrete cultural phenomenon which needs to be read within its American context in order to make sense of its myth of origin – the 'Rochester rappings' of 1848 . . . Such an approach, however, does not sufficiently account for the complexities of spiritualism's inheritance; it does not consider the heterogeneity of a movement that draws from both sides of the Atlantic, and from European Christian traditions as well as Native American religious practices and, crucially, from the religious beliefs of slaves (Bennett, "Crossing Over" 102).

Benett's argument is one of utmost significance for the present scope of study, since it allows a broader reading of the dynamics of reception in the literary and cultural exchanges taking place in the spiritualist network. The importance of this cross-cultural view has also been mentioned by Ferguson in her study on Spiritualism and nineteenth-century scientific racism (*Determined Spirits* 7); as well as by Geoffrey Nelson, who skilfully underlines the

[14] Stephen J. Stein identifies spirit manifestations and spirit possession as characteristic elements in Shaker religious consciousness, manifested especially during the "Era of Manifestations" between 1837 and the mid-eighteen-fifties (174).

[15] Common traits between Spiritualism and some American religious movements originated during the Second Great Awakening include millennialist and utopian views of the world (Kerr 11), an appeal to emotion as a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism (Stokes 41), emphasis on communal gatherings (Hankins 7), and "unbroken communication" with the supernatural (Braude 13).

[16] This term was borrowed by the historian Whitney Cross in 1950 from *Memoirs of Reverend Charles G. Finney, the American Evangelist* (1876) and is now employed to refer to the Western and central regions of New York where the reforms and religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening took place during the first half of the nineteenth century. As Rachel Cope clarifies, this epithet reflects "a time and place that was repeatedly burned by the fires of revivalism" (32). Religious traditions such as Mormonism and Seventh-Day Adventism also originated in this context. Spiritualism was therefore fomented by an environment which was already highly receptive towards the supernatural.

common traits between spiritualist practices and the traditional belies of ethnic minorities, such as Native Americans and slaves of African descent (55, 45). Moreover, supporting this claim, Barrow comments upon the presence of black mediums in spiritualist circles in the American South as a possible result of the contributions of Africans to the religious culture of English-speaking countries around the Atlantic basin (2). However, it is essential to consider the extent to which these influences were acknowledged by nineteenth-century spiritualist historians. Although they displayed a varied spectrum of reactions to non-Western religions, American and British spiritualists were generally "more interested in the site of the séance, and the revelations it might contain, rather than its cultural origins" (Bennett, "Crossing Over" 102). With or without awareness of its roots, Spiritualism's syncretic combination of foreign rituals undoubtedly catered to the public demand for sensation and exoticism in Antebellum America and Victorian England.

1.1.2 Spiritualism in Victorian Literature and Culture

Despite being broadly acknowledged as the era of literary realism and scientific development, the Victorian period was also characterized by its prolific amount of supernatural texts, which abounded in references to ghosts and ghost-seers. Evidence presented in the form of spiritualist periodicals, "spirit" daguerreotypes, and "ghost-written" literature suggests that spectres were not considered exclusive to the realm of fiction.[17] Spiritualism harmonized wonderfully with the acute concerns around death and the uncanny in Antebellum America and Victorian England, where popular culture was brimming with consolation literature, mourning jewellery, and post-mortem photographs. The new spiritualist trend travelled to British soil

[17] Frederick Hudson introduced spirit photography in Britain in 1872, in collaboration with the medium Georgiana Houghton, producing fraudulent photographs which were supposed to capture ghostly images. For more information on Spiritualism and photography, see Clément Chéroux's *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (2005).

with the arrival of the American medium Maria Hayden, after which levitating tables and messages from the beyond became a fashionable entertainment in Victorian society.[18] As Helen Sword explains, numerous eminent figures of the day manifested a clear fascination for the mysteries of the Other World. Writers such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Lewis Carroll, Christina Rossetti, Rudyard Kipling, Alfred Lord Tennyson, or Elizabeth Barrett-Browning dared to experiment with spiritualist séances, manifesting contrasting reactions to phantasmal phenomena (5).[19] George Eliot, for instance, denounced Spiritualism as "the most painful form of the lowest charlatanerie" (48-49); whereas Conan Doyle, a famously convinced spiritualist, became an enthusiastic advocate for the movement by joining the Society for Psychical Research, giving lectures in defence of his beliefs, and publishing a prolific amount of works on the study of the paranormal.[20] Well-respected scientists like Oliver Lodge or Alfred Russel Wallace also fell under the spell of psychic phenomena, and even Queen Victoria consulted mediums while mourning the death of Prince Albert (Brennan 87).

Ironically, part of the reason behind the Victorians' infatuation with invisible entities lies in the fact that Spiritualism emerged during an age in which scientific advances were unsettling the rigidity of the material world (Dickerson 21). Photography and other technological innovations blurred the line between appearance and reality (Leman 16), the development of the railway system during the 1840's had "practically reduced the dimensions of the earth",[21] and discoveries such as Louis Pasteur's germ theory of disease proved the

[18] Georgina Byrne describes the reception of Spiritualism in England as "a strange and fascinating American import" that nonetheless shared "long-established cultural tropes" with its host country (22).

[19] Evidence of Tennyson's involvement with the Society for Psychical Research is not provided by Sword, but by Vanessa Dickerson (*Victorian Ghosts* 23).

[20] Texts such as *The New Revelation* (1917), *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (1921), *Our American Adventure* (1923), and *The History of Spiritualism* (1926) constitute some examples of Conan Doyle's involvement with Spiritualism and psychical research. His interest in this field is amply addressed in the recent Neo-Victorian ITV show *Houdini & Doyle* (2016).

[21] Comment published in the *Illustrated London News*. Issue 1282. 15 October 1864. 392. *Illustrated London News Historical Archive*. Accessed 24-02-2018. Access provided by the Bodleian Libraries of the University of Oxford. Web.

existence of a reality beyond the limits of human perception, a fact that some Victorians interpreted as evidence of the supernatural plane: "How many of us have seen the microbe that kills?", questioned the controversial British journalist William Thomas Stead, "There are at least as many persons who testify they have seen apparitions as there are men of science who have examined the microbe" (17, 52).[22] Consequently, ghosts were disrupting geo-cultural and temporal barriers precisely because such boundaries seemed more fragile than ever before.

As a highly notorious subculture, Spiritualism was considerably well received in the Victorian text. Its unorthodox philosophy and sensationalist press had a powerful impact on the literary imagination and provided numerous novelists with abundant material, whether as a cause of amusement in satirical responses to the movement, or as a source of inspiration for supernatural fiction. In his informative book *Mediums, and Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals* (1972), Howard Kerr traces the development of what he denominates "seánce burlesque" texts in which American authors such as Mark Twain, James Russell Lowell, and Henry James, provided the first literary reactions to the rise of Spiritualism (58-82). Most importantly, spiritualist practitioners contributed a substantial body of literature which "accounted for the sale of fifty thousand books and fifty thousand pamphlets every year", ranging from a very active press to mediumistic autobiographies and spirit-dictated texts (Braude 26).[23] For instance, certain spiritualist mediums claimed to invoke the creative energies of dead writers in order to publish their own literary production. The remarkable list of eminent ghosts who allegedly wished to have their words transcribed included Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Lord Byron, Plato, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, and Percy Shelley (Kerr

[22] Having been hailed as the "St. Paul of Spiritualism" during his first séance (Eckley 161), Stead manifested his immense interest for psychic phenomena in numerous publications in defence of the spiritualist movement, the best known being *After Death, Or Letters from Julia* (1910).

[23] Braude mentions how the *American Booksellers Guide* of 1871 advised its readers not to overlook the economic benefits of selling spiritualist literature as evidence of the extent to which "hardly any major novelist of the period could resist Spiritualism's dramatic possibilities" (26-27).

16). One of the most frequent visitors at what Nathaniel Parker Willis humorously called "post-mortuum *soirées*" was Charles Dickens,[24] whose unfinished last novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) became a renowned case of 'ghostwriting' when the American printer Thomas Power James claimed to have completed the work under its deceased author's instructions (Seltzer 2016). Further examples include the celebrated trance poet Lizzie Doten, who composed 'spirit-poems' dictated by Edgar Allan Poe, William Shakespeare, and Robert Burns through automatic writing for her collection *Poems from the Inner Life* (1865). Far from being the only women writers to benefit from the Occult revival, literary mediums such as Doten represent valuable examples of the diverse connections between mediumship and the act of writing with relation to issues of narrative authority, mediated voices, and the anxiety of authorship. Accordingly, the following section examines the significance of the medium's 'ghostwriting' by applying it to the reception of the unknown into the text and the haunted parlour.

1.2 Voicing the Other in the Séance Narrative: Theoretical Considerations

1.2.1 Mediumship: Hosting and Ghostwriting Otherness

Supernatural fiction was an extremely popular genre among women writers during the Victorian period, attracting both spiritualist and non-spiritualist authors. In fact, according to Jessica Amanda Salmonsen, seventy per cent of the ghost stories published in British and American magazines came from a female pen (10). This success is undoubtedly reflected in the works of a great number of spiritualist women who turned to literary production, much of which was written under alleged spirit guidance. One particularly remarkable instance is that of Mary Danna Shindler, who claimed to have directly asked ghosts during a séance "Do you

[24] Willis' observation appears in his newspaper *Home Journals, The Rag-Bag*, New York, 1855 (Kerr 4).

wish me to write the work I am thinking of?", to which they replied, "Yes – go on; it will sell well" (*Banner of Light*, 18 September 1875, 1). Throughout the long nineteenth century, mediums and trance speakers inscribed a prolific legacy in the form of sensation novels as in the case of Marryat's *The Dead Man's Message: An Occult Romance* (1871) and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' acclaimed trilogy *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *Beyond the Gates* (1883), and *The Gates Between* (1887); short stories as those compiled by Helena P. Blavatsky in *Nightmare Tales* (1907); autobiographical accounts such as Elizabeth d'Espérance's *Shadow Land or Light from the Other Side* (1897) and Sophia de Morgan's *From Matter to Spirit* (1863); or poetry collections like Achsa W. Sprague's *The Poet and Other Poems* (1865). Although certain authors employed spiritualist culture for aesthetic purposes, the aim of most spiritualist writings was to advocate for the movement's beliefs. For example, the acclaimed American medium Cora L.V. Richmond's testimonial *My Experiences While Out of My Body and My Return After Many Days* (1915),[25] or Catherine Crowe's work *The Night Side of Nature; or, Ghosts and Ghost-Seers* (1850) were meant to provide evidence of the existence of a paranormal plane. As noted by Ann Braude, "Spirits, it seemed, encouraged women to do things other forces militated against" (84).

Besides facilitating a rich and active literary production, women's central role in Spiritualism also granted them access to public oratory, religious authority, economic independence, and mobility, as can be appreciated, for instance, in the aforestated case of the Fox sisters. Their occupation and their responsibility for the spread of the movement across the Atlantic and beyond placed them in a relatively powerful position that allowed them to use their influential trance speech to take active participation in the political, scientific, and

[25] In order to avoid confusion, it should be clarified that Cora Scott married four times and adopted the respective surnames of her husbands, Hatch, Daniels, Tappan, and Richmond; hence her appearance under different signatures in diverse texts throughout her life.

theological discourses of their time, which were considered part of the traditionally masculine area in the Victorian conception of the separate spheres (Owen 19). Guided by their alleged communication with the souls of the deceased, trance speakers frequently advocated for the "family of reforms", which included temperance, abolition, and women's suffrage (McGarry 4). In this way, mediums could grant a voice to the vulnerable and invisible outside the séance room in the form of ardent political activism, especially in the United States.[26]

Paradoxically enough, the reason behind such advantageous conditions for female empowerment originated from the Victorian notion of passive femininity.[27] For instance, Braude reveals an excerpt from the spiritualist newspaper *Banner of Light* (1866) in which the author of the article argues that the assumed physical weakness and nervous sensitivity of women facilitate "passivity, susceptibility, impressionability, mediumship, communication, revelation" (83). As Owen illustrates, women's supposedly innate nervous excitability, moral sensibility, and delicate constitution were thought to make them more receptive towards the spiritual plane and hence better mediators of communications from the beyond (7). "It has been observed at all times and in all countries that women are especially prone to orgiastic religious seizure", a classical scholar reflected in 1918, "and with such moods prophecy and magic have been associated" (qtd. in Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts* 17). This configuration of the medium as a bridge between two planes of existence raises a double inquiry that shall be taken into account throughout the development of the present study. Firstly, it is crucial to consider the relevance of the medium's characteristic in-betweenness in terms of the various symbolic

[26] Exhaustive accounts on this topic can be found in Braude's chapter "The Body and Soul Destroying Institution" (117-142), or in Barbara Goldsmith's *Other Powers* (1999).

[27] John Ruskin summarized Victorian conceptions of masculinity and femininity in his lecture "Of Queen's Gardens" (1865): "The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender", whereas the woman "must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise – wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation . . . with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service" (90).

boundaries represented in her conversation with spirits. Secondly, and most importantly, it is decisive to take into account how this elusive existence affects the reception of other apparitional identities within herself and in the narrative of her séance.

Among the manifold meanings ascribed to Victorian women's engagement in the supernatural, the present study is particularly concerned with the aforementioned connections which Grimes notes between authorship, ghostliness, and female identity (87), as well as with how writers like Hopkins, Marryat, and Fox employ this identification with the abject to verbalize preoccupations involving outcast and muted characters. In this sense, mediumship constitutes both a symbol of women's social invisibility (*Ibidem* 95) and, at the same time, a strategy of resistance against patriarchal effacement. Of course, this self-recognition as othered shadows inevitably relates to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's comments on the lethal requirements of Victorian femininity: "Exorcised from public life, denied the pleasures (though not the pains) of sensual existence, the Victorian angel in the house was allowed to hold sway over at least one realm beyond her own household: the kingdom of the dead" (26). By conversing with the deceased, spiritualist women writers acknowledged and negotiated their own phantasmal position in the nineteenth-century literary tradition, choosing to seek expression beyond the male-dominated sphere of cultural hegemony.

Despite its associations to feminine passivity and spectrality, the séance table is nonetheless a fruitful space for female creativity, since it facilitates what Gilbert and Gubar describe as a defining element in the woman writer's struggle for subjectivity: the search for matrilineal precursors in order to challenge the patrilineal canon (53). Due to their conspicuous absence from the literary canon, such foremothers are essentially ghostly (*Ibidem* 25), thus turning the author's pursuit of silenced ancestors into a mediumistic responsibility. Whether engaging in this necromantic dialogue literally by receiving words of sisterly encouragement

from deceased poets,[28] or manifesting such preoccupations on the page by breathing life into literary heroines who "look everywhere for grandmothers and find none" (Browning 230),[29] the Occult revival provided *fin-de-siècle* women writers with effective tropes which enable a significant descent of the 'madwoman' from the attic to the séance room.

As it shall be argued in subsequent sections of this work, the internalization of the disembodied mother's voice as either a burden or a liberation in Hopkins', Marryat's, and Fox's novels exhibits a strong awareness of the fact that "a life of female rebellion, of 'significant action' is a life that must be silenced, a life whose monstrous pen tells a terrible story" (*Ibidem* 36). Mediumship therefore plays an essential role in the recovery of these muffled narratives not only due to its potential to re-animate the voices of the dead, but also because it allows the woman writer to re-imagine alternative possibilities of Self/Other relations by the subversive nature of séance language.

In this sense, mediumistic communication may be understood in terms of Hélène Cixous' well-known concept of *écriture feminine*, as it entails writing from the silence and darkness to which women have been relegated, transcending the dichotomies of male-centric discourse ("Medusa" 886). From the marginal space of the séance room, the medium also 'flies' between life and death, above the binary divisions of the symbolic order (*Ibidem* 887), writing the "non-existent", the "unthinkable", the effaced mother's "no-name" (Cixous, *Reader* 37), letting "the other language speak – the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death" ("Medusa" 889). Likewise, by englobing an infinity of identities through the fluid codes of trance speech and automatic writing, mediumistic language breaches conventional narrative techniques, sweeping away grammar, logic, and syntax (*Ibidem* 886),

[28] For instance, Melvina Townsend's automatic writing revealed encouraging messages by the deceased spiritualist poet Achsa Sprague, who assured that she would "lend [her] spirit's might / To give [her] power" (*Banner of Light*, 2 May 1863, 7).

[29] Gilbert and Gubar quote this line by Elizabeth Barrett Browning as an example of this matrilineal quest for female subjectivity.

engaging in an unrestrained interplay of meanings often compared to the outpourings of the madwoman. Therefore, by enabling Victorian women to write or speak from the unconscious, "the place where the repressed manage to survive" (*Ibidem* 880), Spiritualism offered compelling devices to seek and channel the (m)other's voice.

For what concerns the medium's displacement, it is certainly accurate that her "proper home is neither this world nor the next, but that vague & debatable land that lies between them" (73), as expressed in Sarah Waters' Neo-Victorian novel *Affinity* (1999). Consequently, Victorian mediumship implied being suspended amid passive and active states of consciousness, the present and the past, fiction and reality. During the séance, mediums were perpetually crossing borders, not only by lifting the veil between life and death, but also by transcending cultural, gendered, psychological, temporal, and geographical boundaries. This aspect was manifested, for instance, in the frequent use of metaphors suggesting mobility in spiritualist discourse. As Sarah Willburn indicates, "[j]ust at the moment actual frontiers were vanishing, late Victorian and Edwardian occultist literature [was] filled with metaphors of exploration, emigration, conquest, colonization" ("Savage Magnet" 176).

From the aforementioned 'spiritual telegraph' to references to the narrative 'I' traversing across time and space in mediumistic life writing (Kontou, "Florence Marryat" 225), including allusions to the transmigrations of the soul, this rhetoric of transit was fairly common in spiritualist literature.[30] One of the most evident examples is the notion of 'travelling clairvoyance', which Alfred Russell Wallace defined as a "higher clairvoyant state termed 'mental travelling'" during which "the spirit quits the body" and "traverses the earth to any distance, communicates with persons in remote countries" (*Scientific Aspect* 33). According to Robert Nelson, spiritualist practices conjured up a context in which the "divisions of gender,

[30] Bennett provides further examples and an insightful interpretation of this rhetoric of mobility within the context of transatlantic exchanges in her chapter "Crossing Over: Spiritualism and the Atlantic Divide".

race, space, and even time and death were attenuated, if not obliterated", manifested "when, for instance, young white female mediums channelled long-dead male Indian chiefs" (34). Mediumship went beyond communication with these foreign people: it also involved embracing ambiguity, hybridity, and multiplicity by adopting various personalities and allowing them to speak through the female body to convey their polyphonic stories. Nineteenth-century mediums thus widened their consciousness across borders in order to host the unfamiliar within them:

> At séances, women's access to the ghost, the disruption of sex and gender codes, the appropriation of 'othered' identities . . . and the storytelling that followed them were all means of accessing . . . sites of intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual refiguration (Tromp 4).

Granted, the medium's exposure to being altered by the presence of the Other entails unsettling the margins of her hospitable mind and opening up to the inscrutable. In her autobiography *Shadow Land or Light from the Other Side* (1897), the materializing medium Elizabeth d'Espérance wrote that her "brain [was] apparently becoming a sort of whispering gallery where the thoughts of other persons resolved themselves into an embodied form" (217-72). Practices such as spirit possession represented a radical acknowledgement of the Other within the Self during a time in which the borderlands of the unconscious were also being explored by Victorian parapsychology.

William Crookes, Charles Richet, and other members of the Society for Psychical Research examined for some time the possibility of understanding passive states of consciousness as a portal into the supernatural. While pondering upon this concept, William Thomas Stead urged his readers to consider the following dilemma: "Before disputing about whether or not there are ghosts outside us, let us face the preliminary question, whether we have not each of us a veritable ghost within our own skin?" (*Real Ghost Stories* 18). As eerie as it may sound, ghosts were indeed destabilizing the foundations of Victorian identity, and the transformations of the era were made apparent in its scientific discourse. In her discussion of

the cross-fertilization between spiritualist terminology and nineteenth-century mental science, Grimes deciphers the parapsychological interpretation of ghosts as repressed manifestations of the irrational side of the psyche (84), an area which was believed to be predominant in women's "haunted intellects" (Dickerson 30). What Stead denominated the "unconscious personality" was "shrouded in unfathomable mystery" (18), as well as being characteristically female and spectral (25). In theory, the information stored by this dormant side of consciousness was only accessible during mesmeric trance, hypnosis, or cases of hysteria (25). Following this parapsychological reading, the medium's act of permeating the limits of the unconscious indicated a high degree of openness towards the Otherness of its hidden phantoms, whether on the mental or the paranormal plane.

Such conditions would therefore establish a receptive framework for the internalization of alien presences, of othered, abject forms which, in Kristevan terms, embody "what disrupts identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, composite" (4). Similarly, the medium's marginal position eludes a fixed, immutable classification, floating between the private and public spheres, feminine passivity and a transgressive active role. If mediumship is characterized by the "permeability, nonexclusion" that Cixous attributes to feminine writing ("Sorties" 210), it is no wonder that spiritualist women's novels such as the ones considered in this study often manifested intense concerns regarding silenced or marginalized characters:

> Woman admits there is another . . . It is much harder for man to let the other come through him. Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me – the other that I am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me alive – that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me (Cixous, "Sorties" 210).

By placing herself, as the term itself indicates, in a middle position (*Merriam Webster* 2020), the mediumistic woman writer acts as a channel of transmission for entities who, like herself, haunt and destabilize the boundaries of Victorian culture. Rachel Hollander's recent

approach to the notion of narrative hospitality with regard to the Late Victorian reconsideration of the relationship between Self and Other seems extremely applicable in this case, since it permits a deeper appreciation of the dynamics of cross-cultural reception in spiritualist literature. Based on Emmanuel Lévinas' interpretation of the ethical encounter with the Other, hospitality would consist in acknowledging the full human complexity and "the strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I" (Lévinas qtd. in Hollander 10), instead of simply translating the experience of the Other in terms of the Self (Hollander 3). True empathy therefore originates in this hospitable exchange with the stranger. In doing so, the Self assumes an ethical responsibility towards the Other: it welcomes his expression in a "face-to-face conversation" (*Ibidem* 11), that is to say, accepting his presence beyond the understanding of that which is unlike himself and respecting "the plurality of the same and the other" (*Ibidem* 11). Drawing on these ideas, it is possible to call into question whether spiritualist literature, ghost-written texts, or séance narratives can be considered truly hospitable towards estranged voices. Considering, for instance, the phenomenon of spirit possession, it would be convenient to discern which speakers maintain narrative agency over the stories the medium delivered. By the same token, such considerations are transferable to occultist literary works depicting alienated characters. Borrowing Tromp's denomination, both the spiritualist text and the performance of the séance may be decoded as a process of "disruptive storytelling" in which the mediumistic writer invites other speakers to intertwine with her account (10). While weaving her web of haunting stories around her audience, the psychic yarn spinner challenges the traditional master discourse by resurrecting forgotten voices that whisper alternative versions of the past.

However, the reinterpretation of the voices of the dead is not devoid of controversial implications, such as the difficulty to determine which narrator pulls the threads in the séance's carefully orchestrated heteroglossia. In the spirit cabinet, the transmission of such stories could

be treacherous due to a twofold issue of representation and appropriation. On the one hand, as Owen indicates, "renunciation of the conscious personality was the price paid for the authoritative voice" (11), that is, mediums' utterances were hardly acknowledged as personal statements, since the achievements were attributed to spirit guides rather than the woman's personality. As it has previously been stated, published 'ghost-written' works were, in theory, validated as the product of illustrious male predecessors,[31] and trance speakers with remarkable oratory skills, such as the celebrated Cora Hatch, were more likely to bear a spiritual revelation if "a male spirit was speaking through her lips".[32] In other words, the definition of narrative power during the séance was obscured by the fact that most spiritualists were more concerned with the message than with the vessel. Such patriarchal configurations resonate with Lévinas' conceptualization of the feminine as an essentially passive and instrumental intermediary for two or more men to communicate and bond (Still 21). For this reason, critical readings of Lévinasian hospitality offer an appropriate framework not only to decipher cross-cultural transmission and reception in spiritualist discourse, but also to identify, from a feminist perspective, the serious limitations posed by certain representations of mediumship.

On the other hand, the question of how far the medium may be considered a reliable narrator is deserving of scrutiny. For instance, in the case of hosting racially othered spirits, it would be convenient to consider whether her account would constitute a faithful translation of their experience and their culture, or if it could be interpreted as a case of appropriation of marginalized identities. The theatrical impersonation of ethnic minorities by white Western mediums could be, despite its restorative aim, inevitably linked to a reductive perspective,

[31] As an example, although Lizzie Doten's transcriptions of Edgar Allan Poe's "spirit-poems" were praised by Alfred Russell Wallace for their quality, he lamented that "being given through another brain, they are deficient in the exquisite music and rhythm of [Poe's] best known work" (qtd. in Kerr 17).

[32] This remark was expressed by Nathaniel Parker Willis in the *Home Journal* after attending a trance lecture delivered by Cora Hatch. Although he was not sure of whether she spoke "her own thoughts or those of other spirits", he concluded that her "nearly supernatural eloquence" was reason enough to consider granting women more spiritual authority in the church (qtd. in Braude 94).

limited by Victorian conceptions of racial difference and alien cultures.[33] Likewise, speaking for the Other through the 'mediumistic' writing of Neo-Victorian fiction is not exempt from complications, since the postmodern re-enactment of the Victorian past is also defined by contemporary ideas and stereotypes about that distant time. These dilemmas concerning agency and mediation shall be taken into account in following sections of this monograph so as to examine the function of Spiritualism in textual interactions across geocultural and temporal borders.

1.2.2 Other Worlds, Othered Voices: Spiritualism, Race, and Geo-Cultural Borders

Transatlantic Spiritualism became an intricate arena for cross-cultural encounters, both on the earthly and the otherworldly levels. In the words of the American novelist William Dean Howells, spiritualists seemed "hospitable to novelty of all kinds", because they had "tested more new religions and new patents" than "less inquiring communities" (qtd. in Kerr 11). Besides promoting a steady flow of ideological and literary exchanges between the United States and Britain, spiritualist circles offered each nation a means of interaction with the ghostly presence of ethnic minorities against the backdrop of the traumatic events surrounding slavery and imperialism.

As it has previously been stated, the American spiritualist congregation led an intense wave of political activism. Blending with a controversial troop of "Women's Rights Men, Negro Equality Men and Miscegens",[34] the emerging wave of psychic reformers marched relentlessly for the sake of the antislavery movement. The close ties between Spiritualism and abolitionism began when the Fox sisters were invited into the home of the Quaker reformers

[33] As Bennett (115), Cox (168), Lehman (9), and Tromp (2) reveal, this type of role-playing was a common practice in spiritualist circles.

[34] Excerpt from the New York *Herald* (1866), qtd. in Cox 162.

Amy and Isaac Post, who hosted fugitive slaves and reform lecturers regularly as part of the Underground Railroad network (Braude 11). The abolitionist intellectual circle was eager to welcome the Fox sisters and their spirit friends among them, encouraged by the ghosts' announcement of a new era in which "Spiritualism [would] work miracles in the cause of reform".[35] As the movement progressed, trance speakers and activists spread the antislavery agenda with such enthusiasm that the abolitionist Gerrit Smith assured that the spiritualists he met in tours through the state "cast tenfold as many votes for the Abolition and Temperance tickets as did others" (39-40). Convinced that, if the spirits' advice was followed, "Slavery and oppression [would] die" (Tiffany 169), spiritualist reformers extended their activism by standing up for the cause of the Native Americans and against imperialist policies (McGarry 2). Their efforts harmonized with the spiritualist cosmology, which emphasized equality in the "brotherhood of man" as one of the seven principles of the movement.[36] Accordingly, in her central work *Modern American Spiritualism*, Britten justified the scope of the movement by depicting it as a broad unifying network that englobed individuals belonging to any social class, race, or geographical location:

> Modern Spiritualism is rife along the length of the far Pacific shores, and skirts the Atlantic seaboard. It is in the cabin of the miner, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, on the peaks of the White Sierras, and consoles the toiling emigrant in his nightly camp on the desert waste or the wild prairie. It has breathed its first lessons of freedom and refinement to the Carolina slave, and humbled the pride of the Louisiana planter (13).

Similar views were applied to communication across the grave: according to the National Developing Circle, mediums showed "an open and sympathetic interest to all spirits

[35]This message was interpreted by one of the Fox sisters, who claimed it had been transmitted by the ghost of an antislavery pioneer (Braude 17).

[36] The seven principles of Spiritualism were believed to have been dictated by the spirit of the recently departed Robert Owen through the mediumship of Emma Hardinge Britten (Byrne 82) and summarize rather well the basic tenets of spiritualist philosophy. Such principles include: "The fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the communion of spirits and the ministry of angels, the continuous existence of the human soul, personal responsibility, compensation and retribution hereafter for all the good and evil deeds done here, eternal progress open to every human soul" (Byrne 82).

coming to us in the understanding of Truth irrespective of race, nation or color", and had received visits from "Indian, African, Egyptian, and Persian" ghosts (Cox 201).[37] Moreover, due to its common elements with the beliefs and practices of the African-American community, Anglo-American Spiritualism presented, to a certain extent, the potential to "bridge the gap between peripheral and mainstream U.S. cultures" (Kucich, 10).[38] The syncretic and less orthodox spirituality followed by black Protestant churches allowed a more receptive atmosphere towards the transaction of spiritualist beliefs. Mediumship was frequently practiced among the enslaved population during the antebellum and Civil War periods, as a Union army lieutenant commented in the spiritualist periodical *Banner of Light*: "The negro is here in great abundance . . . many who see spirits, foretell events, and recognize influences . . . they often see and describe the spirits of their deceased friends".[39] In addition, white mediums such as Cora Hatch were more likely to be accepted among African-American circles than in evangelical churches of European descent.[40] The interplay between African-American culture and spiritualist thought was also made apparent in the origins of the Black Spiritual Church (Pérez 334), as well as in the later formation of the Colored Spiritualist Association of Churches.[41]

Yet there exists scarce evidence of the admittance of ethnic minorities into white spiritualist societies aside from the cases mentioned in this study. It appears that the cross-cultural appeal of Spiritualism was not so much a question of inclusion and collaboration as of

[37] The National Developing Circle was an organization of spiritualist communities which provided its members with instructions on how to practice mediumship in the privacy of their homes.

[38] Except when specified otherwise, all quotes by John Kucich belong to his work *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2014).

[39] "Mediumship Among the Contrabands". *Banner of Light: A Weekly Journal of Romance, Literature, and General Intelligence*, 20 August 1864. *International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals*. www.iapsop.com. Accessed 15-10-2017. Last Updated 2011. Web.

[40] Cora Hatch was welcomed to display her abilities amidst black churches in Washington D.C. Cora L.V. Daniels to Amy Post, 2 January 1866, *Amy and Isaac Post Family Papers* (Braude 211).

[41] The Colored Spiritualist Association of Churches was created in 1922 as the first large spiritualist organization composed by African Americans (Baer 114).

more indirect influences through what anthropologists denominate "culture contact" (Barrow 2). As Robert Cox points out, "all the rhetoric of antislavery and civil rights translated into only a handful of African Americans at the tilting tables of the northern states" (166). Behind the message of universal harmony and fraternal love upon which the "antebellum myth of Spiritualism" was built lay a more complicated reality (*Ibidem*). Ferguson's observations on the heterogeneous ideological landscape with relation to racial politics in Anglo-American Spiritualism are particularly useful in this context. The spiritualist ensemble, she explains, encompassed a wide spectrum of viewpoints, from sympathisers with eugenic theory to anthropologists who were resolved to identify analogies between the spiritualist tradition and the sacred rituals of foreign cultures. To focus only on the most progressive adherents of the movement would therefore imply a one-sided account of this cultural phenomenon, since the reception of non-white and non-Western individuals within spiritualist culture was more ambiguous than appears at first sight. The contradictory nature of these encounters was reflected in the séance room, where the racialized Other was more present in spirit than in flesh and blood.

Although the African-American spirits were "more inclined than the living ones to attend spirit circles", relatively few of them spoke, and "many of those who did prattled away in comic dialect" (Cox 168). As a brief example, the accounts of séance communication provided by Cox reveal a caricaturesque impersonation of black spirits through white mediums, based on racial stereotypes of the minstrel show.[42] Similar cases of misrepresentation are depicted by Bennett in her article on spiritualist and Shaker performances of spirit possession by Native-American ghosts: the person channelling the spirits "jabbered away in a curious,

[42] The spirits would utter phrases such as "Yes, I'd like to go to the old plantation, massa", echoing the "minstrel ideal of the happy slave nostalgic for his home", thus presenting a troubling view of the institution of slavery, "robbing it of its brutality and veiling the systematic inequality and oppression" (Cox 168).

monotonous sort of dialect", presenting a lack of coherence and rationality while conveying an incomprehensible message, "apparently in their native language, as used by them while living in the body" (*Transatlantic Spiritualism* 122). Instead of granting a voice to the dead and silenced through the medium, such rituals implied, rather, a process of unvoicing the Other, deforming his narrative and replacing it by the nineteenth-century Western perception of alien cultures as savage and abnormal. Furthermore, unlike white spirits, the Native-American ghosts mentioned in Bennett's study were "depicted not as individual members", but homogenized "as collections or examples, in a manner that suggests an anthropological study" (*Ibidem*), thus invisibilizing a great variety of tribes, languages, and narratives. As Elizabeth Pérez notes, the notion of sympathy professed by the spiritualist community did not always correspond to "the emotion aroused by the sharing of another's experience", but to stereotyped mimicry and appropriation of the Other's voice and habits (349). Such modes of behaviour suggest an association between racial difference and the paranormal which, as Willburn notes, reflects the configuration of non-white and non-Western bodies as anomalous or mystifying ("Savage Magnet" 162).

As it shall be argued in this study, Victorian Occult fiction and documented accounts of séances present evidence of the perception of dark bodies as closer to the supernatural and prone to possessing magnetic powers. In the same way in which women's claim to mediumistic abilities was based on preconceived notions concerning Victorian femininity, so was the racial Other's presumed access to the spiritual world shaped by nineteenth-century ideologies of racial superiority. The analogies between these gendered and ethnic stereotypes can be observed, for instance in the *Banner of Light* report on contraband slaves, in which the author states that "the negro character is quite a study to the Spiritualist" due to its "intuitive,

inspirational, religious, and altogether mediumistic" traits (3),[43] thus suggesting that "blacks shared with women the characteristics that made them susceptible to spirits" (Braude 29).

Meanwhile, this sort of spiritualist anthropology was also taking place on the other side of the Atlantic. Like their American counterparts, British mediums were receiving visits from black and indigenous ghosts, in addition to the exoticized spirits of colonial subjects from distant colonial territories. The response to the arrival of the racial Other across geo-cultural barriers remained contradictory in the Victorian séance, as the translation of the spirit's narrative was lost and replaced by borrowed elements from non-Western religions for the sake of spectacular entertainment. Scholars such as Roger Luckhurst have interpreted the ambivalent behaviour towards exoticized spirits as a result of the influence of Imperialism on spiritualist culture (202). For instance, the depictions of the afterlife recorded by the Society for Psychical Research were "saturated with colonial contexts" which mirrored the representations of alien lands in imperialist discourse (*Ibidem* 201).

The séance was therefore configured as a space of colonial encounter, a "contact zone" which, in Gauri Viswanathan words,[44] "offered alternative possibilities for . . . reimagining colonial relationships", thus performing a similar function to "culture's role in imperializing Britain, which allowed for a cross-fertilization of language, history, and literature" (2). The interaction between British and non-Western epistemologies within the spiritualist framework resulted in the configuration of what the anthropologist Andrew Lang denominated "savage spiritualism" (1894).[45] As Ferguson illustrates, this term mirrored their attempt to appropriate and synthesize sacred rituals and superstitions belonging to the diverse systems of belief which had been practiced in foreign cultures long before colonization ("Other Worlds" 178).

[43] "Mediumship Among the Contrabands", *Banner of Light*, 20 August 1864, 3.

[44] A concept introduced by Marie Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* and borrowed by Willburn in her discussion of the role of imperialism in Late Victorian occult fiction.

[45] The topic of spiritualist anthropology shall be addressed more thoroughly in Chapter Three.

Spiritualist anthropologists like Lang approached 'primitive' spiritualities as a source of inspiration for Western Spiritualism. Millenary practices from India and Africa, such as levitation or spirit possession, were incorporated into the spiritualist tradition by Victorian mediums dressed in exotic costumes; and spiritualist historians such as William Howitt idealized colonized cultures as the origin of human knowledge on the supernatural (*Ibidem*). Although, as Ferguson clarifies, the latter position was not adopted by all spiritualist anthropologists, those who seemed more receptive perceived indigenous societies through the reductive idea of the "noble savage", whereas the rest manifested a clear uneasiness towards the Other by drawing a sharp line between the civilized and the savage traditions (*Ibidem*).

Going beyond mere parlour tricks in the dark, the complex power dynamics inscribed in the phantasmagoria constructed around the spiritualist séance corresponded to the contradictory reception of colonized Otherness in the social and political context of the turn of the century. Just when imperial subjects were entering the country in a growing tide of immigration (Adams 378), spirit materializations and further paranormal phenomena staged similar transnational encounters with Indian, Egyptian, Chinese, or Arab 'spirit-guides' (Luckhurst 202). Séance accounts depicting the theatrical abilities of mediums such as Florence Cook, Mary Rosina Showers, or Annie Fairlamb contain various impersonations of the racial Other infiltrating the liminal space of the spiritualist circle. In a subversive reconfiguration of identity, "young girls entered the cabinet as models of decorum" and emerged from it as a series of different personalities, thus engaging in an "explicit enactment of the forbidden" through assertive, antagonistic, and even violent displays of uncivilized behavior (Owen 204). For instance, Miss Cook famously claimed to materialize an infamous spirit identified as 'Katie King' who, according to Crookes, often appeared in "white robes and turban head-dress" to thrill the audience by "recounting anecdotes of her adventures in India" (110). Similarly, Elizabeth d'Espérance published written accounts of her materialization of 'Yolande', "a

beautiful arab girl, olive skinned and dark haired" (Owen 223). Among further cases, Miss Wood channeled an Indian 'spirit-guide' called 'Pocha' (Podmore 112), Mrs Holmes placed herself under the influence of another Indian spirit named 'Rosie' (Luckhurst 202), Miss Fairlamb gave shape to the spirit of a man of "extremely dark complexion", with a beard and moustache, "wearing a striped flannel shirt, calico drawers, and a handkerchief tied around his head" (Owen 216); and even Marryat witnessed the presence of exotic spirits draped in white during her stay in Madras (Bennett, "Crossing Over" 95). Outlandish visitors would also take the form of Native American ghosts, whose transatlantic presence "was an accepted and common part of spiritualist culture" due to the community's belief in their "significant insight, and . . . powerful oratorical gifts" (Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism* 10). Marryat, for example, spoke of successful otherworldly meetings with a spectral "North American Indian girl" named "Daisy" (*There Is No Death* 122).

Other times, however, mediums found such apparitions to be upsetting, as they "claimed to have their séances disrupted by the riotous behaviour" of these overseas spirits "whose pantomime-like performances were thought of as being both entertaining and shocking" (Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism* 10). In agreement with Bennett's reading of Renée Bergland's analysis of the representation of Native Americans as ghostly figures within white imagination, the role of ethnic ghosts in spiritualist culture was equally related to their status as symbols of vanishing cultures, erased by British imperial hegemony. However, rather than being completely effaced, the spectralization of colonized voices in Victorian séance accounts reveals an amalgamation of the Other's voice and the medium's personality which allowed spiritualist practitioners to process concerns around the dissolving borders of the British Empire and the consequent fluctuating notions of race and nationhood.

Hosting foreign ghosts was generally marked by a combination of amusement and apprehension towards the systematic emulation of the Other's gestures, customs, and language

(Pérez 349). During these visitations, mediums would momentarily "go native", thus turning the séance into a possible source of inspiration for sensation novels, since as it shall be explained in following chapters, séance narratives and fantasies of reverse colonization shared several recurrent motifs which reflected preoccupations regarding a possible contamination of the physical and national body. Elements such as the malleable categories of Self and Other, the danger of invasion from evil spirits, or the irruption of atavistic impulses within the apparently civilized individual constitute only some examples of the similarities between spiritualist discourse and imperial Gothic. Just like the subversion of normative femininity during spirit possession implied a "co-existence of wickedness and virtue" (Owen 215), so did the reception of exoticized ghosts suggest an equally disturbing co-existence of the savage and the civilized within the medium. For instance, sitters and investigators of the Society for Psychical Research were amazed at the manipulation of language which took place while the mediums were "speaking spirit" (Owen 212). Whether by articulating taboo subjects or reproducing the unintelligible jargon of heathens, mediums frequently shocked their audience with unspeakable utterings which not only threatened "the stability of the ego" (Owen 204), but also that of the Empire.

Spectators often declared to have witnessed foreign words being spelled out through the rappings, since speaking in tongues was a fairly common incident at British and American séances, as observed by John W. Edmonds: "I have heard mediums who knew no language but their own speak in . . . languages unknown to me, but which were represented to be Arabic, Chinese, and Indian, and all done with the ease and rapidity of a native" (Edmonds and Dexter 35). Another disquieting linguistic ability displayed during mediumistic possession was that of unleashing libidinous outpourings which were interpreted as proof of the presence of disruptive spirits in the circle (Owen 212). Entranced young ladies uttered "expressions which one would think it impossible that they should know" (Laycock 175), and planchettes "took to writing

obscenities and blasphemies" (Podmore 315) by which sitters and mediums "were naturally disquieted and alarmed, as the ideas and words were wholly foreign to their thoughts" (Barrett 322). The intrusion of these profanely foreign ideas and words in the medium's body and consciousness implied a transaction of forbidden knowledge that "could not be written or spoken outside the séance room" (Owen 214); knowledge which ought to remain outside civilized society, beyond the threshold of the unconscious and among the 'savage' societies in the far-flung margins of the Empire (Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness* 228). According to Marryat, these unpleasant surprises could be avoided if the borders of the séance were reinforced: "The surest remedy is to see that no careless, or ungodly, person joins your circle. Keep your séance room free from all bad, earthly influences, and the spiritual ones will not come near you" (*Spirit World* 71). The *fin-de-siècle* "moral panic", caused by emerging forms of social and geographical mobility (Adams 377), was made apparent in this careful organization of the spiritualist circle, which, in order to cast out unruly phantasms, ought to be composed of "men and women of education and social position" exclusively (Marryat, *Spirit World* 75).

Moreover, the much-dreaded contamination of language entailed a verbalization of further aspects which haunted the national imaginary. Echoing the interpretation proposed by aforementioned early psychoanalytical theorists, Owen reads mediumship as a technique to interact with "the tantalising Other of the unconscious" (222). Nineteenth-century physicians and psychical researchers on both sides of the Atlantic observed that mediums possessed by "evil spirits" often broke into the same "lewd and lascivious language" displayed by "young ladies in a hysterical paroxysm" (Laycock 175-176), thus establishing uncanny connections between the "strange performances of hysterical mediums" and female insanity (Beard 2). More specifically, such conditions were often compared to the allegedly ferocious behaviour of the racial Other: "Hysteric patients exhibit . . . the tendency to a recurrence to those grimaces, contortions, and other violent physical movements which are the ordinary expressions of

feeling in animals and the lowest savages" (Anstie 839).[46] Cases of immoral or hysterical spirit possession therefore exposed the "blurring of psychic and sexual boundaries" (Arata 627) and the resurgence of primitive instincts (Brantlinger 230) associated with the invasive 'savage' in Late Victorian fiction. Just like "imperialist writing . . . represents the Empire as a barricade against a barbarian invasion" (Brantlinger 230), Marryat thought it useful to settle "a band, or cordon of spirits surrounding [the] house . . . In case any malevolent spirits should try to approach the circle" (*Spirit World* 70). By allowing their bodies to be possessed by ghosts from lands of "strange gods and 'unspeakable rites'" (Brantlinger 228), mediums conjured up an emblematic scene of imperial Gothic.

In the séance, the spectral 'lower' races entered not only the medium's British anatomy, but also, metonymically, the country itself, thus embodying the intrusive Other which "endangers Britain's integrity as a nation at the same time that he imperils the personal integrity of individual citizens" (Arata 629). As seen from these examples, far from always conforming to the apparently ever-welcoming cosmology endorsed by the nineteenth-century Occult revival, the encounter with otherness across racial and geo-cultural boundaries adopted various and unexpectedly problematic forms in spiritualist literature. Consequently, the examination of the Other's narrative agency in such works demands calling into question the extent to which the mediumistic act of speaking for the dead entails a subversive recovery of socially and culturally invisibilized entities, or if, on the contrary, it contributes to the period's problematic invocation of the "imagined, romanticized lives" of ethnic communities that were "in reality being repressed, dominated, and ruthlessly treated by Anglo-American culture" (Bennett, "Sacred Theatres" 130).

[46] Anstie, Francis. "Hysteria", *Lancet*, 14 December 1872, 839-842, qtd. in Depledge 26.

II. Tales of Blood and Spirits: Unveiling Racial Hybridity in Pauline Hopkins' Pan-Africanist Novel

The significance of Spiritualism as a vehicle for cross-cultural interactions in nineteenth-century America was made apparent in its diverse adaptations into African-American literature. Due to the connections between the spiritualist movement and racial equality activism, along with the parallels between spiritualist practices and certain aspects of African folklore, Spiritualism offered authors of colour a powerful instrument to make their stories heard. The inclusion of spiritualist imagery in their texts allowed African-American writers such as Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins (1859-1930) to channel the ghostly presence of the racial Other which was becoming increasingly visible in the political landscape of the United States. The aim of this chapter is to explore the contact between African-American writing and the Occult revival in order to comment upon Hopkins' employment of spiritualist elements in her serialized novel *Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self*. Such an analysis shall enable the appreciation of the ways in which Spiritualism provided a suitable ground for, on the one hand, a hospitable encounter with Otherness, and, on the other, a possibility for African-Americans to preserve their erased cultural heritage.

2.1 Between Dialogue and Resistance: African-American Presence in the Occult Revival

2.1.1 Starting Cross-Racial Exchanges: Spiritualism and Abolitionism

Spiritualism constituted a significant bridge between marginal and dominant cultures in various ways. Firstly, as John Patrick Deveney highlights, "there was not a single early spiritualist who was not also a reformer and an abolitionist" (10). The spiritualist ensemble was renowned for its antislavery efforts, and this radical stance generated an exceptional potential for ideological cross-fertilization and collaboration with the African-American community. As

it has previously been stated, such exchanges began taking place in the initial stage of the movement, at the same site where the Fox sisters initiated the emerging pseudo-religion.

Offering their house in Rochester in favour of the reformist cause, early spiritualists Amy and Isaac Post hosted prominent black and white abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, Abigail Kelley Foster, Henry Clarke Wright (Braude 11), Harriet Jacobs (Kucich 8), or William Lloyd Garrison, who declared himself a "firm believer in the reality" of Spiritualism.[47] Isaac Post, who also claimed to be a medium (Powalski 17), published in 1852 *Voices from the Spirit World*, a volume of messages transferred by the ghosts of politicians, religious leaders, and even repenting slaveholders who stressed the relevance of Spiritualism in social change and the abolitionist cause: "I should have been foremost in promoting liberty, instead of slavery", lamented John Caldwell Calhoun through Post's automatic writing, advising the immediate emancipation of all slaves (Post 88). United by common preoccupations within the Rochester circle, radical reformers sometimes joined their spiritualist allies in their communications with the great beyond: "The Mysterious Rappings have for some time past been the theme of much discussion here", wrote the African-American activist William Cooper Nell to Amy Post in December 1851 (Nell 280). In the same correspondence he recounted that he was "familiar with many of the members" of the reformist group in Rochester and "often converse[d] on the subject" of Spiritualism with them. "To my mind the Knockings were apparent", he concluded after attending a séance followed by a lecture delivered by his fellow abolitionist LaRoy Sunderland, who owned "an office where his Daughter operates as a Medium" (*Ibidem*). Nell was joined in his curiosity by a lengthy list of antislavery reformers who expressed interest or participated in spiritualist beliefs, including Harriet Beecher Stowe (Kucich 18), Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Lydia Maria Child, James Freeman Clarke, Gerrit Smith (Cox 163), Adin

[47] William Lloyd Garrison to Lydia Maria Child, 6 February 1857, Garrison Papers, Department of Rare Books, Boston Public Library, qtd. in Cox 162.

Ballou, Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Nelson 39), and Sojourner Truth (Mandziuk and Fitch 16).

Having become fascinated by Spiritualism after delivering a speech on abolition before a radical Quaker and spiritualist audience in 1856, Truth joined the spiritualist community of Harmonia in 1867 (Washington 279). "I cannot tell you the pleasure it gives me . . . to hear her talk", wrote the medium Cora L.V. Scott to Amy Post, "her words are like pearls cast from the crown of Truth – the world will long remember her when other names are forgotten".[48] Other links between Spiritualism and the abolitionist agenda were established by opponents of both movements, who accused Abraham Lincoln of being a "spiritualist of the abolitionist school" (6) that instead of consulting the Constitution descended "in a secret hole in the White House" (94) to commune with "a *rapping* table" (28).[49] Apparently, these concerns were not limited to the material plane, since, as the Civil War approached, séance rooms flooded with spirits demanding racial equality (Cox 163). Such reformist urges were in agreement with the spiritualist cosmology, which, as John Kucich underlines, "offered . . . a rationale for the equality of every individual soul, regardless of race" (118), thus constituting one of the main reasons behind the aforementioned wave of abolitionist enthusiasm for phantasmal communications.

The philosophy assimilated by the spiritualist movement presented a reflection of the diverse social and cultural transformations taking place before and after the Civil War, a period which Robert Cox defines as "a watershed in American thoughts and feelings on race" (164). As a response to the changes in racial relations following the armed conflict, the spiritualist "conception of the self as porous, unbounded, and mutualistically engaged" allowed followers

[48] Cora L. V. Daniels to Amy Post, 2 January 1866, No. 1580 of *Post Family Papers*, qtd. in Lehman 124.

[49] Anonymous citizen of Ohio. *Interior Causes of the War: The Nation Demoralized, and Its President a Spirit-Rapper*. New York: M. Doolady, 1863, original emphasis.

to "navigate the complex, confusing, and rapidly shifting social structures of mid-Victorian life" (Cox 165). That is to say, Spiritualism allowed its believers to grasp the unsettled binary oppositions between white and black, and to make space for new conceptions of racial difference. In terms of narrative hospitality, spiritualist discourse often showed similarities with abolitionist thought. While spiritualists became the voice of the Other through mediumship, possession, or telepathy; antislavery activists manifested comparable intentions in their attempt to practice radical empathy towards African-Americans by similarly blurring the boundaries between Self and Other. For instance, the abolitionist writer Sarah Grimké told the African-American Quaker Sarah Douglass that she desired to understand her experience of racial prejudice, and, through dialogue, achieve spiritual communion: "thro' the grace of God, my soul may be in your soul's stead".[50] Likewise, the politician Thomas Earle advised his fellow activists in the following way: "We must learn to put our stead in the souls of the poor African . . . to taste and drink and feel his wrongs" (qtd. in Newman 119).

Such statements suggest an ethical encounter with the Other through a trope that was, in the words of Robert Nelson, "reiterated, amplified, and refashioned" by Spiritualism in abolitionist philosophy (37). The spiritualist system of belief emphasized the need for the dissolution of bodily limitations, thus offering a useful ideology for the reformist movement:

> The most egregious evils of the nineteenth-century Atlantic world – racial slavery, the institutional subordination of women to men, international war – were rooted in bodily distinctions of race and sex and nation. Those evils might be eradicated if blacks and whites, women and men, Americans and foreigners could transcend their bodily differences, if they could relate to one another as undifferentiated and equal spirits . . . In short, the liberation from embodiment that radical reformers envisaged in their writings was a central component of Spiritualist religious practice (Nelson 34).

[50] Grimké to Douglass, 3 April 1837. Theodore Dwight Weld, *Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké Papers*, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, qtd. in Sklar 97.

Amidst this rhetoric of flexibility, the spiritualist medium became an important symbol for the internalization of racial difference. As it shall be argued in the subsequent examination of Hopkins' text, the medium's hospitable mind and body were read as a crucial element in the negotiation of newly defined borders. In her article on the presence of African-American histories and entities in Anglo-American Spiritualism, Elizabeth Pérez stresses the central role of the malleable categories of Self and Other in the reception of racial and cultural difference among mediumistic practices (348). "Sympathy for the spirits", she documents, was attained through "metonymic imitation of their postures and habits", which was deemed "a prerequisite for them to 'pass' through, or possess, the body of the practitioner" (349). Such conceptions shared, as argued by Judy Rosenthal, a "radical becoming, or overcoming of difference" (30). "Possession ceremonies", explains Rosenthal, ". . . are precisely paths for becoming Foreign Others – for turning into what one (and one's group) is most radically not" (30). Due to its characteristic hybridity, mediumship became a powerful instrument for the recognition of mixed-raced identities, a subject of central relevance in African-American political activism and literature.

2.1.2 The Dark Side: Voicing the African within the American

The cross-fertilization between spiritualist circles and the African-American community went far beyond abolitionist activism. As a movement that was "obsessed with the identity of the self and the structures of American society" (Cox 165), Spiritualism provided useful elements for the exploration of shifting conceptions of the racialized Self. Moreover, its culturally syncretic roots allowed writers and practitioners to foreground African-American representation. The common traits between American Spiritualism and certain African and Afro-Diasporic religions turned the emerging movement into a device through which its black followers could bring their past back to life by recovering rituals which "had been passed down

among African-American families as folklore and old wives' tales" (Finley 61). In his insightful volume *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2014), Kucich describes how the spiritualist tradition constituted a "useful means of establishing a common ground in the mainstream press" (94), thus enabling "writers from marginalized cultures . . . to celebrate their heritage openly" while European-American spiritualists could "learn from (and, often, appropriate) cultures that had long been ruthlessly marginalized" (148). The Occult revival thus facilitated the elaboration of a "spiritual discourse understandable to a white audience yet marked by an African difference" (Kucich 16), and, at the same time, supplied a framework in which African-American liminal individuals could produce a "repressed counter-narrative" (Kucich 95) in opposition to the silencing policies of mainstream culture.

As a noteworthy case among writers whose voices were fuelled by Spiritualism, the long-forgotten and rediscovered mixed-raced novelist Harriet E. Wilson channelled her personal history, as well as her African and Native American ancestry, through her career as a writer and trance speaker.[51] Celebrated in spiritualist circles as "the eloquent and earnest colored trance medium" (*Banner of Light* 1867), Wilson penned her autobiographical work *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859), a narrative of hardship and abuse which is now considered the first novel published by an African-American woman (Ellis and Gates 234). However, as Jerri Anne Boggis and Eve Allegra Raimon clarify, her public presence as a reformer had a greater impact through her mediumship than through her authorship: "The prominence that Wilson could not find as a writer among her contemporaries was apparently available to her as a frequent member of the Spiritualist lecture and conference circuit" (Raimon 14). As a highly regarded member of the spiritualist congregation and a

[51] Wilson's work slipped into oblivion after 1859 and was republished by Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. in 1983 (Ellis and Gates 234).

powerful orator, Wilson found in the new system of belief a platform from which to verbalize issues concerning racial equality, women's rights, and reform in education and labour before a segregated crowd while occupying a central space in the intellectual and religious debates of the day (Potts 20). Her entranced lectures at spiritualist gatherings, sometimes addressing as many as three thousand people (*Banner of Light* 1867), earned her "the hospitality of the spiritual brotherhood everywhere" (*Banner of Light* 1868) and contributed to the manifestation of African-American experience within the speedily changing social context of the Reconstruction era.

Further proof of the advantages that the spiritualist background posed for African-American representation in life and literature may be identified in the pages produced by the former slave Harriet Jacobs. Although Spiritualism is not explicitly mentioned in her work, her active participation in the spiritualist circle initiated by Isaac and Amy Post provides insight into the hybrid spirituality which African-American communities developed outside the margins of orthodox Anglo-Christianity (West 109). Most importantly, her contact with the Rochester reformist community, which welcomed all sorts of previously silenced narratives from the living and the dead, led her to find a voice of her own. Encouraged by Amy Post and edited by Lydia Maria Child, Jacobs published her life story in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Following Erin E. Forbes' suggestion to interpret Jacobs' narration as a form of mediumship, the autobiography would be in itself "a communication from the dead" that made her authorship as subversive as the "radical agency of the medium, who communicates as and for another" through the regenerative power of storytelling (445). Her acquaintance with spiritualist philosophy and its malleable boundaries became a useful tool for redefining her marginalized Self through writing. The expression of Jacobs' identity, doubly othered, resonated with the spiritualist yearn to transcend and reconfigure the borders of race and gender: "Tied already to the female body, the black woman was additionally inscribed with a

racial body", argues Kucich, concluding that "Jacobs consequently needed to work double hard to write herself out of this double bind" (12). Spiritualism therefore presented a form of dialogue, functioning outwards and inwards to deal not only with the intercultural exchanges between Jacobs and white abolitionist groups, but also with the complexities of African-American self-perception.

Black spiritualist Shaker Rebecca Cox Jackson also brought forward the words of the dead in order to phrase her own stories. Born a free woman in Pennsylvania, Jackson reported that her visions and voices began during her childhood, long before her conversion to Spiritualism:

> For all these years, I have been under the tuition of invisible Spirits who communicate to me from day to day . . . By this means I have been able to tell people's thoughts and to tell them words they have spoken many miles distant from me. And also to tell them things they would do a year before hand (Jackson 222).

Frustrated by her brother's broken promise to teach her to read and write, she attributed her self-taught literary skills to divine powers (Culley 94). What she considered to be a miraculous gift of literacy was interpreted as a proof of her supernatural abilities and enabled her to transcribe her ecstatic visions and dreams (*Ibidem* 95). Prior to her official initiation into spiritualist congregations, she became an influential Shaker leader, founded her own community in Philadelphia (Clark 81), and recorded her experience of mediumship in her journals, compiled as *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress*, and published by Jean McMahon Humez in 1981. Like Wilson and Jacobs, Jackson employed spiritualist practices to "speak into being" (Bryant 63) by producing written and oral accounts of her passionate inner life, as well as to allow her African cultural heritage to shape her faith (Albanese 140). Furthermore, her religious mediumship inspired other black women in the community, and, although the possible same-sex relationship between Jackson and her younger *protégée*, fellow Shaker, and lifelong companion Rebecca Perot remains

unclear (Walker 73), its subversive nature may be read as a reflection of the way in which spiritualist discourse facilitated the transgression of gendered barriers, as well as the development of non-normative identities.[52] Through her contact with the supernatural, Jackson participated in "the radical, revolutionary tradition of women's life writing and self-creation" (Bryant 76), thus cultivating empowering spaces for black women's storytelling, such as a séance circle in her own home (Bryant 76).

Although, as it has previously been stated, women writers were more prone to dabbling with the Occult, African-American rewritings of spiritualist doctrine were not limited to the female pen. Instead, they were extended to the expression of other liminal identities, as it can be observed in the works by the enigmatic mixed-raced novelist, trance lecturer and reformer Paschal Beverly Randolph. Now regarded as a prominent theorist in the evolution from Spiritualism to Theosophy (Deveney 253), he earned his living as a medium, healer, clairvoyant physician, and psycho-phrenologist before abandoning Spiritualism in 1858, claiming he had been possessed by a demonic energy (Albanese 144-45), and moving on to Rosicrucianism and Occultism (Clark 81). Unlike writers like Hopkins, who embraced their African ancestry, Randolph made conflicting claims about his origins throughout his life, fluctuating from being a "proudly open man of mixed-raced identity" (Ferguson 128)[53] to even "denying that he had any African blood at all" (Cox 168). His inner struggle to come to grips with his racial background was reflected in his novels, travel writing, and works on psychical research. Having earned the informal title of the "Man with Two Souls" (Deveney 300), Randolph's hybrid identity continually shaped his spiritual doctrine. *Dealings with the Dead:*

[52] In her introduction to *Gifts of Power*, Jean McMahon Humez suggests that Jackson might "have been an open lesbian" if she had "been born in the modern age"; yet she acknowledges that, although "the love they felt for each other helped make heterosexual relationships unnecessary", there is "very little direct evidence either to support or contradict the theory that there was an acknowledged sexual component" in their union (9).

[53] As an example, the theosophist author Helena P. Blavatsky stated in her *Collected Writings* (1881-1882) that Randolph's "mother . . . was said by him to have been the granddaughter of 'a born Queen of Madagascar'" (519).

The Human Soul, Its Migrations and Its Transmigrations (1862), a study on paranormal phenomena, exemplifies a sense of fragmentation and mobility that seems to persist throughout his work, as it is expressed in the following depiction of his psychic journeys, possibly heavily influenced by what Andrew Jackson Davis qualified as travelling clairvoyance (Deveney 390): "I passed through countless changes, exhibited a million characteristics, until at last . . . became . . . intuitive both as to the past, the present, and the future" (105). As Ferguson explains in her chapter on miscegenation and the Occult, Randolph's rich and diverse literary production manipulated certain aspects of spiritualist discourse, rewriting of a cosmology in which "the mixed-raced subject . . . seems destined to be split into multiple conflicting pieces, denied synthesis and meaning" (*Determined Spirits* 121).[54] His career-long efforts to "rescript the dominant narratives of evolutionary and racial destiny in favour of his own mixed blood" (*Ibidem* 115) not only mirror his attempts to reconcile and comprehend the paradoxical aspects of his racial identity, but also, as Deveney states, the "confusion, ambiguity, and, frankly, self-hate because of his origins . . . at the wake of the Civil War" (150).

Randolph's writings exhibit an intense awareness of the Otherness posed by the haunting presence of African blood in his sense of Self. Occult methods such as spirit possession were therefore employed as a manifestation of issues concerning agency and voice, as well as an exploration of the "possibilities of MIXED IDENTITIES" (*Dealings with the Dead* 116) within the same person. According to the philosophy exposed in *Dealings with the Dead*, trance states would enable the practitioner to engage in conversation with the othered side of consciousness through a process which Randolph denominated blending. "I felt that my own personality was not lost to me, but completely swallowed up", he narrates, "during these

[54] For example, despite promising a spiritualist afterlife with "localities for all divisions and shades of the human race", Andrew Jackson Davis' Harmonial philosophy echoes the white supremacist hierarchy by granting the Caucasian race a prominent rank as the "representative of the higher race to come" (*Death and the After Life* 185).

strange blendings of my being with another, I felt that other's feelings, thought that other's thoughts . . . to which . . . I frequently gave utterance" (114). Most notably, Randolph expanded his definition of blending beyond spiritual intercourse to designate interracial procreation. In his posthumous text on esoteric sexology *Eulis, Affectional Alchemy* (1930), the "Man with Two Souls" discusses how racial and psychic blending were essential to humanity's evolution. According to Randolph's "miscegenist utopianism" (Ferguson, *Determined Spirits* 115), interracial mingling constituted a progressive and spiritually uplifting form of conception that would ensure the necessary recovery of an original state of transracial unity (*Dealings with the Dead* 9). Such complex eugenic aspirations were fictionalized in his autobiographical novel *The Wonderful Story of Ravalette* (1871) through the adventures of its mixed-raced protagonist. By engaging with Spiritualism and Theosophy, Paschal Beverly Randolph became a precursor of the *fin-de-siècle* African-American Occult revival (Ferguson, *Determined Spirits* 115) and crafted a peculiar syncretic doctrine based upon a combination of European texts, such as Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* (1877),[55] foreign spiritualities he discovered during his journeys (Deveney 31), and pseudoscientific theories belonging to the fields of eugenics and anthropology (Ferguson, *Determined Spirits* 115). Drawing upon this system of belief, Randolph put into words the complications of his biracial Self, thus offering a rationale for individuals who, like the spirits that roam the confines of earthly existence, belonged to neither side of the interracial divide.

2.1.3 Travelling Phantoms: Afro-Diasporic Echoes in Spiritualist Practices

Beyond inspiring African-American writers like Randolph or Wilson to verbalize their discourse against a background in which their culture was continuously erased, Spiritualism

[55] The multiple cases of intertextuality between Randolph and Blavatsky's work have been documented by John Patrick Deveney (103).

allowed them to travel across their predecessors' diaspora by invoking ancient traditions of their ancestral homeland. As it has previously been mentioned, when Anglo-American mediums like Britten started turning tables, they were surprised to find out that entranced slaves at plantations had been communicating messages from the dead for a long time (Cox 178). Addressing this matter, Kucich explains how the syncretic roots of modern Spiritualism were based upon various systems of belief belonging to cultures surrounding the Atlantic basin whose origins were prior to the rise of the American movement, including diverse "charms, prophecies, and ghosts" that eventually became "a vital part of European-American rural and working-class culture" (2). It was this blending of foreign superstitions and sacred ceremonies which made Spiritualism more "open to African and Native American traditions when more elite culture was not" (Kucich 2). Although, as noted by Janet Boddy, spiritualist phenomena can be identified in a great number of cultures across the globe (414), such practices are remarkably prominent in Afro-Atlantic religions, a tendency which was thoroughly documented by Cynthia Shambaugh and Irving Zaretsky in their study on the intense force and recurrence of spirit mediumship from African to African-American beliefs (1978). Mary Ann Clark broadens this subject by commenting upon the prevalence of rites demanding trance states in West and West-Central Africa, specifying Anglo-American Spiritualism's shared heritage with Kongolese cosmology in their similar perception of the afterlife (81). In her article "Spirit Mediumship as Historical Mediation", Elizabeth Pérez provides additional evidence of the common aspects between Spiritualism and Afro-Diasporic religions by calling attention to the warm reception of spiritualist literature among population of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean (335). Works like Allan Kardec's *Spirits' Book* (1857) and *Book of Mediums* (1861) circulated successfully amidst religious groups around these geographical areas, possibly due to the fact that such ideas resonated well with African systems of belief involving a constant contact with spectral entities of bygone times. Paul Christopher

Johnson traces communications from the dead back to the first published account of African spirituality, Joannes Leo Africanus' *History and Description of Africa* (1600), in which the author narrates how women became possessed by spirits and channelled their messages to "faine the divell to speake within them" (149). Interestingly enough, such practices became even more recurrent among displaced people of African ancestry during and after the institution of slavery (Mattoso 127),[56] surpassing the original traditions of their homeland to such an extent that African-born slaves transferred to the colonies were sometimes surprised by the frequency of spirit possession in their new habitat (Harding 155).

In agreement with J. Lorand Matory, it is helpful to understand such events in relation to new conceptions of the Self across geo-cultural borders, especially with reference to issues of ownership of territory and bodies ("The Many Who Dance in Me" 258). Beliefs involving mediumship would therefore thrive among oppressed subjects who had been deprived of their territorial power and who, in response, tended to invoke aid from Other Places (*Ibidem*). Likewise, Johnson draws attention to how this notion of the haunted, "owned or occupied body" (396) was rather often connected to colonial processes based on enslavement and the questions those processes evoked around the concept of personhood (400). He convincingly interprets these entranced gatherings as "affirmations of community" and "subaltern resistance" among alienated and displaced individuals attempting to preserve their cultural heritage, as was the case with African-Americans (394):

> Spirits . . . index mobility, displacement, migrations, arrivals and departures, entrances into and leave-takings from bodies . . . If spirits *are* about arrivals and departures, it would not surprise that people in motion may be, hypothetically, more engaged with activating and accelerating possession practices than those with territorial power (Johnson 400, original emphasis).

[56] Katia Mattoso's observations refer to slave communities in Brazil (127). However, Johnson indicates that similar situations took place among African slaves in the United States (394).

Taking into account the diasporic sensibilities implied by Johnson's analysis, it is possible to understand these traditions as tools for the community to deal with their displacement, thus processing "the awareness of separation from a place, a life, or a person left behind" (*Ibidem*). According to Elizabeth Pérez, practitioners allowed unseen agents to invade them because their bodies were "among the only objects former slaves and persons of African descent owned" and consequently represented the sole means for them to mourn their disconnection from their motherland (355). Along these lines, Bennett stresses the role of Spiritualism in bridging scattered diasporic civilizations around the Atlantic basin by recalling Paul Gilroy's motif of the sailing ship as a middle passage outside national boundaries ("Crossing Over" 98). For Gilroy, the image of the ship in motion symbolizes the "living, micro-cultural, micro-political system" embodied by the black Atlantic, englobing "the circulation of ideas and activists" as well as "the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland" (4). Bennett applies this trope to her exploration of the transatlantic impact of Spiritualism, arguing that this floating means of transport illustrates Spiritualism's connection with black Atlantic culture through "sea travel, mercantilism and colonial endeavour" ("Crossing Over" 98), as well as the characteristic in-betweenness of its practitioners. Although Bennett's reading is oriented towards spiritualist mediums who, in addition to roaming between the living and the dead, travelled from Britain to the United States, Gilroy's ship would be an even more fitting illustration for the function of Spiritualism as a vehicle to navigate the turbulent waters of national identity for people of colour who were literally caught between cultures and conjured their African past as an act of resilience to survive within a context in which they were constantly othered.

The quest for selfhood was a highly recurrent theme in African-American spiritualist texts, as it may be appreciated in its followers' séance accounts and published literature. Messages delivered through automatic writing, spirit-poems, and Occult fiction of the period

clearly reflect intense concerns regarding racial heredity, traumatic personal or collective histories, and complications aroused by the speaker's inherent Otherness. In order to verbalize the "repressed counter-narrative" of the silenced accounts of their past and their present (Kucich 95), spiritualists of colour "carried on an extended conversation with white Spiritualism, appropriating and reshaping it" (Cox 165). Perhaps as a re-enactment of the significance of orature in African socio-cultural spaces (Ogundokun 179), séances were employed as a "ritual remedy of interpersonal problems" through which their ghostly storytelling functioned as a form of self-discovery and exorcism of communal trauma (Pérez 355). Addressing what Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok denominate "transgenerational haunting" (175), these Occult gatherings unveiled the baggage of untold stories unconsciously transmitted to later generations which returned to haunt the porous boundaries between past and present, Self and Other (175). Accordingly, the syncretic version of Spiritualism which was developed at the margins of American society involved casting out this phantom by putting into words the "unspeakable secret which is lodged inside the subject" (Arias and Pulham 17), thus presenting an adequate channel for the relationship between Afro-Diasporic individuals and the traumatic history of their people. As Pérez specifies, "the deeper the wounds" recorded in the ghosts' biographies, "the more profound the healing they were thought to be able to affect" (351).

In this sense, black and Creole spiritualist rituals shared a historiographical character, thus constituting a way of looking back, demanding justice, and synthesizing various oral narratives to condemn the "oppression that had scattered the branches of African-American family trees" (Pérez 355). Pérez accurately points out that the historian's task in resurrecting the past implies a certain type of mediumship, a trope that inhabits, for instance, Steven Greenblatt's ruminations on how "the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living" (1). By using spiritual

ceremonies as a revisionist form of historical mediation (Pérez 330), African-American Spiritualism granted expression to these voices, "uncannily full of the will to be heard" (Greenblatt 1), favouring the "emergence of countermemories that went against the grand narratives" of dominant culture (Pérez 336). "The self to be discovered through relationships with the spirits is a healed healer", Pérez states, "one competent in mediating between the past and the present . . . in order to preserve the life of the group" (355). Moreover, spirit guides returned to the earthly plane to provide a harsh critique of social and political structures, lending séance sitters the wisdom acquired through their experience to aid them in their resistance against racial abuse (Matory, "Free to Be a Slave" 398). Such was the case within African-American spiritualist circles in the Reconstruction era, during which shifts in the conceptualization of race demanded their ghostly followers to reassert their liminal presence in American society.

The séance records of the Afro-Creole spiritualist community led by Henri Louis Rey in New Orleans represent a decisive example of the employment of mediumship as historical mediation, cultural resistance, and negotiation of racial and national identity. Home of the largest spiritualist community in the South, the *Cercle Harmonique* (Harmonic Circle) was founded in 1858, while the country anticipated Civil War, and concluded in 1877, coinciding with the end of southern Reconstruction (Clarke 3). Influential mediums and healers abounded among its participants, to such an extent that Britten presumed: "either the noble Creoles are determined to take Spiritualism by storm, or the spirits are determined to take them" (428-29). In any case, their identification with wandering spirits empowered them to claim their own voices during the aftermath of the armed conflict. The particular circumstances of Afro-Creoles placed them on a middle ground in the social structures of the Antebellum South, as they were considered "too white in complexion and upbringing to identify themselves with slaves", whereas "their legal designation of 'free people of color' rendered them too black to associate

freely with the white population" (Daggett 1). In contrast with the dichotomous perception of racial difference applied elsewhere in the Antebellum United States, the residents of New Orleans were arranged according to a three tiered system which allowed a certain degree of mobility in between (Cox 170).[57] However, as a consequence of the transformations in racial relations after the Civil War, interracial barriers were solidified into the rigid American binary system, thus annihilating "any semblance of fluidity in racial definition" (*Ibidem* 175). According to Eve Raimon's informative commentary on the connections between racial conflict and supernatural horror, nineteenth-century judicial, social, and scientific debates about the meaning of racial difference intended to draw sharp boundaries between black and white as a response to a historical period during which dominant configurations of race and what it meant to be an American were being called into question (4). The subsequent fear of miscegenation gave way to a perception of mixed-raced people as hybrid entities who threatened to unsettle the stability of the binary oppositions which lay at the core of traditional power structures.

As biracial individuals were thus othered, Henry Louis Rey and his companions moulded Spiritualism to fit their own political ends, applying its cosmology and practices to welcome the Otherness embodied by their black ancestry, as well as to host the spectral voices of the "martyrs of racial justice" who guided them to rebellion against segregation (Cox 180). The séance transcripts of Rey's circle show spirit messages of support and encouragement, usually delivered by ghosts associated with the struggle for the abolition of slavery, such as Abraham Lincoln, who declared: "I assure you, my children, liberty will reign on earth . . . Courage, my brothers".[58] Other communications urging them to have "patience" and "continue

[57] According to the three-tiered racial system, inhabitants were classified as white, black, or Creole. The degree of mobility depended upon factors such as social class and whether they belonged to English or French-speaking families (Cox 170).

[58] *René Grandjean Séance Register*, 7 December 1865. University of New Orleans, qtd. in Cox. 9-10.

[their] admirable work" were uttered by comrades in arms who had passed away during the Civil War,[59] or victims murdered during race riots, who assured: "the hour of reward has struck for the suffering blacks".[60] The spirits who visited Rey's table manifested an overt acknowledgement of their African heredity (Cox 176), as well as a fierce intention to remind white Americans not to reject "their black brother", who "belongs to God the same as you" and "is entitled to the same rights as you".[61] In opposition to the segregated background against which Rey's congregation was formed, the voices of the dead often announced a "universal brotherhood" of cross-racial alliances.[62] Their call for "only one humanity, and one flag for all and every one"[63] was quite literal, since it did not only allude to the peaceful coexistence between races, but to the abolishment of race as a socially divisive force (Cox 181). Messages from the Other Side searched to transcend the diaspora by erasing the boundaries among people of African descent (Cox 176) and predicted an afterlife full of proud miscegens where races would blend and all would be creole (Cox 182). For instance, the following spirit poem manifested what Paul Gilroy refers to as the "redemptive return to an African homeland" by displaced individuals willing to bridge the gap with their African cultural legacy (4):

> I look with joy from Africa
> Join the sons of Africa
> In love we live
> In love we forgive
> White men
> Black men.[64]

[59] *Ibidem*, 2 December 1865, 20.
[60] Spirit of W.R. Meadows, murdered in the riot of July 1866. *Ibidem*, 10 June 1871, 33.
[61] Spirit identified as R. Preaux. *Ibidem*, 19 July 1872. 66.
[62] Ghost of Thomas Williams, who had been a Union general during the Civil War. *Ibidem*, 28 November 1871, 154.
[63] *Ibidem*. 28 November 1871, 154.
[64] *Ibidem*, 26 October 1870, 32.

Beyond the promise of general pan-racial unity, the spirits pointed towards a destiny that mirrored the politics of Pan-Africanism, which would start being developed at the turn of the century (Sherwood, *Origins* 12). It is therefore not surprising that the Pan-Africanist movement, whose goal was to promote understanding and collaboration among diasporic groups of African origin, would be appealing to spiritualists and vice versa. For this reason, Hopkins' *fin-de-siècle* Pan-Africanist work *Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self* stands out as a continuation of the work of African-American writers and activists who borrowed elements from spiritualist ideology and combined them with their own political ends to emphasize radical hospitality towards racialized Otherness.

2.2 Unveiling the Hidden Self: Welcoming African Pasts Through the Occult in *Of One Blood*

Hopkins' serialized novel features a mosaic of pseudoscientific theories and occultist beliefs which reflect the author's lifelong personal concern with issues of origins, family history, and African-American representation (Brown 220). Interweaving elements belonging to the fields of Spiritualism, Occultism, New Psychology, archaeology, ethnology, and Ethiopianism, Hopkins' writing responded to contemporary debates surrounding the "ubiquitous race question" by enabling the transcultural reception of racial Otherness (Hopkins, *One Blood* 584). Throughout the novel, its mixed-raced characters are aided by supernatural forces not only to bridge the geo-cultural gap between their American identity and their African ancestry, but also to be guided during their inner journey of self-discovery and interaction with their othered side. Mystical visions, trance states, and ghostly visitors delineate the contact zone with the protagonists' concealed heredity, thus establishing a transtemporal conversation between the displaced past of the African-American community, the turn-of-the-century United States, and a possible diasporic, Pan-Africanist future (Gillman 66). In her

narrative process, Hopkins breathes life into obliterated accounts of the horrors perpetuated under the institution of slavery, paying special attention to the transgenerational trauma of sexual abuse experienced by African-American women.

Of One Blood is a race melodrama published between 1902 and 1903 in the *Colored American Magazine*, the first literary periodical devoted exclusively to "the development of Afro-American art and literature" with the aim of challenging dominant representations of African American culture by developing "the bonds of racial brotherhood" (60), as the editorial announcement declared in May 1900.[65] Standing out as the only woman in the staff during the initial years of the magazine, Hopkins worked as its co-editor until 1904 (Brown 2) and was known for her contributions to "the arena of historical, social, and economic literature" ("Editorial" 60),[66] such as her vocal criticism of the Jim Crow Laws during a period of intensifying racial violence in the United States (Carby 35). Additionally, her active participation in public debates of her era – notably, in the areas of science, psychical research, and anthropology – was marked by Pan-Africanist and black nationalist efforts through which she called into question the segregationist ideas developed by the abovementioned fields (Gillman 58). Besides her activism in favour of political equality for people of African descent, Hopkins' remarkable work was striking for its early intersectional feminism. For instance, her consideration of the double burden endured by women of colour was expressed in her biographical series "Famous Women of the Negro Race" (1902), in which she insisted upon the relevance of narratives concerning their contemporary lives and work as central elements in African-American history and Pan-Africanist politics (387). These preoccupations were also manifested in the fictionalization of her maternal family history in *Contending Forces: A*

[65] "Editorial and Publishers' Announcements" *The Digital Colored American Magazine*. May 1900.

[66] Hopkins shared the original editorial board of the magazine with black entrepreneurs Walter Wallace, Harper Fortune, Walter Johnson, and Jess Watkins (Brown 2).

Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South (1900), which reveals the links between the women in her family and the Atlantic slave trade in the West Indies while also responding to the "crisis in the history of the Negro in the United States" ("Preface" 16). In order to draw the reader's concern towards the dilemma of African-American identity, Hopkins devised *Of One Blood* as an elaborate melting pot englobing various fields of her scholarly background which show her close involvement with the New England intellectual circles. The combination of her extensive knowledge on the branches of Spiritualism and Occultism with the Afro-Atlantic literary-religious tradition granted, in Elizabeth West's terms, "voice and agency to African-American folk belief in the power of visionaries or seers" (109). Such an approach highlighted her cultural heritage while exploring the "transpersonal dimensions of consciousness in the context of a transnational black Atlantic geography" (Schrager 184). Most importantly, such communications between the earthly and the otherworldly point towards the phantasmal disclosure of the African Other within the American Self in various ways. Firstly, Hopkins' text emphasizes the prevalence of the black Atlantic in the roots of Western Spiritualism by clearly suggesting "a link between the spiritual practices of continental Africans and their descendants in America" and locating "Africa as the origin of the supernatural beliefs and practices maintained by slaves" (West 109). Likewise, the novel's multiple references to Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and mysticism shed light on the characters' veiled racial heredity. Lastly, on a more general level, Hopkins directs her selection and adaptation of the Occult revival towards emerging nineteenth-century theories concerning the African origins of humanity (Gillman 61). Such aspects constitute the thematic core of *Of One Blood; Or, the Hidden Self*, as it is manifested in the story's title and subtitle. For this reason, the two phrases deserve to be decoded separately in order to perceive Hopkins' application of spiritualist ideology to the recurrent trope of black ancestry which haunts the borders of individual and national identity.

2.2.1 Intertextual Reception and the Encounter with Otherness

Before doing so, it is first convenient to examine the novel's plotline so as to grasp the way in which Hopkins frames her Occult fiction within the tradition of sensation literature and Gothic melodrama. Initially set in Boston during the Reconstruction era, the story mainly evolves around Reuel Briggs, a secretly mixed-raced student of medicine, possibly named after the journalist who publicized the Fox sisters' exposure in 1888,[67] and equally fascinated by "what might be termed 'absurdities' of supernatural phenomena or mysticism" (Hopkins 30). He is joined in his adventures by his aristocratic friend Aubrey Livingston, and Dianthe Lusk, a charming former slave, singer, and trance speaker who loses her memory as the result of a train accident. After rescuing her from the unfortunate event, Reuel takes advantage of Dianthe's amnesia to erase her identity and her racial origin. With Aubrey's help, he changes her name to Felice Adams, and, in a sinister foreshadowing of Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913), appropriates her voice, transforms her personality, and assimilates her into white American society in order to marry her.

The depiction of Dianthe's relationship with Reuel, filtered through his male perspective, already configures her as an otherworldly being by emphasizing the "mysterious mesmeric affinity existing between them" (Hopkins 103). During their first encounter, Reuel is "carried out of himself", growing "cold with terror and fear" as he lays eyes upon the "lovely phantom" and recalls having perceived her face earlier that afternoon in a mystical vision (36). Dianthe's ghostlike nature persists throughout the novel. While remaining completely unaware of her African-American past, living "in another world, unconscious of her own identity" (645),

[67] Reuben Briggs Davenport covered the Fox sisters' confessions in *The Death-Blow to Spiritualism, Being the True Story of the Fox Sisters as Revealed by Authority of Margaret Fox Kane and Catherine Fox Jencken* (1888).

she is left defenceless in Aubrey's hands when Reuel leaves on an archaeological expedition to Ethiopia, where he will learn to cherish his African cultural heritage. In accordance with his role as a manipulative Gothic villain, Aubrey first blackmails Dianthe by threatening to reveal her true origins, then tricks her into believing that Reuel has died before pressuring her into becoming his wife. In the meantime, Reuel discovers that he is the lost descendant of an Ethiopian king. After being recognized by the royal birthmark on his breast, he adopts a new name, Ergamenes, and is consequently worshiped as a demi-god in the hidden ancient city of Telassar. Having received a letter from Aubrey announcing Dianthe's death, he embraces his destiny and is betrothed to Queen Candace to rule over the Ethiopian people in his rightful motherland. Although Dianthe does not share her husband's redemptive return to Africa, she eventually learns her true family history in a different way, marked by her contact with the supernatural.

Firstly, she is comforted by a visit from the spirit of her mother, Mira, who had been a slave in Aubrey's father's plantation and shared her daughter's mediumistic powers. Secondly, and most importantly, she learns the truth about her dark past through her African grandmother. Aunt Hannah discloses for her granddaughter the result of the painful dynamics of sexual abuse perpetuated under the institution of slavery, informing her that the three protagonists all descend from the same mother and have therefore maintained incestuous relationships. Mira, the mixed-raced offspring of Aunt Hannah's forced relations with her master, shared her mother's traumatic experience of interracial rape and thus gave birth to Dianthe and Reuel. In a final sensationalist plot twist, along the lines of maternal melodrama (Gillman 36), the African grandmother replaced the master's deceased infant with her daughter's third son, Aubrey, before Mira was sold away, thus leaving him to be brought up within the Livingston family. Appalled by these accounts and driven mad by her captivity in her new husband's household, she attempts to poison Aubrey, but he forces her to drink the substance and lastly

takes his own life. Reuel comes home to watch Dianthe die in his arms while experiencing a trance state in which she communes with the ghosts of her Ethiopian ancestors. The story ends with an appeal to racial justice in the biblical quote "Of one blood have I made all races of men" (807), a phrase that does not only point towards the title of the novel, but also to the characters' shared parentage in Aunt Hannah's shocking revelation: "Yes, honey, all of one blood!" (729). All these allusions to the key metaphor in the story bring out three distinctive traits in Gothic fiction – identity, heredity, and sexual taboos – that Hopkins juggles to reflect social anxieties concerning racial purity at the turn of the century.

The reception of the Gothic literary tradition, which resurfaced during the *fin-de-siècle* Occult revival, is part the complex web of intertextual references that underlies the encounter with Otherness in *Of One Blood*. Hopkins' work could be classified within the category of American Gothic, which, as Leslie Fiedler clarifies, is more concerned with political issues than its British counterpart due to its intimate ties with the history of racial conflict in the United States (145-46). Likewise, Justin Edwards draws attention to the fact that, although nineteenth-century preoccupations concerning race can also be identified in British literature, such texts differ from the American trend in the fact that they are generally focused upon an external source of horror due to historical factors (17). For instance, the British slave trade and plantations existed in the colonies, outside national borders. This situation gave way to textual representations of the racial Other as something distant and mysterious, and the fears which are aroused by this kind of literature are triggered by the possibility of invasion from the unfamiliar outsider. In contrast, racial tensions were a central part of national consciousness in the United States. Consequently, the racial threat presented in American Gothic comes from within, which is why the presence of the racial Other is often depicted as an internal menace, as in the case of narratives concerning miscegenated blood. This central sensationalist element runs through Hopkins' narrative from beginning to end. Blood has adopted a wide spectrum of

meanings in Gothic literature, ranging from the fragility of life to anxieties within the family structure, and, although the violence exerted in the novel does not reach the extremes of blood-spilling, this crimson fluid constitutes the main source of horror for the characters, working as a hidden, internal threat within the borders of the human body. As William Hughes illustrates, the body through which the blood circulates in the Gothic tradition does not always stand for a single person: it may also represent a racial and national body whose purity is in danger of being corrupted (24). This notion is therefore crucial to a thorough understanding of the characters' reactions to the discovery of their African ancestry, since the critical symbolic value of blood is strongly linked to the concept of personhood. In agreement with Susan Gillman, the preoccupation concerning this other recurrent theme in Gothic fiction is made apparent in instances of "disguised, doubled, and multiple identities, babies exchanged in the cradle, magical signs and birthmarks as proofs of identity" (59) throughout Hopkins' text.

It is possible to appreciate further traces of the Gothic in the presence of transgressive forms of sexuality, a key feature in the gothicization of racial conflict. For instance, the mere existence of mixed-raced characters contributes to the creation of an ominous climate around the then-shameful secret of interracial sexual union, a practice that was considered unnatural in this period of racial discrimination (165). As a living proof of miscegenation, their presence constitutes a haunting reminder the sexual violence perpetuated during slavery, since biracial children were more often than not the result of the sexual exploitation of African-American women (Belgrave and Allison 434). Similarly, sinister entanglements are taken a step further through the incestuous triangle formed by Reuel, Dianthe, and Aubrey. As Jenny Di Placidi notes, incest is a prominent theme in the Gothic genre, configured as "a sexual act associated with transgression, violations of power and violence" (4). Such dangerous liaisons form part of what Susan Gillman defines as "Hopkins' strategic blood-talk" (77). Besides representing the characters' internal struggle with their ancestry, Hopkins' choice of basic metaphor implied

a challenge against the racist discourses taking place in nineteenth-century culture. In her article on Hopkins' syncretic use of occult sciences to tackle essential dilemmas of the period, Gillman mentions how blood was "probably the most commonly used term in racist and racialist discourse" (60) across diverse fields, appearing as a legal concept in the one-drop rule of miscegenation (78), as well as in ethnology and post-Darwinian theories of "blood-mixture" (58), as "a quasi-mystical figure for nation and race purity" (61) and, chiefly, "as a basis for scientific and social scientific theories of the heredity (and degeneracy) of racial characteristics" (61). Hopkins' project to deconstruct the term "blood" (60) can be read, as Gillman convincingly argues, as a counter-narrative that "not only responds to those dominant discourses but also converts them to [her] own use" (58). For instance, the novel's final section transforms the curse of black blood not only into a positive sign of Ethiopian royalty, but also into a proud celebration of the African cradle of humanity as "the most ancient source of all that [we] value in modern life" (Hopkins 270). Through this innovative use of typical Gothic patterns, the author reverses the traditional presentation of miscegenation as a source of horror and generates, instead, an empowering supernatural tale fitting her Pan-Africanist ambitions.

Besides borrowing elements from the scholarly areas mentioned above, Hopkins based her exploration of the internal mysteries of *fin-de-siècle* African-American identity on another contemporary current of thought, that of Spiritualism and the Occult. Just like the pseudoscientific fields of nineteenth-century eugenics and ethnology, these movements proposed an investigation of what occurs within the borders of the Self and the body. However, spiritualist practices and Occult doctrines clearly shifted consideration from the physical level to a more ethereal plane by establishing connections between the spiritual world and the inner workings of the human mind. Despite the fact that Hopkins was not a practicing spiritualist, she manifested a career-long interest in Occult matters, especially in those oriented towards deciphering the depths of the unconscious.

This facet of her background is made apparent in her repetitive use of mystical elements as plot devices in *Of One Blood*, a work which, as Kucich demonstrates, is founded on "a solid tradition of literary spiritualism as a revision of previous works on the subject" (137). Hopkins' knowledge on these subjects is made apparent, for instance, in her cross-textual references to spiritualist concepts, such as the phrase "There is no death. Life is everlasting, and from its reality can have no end" (Hopkins 102), which, in addition to echoing Marryat's volume *There Is No Death: On Crossing Over* (1891), alludes to a fundamental tenet for spiritualists, who conceived death as a rite of passage from the earthly plane to one of the seven hierarchical spheres that composed the more evolved stage of the spirit world.[68] Likewise, Reuel's curiosity regarding "Plato's doctrine – the soul's transmigration, and reflections from the invisible world surrounding us" (Hopkins 109) emulates the spiritualist reworking of neo-platonic thought embraced by Paschal Beverly Randolph, Andrew Jackson Davis, and other followers of the movement (Gutierrez, *Plato's Ghost* 10). Hopkins was also familiar with Harriet Martineau's *Letters on Mesmerism* (1845), as well as with the work of the mediums Lizzie Doten (Brown 392) and Cora Scott, the last of which is included as a character in *Of One Blood*. The first short story published by Hopkins in the *Colored American Magazine*, "The Mystery Within Us" (1900), confirms her curiosity for these peculiar ideologies. The title of the narration presents a preoccupation with the inner structures of the Self which Hopkins was to reiterate in her subsequent serialized novel.

[68] Although the spiritualist faith clearly drew upon the notions of death and eternal life manifested in Christianity and other world religions, spiritualists combined these traditions with the views of the eighteenth-century Swedish philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg to justify a permeable communication between the world of the living and the Great Beyond that formed the basis of their system of belief. Bret E. Carroll provides a detailed explanation of the influence of the Swedenborgian cosmology on the spiritualist conception of the afterlife in her study *Spiritualism in Antebellum America*: "Spiritualists divided their spiritual universe into seven hierarchically arranged and concentric 'spheres'. At the center of these spheres or the top of the hierarchy was God . . . [and] Occupying the seven spheres . . . were finite spiritual beings who embraced a virtually infinite number of degrees of development" from which they could advise earthly dwellers on how to attain a state of supreme goodness through the aid of mediums (62-3).

A mere consideration of Hopkins' subtitle *The Hidden Self* brings attention to the essential theme of her novel, and, at the same time, clearly alludes to one of the main sources of inspiration for the development of such a topic. As Cynthia Schrager explains, Hopkins' views on the unconscious and the supernatural as gates to self-discovery were influenced by "The Hidden Self" (1890), an essay by the philosopher and psychologist William James dealing with the existence of multiple personalities as a consequence of traumatic experiences (182). The following reflection, expressed by Reuel, provides some insight on the intertextual allusions to James' essay, along with William Dean Howells' volume *The Undiscovered Country* (1880),[69] whose title recalling Hamlet's musings about the afterlife hints towards the spiritualist theme of the novel: "The wonders of the material world cannot approach those of the undiscovered country within ourselves – the hidden self lying quiescent in every human soul" (Hopkins 33).[70] The information provided on the sources that Reuel consults in his relentless studies on the paranormal demonstrates the extent to which the relationship between Spiritualism and the emerging theories proposed by the New Psychology movement was a major impact on Hopkins' work (Schrager 182). Spiritualism was an "enormously effective . . . predecessor of psychotherapy" in the sense that its practitioners were concerned with the disclosure of concealed or forgotten stories as a healing method (Gutierrez, "Spiritualism" 9).

For instance, the experiments carried out by the members of the American Society for Psychical Research, which James co-founded in 1884, examined this notion in two co-dependent ways: firstly, by considering the possibility of understanding the unconscious as a channel for communication with the spirit world; and, secondly, by simultaneously interpreting paranormal events and odd experiences such as trance states, spirit possession, hypnosis,

[69] "But that the dread of something after death, / The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (Shakespeare 3.1.79-81).

[70] Howells' novel exposes the trickeries of fraudulent mediums to illustrate the rise and fall of the spiritualist movement through the disappointments of Dr Boynton, a mesmerist, and his psychic daughter Egeria.

dreams, or sleepwalking as instruments to unveil the mysteries of the unconscious (James, "Hidden Self" 80). James perceived the trance-condition as "an immensely complex and fluctuating thing, into the understanding of which we have hardly begun to penetrate" and claimed that "a comparative study of trance and sub-conscious states is . . . of the utmost importance for the comprehension of our nature" (*Ibidem* 100). It is precisely through such states that Reuel and Dianthe set out to comprehend their own nature. Furthermore, James' essay appears as a book "eagerly sought by students of mysticism, and dealing with the great field of new discoveries in psychology" (Hopkins 30) which Reuel consults in the first chapter of *Of One Blood*. "All the while . . . the phenomena are there", reads Reuel, "lying broadcast all over the surface of history . . . divinations, inspirations, demoniacal possessions, apparitions, trances, ecstasies, miraculous healing . . . and occult powers possessed by peculiar individuals" (Hopkins 30). Although Reuel attributes these words to the French psychologist Alfred Binet (*Ibidem*), Hopkins is quoting James' comments word by word (80). Even the title under which she disguises the text, *The Unclassified Residuum* (30), duplicates the first sentences of "The Hidden Self": "The great field for new discoveries is always the unclassified residuum . . . No part of the unclassified residuum has usually been treated with a more contemptuous scientific disregard than the mass of phenomena generally called mystical" (James 79-80). Such a sense of reception of the irrational and the uncanny on a mental plane provides a suitable context for the discovery of the Other within the Self. Hopkins applies this idea to the unveiling of racial heritage by employing parapsychological theories throughout *Of One Blood* as a form of decoding African-American identity in the Reconstruction era. Consequently, the paranormal events in the story expose and denounce the traumatic memory of slavery and discrimination in the United States through the recovery of repressed and oppressed stories, thus producing a parallel reading of silenced recollections trapped in the characters' unconscious and suppressed accounts in the grand narratives of history.

This is especially true for Dianthe, whose sudden irruption of erased memories mirrors the Freudian "return of the repressed" in hysterical patients ("Further Remarks" 170). Hopkins was well acquainted with the work of Sigmund Freud (Brown 392), who, like James, had attempted to gain access to the unconscious mind through mesmeric practices by introducing hypnosis into his clinical methods in 1887 (Macmillan 25), after which he joined the Society for Psychical Research in 1911.[71] The thematization of the African "hidden self" was shaped by further studies on related phenomena, such as Pierre Janet's dissociation theory (Brown 394), Alfred Binet's *Hypnotism* (1888) and *On Double Consciousness: Experimental Psychological Studies* (1890), along with Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, and Hippolyte Bernheim's scholarship on early psychology, hysteria, and trauma (Wallinger 325). Most notably, Cynthia Schrager connects Hopkins' text to the notion of double consciousness which was famously employed by the Pan-Africanist author and activist W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (1903) to delve into the paradoxical duality of the African-American sense of personhood (Schrager 188). Du Bois possibly borrowed this term from James, with whom he had coincided at Harvard University (Lemert 96), and was influenced by his views on the phenomenon of multiple personality in the socialized self: "A man has as many selves as people who recognize him" (294), James argued in *Principles of Psychology* (1890). In *The Souls of Black Folk*, this concept is addressed to express the duality of African-American identity: "One even feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois 41). Hopkins' attentive reading of Du Bois' philosophy lies at the core of the conception of her mixed-raced characters' hybridity in *Of One Blood* (Schrager 189).

[71] Freud became an honorary member of the Society for Psychical Research of Cambridge in 1911. His contributions to its proceedings were presented in his paper "A Note on the Unconscious in Psycho-Analysis" (1912).

As African-Americans, Dianthe and Reuel are "born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world" (Du Bois 189). Besides being torn between two cultures, the clairvoyant couple is able to see beyond the veil between this world and the next: "I see much clearly, much dimly, of the powers and influences behind the Veil, and yet I cannot name them", utters Dianthe during a trance (107). The lifted "Veil" is loaded with implications concerning the act of crossing over to the Other Side, or traversing the barrier dividing active and passive states of consciousness, which conform mystical experiences to which Hopkins applies the social and political meaning of Du Bois' symbol. The Veil, a well-known and recurrent image in *The Souls of Black Folk*, illustrates Du Bois' argument as a powerful metaphor for the unequalizing borders between white and black Americans. *Of One Blood* contains multiple acts of veil-lifting, such as the blurring of the colour line through spiritualist or Occult practices against the backdrop of racial segregation. Hopkins elaborates upon this trope in her revelation of mysterious secrets regarding family histories, racial difference, the limits of the conscious mind, the roots of Western culture, and the origins of humanity, all of which constitute cases of reception of the Other within the Self. One of the most evident examples of this internalization of Otherness can be found in the Africanized rewriting of the Genesis that takes place during Reuel's archaeological project in Ethiopia. When Professor Stone, leader of the expedition, announces his intention to prove that "black was the original color of man in prehistoric times" (Hopkins 270), Reuel, who has trouble acknowledging his African heredity, is well aware of the fact that such a disclosure would shake the foundations of Western culture, perceptions of race, and personhood: "Your theories may be true, Professor, but if so, your discoveries will establish the primal existence of the Negro as the most ancient source of all that you value in modern life . . . How can the Anglo-Saxon world bear the establishment of such a theory?" (Hopkins 270). It is precisely the answer to this "burning question" (Hopkins 33) that the characters in *Of One Blood* set out to find by gradually

processing the "mystic spell of Africa" that "is and ever was over all America" (Du Bois, *John Brown* 1).

2.2.2 "From Alabaster to Ebony": Character Development and the Racialization of Identity

2.2.2.1 Reuel Briggs' Archetypal Journey: The Mythical Hero's Quest as Reconciliation with the Dark Other

When Reuel sits with his friend Aubrey Livingston among the segregated audience at a concert of "Negro music" by "a party of Southern colored people" (33) at the Tremont Temple Baptist church, his attitude quickly traces a clear line between his self-perception as a white man and the African-American singers performing. His concealed heredity remains incognito as his classmates observe: "there are some pretty girls in the troupe; one or two as white as we" (34). Reuel not only refuses to discuss with his companions the "woes of unfortunates, tramps, stray dogs and cats and Negroes" (34), but also avoids any possible identification with them by uttering pejorative comments regarding interracial mingling. As a response to Aubrey's remark about how, in contrast with the white-looking girls in the choir, Southern women range "from alabaster to ebony" (34), Reuel declares that "[i]f this is to be the result of emancipation", he would like to "vote that we ask Congress to annul the Proclamation" (35),[72] thus expressing clear discomfort towards the dissolution of racial boundaries. Aubrey joins him in his configuration of African-Americans as a freakish object of curiosity, stating that "the results of amalgamation are worthy the careful attention of all medical experts" (34), to which Reuel "peevishly" replies with an evidently ill-intentioned allusion to Aubrey's family of slave holders: "Don't talk shop, Livingston" (34). Yet Reuel's approach to his veiled racial and

[72] Alluding to the liberation of slaves by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.

cultural heritage is to be magically transformed during the course of the novel, guiding him into a simultaneously inner and outer journey to come to terms with his inherent Otherness. Paranormal occurrences indicate the turning points of his adventure, granting him a deeper insight into the enigmatic hidden dimension of the Ethiopian royal lineage to which he belongs. This section aims to examine Hopkins' combination of mythic patterns found in world mythologies, Pan-Africanist ideas, and elements related to spiritualist culture. Observing the author's fusion of Occult tropes and narrative patterns that would be recognizable to her readership, such as what is now known as the monomyth of the hero's journey (Campbell 30), may facilitate the appreciation of how this syncretic text contributes to the protagonist's hospitable encounter with the racialized Other throughout his transatlantic odyssey.

The hero is configured as an explorer of the Other(ed) Side since the first pages of Hopkins' novel, and it soon becomes apparent that his fields of inquiry involve a preoccupation with the borders of the unfamiliar. Far from being limited to "seek[ing] the limit of civilized intercourse with Africa" (196), Reuel's acts of trespassing range from the geographical limits of his exotic adventures to the more ethereal boundaries of science, consciousness, race, and spiritual existence. His progressive disruption of binary oppositions begins with his academic interests. Cynthia Schrager (197) and Susan Gillman (62) agree on the fact that Reuel's characterization as a distinguished student at the faculty of medicine of Harvard University constitutes a subversion of dominant narratives of the period in diverse ways. His success as a "genius in his scientific studies" (31) conforms a response to nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific discourses around the meaning of racial difference – such as ethnology, polygenesis, and eugenics – which promoted stereotypes conceiving racial Others as mystifying creatures whose hybrid nature placed them closer to the realm of the supernatural (Willburn, "Savage Magnet" 160). Reuel challenges these assumptions not only by outstanding in his achievements as a promising biracial medical practitioner, but also by bridging the gap between what James

interpreted as the male, "scientific-academic mind" and the "feminine-mystical mind" ("Hidden Self" 81). By merging scientific knowledge with experimental mesmerism and ghostly visions, Reuel joins other spiritualist intellectuals of the period, such as Conan Doyle, Stead, or Crookes in their efforts to promote the symbolic "marriage" between the mutually exclusive realms of science and the supernatural, a union which was illustrated according to the separate spheres of Victorian life: science was linked to aspects such as reason and active consciousness, attributed to the masculine side; whereas spirituality, emotions, and the irrational were left to the feminine mind (Grimes 86).[73] As it has previously been stated, gendered and racialized stereotypes often converged, thus othering women and non-white individuals as similarly "intuitive, inspirational, religious, and altogether mediumistic" (*Banner of Light* 3).[74] To a certain extent, Reuel dissolves these divisions and secures his mobility between the margins and the centre of American culture by maintaining a simultaneously rational, intuitive, scientific, and mystical approach towards his discoveries. However, it is critical to note that racialized and gendered borders are not equally blurred in *Of One Blood*. In agreement with Schrager's enlightening analysis of the aforestated congruence between James' work and Hopkins' writing, Reuel and Dianthe's roles as active psychical researcher and passive, mesmerized patient reproduce the dichotomy of a feminine spiritual discourse and a masculine, medical one (184). Therefore, although the haunted duality suggested by the inclusion of James' parapsychological theories conforms to Hopkins' subversive approach to racial Otherness and sexual difference, the novel maintains, nonetheless, some of the binary structures supporting nineteenth-century gender roles.

[73] In his already mentioned work *Real Ghost Stories,* Stead explains hypnosis by describing active consciousness in traditionally masculine terms. It is "vigorous, alert, active, positive, monopolising all the means of communication and production" and "ignores the very existence of its partner" (20). In contrast, the unconscious is configured as feminine: "night comes, our conscious self sleeps, our Unconscious housewife wakes . . . It is only when the conscious personality is thrown into a state of hypnotic trance that the Unconscious Personality is emancipated from the marital despotism of her partner" (20).

[74] "Mediumship Among the Contrabands", *Banner of Light,* 20 August 1864. 3.

Reuel certainly "feels his twoness" (Du Bois 41) during his quest for identity. His racial ambivalence, for instance, is first suggested in the description of his physical appearance: "His head was . . . covered with an abundance of black hair . . . thick and smooth . . . his skin was white, but of a tint suggesting olive, an almost sallow color" (31). Similarly, he is depicted as a wandering spirit whose ambiguous origins distinguish him from his classmates: "None of the students . . . knew aught of Reuel Briggs' origin. It was rumoured first that he was of Italian birth, then they 'guessed' he was Japanese" (31). Curiously enough, the fact that he is first configured as a white person, however foreign, places him far from his final fate as an Ethiopian king. His invisible and spectral African ancestry has therefore not yet materialized at this initial stage of his journey. It remains, instead, a dormant mystery that will only be triggered by his first encounter with spiritualist phenomena. Apparently uprooted from any clear nationality, Reuel is presented as a lost, melancholic, ill-tempered young man (30) until his transcendental first meeting with Dianthe. The paranormal events depicted in the novel, triggered by her presence in the narrative, signal the beginning of Reuel's mystical heroic quest. She first appears as a "passing shadow" (32) across his trance state, and later holds him "spellbound" (36) by her voice and beauty at Tremont Temple. In her role as an African-American medium, Dianthe intensifies her partner's contact with the allegedly feminine, otherworldly side of reality, thus corresponding to the conceptualization of Africa as a womanly and spiritual uncharted territory (Goyal 46).

Significantly, as Reuel's wife and sister, she connects him to the matrilineal chain which, through Mira's ghost and their grandmother's narrative,[75] symbolically leads them back home by means of Occult practices associated with the figure of the African mother (Schrager

[75] The significance of Dianthe's role in the cross-generational and cross-diasporic matrilineal conversation established through spiritualist practices shall be commented upon in subsequent sections of this study.

184). In this sense, Reuel's evolution and migration represents a journey back to the motherland, both in a mythical and in a Freudian sense. By engaging in a supernaturalized reconnection with the dwelling of his ancestors to discover not only his own roots, but also the primal source of humankind, the male protagonist fulfils Campbell's interpretation of the woman as origin and destiny of the mythical quest (Mackey-Kallis 47): it is triggered by Reuel's attraction to his sister and concludes with the hero's Freudian desire to redress his exile from maternal territory, "re-appropriat[ing] one's origins by returning to the island-mother" (Goolcharan-Kumeta 70).

On his way to what may be read as his Africanized Ithaca, Reuel finds himself following the same itinerary he first advised Professor Stone not to trace: "Don't touch upon the origin of the Negro, you will find yourself in a labyrinth" (270). Channelled through occultist imagery, Reuel's negotiation of his diasporic status along the well-known and immensely recurrent narrative pattern of the hero's journey grants a Pan-Africanist connotation to this universal plotline.[76] Although Hopkins' novel presents multiple traits belonging to the archetypal monomyth, such as the classic call to adventure which encourages Reuel to leave the ordinary world of Boston middle-class society to "unearth buried cities and treasures" (194) on African soil, three specific stages deserve special attention for the purpose of this study: the meeting with the mentor, crossing over the threshold, and the hero's journey back to his motherland.

During his visit to the ancient Ethiopian city of Mereen, the protagonist meets Ai, a magician, savant, and leader of the hidden city of Telassar, who is described as a man of "kingly countenance, combining force, sweetness and dignity in every feature" (546), and is to become

[76] As it has been argued in seminal studies such as Joseph Campbell's *The Hero of a Thousand Faces* (1949), Northrop Frye's *The Secular Scripture* (1976), David Adams Leeming's *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (1981), or Harold Bloom's *The Hero's Journey* (2009), the narrative scheme of the archetypal quest can be identified in various works across literary history, from Virgil's *Aeneid* (19 BC) to Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851).

Reuel's benefactor and counsellor. Corresponding to his role as wise, protective mentor (Campbell 57), this "Afrocentric patron" (Knight 69) performs a decisive function in the story, since he triggers the hero's crossing over the threshold to the non-ordinary world of the unknown and the unpredictable, which constitutes a turning point in the course of the archetypal monomyth (Campbell 28). Ai informs Reuel of his veiled identity as "a legitimate son of Ethiopia" (497) and contributes to the typical anagnorisis of the hero (Frye 127) by offering him food, clothes, and a new name, thus encouraging him to embrace his newly-discovered royal African side. Their entrance into the majestic palace of Telassar acquires manifold meanings with relation to Reuel's metamorphosis. On an external level, it implies a transition from the socially and politically hostile space of the United States, where he cannot perform his medical profession freely, to the utopian, welcoming, nurturing space of Telassar (Knight 69). Furthermore, as Debra Bernardi argues in her reading of the spatial dimensions of Hopkins' text, physical locations often acquire a metaphorical significance (212). While Reuel's mobility is a characteristic part of the author's "narratives of invasion, narratives that are driven by spatial relocations, as one character invades a new social space, consequently propelling the plot" (Bernardi 212), his exploits entail a passageway into "the psychic space of the mind" (*Ibidem*). Beyond bridging the African diaspora, Reuel's arrival to the exotic homeland of his predecessors allows him to step into that ghostly borderland which Stead denominated the "unconscious personality" (20), where invisibilized truths lie dormant. By traversing the threshold into this mystical world, Reuel's trip adopts the significance of the mediumistic act of "crossing over", a recurrent term in spiritualist discourse employed as a reference to contact with the Great Beyond (Bennett 27). The echo of spiritualist beliefs is manifested, for instance, in the spiritual guidance offered by Ai to his king: "we can hold communion with the living though seas divide and distance is infinite, and our friends who have passed to the future life of light are allowed to comfort us here" (498). Such words parallel

the spiritualist transcendence of boundaries which allows the reception of the Other across time and space. Consequently, Reuel is "initiated into the mysteries" (498) of his ancestry as he engages in a "a technical conversation on the abstract science of occultism" (498) with his learned counsellor. Replicating Spiritualism's almost archaeological mission to recover the past, Ai unearths the Ethiopian "prehistoric existence of magnificence, the full record of which" was thought to be "lost in obscurity" (342). Following further traits of the Occult revival, this restoration of "the wisdom and science of [his] ancestors" (497) epitomizes the theosophical claim to an ancient lineage of historical continuity of the religio-magical cults of Antiquity (Tryphonopoulos 23). In a comparable restoration of this sort of knowledge, Ai transfers his Occult wisdom to Reuel as a heterodox mixture encompassing Ethiopian Christianity, Egyptian mythology, and Arabic magic (498). It is this transcultural alchemy which enables Reuel to lift the veil between the past and the present through the sight of a magical fountain in which the fate of his lover is reflected (498). While doing so, he is revealed Aubrey's evil manipulation of Dianthe, for which he decides to sail back to the United States.

Othered and in a state of developed consciousness (Campbell 29), Reuel returns "as eternal man – perfected, unspecific, universal man" (Campbell 15). Like the hero pursuing the mythic quest, "he has been reborn" (Campbell 15), has accepted his new identity and is ready for his "reintegration with society" (Campbell 29), which takes place as a symbolic resurrection from the underworld due to Aubrey's plot to have him murdered during the expedition. Having traversed the African diaspora, his renewed Self encapsulates the Pan-Africanist ideal of cross-geographical unity among black individuals while confirming Professor Stone's argument: "Undoubtedly . . . Afro-Americans are a branch of the wonderful and mysterious Ethiopians" (342). Although the term "Ethiopian" was regularly used to refer to all Africans, Eric Sundquist clarifies that it was sometimes employed to englobe all blacks in the diaspora, especially by New World black nationalists such as Hopkins (554). Therefore, Reuel's initiation into Occult

knowledge during his heroic quest connects him to his ancestral heritage and promotes a hospitable dialogue with his African past, articulating Hopkins' political activism in favour of racial justice, and challenging white supremacist power structures, as it is declared in the novel's final message: "No man can draw the dividing line between the two races, for they are both of one blood!" (729).

2.2.2.2 Channelling the African (M)other: Dianthe Lusk, Matrilineal Mediumship, and Narrative Hospitality

Dianthe's approach to the African diaspora in *Of One Blood* is filtered through her mediumistic role as a clairvoyant, as well as an instrument for the transmission of traumatic accounts concerning the hardships of African-American women throughout the nineteenth century. Named after the first wife of the prominent abolitionist John Brown (Gruesser 162), her character bears a clear connection with Hopkins' anti-racist and Pan-Africanist agenda. Brown was one of the main instigators of the American Civil War, as W. E. B. Du Bois illustrated in *John Brown: A Biography* (1909). His crucial task in boosting the slave liberation movement in the Southern states was very much admired by black intellectuals like Du Bois (Cain 305) and Hopkins (Brown 374), who included his name in her serialized novel *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902). The fact that Dianthe is thus linked to the struggle for racial equality emphasizes her configuration as a channel for African narratives from beyond the grave. Once more, Hopkins makes use of parapsychological theories, Occult imagery, and Gothic tropes to underline a character's hybrid position between races, cultures, the present, and the past.

Dianthe's characterization as a mixed-raced woman corresponds to the 'tragic mulatta' trope in the tradition of melodrama and sensation fiction. Bearing the traits of the Gothic heroine placed within the framework of racial conflict, she is depicted as a virtuous, innocent

victim who is prone to fainting and experiencing intense, overwrought emotions. The 'tragic mulatta' originated in American antebellum melodramas and remained a recurrent figure in sentimental literature by British and American authors throughout the decades of 1850 and 1860, appearing in works such as Thomas Mayne Reid's *The Quadroon; or, Adventures in the Far West* (1856), Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Octoroon; Or, The Lily of Louisiana* (1859), or Hannah Crafts' *The Bondwoman's Narrative* (1853-1861). Stories portraying this character type generally focus upon an innocent young girl with only the slightest trace of African blood in her veins, usually belonging to a middle-class background, and considered strikingly beautiful according to the standard of white beauty, based on the assumption that she is attractive because she does not seem black (Malchow 174). For instance, in Hiram Mattison's *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon; Or Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life* (1861), the author assures his readers that "notwithstanding the fair complexion and lady-like bearing of Mrs. Picquet, she is of African descent . . . an octoroon or eight blood" (5). Her "lady-like bearing" is therefore directly linked to the fact that no one "would suspect" that she had "a drop of African blood in her veins" (5). Likewise, Reuel falls under Dianthe's spell when he perceives that she is "not in any way the preconceived idea of a Negro" (35), but, instead, "fair as the fairest woman" (35), with a "face framed in golden hair, with soft brown eyes . . . [and] rose-tinged baby lips" (32). Moreover, her "perfect manners, . . . ease and good-breeding" turn her African ancestry invisible for "those socially above the level to which they knew this girl was born" (191).

Further traits belonging to the 'tragic mulatta' are sexual advances from a male tyrannical figure – often a slave owner – towards the vulnerable heroine. Emulating a characteristic aspect of Gothic incest (Di Placidi 3), Dianthe becomes a passive victim to the aggressive sexuality of Aubrey Livingston, who blackmails her into succumbing to his passion. On this wise, in agreement with Alisha Knight, the 'tragic mulatta' pattern voices a critique to

the history of interracial sexual abuse in the South, since Aubrey "represents everything that is negative about the region: racism, violence, and lust for black women" (69). Lastly, Dianthe's ending fits into this tradition, which generally concludes with the girl's discovery of the shameful secret of black blood, followed by persecution and captivity by the villain, leading to despair and a tragic early death (Raimon 5).

In her study on the mulatto character in American fiction, Judith Berzon describes the mixed-raced Other as "the fictional symbol of marginality", always presented as "an outcast, a wanderer, one alone" (100). Along her liminal existence, Dianthe epitomizes this sense of marginality by being constantly silenced and erased as a manifestation of nineteenth-century uneasiness towards hybrid entities that challenge definable boundaries. As it has previously been stated, her function as Reuel's female counterpart configures her as a bridge enabling the reception of the uncanny, her otherness as a woman constituting a necessary element in the male quest for selfhood. Particularly othered since Freud's interpretation of the female psyche as an unexplored "dark continent" (212),[77] the theoretical approach to Woman as "the origin of the very concept of alterity" (66) which leaves "no other possibility than to call it mysterious" (88), as Lévinas determined in *Time and the Other* (1946-47), has been examined in the work of theorists such as Claude Lévis-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, and, subsequently, called into question by Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, among diverse feminist thinkers. Paraphrasing Lévinas in her introduction to *The Second Sex* (1949), De Beauvoir dismisses his assertions as a reductive interpretation of Woman as a mere platform for male transcendence: "Man defines woman not in herself but in relation to him . . . he is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other . . . the subject can be posed only as being opposed . . . to the other, the

[77] Freud's choice to borrow his metaphor from the travel catalogue *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), which narrates the Victorian explorer Sir Henry Morton Stanley's vision of Africa, is particularly telling of how gendered, geo-cultural, and racial Otherness could overlap in nineteenth-century culture.

inessential, the object" (17, 20). Woman is therefore fated to be regarded, in Cixous' words, as a "no-body wrapped in veils, carefully kept distant", inextricably linked to the "invisible, foreign, secret, hidden, mysterious, black, forbidden" in patriarchal discourse ("Sorties" 200). Dianthe's configuration as a silent spectre therefore reflects how she is doubly othered by the complementary forces of sexism and racism. Although this specific form of double consciousness and the issues to which it responds were not fully explored until Frances Beale's pamphlet "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1969), Hopkins' work shows intense awareness of the concerns of intersectional feminism. For instance, the female protagonist's marginality lends itself to interpretation through the prism of Patricia Hill Collins' idea of the matrix of domination as an interlocking system of oppression in terms of race, gender, and class faced by African-American women (222). Consequently, as a manifestation of her dual Otherness, Dianthe's is invisibilized through a twofold loss of identity: she is, first, kept ignorant of her family history and her parentage with Reuel and, secondly, attributed a completely different personality after her amnesia, as her partner observes: "It is a *dual* mesmeric trance! The girl is only partly normal now" (106). Furthermore, Dianthe's ambivalent 'tragic mulatta' status places her as one of those "racially phantasmagoric female figures" (22) in American fiction, who, as Daphne Brooks convincingly argues, share the transgressive in-betweenness of spiritualist mediums. Brooks bases her discussion upon a comparison between the "confusing ocular politics of race" and the "confounding porousness of the female medium" (20), thus equating the practices taking place at the séance table, such as the appropriation of identities, or speaking in tongues, with the controversy aroused by other entities eluding a fixed classification in a turbulent culture which "was itself a kind of phantasmagoria show" (20). Such preoccupations reveal a parallel "obsessive fascination with both spirit-rappers and white mulatta figures" (20) at a time when nobody was "clear enough in vision to decide who hath black blood and who hath not" (Hopkins 729). Such attitudes,

Brook argues, enclosed an "impulse to institute systems of racial and ontological order and meaning onto bodies that show dangerous signs of erupting out of conventional categories" (20). Responding to similar anxieties involving a fear of border crossing, the biracial medium functions, in Jennifer Brody's terms, as "a floating signifier . . . she is perpetually being erased or effaced in an effort to reify the tenuous, permeable boundaries between white and black, high and low, male and female, England and America, pure and impure" (18). Therefore, Dianthe's mixed-raced, mediumistic figure, "(encom)passing the uncanny traces of the familiar and the foreign" (Brooks 19), facilitates her identification with ghostly subjects.

Before hosting the voices of her African past in her cross-generational encounter with Otherness, Dianthe must, first, forget her Self. During her amnesia, she drifts away from her ancestry and identity, accessing her veiled former existence only through altered states of consciousness: "I sometimes dream or have waking visions of a past time in my life . . . But when I try to grasp the fleeting memories they leave me groping in darkness . . . I try to recall the past, but all is confusion and mystery" (Hopkins 196, 197). Her loss of memory implies an erasure of personhood during which she lacks all form of agency, thus mirroring, in an eerie re-enactment of bygone times, her mother's subjection to the slave owners: Aubrey's father, Doctor Livingston, who "owned a large plantation of slaves" and was "deeply interested in . . . mesmeric phenomena", experimented on Mira, "throw[ing] her into a trance state many times . . . to call her into the parlor to perform tricks of mind-reading for the amusement of visitors" (112), thus objectifying her spirituality as an exotic freak show. Aubrey confides to Reuel how his father "made the necessary passes" to change Mira "from a serious, rather sad Negress, very mild to everyone" to a "gay, noisy, restless woman, full of irony and sharp jesting . . . Nothing could be more curious than to see her and hear her" (112). Her daughter undergoes a similarly "peculiar metamorphosis" (112) at the hands of Reuel's magnetizing powers, which, as Gillman clarifies, "are themselves emblems of barely conscious and potentially illicit sexual

control" (Gillman 59). Even after her separation from her first husband, she succumbs, "in a postbellum recapitulation of the sexual violence done to her female forebears", to "the superior 'will power' and 'invisible influences' of Aubrey, himself the son of the slave holding" (Gillman 59). In her powerless stance against Aubrey's overwhelming domination, Dianthe is portrayed as a passive, hypnotized victim: "In vain the girl sought to throw off the numbing influence of the man's presence. In desperation she tried to defy him, but she knew that she had lost her will-power and was but a puppet in the hands of this false friend" (198). Such states undoubtedly match her situation with that of other mesmerized patients and trance speakers at the turn of the century: stories involving the "phantom-like" (87) Egeria Boynton in Howells' *Undiscovered Country* (1880), George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1895), or the famous Verena Tarrant in Henry James' *Bostonians* (1886) constitute examples of what Willburn denominates Victorian "trance novels", that is to say, "a body of fiction [which] focuses its plotlines on the effects that trance states have on young female characters" (*Possessed* 115). What these literary entranced women have in common is the fact that they are not in control of their own voice, but are, instead, dominated by a figure of authority who speaks for or through them.

As Helen Davies argues in her analysis of the gendered power dynamics which took place as eroticized mesmerism in Victorian fiction, narratives evoking binary oppositions between an assertive, masculine subject and a passive, feminine object manifest *fin-de-siècle* preoccupations concerning vocal women who possessed the ability to captivate their audiences (272). For instance, when Dianthe "rose and came slowly to the edge of the platform and stood in the blaze of lights with hands modestly clasped before her" (35), the public was immediately "spellbound" (36). In this depiction of her performance at Tremont Temple, the singer resembles the celebrated medium Cora Scott, who was portrayed by Nathaniel Parker Willis during her trance lectures at Dodsworth's Hall as a fascinating sight: "how very curious it was, to see a longhaired young woman standing alone in the pulpit, her face turned upward, her

delicate bare arms raised in a clergyman's attitude of devotion, and a church full of people listening attentively while she prayed" (303). However, as Claire Kahane rightly suggests, female irruptions into the public sphere were regarded as a subversive participation in the male tradition of oratory (64). For this reason, Scott's eloquence was often attributed to the presence of "a male spirit . . . speaking through her lips" (Willis 303). "When speaking, she did so in a trance, the most passive of states . . . she spoke, but her speech was understood as ventriloquized; she received no credit for her own intellectual, verbal, or performative skills", clarifies Molly McGarry (39). Despite the spiritualist performer's spectral mobility amidst the private and public spheres, her figure could be reduced to a "penetrable, malleable . . . 'copy'" that "recites the traditional script of femininity" (Davies 328). According to Davies, the presumably feminine susceptibility to being possessed by a male spirit or succumbing to a man's mesmeric abilities led to increasing associations between "ventriloquism" and "masculine potency and prowess" in Late Victorian literature (328). The nineteenth-century cultural and social need to unvoice these vocal women is certainly exhibited in *Of One Blood,* as Dianthe and Reuel replicate the aforementioned dichotomous roles of the male mesmerist, medical practitioner and psychical researcher; and the female medium, entranced patient and object of scientific inquiry.

Whereas Reuel proclaims having "stumbled upon a fascinating case" (106) of "suspended animation" (102) and "cataleptic sleep" (103), Dianthe is deprived of her ability to sing: "The grand, majestic voice that had charmed the hearts from thousands of bosoms, was pinioned in the girl's throat like an imprisoned song-bird. Dianthe's voice was completely gone along with her memory" (192). Her highly symbolic silence puts an end to her career on stage and underlines her suppressed narrative agency, of which she seems painfully aware: "I know much but as yet have not the power to express it" (107). Consequently, her mute amnesia is

decoded through Hopkins' employment of contemporary psychoanalytic theories on female insanity within a context of racial and sexual violence (Brown 393).

Notions concerning hysteria, women's orature, and the unconscious are interwoven via Dianthe's character throughout Hopkins' novel. As noted by Judy Cornes, the connections between madness and the loss of identity constituted a recurrent theme in the literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which reflected a strong "fascination for the shaky foundations on which rested these authors' desires for certainty in an unpredictable universe" (5). Dianthe's tendency to fall into frantic seizures and wild bursts of tears may be read as signs of mental instability, especially as Reuel warns her against such fits: "Don't get excited. That you *must* guard against" (196, original emphasis). His appeal to reason echoes the watchful husband in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), as well as the apprehension of nineteenth-century doctors towards the "unnatural and unhealthy excitement" which affected women who established contact with the paranormal plane (Anonymous, qtd. in Alvarado and Zingrone 230). As previously mentioned, this distinctive openness towards the irrational side of the mind through altered states of consciousness connected the image of the spiritualist medium to that of the hysterical patient in Victorian mental science (Dickerson 34). For example, in his lecture "The Philosophy of Spiritualism and The Pathology and Treatment of Mediomania" (1874), the American physician and clergyman Frederic Rowland Marvin initiated the term 'mediomania' to classify mediumship as a specific brand of hysteria which appeared when women were agitated beyond their power of healthy endurance (38).[78] It is precisely Dianthe's 'mediomania' what eventually functions as an open door towards the unconscious, which allows the invasion of traumatic recollections and untold stories on an individual and cross-generational level. Once her memory returns, she recovers not only her

[78] See also William Hammond's *Spiritualism and Allied Causes and Conditions of Nervous Derangement* (1876).

past as an African-American former slave, but also the concealed narratives of her mother and grandmother.

Dianthe's awakening coincides with her mysterious encounter with Aunt Hannah, who is herself a conjure woman, "the most noted 'voodoo' doctor or witch in the country" (727). Through the healing power of storytelling, she helps her granddaughter patch together her fragmented sense of Self by reconnecting her to her familial roots. Unveiling and assembling pieces of history and cultural heritage, both women engage in the creation of a black matrilineal consciousness to welcome narratives which privilege the voices and experiences of those in the margins (Goyal 46). The significance of matrilineal tradition in African-American female expression was pointed out by Alice Walker in her influential womanist essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1972). Walker praises the muffled voices of those "mothers and grandmothers" who have "handed on the creative spark" to the next generation (407), empowering their daughters to speak up. Although her observations refer to the field of literary creation, she places particular stress upon the relevance of storytelling as a valuable vehicle for cross-generational transmission among black women "year after year and century after century, when for most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write" (403). Orature thus persists as a crucial element in the unfolding genealogy of maternal feminist sensibilities, acting, just like the "disruptive storytelling" of the spiritualist séance (Tromp 10), as an instrument to verbalize the "repressed counter-narrative" of the dead and silenced (Kucich 95). In her quest for a coherent identity, Dianthe wanders "through the mazes of unfamiliar forest paths" (727) until she discovers her grandmother's "Southern Negro cabin" (727), thus matching Walker's allegorical matrilineal reunion: "Guided by my heritage . . . in search of my mother's garden, I found my own" (409).

Aunt Hannah's maternal legacy of supernatural power is inherited by Mira, who exerts her mediumistic abilities to put into words her passive protest against the tyranny imposed by

slave owners. Despite being under the mesmeric influence of Doctor Livingston, her trance state serves as a subversive strategy to voice a vengeful prophecy announcing the Civil War:

> All the women will be widows and the men shall sleep in early graves. They come from the north, from the east, from the west, they sweep to the gulf through a trail of blood. Your houses shall burn, your fields be laid waste, and a down-trodden race shall rule in your land (113).[79]

Mira's chilling tale not only predicts her own emancipation from bondage, but also the future freedom of her mother and daughter. Her subsequent paranormal encounter with Dianthe suggests an additional employment of practices associated with the Occult to trace an African-American matrilineal connection across time and space. Although the ghost's "complexion was that of mulattoes and foreigners", Dianthe "did not feel at all frightened, recognizing instantly the hand of mysticism in this strange occurrence", embracing the Otherness embodied by this silent unearthly visitor. Mira "neither looked at Dianthe nor did she speak; but . . . opened a book . . . and wrote" (199), signing her name as a testimonial gesture manifesting her desire to communicate her personal history to her offspring. Moreover, her determination to underline the following excerpt belonging to the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of Luke indicates a clear attempt to foreshadow the subsequent disclosure of suppressed biographies: "For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed" (199). Spiritualist tropes therefore perform a decisive role in the production of a matrilineal narrative which recovers and interweaves the ordeals undergone by three generations of African-American women.

In agreement with Pérez's aforementioned reading, the "self to be discovered through relationships with the spirits is a healed healer" (355): storytelling operates as an emblematic exorcism of the "transgenerational haunting" (Abraham and Torok 175) posed by the traumatic past of the fragmented Afro-Diasporic community. Just like the subject who remains "haunted

[79] Since Hopkins frames her narrative in Reconstruction America, mentioning the recent "passing of slavery from the land" and "the war", which had "passed like a dream of horrors" (34), it is understood that Aubrey's retrospective account of Mira's paranormal activities is prior to the Civil War.

by the gaps and silences of others" in Abraham and Torok's analogy (Arias and Pulham 12), Dianthe is not free until Aunt Hannah verbalizes their family history, casting out the phantom looming over centuries of sexual abuse and racial discrimination. It is only through her narrative that Dianthe is ultimately reconciled with her African bloodline, a reunion which is consolidated on her deathbed. Watched over by her grandmother, she receives the spirits of her forebears in a state of almost religious seizure:

> It was the welcome of ancient Ethiopia to her dying daughter of the royal line . . . Upspringing from her couch, as through the air the mighty hallelujah sounded, Dianthe with frantic gestures and wild distended eyes cried "I see them now! The glorious band! . . . All hail my royal ancestors" (804).

Since she cannot travel to her motherland, Africa is brought to her through a reversed diasporic migration, granting her "a powerful disembodiment, one that allows her to escape the . . . trauma that as a child of women enslaved in America she inherits and experiences" (Brown 393). In like manner, as an African maternal figure, Aunt Hannah secures Dianthe's conceptual return to the familial homeland. As observed by Yogita Goyal, it is essential to bear in mind how the influence of nineteenth-century theories of race and gender "requires positioning Africa as both essentially feminine and spiritual in order to construct a maternal tradition" (46). Paying attention to "the role that Africa plays in the novel to unearth its theorization of diaspora", it is possible to shed light on further evidence of the "intersection between James and Hopkins" (46) in the novel's imagery. Hopkins' application of James' interpretation of the "feminine-mystical mind" ("Hidden Self" 81) in relation to Pan-Africanist ideals is made apparent in the identification of the parallel traits shared by Aunt Hannah and the Ethiopian territory as necessary aspects for a cross-diasporic homecoming. Just like the elderly matriarch, Ethiopia is presented as a mysterious, otherworldly, welcoming, and nurturing space, thus alluding to the emblem of "Mother Africa", also known as the "Mother Land", or the "Promised Land", which are crucial notions in Pan-Africanist thought (Djung and Erhunmwunsee 83).

Strongly linked to the "Back to Africa" movement of the nineteenth century (Hanks 139), this gendered vision of the "dark continent" (Stanley 1878) as a mother who longs for the return of diasporic people of African descent to their original cradle raises meaningful issues in terms of narrative hospitality.

The feminized host occupies a central position in the surpassing of geo-cultural borders in *Of One Blood*, since its apparition extends from the trope of 'Mother Africa' to the figure of the spiritualist medium. Border crossing adopts various shapes and meanings in this Pan-Africanist fiction, for which the dynamics of encounter between host and guest require a careful consideration with regard to the interaction with Otherness. By blurring racial, cultural, generational, geographical, and temporal boundaries, Hopkins stages a welcoming framework for Dianthe's embracement and reaffirmation of her African othered Self. Drawing upon Brooks' analysis, the possibility of this dialogue is due to the permeability of the racially liminal figure and the spirit medium as sites of multiplicity and contradiction, for which they embody a polyvalent passageway into the unknown, "an imaginary site of contact and conflict, a frontier" (27). Brooks' observations are granted a richer insight if they are taken into account in the light of Lévinas' conception of hospitality as a conversation in which the subject lets the Other exist as a stranger, assuming that to "let her be" instead of reducing her to the patterns of thought adopted by the I implies accepting a disruptive element that modifies self-perception (Irigaray, "Questions" 109).

Most notably, Lévinas establishes an inextricable connection between hospitality, femininity, and Otherness, thus identifying the woman as "the other whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which defines the field of intimacy" (*Totality* 155). The erotic and maternal qualities attributed to hospitality, based on the approach to the female body as the first sphere of dwelling, before the home and the nation state (Still 21), are strongly linked to the understanding of the mixed-raced

medium and the African mother as ever welcoming, receiving, open towards Otherness. Despite the reductive nature of this approach,[80] it provides a suitable tool to decode Dianthe's negotiation of her racialized identity while illustrating how Hopkins' celebration of African heritage is impacted by deeply ingrained associations between women and hospitality in spiritualist culture, Pan-Africanist philosophy, and parapsychological theories.

The allegory of the African mother thus encompasses diverse fundamental aspects of the visibilization of diasporic personhood. In addition to representing the ancestral homeland, this symbol mediates the characters' narratives in their mobility traversing the diaspora. 'Mother Africa' triggers Reuel's geographical displacement to meet his destiny as Ethiopian king, and frames Dianthe's participation in their family's spiritualized matrilineal narrative. Following this analogy, Dianthe not only functions as a bridge between the familiar and the uncanny, but also engages in a heroic quest for the motherland. As Julia Kristeva points out in her influential essay "Stabat Mater" (1977), the conceptual maternal body "turns out to be an adult (male and female) fantasy of a lost continent" (133). Therefore, through her paranormal reconciliation with Africa, Dianthe's quest for identity may also be said to follow what Maureen Murdock defines as the steps of the heroine's journey: her story begins with the initial separation from the motherline and ends with a yearning to reconnect with the feminine in order to heal the split between mother and daughter (Murdock 112). Despite her passive stance throughout Hopkins' text, Dianthe eventually embodies an empowering reversal of the traditionally male-centric monomyth, thus subverting the silencing policies of patriarchal America through her essential connection to Africa's matriarchal roots (Amadiume 29).

[80] Judith Still perceptively comments on how the Lévinasian feminized notion of hospitality entails an imaginary in which the woman's authority is "only a delegated one, and she is an intermediary, her body (and mental and emotional faculties) a means for two or more men to communicate and bond" (Still 21).

Finally, as it has previously been stated, the spiritualist portrayal of women resonates with Cixous' arguments, according to which the female subject is more receptive of the unfamiliar due to the fact that she "admits there is another" and can therefore become the "dwelling place of the other" ("Sorties" 2010). In this sense, hospitality is attained through the act of writing, which Cixous describes as "making room for the other part of myself who is the other, who can only exist, of course, if I am there to receive it" (*Déluge* 112). Amidst the "performative textuality" she exerts during the séance (Grimes 88), the spiritualist medium equates Hopkins' role as a woman writer in her experience of hospitality, widening her sense of Self to the extent that "I is not I . . . it is with the others, coming from the others, putting me in the other's place, giving me the other's eyes" (*Déluge* 87). Through her mediumship, Dianthe is therefore able to open herself to the matrilineal storytelling which links her to her African heritage by recovering the tales whispered by the forgotten dwellers of bygone times. In this way, the affinities between spiritualist rhetoric, women's writing, and narrative hospitality in *Of One Blood* symbolically contribute to making space in the American canon for the voices of black women such as Hopkins and her foremothers.

2.3 Conclusions

In a similarly mediumistic task, Hopkins channelled spiritualist culture to make textual space for the African within the American, focusing her occupation as a novelist, journalist, and activist on voicing the complaints of those who were socially invisible or could no longer speak. *Of One Blood* offers an African-American perspective on motifs such as travelling clairvoyance or mesmeric trance, granting occultist methods a new significance so as to fit the authors' efforts towards racial justice at a time of social, cultural, and political upheaval in the United States. In this way, the novel offers a positive depiction of cultural hybridity as a response against the fear of miscegenation aroused by the shifts in racial relations at the turn

of the century. The key to solving the mystery of Dianthe and Reuel's ambivalent identities seems to lie in conversation with the supernatural, since it is through paranormal events that the characters come to terms with their inherent Otherness. In addition to borrowing motifs from spiritualist discourse, Hopkins skilfully manipulated further trends associated with the Occult revival, such as the Gothic literary tradition and the theorization of the unconscious in nineteenth-century mental science, to uncover not only the characters' black ancestry, but also the African origins of humanity. By doing so, she took part in a tradition of African-American writers who made use of the paranormal to explore and articulate the complexities of African-American existence throughout the nineteenth century. Before Hopkins, authors of colour such as Harriet E. Wilson, Harriet Jacobs, Rebecca Jackson, or Paschal Beverly Randolph found a voice through the spiritualist cosmology, engaged in the cross-cultural encounters fomented by spiritualist circles, and left trace of their spectral presence in texts ranging from Antebellum abolitionist literature to the *fin-de-siècle* sensation novel. Moreover, spiritualist circles provided a site for black or Creole communities to find solace, encouragement, and strategies of resistance against racial oppression, as it is shown in the rebellious spirit messages translated on to the séance transcripts of Henri Louis Rey's *Cercle Harmonique*.

Hopkins' invocation of the African past entails a redemptive revision combining the traumatic history of slavery and an Ethiopian "imaginary past of wholeness and unity" (Gillman 64). Such a syncretic vision foregrounds Afro-Diasporic voices while displaying the process of grasping the complications of emerging conceptions of the Self across geo-cultural borders. For this purpose, *Of One Blood* constitutes a hospitable narrative structured upon an "equivalence between scientific theories of the physiological 'passing down' or inheritance of 'blood', and occult or spiritualist theories of a psychic and cultural identity that endures over time and space" (Gillman 64). As it may be observed in the characters' personal development, Reuel's heroic quest and Dianthe's travelling clairvoyance allow them to transcend the African

diaspora and initiate a journey home on a spatial and spiritual level, thus unveiling the 'Hidden Self' of African heredity through the breaching of temporal and geo-cultural borders. Modern American Spiritualism therefore provided this African-American text with a rich variety of tropes to conjure up the untold experiences of marginal entities. Through the literary adaptation of themes and practices inspired by the Occult revival, Hopkins crafted a unique framework to manifest the welcoming encounter between Self and Other in the exploration of racial difference, altered states of consciousness, and the roots of Western culture.

III. Haunting Imperial Borders: Miscegenation and the Hostile Reception of the Colonized Other in Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*

Following the itinerant restlessness of ghosts and mediums, Modern American Spiritualism quickly sailed to the other side of the Atlantic, where it flourished on British soil, encompassing cultural, political, and literary encounters while generating a copious amount of supernatural fiction dealing with liminal creatures and marginal voices. Despite the multiple common traits between the American spiritualist movement and the Late Victorian Occult revival, the contrasting socio-political backgrounds of these two transatlantic neighbours inevitably led to new spiritualist practices and texts which manifested diverse attitudes towards racial difference and cultural outsiders. The work of the British spiritualist writer Florence Marryat (1833-1899) contains useful evidence of how the tense relationship between the author's homeland and its colonial territories affected the reception of Otherness in her Occult fiction. Like Hopkins, Marryat bewitched her readers with accounts of the misadventures of a mixed-raced Gothic heroine in her sensational novel *The Blood of Vampire*. As it shall be argued throughout this section, the former slave Dianthe Lusk and the vampiric Jamaican heiress Harriet Brandt are both haunted by their heredity, for which they respectively embody disquieting reminders of the horrors of slavery and colonial violence. However, in sharp contrast with Hopkins' pan-Africanist narrative, the Creole protagonist of Marryat's story seems unable to cope with the complexities of her biracial identity.

This chapter seeks to provide an examination of the hostile dynamics of reception of racial and geo-cultural difference in Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* in order to shed light upon the variety of approaches to hybrid entities that challenge definable boundaries within Occult fiction. Despite the fact that Marryat was a practicing spiritualist and an "ardent and susceptible believer" (Owen 227), her work does not always present the welcoming attitude suggested by spiritualist cosmology. The following analysis shall be carried out by means of

an interpretation of the protagonist's unsettling transgression of national and corporeal borders as acts of what Stephen D. Arata identifies as reverse colonization (623).[81] Such a reading reveals an utter rejection of the Other within the Self which differs greatly from the eventually hospitable reception of black ancestry depicted by Hopkins in *Of One Blood*, thus demonstrating how the influence of spiritualist discourse did not necessarily entail the same degree of openness towards ethnic minorities.

3.1 Other Places, Other Ghosts: Spiritualism, Race, and Empire in Late Victorian Culture

When the well-known American abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe visited Britain in 1853, the British poet and future spiritualist Mary Howitt wrote to her husband telling him: "The great talk now is Mrs Stowe and spirit-rapping, both of which have arrived in England" (qtd. in Owen 19).[82] Indeed, Spiritualism and abolitionism were both outstanding topics among the transatlantic transactions which shaped the numerous changes that took place throughout the long nineteenth century. Although the trans-oceanic flow of texts, ideas, and conversations fostered by the spiritualist and abolitionist communities – which often overlapped – gave way to various cross-cultural interactions, the relationship between Victorian England and the racial Other remained a complex one.

As noted by Jennifer de Vere Brody, England had "welcoming, supposedly more democratic shores" than the United States (18). People of mixed-raced ancestry were more accepted in English society than in America (19), since, as Vanessa Dickerson illustrates in her

[81] Although Arata's argument refers to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), his essay on reverse colonization is applicable to numerous elements of Marryat's novel and provides helpful tools to understand the characterization of nineteenth-century literary vampires.

[82] Mary Howitt and her husband William Howitt would later turn to Spiritualism. Their daughter, Anna Mary Howitt Watts, author of *Pioneers of the Spiritual Reformation* (1883), became a spiritualist medium, writer, and painter.

compelling work *Dark Victorians* (2008), Britain functioned as "a vortex for . . . crossings, conversations, and collaborations" between African-Americans and British abolitionists (10). However, far from being a harmonious network of cross-racial exchanges, such encounters were complicated by the fact that "the Britain of philanthropy and reform was also the Britain of empire, an empire that extended British rule over nearly a quarter of the earth's population" (Dickerson 4), whose authority was partly based on the configuration of African and Afro-Diasporic individuals as "savages in need of the civilizing guidance of the imperial metropolis" (Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans" 187), and whose colonial wealth had mostly depended on enslaved plantation labour until 1833 (Morgan 8). Furthermore, the arrival of imperial subjects to British shores in an increasing tide of immigration triggered intense concerns regarding the destabilization of national identity, along with the much-feared prospect of racial miscegenation and the dissolution of cultural borders (Adams 378). Among other factors, these events undoubtedly affected the reception of Otherness in Late Victorian culture, as it was manifested in the period's Gothic and spiritualist fiction. In order to grasp the ways in which *The Blood of the Vampire* captures the growing discomfort towards such encounters through its Jamaican protagonist, it would be convenient to first take into account the political context which Marryat addresses in her novel.

3.1.1 From Radical Reformists to Fraudulent Mediums: Lights and Shadows of Transatlantic and British Spiritualism

The process that Bennett characterizes as a ghostly American invasion began four years after the eerie incidents at the Fox sisters' home and was sealed by the "steady stream of transatlantic visitors" (Owen 19) perpetuated by mediums like Marryat ("Crossing Over" 95-96). As, perhaps, an ironic counterpart to the spread of the British empire, this singular strategy of American cultural imperialism spread swiftly by means of elaborate systems of marketing,

advertising, public lectures, séances, and newspaper publications ("Crossing Over" 96). Although the common characteristics between British and American religious and cultural environments certainly contributed to the climate of reception which anticipated the arrival of Spiritualism in Victorian England (Barrow 10),[83] some of the features displayed by the younger branch of the spiritualist movement differed from the philosophy and aspirations embraced by the original occultist communities in the United States. Victorian Spiritualism, for instance, was generally more focused upon psychical research into the pseudoscientific aspects of paranormal phenomena, rather than on the original religious essence of the movement (Cerullo 28). Consequently, as remarked by Howard Kerr, British spiritualists did not necessarily endorse the radically reformist views of believers in the United States (11).[84] This contrast may be accounted for by taking into consideration the time gap between the social impact of both sides of the occultist trend: whereas American Spiritualism flourished in the mid-nineteenth century, British Spiritualism reached its peak between the later decades of 1870 and 1880 (O'Brien Hill 334). By the time spectres and psychics prospered in England, the mindset was shifting from the mid-Victorian social optimism and "profoundly reformative philosophy" of positivism, which "sought to demonstrate the progressive movement of human history" (Kucich, "Religion and Science" 117), to the more decadent stance adopted by various artists and intellectuals in the Late Victorian period.

Janet Oppenheim describes how "the occult enjoyed a striking popularity in the late Victorian and Edwardian decades" (160), not only as a reaction against religious orthodoxy and scientific scepticism, but also because "triumphant positivism" had "sparked an

[83] For instance, Logie Barrow cites a common interest in self-education promoted by religious sects of the Second Great Awakening, such as the Quakers and the Shakers, as one of the main factors behind the favourable reception of Spiritualism in England (10).

[84] "Until it subsided in the 1870's this radical tendency . . . distinguished American from British and Continental Spiritualism" (Kerr 11). Subsequent examples of political activism within the British occultist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shall be dealt with in greater detail in chapter 4.

international reaction against its restrictive world view" (*Ibidem*), causing men and women to turn, instead, to movements such as the Rosicrucian revival and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Granted, Spiritualism remained a highly successful sphere of influence with numerous enthusiastic adherents until well into the first half of the twentieth century. However, scandalous cases of fraudulent mediums such as Florence Cook and Mary Rosina Showers contributed to the association of what Demetres Tryphonopoulos calls the "popular" side of Spiritualism (43) with the more frivolous world of popular entertainment and parlour tricks (O'Brien Hill 334);[85] whereas the "philosophical" side progressively shifted towards the less democratic Theosophical position, whose secret societies and "rigidly hierarchical organization . . . turned spiritualism away from what had seemed in the 1850s its anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional direction, and set in on a path toward hermetic elitism" (Goldstein 2004).[86] Such conditions may have generated less hospitable narratives than those embraced by the descendants of the American Second Great Awakening. After all, due to the reduced number of people of colour in England (Brody 19), most British spiritualists were not in direct contact with ethnic minorities, and, for the same obvious reason, there were no equivalents for the black and Creole séance circles found in the United States. Therefore, the presence of the racial Other in Late Victorian culture was approached in a contrasting manner. Ethnic minorities in the Victorian séance were conceived as either an enigmatic absence, or as alien entities

[85] Despite the fact that sceptics had been calling into question the supernatural skills of spiritualist mediums since the early days of the movement, Georgina O'Brien Hill identifies the 1870's as a turning point in which psychical researchers like Crooks were particularly interested in testing their veracity due to the evolution of mediumistic abilities from the subtle "table-rapping and voices heard in the dark" to more controversial "full form materializations" (334). As Ann Braude notes, the practice of full form materialization "opened Spiritualism to new and more spectacular forms of fraud and self-aggrandizement" (177), both in England and America, which, along with the Fox sisters' confessions, sealed the movement's eventual decline. Similar notorious cases in the twentieth century include the famous confrontation between deceptive psychics and the illusionist Harry Houdini in 1926 (Young 341).

[86] Former spiritualist Helena P. Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, clarified the distinction between the original spiritualist movement and Theosophy: "If we are anything, we are Spiritualists", she wrote to her sister, "only not in the modern American fashion, but in that of the Ancient Alexandria" (qtd. in Kuhn 96). American Spiritualism, in contrast, placed "no special emphasis on secret or esoteric wisdom and secret initiation rites" (Smith, *London Heretics* 142).

invading the borders of the séance room, and, in parallel, the literary text. As it shall be addressed in the following section, such apparitions were generated by various conceptual ghosts haunting the English sense of Self at the turn of the century.

3.1.2 Spectres in Context: Late Victorian Fears and Imperial Decline

Just like the political context of nineteenth-century America was reflected in its occult circles, the response to paranormal encounters across geo-cultural borders registered by British Spiritualism mirrored a series of cultural issues which "blurred the boundaries of Britain itself" (Adams 378) by conveying a sense of "racial, moral, and spiritual decline" which was thought to place national identity and traditional values under attack (Arata 623). Despite the fact that 1897, the date of publication of *The Blood of the Vampire*, was a Jubilee year, this time was nonetheless "marked by considerably more introspection and less self-congratulation than the celebration of a decade earlier" (Arata 622). As pointed out by Arata (622), crucial changes such as the loss of overseas markets of British goods, the deterioration in British manufacturing in the light of rising American and German industries, the effects of the agricultural depression, and, most importantly, the increasing unrest in British colonial territories were gradually unveiling the decay of England's worldwide influence to the extent that, by 1889, George Bernard Shaw commented that English civilization was "in an advanced state of rottenness" (qtd. in Selim 28). Much of the literature of the period reproduced this notion, thus saturating Late Victorian culture with the sense that "the entire nation – as a race of people, as a political and imperial force, as a social and cultural power – was in irretrievable decline" (Arata 622). Writings of the era foresaw, in the words of Patrick Brantlinger, an age of "British backsliding" induced by the Victorians' increasing difficulty "to think of themselves as inevitably progressive" (*Rule of Darkness* 229, 230), for which they "began worrying instead about the

degeneration of their institutions, their culture, their racial 'stock'" (230).[87] Additionally, this time of uncertainty was famously marked by the Victorian crisis of faith and the questioning of conventional morality (Harrison 124), which led to further musings concerning the primal energies concealed within human nature. In his identification of the main causes behind Late Victorian decadence, James E. Adams connects the waves of "moral panic" triggered by such anxieties with the emerging scientific drive towards biological determinism and the need to define fixed categories with relation to race, gender, or intelligence (377-378). The emerging understanding of evolution in terms of progress and regression raised an intense preoccupation with the rise of primitive forces dwelling both in the unconscious and in unknown cultures (378). Likewise, Caroline Senf underlines a sense of degeneration connected, simultaneously, to cultural contact through imperial expansion, racial miscegenation, and the resurgence of latent instincts, all of which jeopardized the foundations of what had been represented as the civilized world (161). The blurring of psychic, racial, and sexual boundaries was therefore perceived as the main causation behind the much-feared irruption of so-called primitive forces, which could occur beyond the geo-cultural margins of civilized progress, or, within unexplored aspects of civilized consciousness (Arata 623). As it is evidently illustrated in Hopkins' text, this hypothetical two-fold invasion affected American society as much as it troubled the British public. In its turn, *The Blood of the Vampire* encompasses all of the abovementioned apprehensions by displaying this Late Victorian uneasiness towards the uncanny, racialized Other which unsettles the borders of the British, imperialist Self. As it shall be argued in subsequent sections, the fact that Marryat chose a particularly unstable colonial territory as Harriet Brandt's homeland makes the novel's protagonist all the more dangerous.

[87] Except when specified otherwise, all quotes by Patrick Brantlinger belong to his work *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (1988).

3.1.2.1 Ghosts of Colonial Decay: Political Tension and Racial Conflict in Jamaica

The disruptive nature of the conceptual spirits portrayed in Marryat's Occult narrative stems from a situation of social and political unrest in the British Caribbean which caused significant changes in Victorian attitudes to race. The invisibilization of ethnic and cultural pluralism in the West Indian island, along with the haunting possibility of imperial collapse, and the instability of a territory which, despite the Emancipation Act of 1833, was still "sloughing off the spectre of slavery" conform only some of the many phantasmal aspects of colonial Jamaica (Bolt 78). Such conflicts are addressed in Marryat's spiritualist text, in which the conceptualization of Jamaican Creole women as half-savage supernatural creatures brings forward a series of issues which had been plaguing the British social imaginary during the second half of the nineteenth century. The problematic encounters manifested in the novel correspond to various concerns triggered by events which Christine Bolt classifies as the "turning point" in Victorian reactions to racial difference (77). Matching the aforementioned complicated racial relations developed in post-bellum America, the friction between British imperial authority and its subjects of colour led to a perception of Jamaica as a land of uncertainty whose situation "divided the Victorian political and literary world" (Bolt 75).

Although Marryat's allusions to the political context of colonial Jamaica are rather vague, the protagonist's rejection of her homeland and her comments regarding slave uprisings at her father's coffee plantation reveal the disquieting echoes of a history of colonial violence and racial oppression. As part of the complex transatlantic network upon which the wealth of Britain and other European countries relied (Sherwood, *After Abolition* 2), the economic system of the island depended upon the importation and enslavement of Africans, a displacement which began during the settlement of Spanish colonists in 1494 (Smith, *Plural Society* 116) and was consolidated during British rule from 1655 to 1807. By 1820, Jamaica hosted 310,000 slaves out of a population of 380,000 (*Ibidem* 118). Since the abolition of the

slave trade did not guarantee freedom from bondage,[88] the practice of slavery was perpetuated until its official ending in 1833 and, after that, exploitation was prolonged as a supervised "apprenticeship" system until 1838 (*Ibidem* 149). Emancipation implied a significant loss of colonial possessions, a step towards the dissolution of British imperial hegemony, and the dismantling of the, by then, fragile social stability which had hitherto been based on racial subjugation. For these reasons, the consequent alteration of cross-racial relationships was followed by a period of inevitable change and tense political atmosphere in the island.

In agreement with Bolt, "despite the assumptions of white superiority", it is clear that "the black inhabitants, slave and free, were feared" (77) in colonial Jamaica. Racial conflicts had begun prior to emancipation with slave rebellions such as Tacky's War (1760) and the Baptist War (1831-1832), which were brutally suppressed by British forces (Dunkley 170). The maintenance of white supremacy after emancipation and the lack of economic compensation for former slaves whereas "their ex-owners received £ 20 million for their loss of unpaid labour" (Sherwood, *After Abolition* 2) resulted in series of uprisings which, like the American Civil War, marked a critical juncture in race relations. After a first riot in Kingston in 1841, the government anticipated a "rebellion of Negroes" by 1848 (Smith, *Plural Society* 152). The strife was followed by three more revolts between 1857 and 1859, and, subsequently, a violent conflict between peasant workers the local militia, known as the Morant Bay rebellion, in 1865. As documented by Bolt, this last insurgence had a decisive impact on the radicalization of Victorian conceptions of race: "Just at a time when knowledge of the diversity of African life was being increased through the combined efforts of missionaries, traders and

[88] As a result of the efforts led by abolitionist campaigners such as William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, the Slave Trade Act of 1807 forbade the importation of slaves in the British colonies and pressed other nations to do the same (Clarkson 360). It did not, however, ensure the abolition of slavery as an institution, which was not achieved until 1833. Even then, the Emancipation Act only applied to territories of the Caribbean, Canada and Cape Town. The last Act of Abolition in the British Empire was in 1928, in the Australian Gold Coast (Sherwood, *After Abolition* 1-2).

explorers, the Jamaica revolt increased the vulgar tendency to see all black men as alike and inferior" (76). The panic caused by the destabilization of power structures which ensured British imperial hegemony configured Jamaica as a "place of bitter humiliation" for Britain (Bolt 78), as commented in *The Times*: "[The Morant Bay rebellion] comes very home to the national soul. Though a fleabite compared to the Indian mutiny, it touches our pride more and is more in the nature of a disappointment" (18 November 1865, qtd. in Bolt 77). More troublesome still was the reductive perception of Jamaican inhabitants as uncontrollable savages, as remarked by another journalist: "The insurrection in Jamaica . . . has had the effect of deepening the belief that the negro is not fit for the possession of political power" (*The Times*, 11 January 1866, qtd. in Bolt 77). Racial prejudice was therefore intensified by certain Victorian observers, who resorted to the preconceived notion of the African as innately primitive as a reaction against the controversial state of the Caribbean colony:

> It seems . . . impossible to eradicate the original savageness of the African blood. As long as the black man has a strong white Government and a numerous white population to control him he is capable of living as a respectable member of society . . . But wherever he attains a certain degree of independence there is the fear that he will resume the barbarous life and fierce habits of his African ancestors (*The Times*, 13 November 1865, qtd. in Bolt 76).

For the British, the idea of the white government being overthrown by the inherited "barbarous life and fierce habits" of Afro-Jamaicans seemed an alarmingly plausible fate due to the majority of black population on the island (Bolt 76), caused by the great concentration of slaves in colonies based in the Caribbean (Morgan 8). In addition, such anxieties were fuelled by striking similarities between the circumstances in Jamaica and the North American political context. As Bolt indicates, "Britons compared the situation of the West Indies to that of the United States" (76), a slave-holding country which had very recently undergone a Civil War; whereas the American South feared an analogous war of races as a consequence of the Jamaica revolts (77). Likewise, Jamaican Afro-Creoles and American mixed-raced citizens

shared a comparable status. Just as the hybrid heredity of Afro-Creoles in the post-bellum American South was invisibilized by a dichotomous racial definition,[89] so was the ethnic diversity of Jamaica neglected by a tendency to oversimplify racial matters (Bolt 80). Despite the fact that there existed an "articulate urban coloured class" on the West Indian island (Bolt 80), British accounts of the racial clash made no distinction "between black, white and coloured in terms of religious beliefs, education, legal and political rights, land tenure, occupations, family organization and value-systems" (*Ibidem*). People of biracial ancestry were therefore virtually ignored by the Victorian binary understanding of racial difference, "perhaps partly out of fear of [their] political influence" (*Ibidem*). Whereas the Creole community of New Orleans challenged their invisibility by conversing with spirits, the spectral nature of Afro-Creole Jamaicans became the subject of horror stories and imperial fantasies.

The in-betweenness of colonial Jamaica and its dwellers, freed from the bonds of slavery but still haunted by white rule, was perceived by the English social imaginary as a threatening influence and a crucial step towards imperial decline. In terms of literary representation, the conditions of the island corresponded to the "space of political turbulence and racial strife" which Arata identifies as the ideal breeding stock for the intrusive Other embodied through the vampire in Gothic literature (627). Although Marryat's novel focuses upon a psychic vampire, Harriet Brandt is also imbued with phantasmal attributes by her hybrid position as a mixed-raced "quadroon". *The Blood of the Vampire* demonstrates how accounts of the political turmoil in Jamaica were combined with a *fin-de-siècle* dread of primitive regression through miscegenation to generate a hesitant reception of racial Otherness which was manifested in sensation fiction, Occult novels, and séance narratives of the period.

[89] Chapter Two deals with this issue in "Travelling Phantoms: Afro-Diasporic Echoes in Spiritualist Practices".

3.1.3 Unwelcoming Séances: Representations of Racial and Cultural Otherness in Late Victorian Spiritualism and Occult Fiction

Marryat's mediumistic invocation of a not-so-distant, turbulent colonial past through her writing was part of a larger tendency to employ paranormal phenomena to process the cross-cultural and trans-temporal interactions brought by imperial expansion. After all, colonial expeditions frequently involved "the geographic encounter with religions that included being spoken-through by unseen agents, in lands imagined, interpolated, and occupied" (Johnson 400). Intricate connections were thus generated between the rise and fall of the British Empire and occultist practices, as it was manifested not only in spiritualist circles, but also in the resurgent genre of Gothic literature. At a time when writers were haunted by "the dark side of an earlier faith in progress" (Adams 378), as well as by the seemingly "real and disturbing possibility" of racial, psychic, and cultural decadence (*Ibidem* 377), such anxieties were registered in narratives preoccupied with spectral invasions, psychic regression, and diverse forms of irruption of Otherness across national borders that fall within the spectrum of what Brantlinger denominates imperial Gothic.

3.1.3.1 Colonizing the Colonizer: The Invasive Other in Imperial Gothic Literature

A broad range of Late Victorian and Edwardian ghost stories and sensational works like *The Blood of the Vampire* display evident traces of imperial Gothic, a term coined by Brantlinger which englobes texts dealing with the recurrent motif of the "return of the repressed" as a projection of the dark forces behind imperial decline (227). As it is made apparent in Marryat's novel, such themes were particularly present in spiritualist culture, since, as Brantlinger convincingly argues, "the link with occultism is especially symptomatic of the anxieties that attended the climax of the British Empire" (227-228). In a similar manner, Arata supports the link between Victorian primitivism and the *fin-de-siècle* fascination with the

paranormal by calling attention to the fact that "the primitive and the occultist alike operated beyond or beneath the threshold of the 'civilized' rational mind, tapping into primal energies and unconscious resources as well as into deep-rooted anxieties and fears" (624). The blurring of geographical and psychic boundaries in this characteristic "conjunction of imperialist ideology, primitivism, and occultism" (Arata 624) provides an optimal framework for various representations of a reluctant encounter with the unfamiliar.

According to Brantlinger, imperial Gothic can be traced in numerous adventure novels and short stories which mirror changes in international power relationships by presenting "patterns of atavism and going native" which offer "insistent images of decline and fall or of civilization turning into its opposite" (229), as in H. G. Wells' science fiction tale *The Time Machine* (1895), or Joseph Conrad's memorable *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Starting with H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and flourishing down to, at least, John Bunchan's *Greenmantle* (1916), such narratives are characterized by an eerie combination of the "seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism" with "an antithetical interest in the occult" (Brantlinger 227). Imperial Gothic is defined by presenting an "individual regression or going native", or "an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism" among its main themes (*Ibidem* 230). Such paranormal occurrences are rooted in the Western othering of uncharted territories and mystifying tribes, as the commissioner of a West African territory remarks in Edgar Wallace's *Sanders of the River* (1909):

> There are many things that happen in the very heart of Africa that no man can explain . . . Because a story about Africa must be a mysterious story . . . You can no more explain many happenings which are the merest commonplace in [Africa] than you can explain the miracle of faith or the wonder of telepathy (166).

Atavistic descents into the primitive as a result of contact with colonized cultures are depicted, for instance, in Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Mark of the Beast" (1925). The

actions unfold in India, depicted as one of those enigmatic territories "East of Suez", where "the direct control of Providence ceases; Man being there handed over to the power of the Gods and Devils of Asia" (70). After profaning a Hindu temple, the English protagonist is bit by a leper priest while the place begins "filling and filling with folk who seemed to spring from the earth" (71) in a clear image of massive invasion. As a fruit of this encounter with the "Gods and Devils of Asia", the victim initiates a relapse into barbarism by which he unleashes his most basic instincts and transforms into a werewolf. As it shall be observed subsequently, Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* shows similar instances of how "imperial gothic expresses anxieties . . . about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony" (Brantlinger 229).

Even more apt for the spiritualist framework are those narratives in which occult phenomena follow characters "from imperial settings home to Britain" (Brantlinger 230-231), like in Arthur Conan Doyle's supernatural tale "The Brown Hand" (1899), which portrays an Anglo-Indian doctor haunted by an Afghan ghost after his return to England. In contrast with the internal sources of horror which have been observed in *Of One Blood*, British preoccupations with invasive entities are often triggered by external factors. Whereas American Gothic tropes usually function from the inside-out due to the country's direct contact with the racial Other, the demonized racial tensions represented in the imperial Gothic genre are located outside the British Isles, in remote colonial territories (Edwards 17). This characteristic absence intensifies the strangeness of the Other, since the idea of bringing its malign influence home would be enough to "paralyze the Empire" (68), as Kipling muses in "My Own True Ghost Story" (1888): "Do you know what fear is? Not ordinary fear of insult, injury or death, but abject, quivering dread of something that you cannot see" (65). The spectral intruder's invisibility constitutes one of the many distinctive traits which Arata identifies in "invasion scare" and "dynamite" novels of the decades of 1880 and 1890. A particular trend

within imperial Gothic, such works are defined by situations of decline which make "the nation vulnerable to attack from more vigorous, 'primitive' peoples" (Arata 623).

Fantasies of what Arata denominates "reverse colonization" abound in late-nineteenth-century popular fiction, generating stories in which British imperial practices are "mirrored back in monstrous forms" (623). For instance, in Rider Haggard's *She* (1886), African Queen Ayesha, or "She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed", who rules her people "by terror" (Haggard 21), plans to raid London and dethrone Queen Victoria. In like manner, the better-known Transylvanian Count suggests an epitome of unlimited imperial power in Bram Stoker's canonical *Dracula* (1897) (Arata 640). Critics such as Judith Wilt have convincingly established connections between the vampire's arrival in London, the "awful visitations" his victims suffer, and the "willful penetration" of Transylvania by the emissaries of Western imperial authority (92). In its turn, Dracula's "wish to emigrate to England, the centre of the new, clean, logical, progressive world, from his home in the Carpathian horseshoe, the centre of all the old superstitions of man" (Wilt 92) eventually reveals his determination to "spread through limitless generations" by replacing Englishness with a new vampiric race (Arata 639), as well as his embodiment of a "dark, primitive strata of civilization" which threatens to disrupt further an already fragile Victorian culture (Hatlen 85). The Count's immigration therefore causes an "eruption of archaic and ultimately dangerous forces in modern life" (Arata 625) which "endangers Britain's integrity as a nation" (Arata 629). Most notably, mirroring Queen Ayesha's "empire . . . of the imagination" (Haggard 21), Dracula's influence is rooted in his ability to awaken simultaneously dangerous and attractive instincts lurking in the unconscious (Arata 624). In these ways, the arrival of the wandering Other signifies a political and biological invasion leading to cultural, moral, and racial contamination (Arata 629). Reverse colonization therefore implies a collapse of boundaries "between civilized and primitive, colonizer and colonized, victimizer . . . and victim" (Arata 627), a gothicized blurring of distinctions on

which British imperial hegemony depended. These ambivalent borders were especially present in spiritualist forms of cultural expression, which, through their obscure circles, ghostly intrusions, and possessed mediums, revealed the numerous contradictions within the British imperial crisis.

3.1.3.2 (Re)Tracing Boundaries: Victorian Attitudes to Race in Spiritualist Culture

In a peculiar study of supernatural apparitions in India, Kipling proudly assured that "no native ghost has yet been authentically reported to have frightened an Englishman; but many English ghosts have scared the life out of both white and black" ("Ghost Story" 58). Yet despite this triumphant declaration, the arrival of exotic spirits to the imperial metropolis seemed to send chills down many readers' spines. While ghouls and roaming spectres moved from the literary text to the séance room, spiritualist texts documented considerable evidence of this discomfort, manifested in a wide variety of reactions ranging from a genuine interest in foreign systems of belief, to patronizing cultural appropriations, to, lastly, an unmistakable uneasiness towards the Other articulated through the need to establish rigid borders within the séance circle. As it may also be observed in the period's pseudoscientific writing, spiritualists were not only concerned with the corruption of their late-night gatherings, but also with the alteration of their race and culture as a whole. The ambiguous treatment of non-Western religions and non-white people in the spiritualist séance mirrored an equally complex reception of geo-cultural difference in the fields of spiritualist anthropology and hereditarianism. Ferguson's perceptive remarks on the ideological diversity within nineteenth-century spiritualist thought are immensely helpful in this respect, since she calls attention to the lesser-known, problematic links between the spiritualist movement and eugenic doctrines, theories of racial degeneration, and bio-essentialism:

> While it is certainly true that spiritualism gave a voice to the socially silenced – to women, to the working classes, to non-Whites – it could also act as a safe forum through which the body politics and cultural attitudes that marginalized these subjects might be articulated and transformed ("Eugenics" 65).

Granted, although Spiritualism clearly provided powerful bridges for cross-cultural reception, as *Of One Blood* demonstrates, spiritualist texts did not always embrace the welcoming attitude suggested by the movement's cosmology. It is essential to bear in mind that, while the spiritualist community played a highly significant role in the struggle for racial equality, the Occult ensemble also constituted "a crucial site for the dissemination of . . . ideas about racial fitness and hereditary improvement that culminated in modern eugenics" (Ferguson, "Eugenics" 65). As an example of this paradoxical variety, Ferguson notes how the cross-cultural encounters depicted in British anthropological studies present a relative degree of openness towards the unfamiliar supernatural, fluctuating from imperialistic, deterministic, and, sometimes, deeply segregationist views to a more hospitable approach to the paranormal in colonized cultures ("Other Worlds" 179). As manifested in an expanding body of periodicals and institutions, supporters and detractors of the Occult revival perceived Spiritualism as a valuable tool for the comprehension of 'primitive' traditions and the origins of civilization due to the recurrence of paranormal events across time and space. Spiritualist anthropologists were especially enthusiastic in their examination of the impact of cross-cultural contacts resulting from imperial expansion, thus encouraging a sympathetic understanding of the strangeness of the Other at a time when the "transatlantic public sphere . . . was taking an immense, virtually unprecedented, interest in the belief systems of historic and contemporary non-Western peoples" (*Ibidem*). Yet, despite its "virtue of acknowledging non-Western spirit beliefs as legitimate objects of inquiry", the "contemporary fascination with so-called savage spiritualism" was "alternately patronizing or romanticizing" (*Ibidem*).

For instance, in his anti-imperialist *History of the Supernatural* (1863), William Howitt conceives Spiritualism as a unifying, transversal phenomenon which facilitates invaluable evidence of the prevalence of ghostly communion "in all ages, nations and in all churches, Christian and pagan" (Howitt 13). All peoples, he argues, "pay homage to the invisible, and believe it present and active around us", regardless of whether they are "followers of Brahma, Buddha, or Mahomet" (378). Along these lines, he encourages a thorough study of the "far more honorable, hospitable, and kind" religious customs of the "savages" before their corruption by Western colonial presence (394). However, as Ferguson indicates, Howitt's praise of "primitive" spiritualities is tainted by a "noble savage fantasy" ("Other Worlds" 181), as well as by a "racist force" in his impulse to classify indigenous religions as "lower in character than those of modern spiritualist believers" (*Ibidem*). Adopting a similar stance, Victorian anthropologists Alfred Russel Wallace and Andrew Lang imagined a continuity between modern Spiritualism and earlier epochs of human history, interpreted as proof of a Darwinian spiritual "evolution" (Josephson 101). Once more, such studies show an intense fascination with "the 'primitive' aspects of human nature" which were thought to be reached through spiritualist practice (Brantlinger 231), yet eventually separate 'savage' magical rituals from the allegedly superior tenets of Victorian Occultism.

In "Savage Spiritualism" (1894), Lang inspects the syncretic foundations of Anglo-American Spiritualism, tracing numerous similarities between "modern mediums and séances" and cases of entranced spirit possession in indigenous communities around the world (Lang 52). He concludes, however, that "the civilised mind is apt to see, in savage seances, nothing but noisy buffoonery" (*Ibidem* 46). Likewise, despite demonstrating curiosity regarding non-Western systems of belief, Wallace's essays *On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1875) manifest a certain reluctance to his contemporaries' attempts to homogenize cross-cultural psychic phenomena into a coherent whole (Ferguson, "Other Worlds" 183). An even more

telling indicator of the repercussion of Victorian attitudes to racial difference on spiritualist thought is the undeniable influence of pioneer anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor and his seminal study *Primitive Culture* (1871). Wallace and Lang's perception of 'civilized' Anglo-American Occultism as superior in terms of spiritual evolution while dismissing foreign magic and superstitions as "a survival of savage thought" (Wallace 26) due to a "primaeval animistic" impulse common to all civilizations (Lang 35) clearly alludes to Tylor's leading "theory of survivals", according to which supernatural folklore and further irrational beliefs in post-life spirit agency were vestiges of archaic traditions which had been unnecessarily perpetuated beyond their original purpose in a particular culture (Tylor 70). After arguing this notion of survival through superstition (72) by means of a classification of "magical powers . . . by higher to lower races" (101), comparing sacred rites from India, Africa, the West Indies, Polynesia, Australia, and Europe, Tylor deduces that "Occult Science . . . belongs to . . . the lowest known stages of civilization, and the lower races" (101). Even the British Victorian medium in the cosmopolitan séance room constitutes an atavistic remnant of the esoteric practices embraced by what Tylor refers to as "despised outcast 'races maudites'" (104): "As the negro fetish-man . . . can divine by means of his dirty cloth or cap", he writes, "so the modern clairvoyant professes to feel sympathetically the sensation of a distant person if communication be made through a lock of his hair or any object" (105). For Tylor, this spiritualist affinity with the "damned races" presents an obstacle to civilized progress, which, in his conviction, would be the result of a spiritual evolution from animism, to polytheism, and, finally, monotheism through the employment of reason (Johnson 99). His dismissal of modern Spiritualism as "a great revival from the regions of savage philosophy and peasant folklore" (129) contributed to the perception of the Occult as a regressive doorway into the 'primitive' mind, and, consequently, complicated the already intricate reception of racial and geo-cultural Otherness within the anthropological terrain, the spiritualist community, and the Victorian imaginary.

Whether through sympathetic mediumistic acts of "going native", or wary segregations of the supernatural into savage and civilized traditions, non-Western ghosts and spiritualities were mostly viewed as an alien presence in the "successive incarnations of the Divine ideas" which, according to the imperialist historian John Adam Cramb, formed the seeds of the British nation (qtd. in Brantlinger 229). It was this evolutionist "incarnation of Divine ideas" which was thought to have led to the supposedly fittest Anglo-Saxon race (Brantlinger 229), a race whose degeneration constituted one of the main fears haunting Late Victorian England, as Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* exemplifies. For this reason, the agitation caused by the irruption of foreign supernatural forces in *fin-de-siècle* culture was manifested not only in the period's anthropological discourse, but also in the spiritualist movement's involvement with eugenic philosophy, pangenesis, and anti-miscegenation principles.

In 1883, the polymath and naturalist Francis Galton coined the term "eugenics", which he summarized as the science of the "cultivation of race" in order to "give the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable" (Galton, *Inquiries* 17).[90] Such a proposal, carried out by artificial natural selection, would allegedly bolster "all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race" to "develop them to the utmost advantage" so as to be "better fitted to fulfil . . . imperial opportunities" ("Eugenics" 45). Protection of the national gene pool was essential for the attainment of the ideal "stock", which, he argued, should include qualities such as "health, energy, ability, manliness, and courteous disposition" (*Ibidem* 47). Paralleling Marryat's aforementioned advice to keep the séance room clear of ungodly, uneducated, or lower-class participants for a successful ritual (*Spirit World* 71), Galton claimed that, for its own improvement, the community should be

[90] Although Galton did not formally introduce this term until the publication of *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1883), his eugenic convictions had been present in his studies of heredity since 1865 (Cowan 17).

trusted to "refuse representatives of criminals, and of others whom it rates as undesirable" ("Eugenics" 47). Unsurprisingly, Galton's unhospitable theories of Darwinian hereditary improvement were loaded with racist implications: the supremacy of a "healthy stock" (*Ibidem* 47) within what he termed "suitable races" was to be ensured, among other means, by a purification of the species through the avoidance of racial "degeneracy". The reproduction of "undesirable" individuals was thought to be prevented by "selective breeding of the fit 'races' with each other; social segregation of the fit and unfit 'races', and . . . legal sanctions against miscegenation" (Ifekwunigwe 13). Galton offered the prospect of a eugenic utopia devoid of hardship and sickness, fuelled by what him and many of his contemporaries considered to be racial fitness. Such traits, as Ferguson discloses, were strikingly similar to those which characterized the evolutionary view of the afterlife adopted by countless spiritualist adherents.

Despite its progressive tenets, the occultist movement that Francis Galton himself had explored throughout his career facilitated the supernaturalized "merging of religion and eugenics" which the Victorian naturalist envisioned (Ferguson, "Eugenics" 64). Multiple Anglo-American spiritualist texts showed, as Ferguson signals, ideological complicity with "both positive (the attempt to breed the 'fittest' individuals) and negative (the effort to prevent the 'unfit' from breeding through law, sterilization, or euthanasia) eugenics" (*Ibidem* 65). Drawing on diverse excerpts from spiritualist writing, Ferguson uncovers an obscure side of the spiritualist movement, one brimming with theories of racial degeneration and biological determinism (*Determined Spirits* 3). Converts ranging from Robert Owen to Arthur Conan Doyle manifested a strong interest in beliefs and practices intended to "improve" the genetic quality of the human population (*Determined Spirits* 21), as it is made apparent in the frequent incorporation of eugenic terminology into fictional representations of the afterlife in spiritualist literature. Late-nineteenth-century concerns regarding declining national fitness are addressed, for instance, in occultist texts like Hugh Conway's "The Daughter of the Stars" (1884) and

George Du Maurier's *The Martian* (1898) (Ferguson, "Eugenics" 67). In a similar manner, traces of the "dialogue between spiritualist philosophy and emergent eugenic principles" which Ferguson observes in Victorian popular culture (*Ibidem* 64) are explicitly present in a relevant spiritualist novel: Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*.

3.2 Casting Out Hybrid Spirits: Hostile Reception of Mixed Heredity in *The Blood of the Vampire*

Much like Hopkins' Occult romance, Marryat's vampiric tale unfolds around a 'tragic mulatta' plotline based upon the crucial elements of race and blood. Despite its seemingly obvious title, this neglected novel does not deal with a blood-sucking vampire, but with the threat posed by the Creole heredity running through the protagonist's veins. Along the lines of imperial Gothic, the story begins with the disquieting arrival of a mysterious and wealthy Jamaican heiress to the Belgian coast of Heyst. Born to a British scientist and plantation owner and his lover, a Creole Obeah priestess, Harriet Brandt leaves her motherland to spend her fortune and is desperate to be acknowledged as an Englishwoman in order to merge into European society. However, despite her efforts to emulate her companions' customs, her behaviour is perceived as that of a "a half-tamed savage" (Marryat 137), as she is deemed too passionate, ambitious, frivolous, and altogether non-English to be fully accepted. Following the characteristic ambivalence of the nineteenth-century vampire (Arata 625), Harriet is simultaneously "beautiful and dangerous" (Marryat 37), and thus viewed as a source of impeding threat. In addition to jeopardizing Victorian sexual decorum by mesmerizing her victims through irresistible attraction, her migration from colonial Jamaica to British soil evokes the same fears which were haunting national stability at the turn of the century. There is definitely something odd about Harriet which the other characters find difficult to pin down:

she is configured as a transgressive New Woman by her economic independence, her immorally seductive behaviour is linked to excessive and abnormal appetites, and her foreign accent and ambiguous nationality make her acquaintances increasingly uncomfortable. Their distress increases when it becomes apparent that Harriet seems to drain the life out of those with whom she establishes close contact, thus causing the untimely death of her amorous conquests and her friend Margaret Pullen's infant child. Eventually, Doctor Phillips intervenes to reveal that she is the granddaughter of an African slave woman and was "born under a hereditary curse" (Marryat 107) for which she is destined to "be a pariah to the end of her life!" (Marryat 176). Although Harriet's psychic vampirism is rationalized by the Doctor's scientific discourse as the consequence of a West Indian Vampire bat bite, his diagnosis reveals an additional anomaly upon which he places strong emphasis throughout the novel: "Whatever the girl may be, she inherits terrible proclivities, added to black blood. She is in point of fact a quadroon and not fit to marry into any decent English family!" (Marryat 118). Harriet's menacing nature is clearly attributed to her mixed-raced heredity, an attribute which is continuously demonized as a deadly curse to herself and those around her. National, racial, and corporeal boundaries are therefore alarmingly fragile in Marryat's text, an aspect which causes an evidently reluctant reception of the Other within the Victorian Self. Such a scenario is complicated by the fact that the protagonist carries Creole blood while wishing to identify as purely white: unable to deal with the complications of her biracial identity, Harriet resorts to self-destruction after unwillingly causing her husband's death, lamenting in her suicide note that her "parents have made [her] unfit to live" (Marryat 187).

Taking into consideration the imperial Gothic tropes and segregationist hereditarian trends enfolded within the Late Victorian Occult revival, it is possible to account for the extent to which narrative hospitality seems particularly unclear in the *Blood of the Vampire* by observing Marryat's close affinity and active participation within spiritualist and intellectual

circles. In addition to opening diverse channels for intertextual reception, her position as a New Woman novelist and a spiritualist medium entailed a peculiar interaction with Otherness. Already othered by her literary production, occult practices, and situation as an unconventional Victorian lady, Marryat gave voice to female characters who, like their author, represented a "site of multiplicity and contradiction" (Kucich 11). Despite the fact that her sensational heroines frequently blurred the borders of hegemonic culture through transgressive narratives which challenged their social invisibility, Marryat's questionable representation of mixed-raced heredity in her *fin-de-siècle* vampiric work conveyed an ambiguous message regarding racial and sexual difference. Taking this into account, a brief overview of Marryat's mediumistic creations and transatlantic travels as possible sources of inspiration may help decode the influence of spiritualist culture, theories of heredity, and British imperialism on the encounter with the Creole Other in *The Blood of the Vampire*.

3.2.1 New Woman Fiction at the Séance Table: Life and Works of Florence Marryat

Marryat's life included, as Greta Depledge comments, "all the intrigue of one of her sensation fictions" (3). As a prolific novelist, editor, journalist, actress, and singer, her experience of unhappy marriages, adultery, separation, numerous children, bereavement, doubtful reputation, fame and success generated enough material to inspire around seventy novels (Depledge 7). Having been "accustomed to see, and to be very much alarmed at seeing, certain forms that appeared to [her] at night" (Marryat, *There Is No Death* 13) for years before table-rapping arose as a fashion, her career took a further dramatic turn when, in the decade of 1870, she began to attend séances regularly and became well-known in spiritualist and literary circles where her "psychic power boosted her publicity" (Kontou, "Florence Marryat" 222). Regardless of her family's assumption that she would be "dubbed as a madwoman, or a liar" (Marryat, *Spirit World* 11), the publication of her testimonial narrative *There Is No Death: On*

Crossing Over (1891) confirmed her position as an "ardent and susceptible believer" in Spiritualism and a prominent Occult novelist (Owen 227), since, as she reflects in *The Spirit World* (1894), the book was "received with more enthusiasm than anything [she had] written before" (11).

Despite the immense popularity of her work (Melton and Hornick 62),[91] Marryat enjoyed a mixed critical reception and was harshly criticized on moral grounds by the literary establishment due to her alarming stories and lifestyle.[92] Scandalous tales of marital disappointment and domestic violence were published, for instance, in her semi-autobiographical novel *The Nobler Sex* (1892), which was dismissed by an anonymous reviewer as "an odious account of the ways of people whom nobody would wish to know" (*Academy*, 42, July/December 1892, 190, qtd in Depledge 5). Indeed, unwanted characters, especially outcast women, occupied a central role in Marryat's fiction, which was full of "very impulsive and very strong willed" heroines (Marryat, *Open! Sesame!* 19) who "challenged and transgressed social mores" (Depledge 3-4). Matching Hopkins' cross-disciplinary engagement in public debates, Marryat employed literary production as a vehicle for her active participation in controversial discussions regarding aspects such as women's vulnerability in the nineteenth-century marriage market and at the hands of the medical profession (Depledge 8). Her writing shows, as Depledge notes, a strong "awareness of contemporary aspects of science and medicine" (8), exhibited in her allusions to eugenics, pangenesis, the medicalization of racial difference, vivisection, and theories of hysteria in texts like *An Angel of Pity* (1898), or the

[91] Gordon Melton and Alysa Hornick clarify how, despite being almost forgotten today, Marryat was "a very popular author in her own time, far more famous than Bram Stoker" (62).

[92] The Victorian public was shocked, for instance, when Marryat married her second husband, Francis Lean, less than a year after her first husband, Thomas Ross Church, divorced her on the grounds of his wife's adultery (Mansfield 146). Further commotion was caused by Marryat's unorthodox management of the affair, as Harry Furniss commented: "Known as Mrs Ross Church . . . she decided to marry someone else, and discarded her husband . . . she sent all her friends and acquaintances . . . a statement . . . informing us that she was not divorced, but that in future she wished to be known as Mrs Lean. This little piece of eccentricity fell into her husband's solicitor's hands and thus ended the Church business" (11).

vampiric work in question. Moreover, Marryat's interest in the field of science was demonstrated by her involvement in psychical research as an integral part of the journalistic debate surrounding fraudulent mediums, full-form materializations, and the confrontations between physicians and spiritualist practitioners (O'Brien Hill 344).

The multifaceted arena of the Occult revival provided Marryat with a fruitful context to negotiate "the tension between this world and the next" through her ghostly literary creations, roaming "between life and death, memory and fantasy, performance and reality . . . fictional and autobiographical writings, between the ephemerality of spiritualist experience and the permanence of the past" (Kontou, "Florence Marryat" 226). In agreement with Tatiana Kontou, séance accounts "can be read in literary terms through the narrative motifs of fantastic literature" (*Spiritualism* 87), which, as Rosemary Jackson clarifies in *The Literature of Subversion* (1981), "revolve around [the] problem of making visible the unseen, of articulating the un-said" (49). Such tenets certainly apply to Marryat's séance narratives, where "notions of the double, of fragmented bodies and identities, as well as collapsible time and space prevail" (Kontou, *Spiritualism* 87). For example, the novelist's documentation of her participation in spiritualist gatherings led by Florence Cook's mediumship offer sensationalist depictions of the metamorphosing spirit 'Katie King'. She observes that "[s]ometimes 'Katie' resembled [Cook] exactly; at others, she was totally different", appearing occasionally as "a very small, slight brunette, with dark eyes and dark curly hair and a delicate aquiline nose", or as "a woman fair as the day, with large grey or blue eyes, a white skin, and a profusion of golden red hair" (*There Is No Death* 49). Other times, "her features became blurred and distinct; they seemed to run into each other" (*Ibidem*). Similar motifs emerge in *The Blood of the Vampire*, whose protagonist's features also seem "blurred and distinct" in her symbolic renegotiation of racial and national identity. In this way, Marryat's representations of marginal individuals seemed influenced by an intertextual play between her spiritualist and literary work. As it has

previously been stated, speaking with the dead was "closely allied with authorship" and vice versa (Grimes 8): Marryat's mediumship went far beyond the séance room, engaging in a textual process of speaking for the Other. By writing sensation fiction, a phantasmal genre which was "viewed as a dangerous hybrid and liminal entity because it allowed issues of gender and social instability to surface" (Ofek 184), Marryat granted a voice to the "apparitional identity" of women outside the norm of Victorian femininity (Grimes 95).

As Octavia Davis perceptively points out, Marryat assigns to Harriet Brandt the same "destructive characteristics she attributes to herself and other women, indicating that she had incorporated and internalized claims that . . . women exhibited . . . tendencies similar to those of the degenerate Other" (42). Like her Jamaican heroine, the novelist displayed ghostly, hybrid, and mobile proclivities, as revealed by a medium named Bessie Fitzgerald, who told her: "after you have lived in place a little while, you become sad, weary and ill . . . and you feel as if you must leave it, and go to another place… It is because your nature has exhausted all it can draw from its surroundings" (Marryat, *There Is No Death* 175). Fitzgerald's psychic reading might not have been too far from reality, since Marryat's travelling spirit led her to a life of border-crossing not only to the Other Side, but also to North American and British colonial territories. According to Bennett, Marryat's spiritualist writing was shaped by her trans-oceanic journeys and her "strong feeling for the sea" (*Transatlantic Spiritualism* 45). In addition to her geographical mobility, Marryat's biography was characterized by a family history connected to the black Atlantic, the politics and practices of slavery, and British imperialism (Bennett, "Crossing Over" 97). When she first attended an American spiritualist circle to commune the transient spirit of her deceased child in 1884, she was "already well known as a writer and a spiritualist, but also as the daughter of Captain Frederick Marryat whose novels, largely about the sea, had sold in huge numbers earlier in the century" (Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism* 43). Captain Marryat, whose "legacy and . . . influence" were

"evident throughout [Marryat's] life and career" (Depledge 5), spent several years serving the Royal Navy in the West Indies, along the coast of the United States, and around Burma (Bennett, "Crossing Over" 97). Florence Marryat's linkage to maritime imperial forces continued through her marriage to Thomas Ross Church, ensign in the 12th Madras Staff Corps of the British Army, with whom she spent several years in India (Depledge 9). As mentioned in the previous chapter, ships and the sea constitute a powerful symbol for the cross-cultural interactions which took place through transatlantic Spiritualism, englobing both the movement's ideological fluidity and its connection to black Atlantic culture (Bennett, "Crossing Over" 98). Yet despite her seafaring experiences across geo-cultural margins and her possibly empathic identification with Harriet's restless displacement, Marryat's account of the protagonist's misfortunes in *The Blood of the Vampire* shows little narrative hospitality towards the racialized Other.

The presence of a mixed-raced Caribbean protagonist in the novel may have been stimulated by Marryat's knowledge on the colonial experiences of her father, who had been a "pro-slavery advocate" (Elleray 158) and "the owner of large property in the West Indies" before he finally supported "passing a Bill for the abolition of slave-grown sugar" (Marryat, *Life and Letters* 7). As documented by Michelle Elleray, Captain Marryat's stance regarding slavery remained unclear due to his ownership of a slave plantation in the Caribbean and his declaration that he would rather "protect the British seaman [from impressment] before he thrust his philanthropy on the African negro" when the Slavery Abolition Act came into effect (Marryat, *Life and Letters* 204). He struggled economically during Emancipation, and, although his views would later change "to reflect national self-congratulation as an anti-slavery nation", this shift only occurred after former slaveholders achieved compensation (Elleray 158). Such incidents may have framed the racist context depicted in *The Blood of the Vampire*

while also providing a possible source of inspiration for his daughter's allusions to Jamaican slave labour.

Furthermore, the novel's superficial familiarity with Caribbean culture can most likely be attributed to the aforementioned rise of comparative religious studies that fuelled the Occult revival. Anthropologists, missionaries, and military men provided all sorts of accounts on native rituals, which, being also filtered through an imperialist perspective, offered a distant conceptualization of Jamaican folk beliefs as dark and primitive. For instance, the colonial administrator Hesketh J. Bell published sketches on the practice of Obeah witchcraft among African population in the Caribbean, arguing that such beliefs were proof of the "superstition and credulity of West Indian negroes" (2), as well as their regressive preference for "the old bush life of their African childhood" (52) in opposition to the so-called civilized state they were expected to adopt under colonial rule. Echoing the Victorian view of non-white colonial subjects as savages in need of imperial guidance (Bolt 77), Bell claimed that these irrational beliefs were typical of the black lower classes, who, despite the "evident desire to improve themselves", would have "divested [themselves] of the name and attributes of a Christian . . . and would be found dancing in the most primitive state" as soon as the "upper and educated classes abandon the islands" (51). Despite the amount of shared practices between Afro-Caribbean magic-religious syncretism and Anglo-American Spiritualism,[93] Marryat, unlike Hopkins, does not seem to acknowledge the movement's Afro-Diasporic influences. Most significantly, although the author was known to advocate staunch spiritualist convictions, the traces of the Occult in *The Blood of the Vampire* do not reside in Baroness Gobelli, the fraudulent medium who claims to have "visions in broad daylight, and prophesying the future"

[93] In his overview of mixed Caribbean societies, Michael G. Smith mentions the importance of spirit agency in Afro-Christian cults, according to which good and bad spirits can affect the living, and revelations occur through dreams or divinations, especially through spirit possession and speaking in tongues (*Plural Society* 165).

(Marryat 107), but in the Jamaican Obeah which Harriet inherits from her mother. By locating the source of otherworldly invocations in distant colonial territories, instead of Baroness Gobelli's English parlour, the narrator presents West Indian folklore as the 'real' danger in the story due to its association with the intrusive geo-cultural and racial Other. By doing so, the novelist establishes clear boundaries between Western systems of belief and the superstitious baggage embodied by Harriet, who "had been brought up by . . . the servants on her father's plantation to believe in witches and the evil eye, and 'Obeah' and the whole cult of Devil worship" (Marryat 35), thus presenting her connection to an alien land of folk cults and spiritual hybridity as further proof of her 'primitive' side. The portrayal of foreign esoteric practices as negative elements by a spiritualist author and self-identified medium sheds light upon the paradoxical reception of non-Western Otherness in Anglo-American Spiritualism, whose discourse, in this particular case, appears to be less close to narrative hospitality and more oriented towards erasing the African lodging within the British colonial subject.

3.2.2 A Two-Fold Invasion: Harriet Brandt, Reverse Colonization, and Rejecting the Other within the Self

During the psychic reading performed by Bessie Fitzgerald, Marryat was told: "You are one of the worlds' magnets… You draw people to you, and live upon their life . . . because the spirit requires food the same as the body . . . Constant intercourse may be fatal to your dearest affections. You draw so much on others, you *empty* them" (Marryat, *There Is No Death* 174-175, original emphasis). In a very similar manner, Harriet Brandt's mesmerizing powers and vampiric tendencies are fatal to her surroundings, leading her not to suck her victims' blood, but to drain their energy. She is, as Ferguson notes, one of those "increasingly secular occult vampires", whose "threat was to the social nexus rather than the individual human soul" ("Dracula" 62). In fact, her psychic vampirism seems to derive from the "ambiguous nature of

the folkloric vampire as a ghost-like phenomenon that robs its victims of their vitality" (Crawford 15). As noted by Heide Crawford, folklorists have long used "the terms 'vampire', 'ghost', and 'revenant' interchangeably" (*Ibidem*), a custom which can be traced back to the Oxford English Dictionary of 1734, where vampires were first defined as "evil spirits" who animate the "bodies of deceased persons" (qtd. in Auerbach 20). When Marryat designed her Jamaican heroine, the notion of the ethereal vampire had clearly made its way into literary representations and Late Victorian Occult treatises:

> By the 1890's, occultists . . . had largely relegated the folkloric figure of the blood-drinking vampire to the past, replacing with two equally dangerous . . . alternatives: the psychic vampire, usually a mortal human who, wittingly or not, drains the life force of those around them, and the astral vampire, a disembodied entity on the spirit plane who possesses the corpses of the recently dead to effect a similar enervation (Ferguson, "Dracula" 62).

Although Harriet Brandt can be undoubtedly classified as a psychic vampire, her national, cultural, and racial in-betweenness also places her within the second category, characterizing her as a roaming, disembodied spirit in search of a home. Taking into account the Afro-Caribbean heritage transmitted through her grandmother's mysterious affliction, further implications can be identified in analogies between Harriet's condition and that of diasporic trickster figures in West Indian legends. Like the 'jumbee', 'old hag', or 'duppy' alluded to in Jamaican folktales, she is shapeshifting, deceiving, and seductive.[94] In particular, she shares certain traits with the parasitical 'soucouyant', a female creature who is disguised as a benevolent old woman during the day and sheds her skin at night to infiltrate her victims' homes and suck their blood.

'Soucouyant' stories originated as a result of the intermingled beliefs of displaced East and West African slaves, combined with French vampire-myths transported from European

[94] In Jamaican patois, the terms 'jumbee' and 'duppy' stand for 'ghost'; whereas the 'old hag', a type of 'jumbee', is the Jamaican equivalent for the Caribbean 'soucouyant' (Malouf 196).

countries (Abel 137). Giselle Anatol has detected the presence of this popular character in diverse African-rooted cultures, ranging from almost all Caribbean islands to the African-American South (23). As Anatol convincingly argues, the diasporic, transcultural essence of the 'soucouyant' is not exempt of theoretical implications, all of which, in my view, parallel Harriet's disruptive attributes. Like Marryat's Creole heroine, the 'soucouyant' occupies a "liminal, boundary crossing position" since she "resides on the outskirts of an established community" (Anatol 24). By performing a transgressive invasion of her victims' homes and bodies, entering their private space through cracks and keyholes and piercing their skin, she simultaneously "crosses and re-crosses the boundaries of acceptability" (*Ibidem* 25). Often described as a woman outside conventional norms and associated with "night flying", the 'soucouyant' is distinguished by her "taboo mobility and autonomy" (*Ibidem* 25), just as Harriet's independence as a New Woman is regarded with apprehension. Furthermore, both vampires embody the opposite of the feminine ideal of faithful wife and mother (*Ibidem* 23), as manifested in the sharp contrasts between Harriet's behaviour and the decorum embraced by her companions Margaret Pullen and Elinor Leyton. Being partly black and female, she joins the West Indian monster in the radical Otherness of the "female body-out-of-control" (*Ibidem* 27). These Caribbean tales are brimming with diasporic connotations that are difficult to ignore, thus calling attention to some of Harriet's main features as a reverse colonizer: her geographical flexibility.

3.2.2.1 Turning Borders Inside-Out: Infiltration, Mobility, and Displacement

The collapse of boundaries entailed by Harriet Brandt's role in the narrative begins with her geographical mobility. When interrogated about her plans upon her arrival to Europe, she enthusiastically replies: "Travel about . . . I can go wherever it may please me!" (Marryat 11). Shortly after Harriet sets foot on the Belgian coast, readers follow her journey through Brussels,

London, France, and, lastly, Italy, where she sadly witnesses the death of her last victim. Her transnational ubiquity is a defining trait not only of her condition as a mixed-raced character, which configures her as "an outcast, a wanderer" (Berzon 100),[95] but also of supernatural beings such as vampires, ghosts, and spirits, as Tabish Khair and Johan Höglund explain in their introduction to *Transnational and Postcolonial Vampires* (2013): "The vampire has always been a traveller and the vampire story frequently explores and transgresses national, sexual, racial, and cultural boundaries", not only as a "wandering creature", but also as a "shape changer" (1).[96] Despite the fact that Harriet does not experience literal transformations like those of Count Dracula, who can famously turn into a wolf or bat, she is often animalized and marked as a symbolic shape-shifter through her ambivalent personhood and transgressive autonomy: "I'm not quite sure what I am!", she declares, "I am my own mistress now. I can be what I like!" (Marryat 10). In addition, as it shall be argued, perceptions of her racial identity shift throughout the narrative due to her hybrid heredity, thus reflecting the same "(un)readability" and "perplexing, multivalent resonance" which Brooks attributes to the mulatta and the spiritualist medium (20). Harriet's racial "(un)readability" also resides in her ambiguous nationality, which her acquaintances are unable to decipher upon her enigmatic arrival: "She spoke French perfectly, and when she spoke English it was with a slightly foreign accent" (Marryat 13). In her mystifying multiplicity, Harriet is said to combine "the intelligence of the Englishwoman with the *espièglerie* of the French – the devotion of the Creole with the fiery passion of the Spanish or Italian" (Marryat 179). She appears, however, determined to deny her transcultural background, and is disappointed when Margaret Pullen remarks her exotic pronunciation. "I thought – I hoped – that I spoke English like an English woman!", she

[95] In her aforementioned study *Neither White Nor Black* (1978), Berzon defines the mixed-raced individual as fated to be "[r]ejected out of fear and hatred by the dominant group" wherever he or she goes (100).

[96] Maria Parrino provides an enlightening comparative study of this motif in Marryat's and Stoker's fiction in "Crossing Borders: Hospitality in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*" (2017).

confesses before assuring “I am an Englishwoman, you know!”, to which Mrs Pullen replies “Are you? I was not quite sure!” (Marryat 13).

The protagonist’s uncertain origins contribute to the archetypal “transpositionality” of the vampire, which, according to David Rogers (8), epitomizes this supernatural creature as a mobile character and a permanent outsider. Before being inmortalized in Stoker’s masterpiece, mobility and transgression across time and space were perceived as typical vampiric traits among diverse cultural imaginaries, as documented in Augustin Calmet’s study *The Phantom World* (1746). After meticulous research into spirits, vampires, and revenants, Calmet concluded that such creatures had appeared in “Every age, every nation, every country” (1), reaching back into Antiquity, and roving around the globe with particular permanence in “Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, and Poland” (4). Moreover, like the ghost, the vampire “exists . . . somewhere indefinably between two states of being” (Rogers 8), casting a shadow over hegemonic culture by disrupting the binary oppositions which constitute its foundation. Harriet’s in-betweenness is not that of an undead creature brought back to life, but rather an inherent ambiguity and irreversible displacement caused by her inability to feel at home in Jamaica nor in England. Just like Count Dracula’s castle is located on the borders between Transylvania, Moldavia, and Bukovina (Stoker 3), making it impossible for Jonathan Harker to “light on any map or work giving the exact locality” (*Ibidem*), so does Harriet’s motherland evoke a sense of uncertainty for the Western reader. Taking into account the unstable political situation in colonial Jamaica, her migration from the West Indies to the heart of Western civilization resonates with Arata’s definition of the vampire as a reverse colonizer coming from a space of “political turbulence and racial strife” (627), posing a menace to the stability of a declining Empire. More specifically, Arata underlines the significance of the vampire’s presence in a new country as the “unavoidable consequence of any invasion” (627), decoding Van Helsing’s observations in *Dracula*: “In old Greece, in old Rome; he flourish in Germany

all over, in France, in India . . . and in China . . . He have follow the wake of the berserker Icelander, the devil-begotten Hun, the Slav, the Saxon, the Magyar" (Stoker 198).

Although Harriet Brandt does not consciously share Dracula's plan to invade England and breed a new vampiric race by mirroring British imperial tactics, she unwittingly embodies a similar purpose by destabilizing geo-cultural borders and tempting British men to mingle with her Creole blood through marriage and procreation. Epitomizing the vampire's archetypal role as a territorial trespasser who problematizes the relationship between host and guest (Baker, Green, and Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska 25), her arrival on British soil brings unwanted consequences (*Ibidem* 26). Other characters seem aware of Harriet's potential corruption of British consciousness from the very beginning, as exemplified in her companions' reaction when she mentions her education in a Roman Catholic convent: "At the word 'convent', the national Protestant horror immediately spread itself over the faces of the three other ladies; Mrs Montague gathered her flock about her and took them out of the way of possible contamination . . . and Elinor Leyton moved her chair further away" (Marryat 10). Rather than implying a mere theological threat, Harriet's presence denotes, as suggested in this excerpt, the transnational vampire's cultural invasion and resultant contamination of Britain's racial purity (Nayar 205).

Harriet Brandt's subtle reverse colonization of the metropolis resembles the "atavistic descents into the primitive" triggered by spirit possession in imperial Gothic (Brantlinger 229). Fitting Brantlinger's analysis, the Other's infiltration of national borders functions beneath the surface of the seemingly ordinary: the heroine's dark powers are invisible, encoded within her mixed-raced identity and concealed even from herself. However, despite her attempts to ignore or conceal her heredity, Harriet's Creole past is gradually brought to the surface as the narration unfolds. The young woman's language, appearance, and behaviour are uncannily alien and, at the same time, disquietingly familiar, thus contributing to the blurred distinctions between Self

and Other which Arata attributes to the vampiric intruder (632). For instance, her frustrated desire to speak like an Englishwoman, resembling Dracula's "excellent English, but with a strange intonation" (Stoker 15), suggests a similar intention to 'go native' by blending into the host culture. Like the irruption of foreign expressions in the medium's speech during spiritualist séances, the vampire's distortion of the English language implies a camouflaged presence of the Other within the Self (Arata 632) which fulfils its transgressive function of "radically defying the strict binaries that distinguished the gender and class-conscious England of the novel" (Rogers 11). In the same way in which the Count's meticulous research into "England and English life and customs and manners" (Stoker 18) serves his goal to "impersonate an Englishman, and do it convincingly" (Arata 638), Harriet attempts to emulate the "custom in civilized countries" (Marryat 58). Yet, she is nonetheless perceived as a "gauche schoolgirl, a half-tamed savage" (Marryat 137), "half educated, wholly ignorant of the usages of society, with a passionate underdeveloped nature and a bold spirit" (Marryat 114). Harriet's identity is therefore doomed to remain halfway between the 'savage' and the 'civilized', neither entirely black nor white, never refined enough to fit the standard of an English lady, nor exotic enough to be completely excluded. Despite her efforts to appear European, "the savage in her was *not* tame . . . at any moment, like the domesticated lion or tiger, her nature might assert itself and become furious, wild and intractable" (Marryat 180, original emphasis). In this way, the protagonist risks to be betrayed by her primal instincts, constantly haunted by her latent Creole side. Mirroring the eventual return of the repressed African past in Dianthe Lusk's distorted personal history, Harriet's heredity threatens to disrupt her carefully constructed personhood. For this reason, most of the unsettling aspects attributed to her character in Marryat's novel, such as her ambiguous nationality, or her role as a cultural outsider, contribute to unveiling the root of the protagonist's ominous influence: her racial Otherness.

3.2.2.2 Harriet Brandt's Haunted Body: Hosting the Other and Medicalizing the Abnormal

Harriet's characterization in accordance with the novel's "tragic mulatta" plotline confirms Arata's theory that "racial development . . . is the real source of the vampire's threat" (640). In agreement with this proposal, Harriet's entrance into English society and her eventual marriage to an Englishman become dangerous due to the "curse of black blood" which runs through her veins (Marryat 156). The transgressive potential of her mixed race is codified, in Willburn's words, as a "strange and malign occult power" which poses a menace not only to those around her, but also to herself ("Savage Magnet" 164). Therefore, Marryat's novel presents a two-fold invasion, combining British and American Gothic tropes: Harriet embodies, on the one hand, the abovementioned external threat, cutting across British national borders (Edwards 17), and, on the other, the fear of a troubling internal Otherness which characterizes American narratives of miscegenation (*Ibidem*). Harriet is thus doubly estranged by means of her geographical displacement and her alienated mixed-raced anatomy, which, in line with *fin-de-siècle* attitudes towards racial miscegenation, is perceived as "the embodiment of the worst qualities of both races and hence a menace to the dominant group" (Mencke 189). In sharp contrast with Dianthe's empowering acknowledgement of her Pan-Africanist royal birthmark, the ultimate discovery of Harriet's demonized heredity constitutes a reluctant recognition of the Other within the Self, one which eventually becomes unbearable for the heroine.

Harriet's discomfort towards her hybrid heredity is made apparent from the very beginning of a novel whose "racial loyalties are . . . riven with ambivalence" (Zieger 225). In order to avoid identification with the racial Other, she often draws clear boundaries between herself and Afro-Jamaicans, seeking to erase all possible connections to her motherland, asserting that she has no intention of returning to the island, and stressing the distinction

between “little white babies”, who are “so sweet and fresh and clean – so different from the little niggers who smell so nasty you can’t touch them” (Marryat 14). For instance, the following depiction of her father’s slaves manifests a highly disdainful attitude by which her new acquaintances are shocked:

> We had plenty of niggers on the coffee plantation, regular African fellows with woolly heads and blubber lips and yellow whites to their eyes . . . [the overseer] used to let me whip little niggers for a treat when they had done anything wrong. It used to make me laugh to see them wriggle their legs under the whip and cry . . . they deserved it, you know, the little wretches, always thieving or lying (Marryat 17).

Such a pitiless statement does not necessarily imply an intentional concealment of her biracial identity, since, at this point of the story, she is still unaware of the details of her family history. It does, however, denote her internalized racism, as well as foreshadowing her consequent distress upon discovering that her own mother was “a devilish negress” (Marryat 155). Whether consciously or not, the invisibilization and eventual disclosure of her obscure past propels a typical ‘tragic mulatta’ plot within the framework of imperial Gothic. Just like Dianthe is haunted by the figurative and literal ghosts of her African ancestors in *Of One Blood*, so does the spectre of the “hereditary curse” (107), with all its implications, hover over Harriet’s life. Paralleling Dianthe’s mystifying recovery from amnesia, the revelation of Harriet’s ill-fated genealogy has a similar effect on the heroine: “It seems as if what . . . Doctor Phillips [has] said had lifted a veil from my eyes, and I can recall things that had quite escaped my memory before” (Marryat 164). Before heading towards the gloomy ending which defines her character type (Malchow 174), Harriet displays further elements akin to the ‘tragic mulatta’, such as her ambiguous racial unreadability (Brooks 20). As an example, Anthony Pennell, her suitor and future husband, is amazed by Harriet’s delicate air and sophisticated manners upon meeting her: “She had improved wonderfully in looks since she had been in Europe . . . Her delicate complexion had acquired a colour like that of a blush rose . . . He did not, for one

moment, associate her with the idea which he had formed of the West Indian heiress" (Marryat 128). Once more, the mixed-raced woman's beauty is justified by the notion that her black side is hardly noticeable. However, Harriet displays a more complex characterization than that of Hopkins' Dianthe, since her rosy cheeks and glimmering eyes are not simply a sign of her 'tragic mulatta' condition, but a sign of her revitalization after feeding on her hosts' energy.

Diverse depictions of Harriet's physical appearance in *The Blood of the Vampire* conform with the tendency to portray the primitive aspects of human nature as camouflaged forces in the imperial Gothic tradition (Brantlinger 231). The protagonist's exoticized traits and moments of relapse into 'barbarism' are presented as evidence of the phantasmal Other lurking within the supposedly civilized Self. Miss Brandt is "beautiful and dangerous" (Marryat 37), bearing exaggerated features which denote the "drop of Creole blood in her" (Marryat 49), as well as her allegedly primitive side:

> She was a remarkable looking girl . . . Her skin was colourless but clear. Her eyes, long-shaped dark and narrow with heavy lids and thick black lashes which lay upon her cheeks. Her brows were arched and delicately pencilled and her nose was straight and small. Not so her mouth however which was large, with lips of deep blood colour, displaying small white teeth. To crown all, her head was covered with a mass of soft, dull, blue-black hair, which was twisted in careless masses about the nape of her neck and looked as if it was unaccustomed to comb or hairpin (Marryat 4).

Harriet's peculiar mouth and unruly dark hair operate as signs of her "furious, wild and intractable" nature (Marryat 180), hinting toward the character's subversive role. As Galia Ofek points out in her analysis of representations of women's hair in Late Victorian literature, exuberant manes such as Harriet's often symbolize the contemporary "class and gender mobility which could have endangered, or 'diseased', the whole body of literature and society through . . . the unfixing and transgression of boundaries" (185). Besides alluding to the "constant redefinition and negotiation of female identity" (183), Ofek maintains that "images of overflowing hair . . . 'rampant', 'disorderly', and 'excessive'" (33) were also associated to

primitivism, excessive appetites, and "sexual abnormality" (61). Such primal instincts are particularly connoted by Harriet's vampiric mouth and the almost animalized depiction of the "avidity and enjoyment" with which she devours her meals: "she ate rapidly and with evident appetite . . . [and] kept her eyes fixed on her food as if someone might deprive her of it" (Marryat 4). Bizarre eating habits are part of other imperial Gothic narratives concerning "atavistic descents into the primitive" resulting from contact with supernatural beings beyond the safe borders of the British Empire (Brantlinger 229). In agreement with Howard Malchow, similar monstrous depictions of unnatural appetites mirror "the rhetoric of race prejudice by the nineteenth-century long obsession with cannibalism [and its] association with self-destruction" (170). As an example, the bloodthirsty urges of the metamorphosing Englishman in Kipling's "The Mark of the Beast" are configured as the first symptoms of 'going native':

> Here the chops came in, all red and juicy, and Fleete bolted three in a most offensive manner. He ate on his right grinders only, and threw his head over his right shoulder as he snapped the meat. When he had finished, it struck him that he had been behaving strangely, for he said apologetically, "I don't think I ever felt so hungry in my life. I've bolted like an ostrich" (Kipling 73).

Likewise, Harriet's uncontrollable cravings reveal her inherent Otherness, which threatens to manifest itself at any moment in the form of animalized tendencies akin to those of a "panther awaiting the advent of its prey" (37), a "coiling snake" (18), a "tiger" (69), or even a furious "terrier" (90). Such bestial attributes are further underscored by her similarities with a better known literary Creole,[97] Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason, who not only is compared to the "foul German spectre – the Vampyre" (Brontë 250) before she attacks and bites her own brother, but is also described as "some strange wild animal" (307), a "clothed hiena" (307), a dog (219), a wolf (227), a tigress (223), and a "carrion-seeking bird of prey"

[97] The fact that Bertha's mixed-raced heredity also endangers her husband's bloodline is only one of the many traits she shares with Marryat's Creole madwoman, which have been pointed out in several studies, such as Brenda Hammack's "Florence Marryat's Female Vampire and the Scientizing of Hybridity" (2008), or Pramod Nayar's "Disease and Degeneration: The Pathologized Other" in *The Transnational in English Literature* (2015).

(221). As observed by Brenda Hammack, Jane Eyre's inability to decide whether to classify the madwoman as beast or human being anticipates Marryat's analogous representation of the racial hybrid as a monstrous being whose trace must be eradicated for the sake of civilized development (885).

In her otherworldly qualities, Harriet embodies the irruption of further unconscious desires, thus responding to the *fin-de-siècle* "moral panic", which, as Adams illustrates, was provoked by "newly provocative forms of social freedom and unorthodox sexualities", especially those perceived as threats to normative femininity (377). Much like Lucy Westenra, the protagonist's overwhelming voluptuousness, flirtatious attitude, and eroticized hypnotic abilities epitomize the conception of female sexuality as a "primitive and voracious" threat to Victorian propriety in vampire fiction (Arata 632). As famously narrated by Doctor Seward, Stoker's iconic temptress mesmerizes her male opponents with "eyes unclean and full of hell-fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs [they] knew", irresistibly luring her former suitor towards her: "[t]here was something diabolically sweet in her tones . . . which rang through the brains of even us who heard the words addressed to another. As for Arthur, he seemed under a spell; moving his hands from his face, as he opened wide his arms" (Stoker 197). In addition to exerting a similar – albeit more subtle – influence over her victims, Harriet's "general appearance of excited sensuality" (Marryat 162) alludes to the nineteenth-century stereotype of the mixed-raced woman as a seductress "of otherwise virtuous white[s]" (Mencke 189). Although this prejudice against racial miscegenation originated in America, Depledge clarifies that such attitudes were "not uncommon in England" (26), as it can be appreciated in Marryat's text. "Miss Brandt possesses the kind of beauty that appeals to the senses of animal creatures like ourselves", observes Harriet's British fiancé, "[s]he has a far more dangerous quality . . . She attracts without knowing it. She is a mass of magnetism" (Marryat 138). Indeed, Harriet seems to possess the uncanny power to "hypnotise" her companions, "as the snake is said to

hypnotise the bird" (Marryat 29). "I don't believe I could trust myself", comments one of her suitors, "only speaking of her seems to have revived the . . . sensation of being drawn against my will – hypnotised I suppose the scientists would call it – to be near her, to touch her, to embrace her, until all power of resistance is gone" (Marryat 145).

In agreement with Willburn, Marryat's configuration of the Jamaican heroine as an exotic and mesmerising creature reflects Late Victorian assumptions about dark, non-English bodies that were supposedly prone to possessing supernatural abilities ("Savage Magnet" 164). Therefore, once again, Harriet's strangeness is justified by her hybrid heredity. Beneath her symbolic disguise, she embodies everything which a proper English lady should not be, as the narrator observes: "[she] fell into ecstasies over everything she saw . . . became extravagant and ungovernable" (Marryat 58). Harriet's attitude is described in stark opposition to the modesty and decorum expected of Victorian femininity, which is, in its turn, personified in the character of Elinor Leyton, who has "at all times the most perfect command over herself" (Marryat 109). Whereas Harriet "had not the slightest control over her passions", showing "her eyes wide open and her large mouth trembling with agitation" (Marryat 89), Elinor is described as a woman with "an exceptionally cold face and it matched her disposition . . . She might be trusted to never say or do an unladylike thing – before all, she was cognisant of the obligations which devolved upon her as . . . a member of the British aristocracy" (Marryat 23). The sharp contrast between Miss Brandt and Miss Leyton sheds light upon the "struggle of the proper lady against the monster" which often characterizes nineteenth-century representations of "abnormal" femininities (Ender 39), thus emphasizing Harriet's Afro-Jamaican side. In this sense, her ghostly nature is, once again, further underscored by her affinity with Bertha, the lustful and invisibilized "nighttime spectre" who haunts Jane, embodying her "truest and darkest double" on a figurative and psychological level (Gilbert and Gubar 359, 360). Marryat, like Brontë, corresponds to Claire Rosenfeld's classification of "the novelist who consciously

or unconsciously exploits psychological Doubles" by juxtaposing two characters, "the one representing the socially acceptable or conventional personality, the other externalizing the free, uninhibited, often criminal self" (314). Most notably, when this double is female, "she more often than not is dark" (*Ibidem*).

Harriet's bizarre symptoms are eventually unveiled by Doctor Phillips, who echoes nineteenth-century scientific discourse in his firm confirmation of the protagonist's alienated condition as racial Other: "The girl is a quadroon,[98] and she shews it distinctively in her long-shaped eyes . . . and her wide mouth and blood-red lips! . . . I can tell you by the way she eats her food . . . that she has inherited her half-caste mother's greedy and sensual disposition" (Marryat 77). By decoding Harriet's disorder "medically and scientifically" (Marryat 162), he assumes the role of the voice of reason whose Western logic is meant to solve the mystery of foreign magic (Brantlinger 231).[99] Doctor Phillips' interpretation of the heroine's dangerous attributes as a direct consequence of the vampiric curse passed down through her grandmother's black blood suggest, as argued by Sian Macfie, a medicalization of her dangerous attributes in an attempt to make sense of the unfamiliar (61). More specifically, Hammack observes how "Marryat's portrait of a female vampire reads like a medical case study" (887) due to the novel's scientizing of Miss Brandt's hybrid heredity (885). Matching, once again, Bertha's marginalization due to her possible contamination of Rochester's bloodline (Nayar 188), Harriet's unstable nature is subjected to Late Victorian perceptions of the Creole madwoman as an "unnatural, subhuman being" (Hammack 885), exposing her mixed blood as the result of an animalized inter-species hybridity whose "depiction might not have been out of place in contemporary medical journals such as *The Lancet*" (*Ibidem*). Such

[98] The term "quadroon" refers to a person with one quarter African ancestry, being one of the diverse racialist labels employed to classify a woman of colour in enslaved societies, such as mulatta, octoroon, mustee, mestico, griffe, or creole (Brody 15-16).

[99] As Brantlinger indicates, stories in which "Western science discovers or triggers supernatural effects associated with the 'mysterious Orient'" are a recurrent trend within the genre of imperial Gothic (231).

a reading certainly decodes the novel's interplay with "*fin-de-siècle* thinking about race, gender, and species" (*Ibidem*), thus revealing a reminder not only of the scientific racism which Hopkins challenges in *Of One Blood*, but also of the tense power dynamics between Victorian medical men and spiritualist women.

Despite the fact that Marryat's identification with Harriet Brandt does not seem to be explicitly based upon any shared mediumistic skills beyond mesmeric abilities (Davis 42), it is possible to detect certain similarities between Doctor Phillips' treatment of the Jamaican psychic vampire and scientific conceptions of female mediumship as a "spectacle of pathological womanhood" (Owen 151). As it has previously been mentioned, nineteenth-century physicians "formulated an entire pathology of mediumship and presented it to the world as a malfunction of femininity" (*Ibidem*). If, as Depledge comments, "any woman who behaved in a way that was considered troublesome or transgressive was quite likely to have her behaviour pathologized" by being diagnosed as a victim of hysteria (13), any sign of deviant behaviour by female spiritualists could be easily read as a symptom of 'mediomania' (Marvin 38), thus making Victorian trance speakers particularly vulnerable to the threat of being incarcerated in a mental institution (Owen 139). As it has previously been mentioned, men of science such as the psychiatrist Henry Maudsley pointed out alarming similarities between epileptic seizures, hysterical fits, and mediumistic convulsions, interpreting spiritualist women's bodily contortions, disconnected utterances, and altered states of consciousness as clear evidence of their mental instability (Maudsley 145). Yet, as Owen convincingly argues, this medicalization of subversive conducts had less to do with the links which Braude identifies between trance states and illness (83) and more to do with social acceptability and the moral and intellectual superiority assumed by alienists, who, as the fitting term indicates, were experts

in dealing with estranged individuals (Owen 140).[100] In other words, the subversion of the Victorian 'angel in the house' was presented as one of the main symptoms of 'mediomania': according to Marvin, the spiritualist madwoman would surely "become possessed by the idea that she has some startling mission in the world", for which she would forsake "her home, her children, and her duty, to mount the rostrum and proclaim the peculiar virtues of free-love, elective affinity, or the reincarnation of souls" (47). In the same way in which nineteenth-century hysteria may be regarded, in Elaine Showalter's terms, as "a mode of protest for women deprived of other social or intellectual outlets or expressive opinions" (147), such subversive outbursts often allowed women to articulate what they would never dare to utter in polite society. Marryat, who was well aware of the public debate surrounding the opposition between trance mediums and scientists (O'Brien Hill 341), may well have been one of those possessed 'mediomaniacs' who stepped into the public sphere to articulate a passionate defence of Spiritualism and other unpopular causes.

Likewise, Harriet Brandt's anomalous femininity is pathologized through "descriptions . . . which could have been lifted from the pages of a case history of a typical nineteenth-century hysteric" (Depledge 15). In addition to her subversive behaviour, the Jamaican heroine displays further mediumistic attributes in her role as a vessel for the disruptive racial Other. As a mixed-raced woman, she is perpetually haunted by the almost invisible trace of her illegitimate interracial parentage,[101] and constitutes a disturbing reminder of the unspeakable colonial violence to which she unwittingly gives voice. Whereas Dianthe's inherited traumatic account

[100] A noun referring to a doctor specialized in treating the mentally ill, borrowed from the French concept *médecin aliéniste*, from the verb *aliéner*, meaning "to transfer to another's ownership, estrange, deprive of reason", deriving from the Latin term *alius*, meaning "other" (Merriam Webster 2020).

[101] The relationship between Harriet's parents is particularly demonized throughout the novel as one of the causes behind their daughter's anomalous nature, not only because of its implication of an interracial sexual union, but also due to their unmarried status: "The bastard of a man like Henry Brandt, cruel, bastardly, godless, and a woman like her terrible mother, a sensual, self-loving, crafty and bloodthirsty half-caste – what do you expect their daughter to become?" (Marryat 69).

of atrocities involving slavery, rape, and miscegenation is ultimately channelled and redeemed through her mediumship in Hopkins' American Gothic novel, Harriet's doubly othered possession by the monstrous ways of her Creole mother is conceived as a curse for which Doctor Phillips offers no possible exorcism. Instead of making space for the Other by employing altered states of consciousness as a narrative device, a cross-cultural bridge, or a portal to delve into her family history, as in Dianthe's case, Harriet's passionate outbursts are easily mistaken for hysterical fits during which she experiences a relapse into her 'primitive' roots. The impersonation of the mother's spirit by means of her daughter's anatomy becomes particularly evident when Harriet loses her temper: "All the Creole in her came to the surface – like her cruel mother . . . Her dark eyes rolled in her passion . . . and her crimson lips quivered with the inability to express all she felt . . . At that moment she *was* brutal" (Marryat 112, original emphasis). Her mixed-raced body, occupied by the phantom of her vilified ancestry, displays a troublesome coexistence between the civilized British lady and the 'savage' Jamaican madwoman in which the latter is frustrated by the "inability to express" herself despite Harriet's excessive lack of self-control.

Therefore, besides mirroring the treatment of transgressive women in Victorian medical writing, Doctor Phillips' concerned attitude towards Harriet reflects the discomfort towards the racial Other in Victorian hereditarian thought. His pathologization of her allegedly abnormal condition echoes the "psychological materialism" adopted by nineteenth-century alienists, a trend which placed special emphasis on hereditary transmission to "conceptualize insanity as a degeneration of the mind that had its roots in an individual's diseased family history" (Höglund 155). Rather than suffering from genetic insanity, Harriet appears to have been infected by racialized features perceived as threatening to civilized progress in *fin-de-siècle* discourse (Willburn, "Savage Magnet" 164). For instance, the protagonist's malign

matrilineal heritage is underlined by various parallels between the Doctor's negative portrayals of both women:

> Don't speak to me of her mother. She was not a woman, she was a fiend . . . a revolting creature. A fat, flabby half caste . . . I can see her now with her sensual mouth, her greedy eyes, and her lust for blood . . . she thirsted for blood, she loved the sight and smell of it, she would taste it . . . They said she was 'Obeah', which means diabolical and witchcraft in their language . . . If this girl is anything like her mother she must be an epitome of lust! (Marryat 69, 71).

Harriet's uncanny resemblance with her mother is evidently dehumanized and distorted, thus attributing her disproportionate primal appetites and further pernicious racial stereotypes to her concealed black blood. Evident signs of this mysterious maternal 'disease' are unveiled through the course of the narrative, depicting Harriet as an innocent yet dangerous victim of her past who has no choice but to emulate the primitive and destructive conduct of her progenitor, "moving her tongue slowly over her lips" at the sight of blood and bones, just like the Obeah priestess is characterized by "her large eyes rolling and her sensual lips protruding as if she were always licking them in anticipation of her prey" (Marryat 85, 77). As noted by Depledge, Marryat's Caribbean vampire replicates the characterization of an earlier fictional mixed-raced outcast. Bertha Mason, also "the true daughter of an infamous mother" (Brontë 258), is marginalized on the grounds of hereditary transmission: "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; – idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard . . . Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points" (Brontë 257-258). Such analogous traits, Depledge argues, reflect the permanence of hereditarian fears and racial discrimination in Victorian society during the fifty years that separate the publication of *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *The Blood of the Vampire* (29). Indeed, Doctor Phillips' sombre diagnosis involves diverse recurrent anxieties which lingered in the collective imaginary at the turn of the century. His unnatural medicalization of Harriet's

condition ascribes all sorts of vices to her family, thus equating her mother's black blood with atavistic desires, voracity, and violence:[102]

> How had they *dared* to bring her into the world, an innocent yet hapless child of sin – the inheritor of their evil propensities – of their lust, their cruelty, their sensuality, their gluttony – and worst of all, the fatal heritage that made her a terror and a curse to her fellow-creatures? (Marryat 176, original emphasis).

Besides alluding to the Late Victorian fear of the "return of the repressed" (Brantlinger 227), this enumeration of catastrophic birthmarks points towards Harriet's "fatal heritage" as the cornerstone of the novel's unhospitable reception of the colonized Other. Her supposed contamination of the imperial metropolis is rooted in the eugenic notion that children remain forever haunted by the sins of their parents, thus constructing her terrifying infiltration into British culture as a disruption of what Francis Galton denominated the "healthy stock" of the nation ("Eugenics" 47). She is therefore unwelcomed into the white English gene pool by the anti-miscegenation discourse of nineteenth-century eugenic philosophy, which constitutes a key feature in Marryat's novel.

3.2.2.3 Taming the Supernatural: Eugenics, Pangenesis, and Erasing the (M)other

Despite her attempts to leave her West Indian past behind her, Harriet is irreversibly marked by her transcultural ancestry, bearing, in addition to her matrilineal affliction, the burden of her slaveholding father's evil deeds. In agreement with Depledge, Henry Brandt's deadly experiments "are to be read as an exaggerated depiction of the abuse slaves were subjected to" (25), thus echoing the spectre of racial oppression which remained in Jamaica

[102] In his article "Queer Victorian Gothic", Ardel Thomas points out that, although the heroine's ailment is presented as "a natural organism" (Marryat 162), hence making the Doctor's diagnosis seem "completely sound and scientific", his authority "is predicated on Jamaican folklore and not on a Western medical education" (Thomas 151). Therefore, instead of truly counterbalancing Harriet's strangeness by providing a rational explanation, Marryat offers an equally supernatural excuse for her alienated condition by alluding to her African grandmother's vampiric curse. Doctor Phillips' failed attempt at conquering the dark continent of the irrational Other may therefore be read as the spiritualist author's strategy to discredit nineteenth-century medical authority while exposing the inability of Western science to unlock the secrets of its exoticized colonial subjects.

long after abolition.[103] The protagonist's hybrid ancestry therefore evokes the nightmare of being invaded by the colonized Other, and, simultaneously, the imperial guilt of the colonizer who is forced to face the brutality perpetuated by the metropolis (Arata 623). For this reason, Harriet's arrival on British soil triggers the Late Victorian preoccupation with the "eruption of a past that has not been left behind" (Adams 378), a past that she is believed to contain in every cell of her body. As noted by scholars like Octavia Davis, such anxieties reveal multiple references to the eugenic assumption that "blood may conceal latent characteristics derived from the geographical conditions exerted upon the parents" (42). Marryat's novel certainly seems concerned with "dramatizing scientific theories in vogue at the time of its publication" (Davis 43), starting with its very title, which alludes to the sensationalist plot device that conceals the text's hereditarian and anti-miscegenation theories (Zieger 216). What contaminates Harriet's blood is not exactly the West Indian bat bite, but the biracial heritage that runs through her veins.

Blood is a recurrent trope in *The Blood of the Vampire*, as its title clearly announces. It is also a crucial common theme between Marryat's work and *Of One Blood*, functioning as a sign of racial identity throughout both novels. Moreover, this bodily fluid constitutes a key element in the fields of eugenics and pangenesis, since it was adopted by Francis Galton as a metaphor for heredity in his quest for racial purity (Davis 42). For a spiritualist author, this imagery seems particularly appropriate, since blood becomes a symbol for "what is visible and subject to interpretation, and for what is latent, invisible, and uncontrollable" (*Ibidem*). Therefore, emerging scientific speculations on this matter coincided with similar concerns in the Occult revival, along with literary "Gothic and Romantic concerns with the . . . potentially

[103] Harriet's father, a British scientist, is accused of torturing his Afro-Jamaican slaves and employing vivisection in his experiments. Marryat's anti-vivisection stance is also manifested in her novel *An Angel of Pity* (1898).

dangerous relationships between surface and essence, the present and the ancestral past" (*Ibidem*). Consequently, spiritualist considerations involving the prevalence of individual and collective traumatic histories whose echoes reverberate through time and space are manifested through Harriet's racially ambivalent surface. The fictionalization of the ghostly Other channelled by her occult dark blood connotes a deeper sense of reverse colonization, since it resonates with scientific readings of miscegenation as a spectral, imperceptible yet inevitable loss of national, cultural, and racial identity (Arata 629). At the turn of the century, the rise of deterministic theories of heredity denoted a reluctance towards the dissolution of ethnic borders, as many specialists "believed that if they could control the inheritance of 'good' or 'bad' blood, they could control the development or decline of the British race" (Macaluso 71). According to hereditarian views, avoiding the decadence of imperial hegemony depended greatly upon the perpetuation of the "eugenic belief in the need to keep the white races pure" (Depledge 24). Blood-related symbolism thus came to be a central factor in these debates, conforming, for instance, the main hypothesis in Charles Darwin's developmental theory of pangenesis, which inspired intense fascination among British subjects (Macaluso 71). Proposed in 1868, pangenesis consisted in the notion that all cells in an organism carry minute particles denominated "gemmules" which are susceptible to environmental change and would be responsible for the transmission of attributes from parent to offspring (Bergman 197). As Davis points out, the connections between similar arguments and the popular use of the circulating system as a synonym for ancestry eventually "yielded the common belief that inheritable properties were carried in the blood" (42). Soon after Darwin's pangenetic theory was published, his cousin, Francis Galton, applied this approach during a series of blood transfusion experiments on rabbits (Bergman 197). Despite the failure of this operation, Galton maintained an acute interest in the study of heredity, which was permanently dominated by his eugenic convictions (Cowan 17). His intention "to improve the human race by controlling its breeding

patterns – just as if humans were domestic animals, like horses, dogs and sheep" (Cowan 16), rested on staunch deterministic principles, such as the conservative belief in the prevalence of innate differences in talent and character, independent of the person's environment or education, as he wrote in *Hereditary Genius*: "It is in the most unqualified manner that I object to pretensions of natural equality" (56).[104] Galton's belief in nature over nurture in his analysis of hereditary conducts attributed to co-related mental and physical traits corresponded to the period's trend of "psychological materialism" (Höglund 155). Consequently, his eugenic quest for ethnic purity entailed manifold racial stereotypes, according to which individuals of non-white ancestry were bound to behave in ferocious ways which represented an obstacle to civilized progress (Galton, "Eugenics" 48). In agreement with Davis (43), the spirit of Galton's unhospitable discourse lingers over *The Blood of the Vampire*, voicing the eugenic fear of miscegenation which required a solidification of the boundaries between Self and Other for the alleged improvement of the species, boundaries which Harriet's very existence threatens to dissolve.

Given the recurrence of similar opinions among the spiritualist movement (Ferguson, "Eugenics" 65), it is safe to assume that Marryat may have very easily been exposed to eugenic views, as suggested by the evidence presented in her novel. Harriet's inherent Otherness is codified by means of eugenic principles, articulated through Doctor Phillips, who offers "the truth, medically and scientifically", about "a subject that is little thought of or discussed amongst medical men" (Marryat 162). Her pathologized racial difference is depicted in terms of hereditarian determinism, since even her husband, who adopts the most sympathetic approach, echoes pangenetic assumptions when defending his beloved: "It is not her fault! . .

[104] Ruth Cowan explains that "Galton was a lifelong conservative", hence his conviction that human beings "were inherently different from each other at birth, a difference which could not be overcome by environment and education" (18). This view made Victorian conservatives "disinclined to believe that society could be, or even needed to be, reformed" (*Ibidem*).

. Neither is it the fault of a madman that his progenitors had lunacy in their blood, nor for a consumptive that his were strumous" (Marryat 78). Likewise, the physician's detection of Harriet's anomalous condition is founded upon the eugenic belief that "the bodies of British subjects of color contained 'gemmules' that were degenerative due to their proximity to 'the lower animals'" (Macaluso 72). Doctor Phillips stresses how Harriet's body is infected by "the fatal attributes of the Vampire that affected her mother's birth", a curse that will make Harriet "draw upon the health and strength of all with whom she may be intimately associated – that may render her love fatal to such as she may cling to!" (Marryat 79). In line with Galton's racist presumptions (Macaluso 72), the protagonist's hereditary taint causes her to exhaust her victims, "sapping their physical strength and feeding upon them" (Marryat 161). Her psychic vampirism aligns with Arata's interpretation of reverse colonization as a biological invasion during which the power of the intrusive Other depends upon the exploitation of British subjects (629). Such fantasies articulate the era's "heredity paranoia" concerning the possible deterioration of 'civilized' races through the abovementioned links between blood and racial development (Depledge 23).

Arata locates particularly useful examples of this imperial Gothic tendency in Stoker's *Dracula*, whose villain triumphally declares Mina to be "flesh of [his] flesh; blood of [his] blood; kin of [his] kin" after she has yielded to his control (Stoker 239). Horrified by the polluting act of mingling her blood with Dracula's, Mina declares herself "Unclean, unclean!" (Stoker 236), thus exposing how apparently stable conceptions of the British Self are jeopardized by intimate contact with the foreign intruder. Miscegenation and vampirism, Arata argues, are both to be read as a politically coded invasion that reveals the fragility of racial and national identity in *fin-de-siècle* England, despite the degree of imperial confidence which characterised the Victorian period (639). In this way, Mina's symptoms of impurity and Dracula's "potential to spread through limitless generations" dramatize fears about the

development of other ethnicities in relation to the English, triggered by an intense awareness of the Darwinian fact that "strong races inevitably weaken and fall, and are in turn displaced by stronger races" (*Ibidem*). Similarly, Harriet Brandt replicates Dracula's blood-sucking habits by feeding on her British victims' energy. For instance, Ralph Pullen, one of her conquests, reflects on how her passionate kiss "seemed to sap his vitality", after which he "felt faint and sick" (Marryat 62); whereas the Jamaican vampire seems increasingly stronger and healthier as the narrative unfolds. Just like Dracula bleeds his preys in order to remain "vigorous, masterful, energetic, robust", thus displaying attributes that are "conspicuously absent among the novel's British characters, particularly the men" (Arata 632); so do Harriet's deadly affections emasculate the "worn-out and very pale" Bobby Bates (Marryat 98), who grows "more languid every day" as a result of her sensual embraces (Marryat 148). The vampire's presence leaves a trail of destruction, and of "boys fainting away like hysterical gals" (Marryat 105),[105] denoting a significant reversal of traditional power structures, not only in terms of race and empire, but also of patriarchal hegemony. Equating Dracula and Lucy's "thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes", which granted "the more active male the right and responsibility of vigorous appetite, while requiring the more passive female to 'suffer and be still'" (Craft 261), Harriet subtly deprives her victims of all the attributes considered necessary for a healthy "stock" in eugenic philosophy, such as "health, energy, ability, manliness" (Galton, "Eugenics" 47). In consequence, and in accordance with Galton's model for eugenic reproduction, the dangerous outcome of her interracial intimacy with her companions is eventually eradicated, thus fulfilling "the narrative requirement that the monster be repudiated and the world of normal relations restored" (Craft 160).

[105] Baroness Gobelli, a wealthy, "coarse-fibred and robust" woman, scoffs at her son's effeminate weakness (Marryat 105).

In Galton's view, eugenics would propel Britain's imperial projects by raising "the average quality of [the] nation", so that "the general tone of domestic, social, and political life would be higher. The race as a whole would be less foolish, less frivolous, less excitable, and politically more provident" (Galton, "Eugenics" 47). In addition to her allegedly corrupted blood, Harriet's excitable and frivolous character as a "half-tamed savage" represents an obstacle in the eugenic evolution towards a so-called improvement of the species (Marryat 137). Doctor Phillips is firm in declaring a strict remedy to avoid further contamination: Harriet must never marry. Once again, his prescription replays the anti-miscegenation stance of Galton's "science of improving stock" (Galton, *Inquiries* 17), since she is "not fit to marry into any decent English family" due to her slight trace of African ancestry (Marryat 118): "She has black blood in her, her mother was a half-caste, so . . . it would be impossible for any man . . . to think of marrying her! One might get a piebald son and heir!" (Marryat 143).[106] At a time when conservative groups were demanding "more and better mothers" to prevent the much-feared erosion of the "general health of the national stock and the continuation of English economic and military superiority" (Rogers 12), questions of "judicious mating" became fundamental in eugenic doctrine (Galton, *Inquiries* 17). In Angelique Richardson's words, "eugenic love" could be defined as "the politics of the state mapped onto bodies: the replacement of romance with the rational selection of a reproductive partner in order better to serve the state through breeding" (9). Instead of serving the state, Harriet is suspected of introducing the racial degeneration that would seal the decline of the British Empire, for which she ought to remain isolated from society. However, unheeding the Doctor's advice, she rebels "against the cruel lot that heredity had marked out for her" and marries Anthony Pennell before

[106] The term "piebald" refers to animals displaying a pattern of two different colours of fur, usually black and white. Ralph Pullen's mocking of Harriet's hybrid ancestry denotes eugenic notions of animalized reproduction (Cowan 16), thus equating the racial Other with primitive instincts: cross-bred animals and mixed-raced people were both denominated "half-caste" (Fowler 366).

unwillingly draining his life (Marryat 177). Her husband's death definitely confirms the destructive potential of her Creole background, alluding to the *fin-de-siècle* perception of interracial mingling as a source of horror: "Doctor Phillips was right – it was she who had killed Margaret Pullen's baby and Bobby Bates, and . . . now her Tony!" (Marryat 186). Devastated, manifesting her internalized aversion towards the non-white located Other within the Western Self, Harriet concludes that her unclean parentage has made her "unfit to live", and hence her alienated existence deserves to be erased (Marryat 187).

The West Indian daughter blames her Creole mother for the liminal condition which condemns her to forever remain lingering at the margins of Englishness. As it is foreshadowed throughout the text by configurations of the mother as a dark absence, Harriet's rejection of her matrilineal heritage entails a significant dismissal of her Jamaican past, roots, and homeland. The nameless, voiceless, and blood-thirsty Obeah priestess from whom the protagonist descends is the original vessel for the hereditary taint that terrifies most characters in *The Blood of the Vampire*. Shedding light upon the complications of Harriet's hybrid identity, torn between the 'civilized' Self to which she aspires and the latent 'savage' Creole dwelling in her unconscious, the distant memory of her half-caste mother is often presented as the main source behind her bicultural daughter's turmoil: "At the mention of her mother something came into Miss Brandt's eyes . . . It was not anger, nor sorrow, nor remorse. It was a kind of sullen contempt" (Marryat 29). Harriet's ambivalent relationship with her matrilineal ancestry is also manifested in the mediumistic fits of rage during which she unawarely impersonates her predecessor's barbaric attitude. These momentary relapses into her 'savage' state are remarked by Doctor Phillips as further proof of his hereditarian theories: "When the cat is black, the kitten is black too! It's the law of Nature!" (Marryat 77). Once more, he envisions an unavoidable eruption of the girl's West Indian ancestry, stressing how "that which is bred in her will come out sooner or later" (Marryat 69). His insistence on the harmful

potential of the mother's black blood resonates with the tendency to ascribe genetic disorders to maternal influence in Victorian medical science: "Females preponderate so much more in the cases of inherited disease . . . the inheritance is more frequently from the mother's side" (Gowers, *Lancet*, 28 February 1880, 316). Harriet's infected heredity traces back to her maternal grandmother, an African slave who had been made pregnant by her master, "a certain Judge Carey of Barbadoes" (Marryat 77). Her fellows ascribed her death during labour to the Vampire bat bite, and "prophecied that the child would grow up to be a murderess" (Marryat 69). Matching Dianthe's matrilineal link to the oppression of enslaved women of African ancestry, Harriet's ominous interracial parentage raises issues of individual and collective histories of racial discrimination and sexual abuse, thus unconsciously voicing the troublesome echoes of a colonial past that refuses to be hushed. Whereas Antoinette's original name and muffled matrilineal story are recovered in Jean Rhys' Neo-Victorian classic *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), where the Creole 'madwoman' is given the opportunity to reclaim her mother's voice and deliver her untold account of how they were both abandoned, isolated, persecuted, and abused before being equally censored and accused of insanity,[107] Harriet does not engage in an active retelling of such counter-narratives. Rather, her reluctance to acknowledge her intricate matrilineal connections contributes to further silencing her othered side.

As Harriet struggles to come to terms with her double Otherness as a mixed-raced woman, she erases any trace of her mother's black genealogy from her biographical accounts, leaving her maternal grandmother out of the family tree, and only taking pride on her imperialist origins: "I am an Englishwoman . . . My father was English, his name was Henry Brandt, and my mother was a Miss Carey – daughter of one of the Justices of Barbadoes!"

[107] Like Harriet's Creole mother, Annette remains a looming presence in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, said to be "shut away a raging lunatic" (Rhys 74). Although Rhys redresses Brontë's demonization of Bertha's heredity by retelling the mother's story through the daughter's voice, Antoinette's narrative is nonetheless distorted by the same silencing policies which alienated Annette in the first place: "Look at the crazy girl, you crazy like your mother" (Rhys 31).

(Marryat 13). By doing so, she repeatedly casts her secret bloodline into oblivion, forgetting – or suppressing – her mother's legacy. This complex disruption of cross-generational bonds corresponds to what Deborah Rogers denominates "matrophobia", defined as a recurrent "fear of identification with . . . the maternal body and the motherline" in Gothic fiction (1). Matrophobia, Rogers argues, resides in the daughter's "resentment of maternal submission, exclusion, or sacrifice" (6), or, in Kathie Carlson's Jungian reading, in a fear of being "just like her" which leads to the woman's evasion from the mother's "territory" (50). In these terms, Harriet's breaking away from Jamaica involves an Irigarayan conceptual matricide whose lack of redemptive repair contributes to the heroine's eventual self-destruction.

Given the young woman's invisibilization of her maternal line, her desire to construct an identity which is markedly separate from her motherland and in accordance with Western standards features what Irigaray calls "the murder of the mother" upon which the patriarchal social order is founded (*Reader* 47). As a consequence, the historical "lack of symbolic representation of the mother-daughter relationship and of a maternal genealogy" in the dominant discourse (*Ibidem* 50) would result in women's inability to define themselves in relation to the mother, and to represent their relation to origins in their own terms (*Ibidem* 35-37). Accordingly, Harriet's forgetfulness of her female ancestry, along with the interruption of her family's matrilineal narrative, leads to a deformed self-perception. Just like the "murdered body of the woman-mother . . . haunts the religious, scientific, psychoanalytic, and philosophical traditions held dear in the west" (Kelso 66), the protagonist's diasporic personhood is perturbed by the absence of her mother's voice, whose ghost is replaced, in its turn, by a monstrous version of her story, mediated and distorted by the British imperialist tendency to configure women of colour as embodiments of the Other.

Unlike Mira and Aunt Hannah, Harriet's mother is completely deprived of narrative authority and is hence unable to bridge her daughter's diaspora. Whereas *Of One Blood* ends

with the re-establishment of Dianthe's transnational matrilineal line by the restorative power of cross-generational storytelling, Harriet does not recover from her symbolic amnesia and has no spectral ancestors to welcome her home. Despite the fact that her matrilineal heritage is associated to the supernatural world of primitive rites and West Indian folk magic, such spiritual elements do not bear the empowering potential which the Occult adopts in Hopkins' novel. Rather, instead of making the "hierarchical racial and class distinctions fall apart", as Ayse Bulamur claims (152), the paranormal sphere of Jamaican 'savage Spiritualism' is undeniably charged with negative connotations and hence serves to establish further separation between the protagonist's English and Creole split personalities by emphasizing Western logic's inability to grasp the irrational practices of colonized cultures.[108] As Diana Wallace reminds, the murder of the mother is "deathly to the child as well" (30), affecting the daughter's incomplete understanding of her fragmented Self. Therefore, Harriet's dismissal of the Creole matrilineal perspective, executed through the hostile reception of her racial Otherness, her past, and her origins, equals self-denial and self-effacement.

Her suicide differs greatly from Dianthe's redemptive death, since, while the African-American heroine is reconciled with her welcoming ancestors in a Pan-Africanist heaven where Afro-Diasporic spirits are unified as "all of one blood" (Hopkins 729), the isolation endured by the Jamaican heiress is perpetuated until the end of her life and beyond. Marginalized not only by Victorian society, but also by her own internalized rejection of the Other within the Self, Harriet's final wish is to decisively breach her Creole lineage and "go to a world where the curse of heredity . . . may be mercifully wiped out" (Marryat 187). Her longing to transcend her mixed-raced body in order to put an end to her alleged contamination resonates with the

[108] Although Bulamur argues that the novel's cultural, geographic, and ethnic differences dissolve as "the slaves and servants of Harriet's father's plantation, the Jamaican heiress, and the London elite all participate equally in spiritualism" (152), such a reading implies englobing all manifestations of the supernatural into a homogenous whole, thus disregarding the evident gap which Marryat establishes between European Spiritualism and West Indian Obeah.

spiritualist conception of the afterlife, which, as Ferguson notes, bears remarkable similarities with the eugenic ideal of "an impending society in which sickness and suffering had been eliminated, in which . . . fit bodies replaced . . . diseased ones, and in which each race . . . preserved only its best specimens" ("Eugenics" 67). Therefore, since she is not fit to fulfil the eugenic standards that are implied in the novel, Harriet is fated to disappear into the "imagined harmony that the spiritualists insisted came through death" (Ferguson, "Eugenics" 72).

Instead of guaranteeing the cross-cultural creation of a ghostly matrilineal consciousness, Marryat's incorporation of occultist elements into the novel achieves the opposite effect, especially as Baroness Gobelli, the counterfeit clairvoyant who initially welcomes Harriet as the "daughter of the house" (Marryat 88), turns out to be the least trustworthy person to host the wandering protagonist: as soon as she discovers the destructive effects of her guest's Creole heredity, she banishes her from her home. Ironically, the unhospitable attitude adopted by this fraudulent medium is consistent with the contradictory aspects of the Victorian spiritualist agenda, which, in spite of its apparently progressive doctrine, often seemed unable to deal with the 'ghosts' posed by the presence of racialized Otherness in the séance and the literary text. By the same token, the deceptive occultist draws attention to Marryat's own dubious and somewhat ineffective role as a spiritualist author who, rather than engaging in the mediumistic task of granting voice and visibility to marginal phantasms, deprives Harriet of agency by reducing her hybrid heredity to either an anomaly in need of medicalization, or a roaming shadow threatening to dissolve the carefully constructed racial, national, and cultural borders of the Empire.

3.3 Conclusions

The Blood of the Vampire is as intriguing as its subversive main character, combining paradoxical approaches to the mixed-raced female vampire which demonstrate how the relative degree of tolerance towards the racialized Other within spiritualist fiction may vary, while leaving the reader "room for sympathy and room to wonder about the author's ultimate intent" (Thomas 151). Granted, Harriet's role as the "marauding, invasive Other" is riven with ambivalence (Arata 623), since she is portrayed, simultaneously, as victim and villain throughout the novel. It is precisely this elusion of fixed binary categories what makes her such a troubling Gothic heroine, being constantly influenced by her invisible Creole ancestry in her mediumistic embodiment of atavistic concerns brought from othered lands and dark continents. However, although her mediumistic attributes could have unlocked their potential to reinvent the relationship between the Victorian Self and the margins of national identity, Marryat's narrative does not mirror the open dialogue that spiritualists claimed to establish across the séance circle. In opposition to Dianthe's enlightening clairvoyance, which operates as a bridge between African-American personhood and her predecessor's Ethiopian roots, Harriet's dim conception of her family history emulates Britain's relationship with its colonial past, obscured due to geographical distance, cultural differences, and the systematic erasure of colonized voices, supplanted by a translation of the experience of the Other in terms of the Self in dominant discourses.

Dianthe and Harriet experience contrasting encounters with the defamiliarized margins of Western culture, thus presenting radically different manifestations of the supernatural, ranging from a gateway into empowering self-discovery in the Pan-Africanist melodrama, to a source of terror in the Late Victorian Gothic text. Whereas the paranormal events narrated in *Of One Blood* serve as a device to trigger cross-cultural interactions, matrilineal black arts adopt a contrary meaning in Marryat's work, featuring as one of the main indicators of Harriet's evil parentage. Echoing the distinctions which certain spiritualist anthropologists established

between the Victorian Occult revival and the native sacred rites of colonized societies, Harriet's diasporic connections to the 'savage Spiritualism' of Caribbean magic are depicted as further proof of her strangeness. Foreign esoterism is therefore impossible to tame in *The Blood of the Vampire*, feared as "a survival of savage thought" (Wallace 26) and fated to remain, like the mixed-raced woman, shrouded in mystery. Far from joining Hopkins' empowering celebration of transcultural African ancestry, Marryat's imperial Gothic tale confirms and reinforces nineteenth-century anxieties regarding interracial procreation by problematizing the coexistence of the colonized Other in the Victorian Self as an unwelcome, phantasmal alien presence lodged within the English subject's body.

In contrast with Dianthe's royal bloodline, Harriet's Creole origins are exposed as a deadly curse, while her infiltration into the heart of the metropolis is thought to jeopardize the unstable foundations of the declining Empire. Besides summoning the blurring of racial boundaries through miscegenation, Harriet's biracial and itinerant existence is performed as a portal into a repressed past which replays traumatic histories on an individual and collective level, involving extreme representations of, on the one hand the violent slaveholder as her father, and, on the other, the stereotyped racial Other as her mother. Since, as stated by Doctor Phillips, "a child born under such conditions cannot turn out well" (Marryat 69), Harriet – a daughter of injustice and oppression – is condemned to be torn between incompatible aspects of her past and her present, her 'civilized' British identity and her 'primitive' Creole nature, wondering, like Antoinette: "who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys 76-77).

Yet despite generating a positively unhospitable narrative towards the Creole colonized Other, Marryat's sentimental characterization of Harriet Brandt eventually appeals to the reader's sympathy for the 'tragic mulatta' and her misfortunes. Although, in agreement with Malchow, this strategy engages in the distinctive "benign racism" which typifies descriptions

of mixed-raced women as a "superior class of Negro" in abolitionist literature (174), *The Blood of the Vampire* leaves some space for what may well be a covert critique of Victorian conservative views against racial miscegenation. Anthony Pennell, a Socialist writer and the only character who is able to voice this judgement, is described as Harriet's perfect match and her only "hope for this world and the next" (Marryat 186). In opposition to the deterministic stance adopted by Victorian conservatives such as Francis Galton, Pennell is defined as a "liberal minded man" (Marryat 145) whose progressive views resemble those of nineteenth-century reformist thinkers who "believed that men . . . were basically the same at the time of their birth" (Cowan 18):

> Anthony Pennell was a Socialist in the best and truest sense of the word. He loved his fellow creatures, both high and low, better than he loved himself. He wanted all to share alike – to be equally happy, equally comfortable – to help and be helped, to rest and depend upon one another. He knew that the dream was only a dream – that it would never be fulfilled in his time, nor any other (Marryat 145).

However, Pennell's dream dies with him when he is annihilated by Harriet's hereditary curse, thus confirming Marryat's possible awareness of the fact that his hopes for a more just and equitable world are hard to fulfil in a Late Victorian context where racial difference is demonized. Even though their interracial marriage brings a positive note to the novel, it is hard to ignore the pernicious racial stereotypes which found the encounter with Otherness in *The Blood of the Vampire*. Rather than portraying Harriet as a victim of social prejudice, the novel presents its marginal protagonist as an innocent casualty of her African heritage.

Unable to find a welcoming reception into Marryat's *fin-de-siècle* literature, the mixed-raced vampire has travelled across time and space, breaking its silence and advancing towards more hospitable narratives in the work of women of African descent. West Indian creatures such as the 'soucouyant' have been reinvented in multiple textual afterlives in the last decades of the twentieth century, serving, in Anatol's words, as "a new model for postcolonial

subjectivity" that fulfils "the taboo mobility and autonomy sought by Black feminists and womanists throughout the diaspora" (25).[109] Interestingly enough, Gina Wisker stresses that, although, like in Marryat's novel, these contemporary texts emphasize "self-abjection and loathing" among their major themes, such stories always end by embracing positive images of hybridity, mothering, community, and diversity so as to voice radical critiques of slavery, racism, and othering (51). Therefore, the Caribbean vampire who terrorized Marryat's Victorian readers is still shapeshifting, "used to problematize a variety of embedded behaviours and narratives, whether of gendered or racialized power, silencing, or disabling" (*Ibidem*). Despite the absence of Afro-Caribbean narrative authority in Marryat's Occult fiction, *The Blood of the Vampire* offers a rich dramatization of the complexity of nineteenth-century cross-cultural encounters, unveiling diverse turn-of-the-century anxieties through Harriet Brandt's interracial hybridity, whose ghost still haunts the pages of present-day literature.

[109] Female vampiric models of Afro-Diasporic resistance and re-empowerment include, for instance, the nurturing African-American mother in Toni Brown's "Immunity" (1996), the multicultural community in Tananarive Due's *African Immortals* series (1997-2008), the Southern anti-slavery sisterhood in Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1992), and the Jamaican 'soucouyant' in Nalo Hopkinson's "Greedy Choke Puppy" (2000).

IV. Summoning Postcolonial Ghosts: Exploring Anglo-Indian Relations through Neo-Victorian Spiritualism in Essie Fox's *The Goddess and the Thief*

Despite the Occult movement's decline during the twentieth century, the reverberating ghost of Victorian Spiritualism remains consistently present. In an on-going process of reinvention, it has travelled textually across both geo-cultural and temporal barriers, thus reaching into contemporary historical fiction to haunt present-day readers with nineteenth-century issues and, in a reciprocally spectral dialogue, allowing contemporary concerns to possess reinterpretations and rewritings of Victorian works. Mediums, séances, and table-rapping operate as recurrent tropes in Neo-Victorian literature, summoning voices from beyond the grave to offer readers thoughtful incursions into bygone times which reshape our understanding of the Victorian age by calling into question official accounts of the era. Interweaving affairs of Empire, race, and the supernatural, Essie Fox's third Neo-Victorian novel *The Goddess and the Thief* participates in this revisionist trend by borrowing spiritualist motifs to invoke a hypothetical past, set between British India and Victorian England,[110] in which the bicultural and displaced medium Alice Willoughby becomes involved in a sensationalist conspiracy to overthrow British imperial hegemony. Like Harriet Brandt, the protagonist occupies an awkward position in the British metropolis, fluctuating under the influence of her colonial home; and, simultaneously, matches Dianthe Lusk's mediumistic abilities, through which she accesses and channels fragments of her non-Western maternal legacy. Paralleling Hopkins' and Marryat's Occult tales, Fox's Gothic text is centred upon subjects such as cross-cultural exchanges, mixed-raced heredity, political tensions, and national identity, all of which are manifested through the porous boundaries of Alice's mind and body.

[110] Her previous novels *The Somnambulist* (2011) and *Elijah's Mermaid* (2012) are also set in the Victorian period.

The Neo-Victorian lens provides an additional layer of reception to the malleable borders between Self and Other which constitute the present object of study, since, in this case, the notion of racial and cultural difference is doubly othered by its voyage from a distant historical context into a present-day text, an aspect which is, in its turn, complicated by the lasting impact of the long shadow of Victorian imperialism. As commented in previous chapters, the nineteenth-century Occult revival had the potential to articulate fundamental questions regarding the period's colonial conflicts and shifting conceptions of racial difference. However, in spite of the popularity of Spiritualism as both a theme and metaphor in postmodern historical fiction (Kohlke, "Speculations" 9), matters related to race and Empire are not as recurrent in Neo-Victorian literature as issues of gender and sexuality (Kaplan 156), and exhibit a comparative lack of critical attention (Van Dam 59). In an attempt to compensate the surprisingly scarce amount of scholarly scrutiny dedicated to Fox's novel,[111] the goal of this chapter is to examine the intricate value of spiritualist imagery in *The Goddess and the Thief* as a central device to recover and revalue the figure of the colonized Other through the main character's paranormal interaction with her South Asian heritage. Special emphasis is placed on the intersections between interracial alliances and the supernatural, taking into account the culturally syncretic aspects and flexible boundaries of Spiritualism so as to analyse Alice's relationship with her mother(land) and the extent to which this story constitutes an ethically hospitable narrative towards the silenced voices of Indian subjects in the light of postcolonial considerations. In order to do so, it is essential to contemplate carefully the role of the medium in its diverse implications, not only as psychic seer, but also as a phantasmal historian offering an alternative window to the past (Kontou, *Spiritualism* 6), as well as the possible limitations

[111] Academic studies on *The Goddess and the Thief* are, to my present knowledge, non-existent.

of appropriating voices to speak for the Other in a contemporary context.[112] As it shall be pointed out in the subsequent section, such as dilemma is not uncommon in the Neo-Victorian genre, which offers a wide and useful array of critical tools to converse with the departed.

4.1 From Postmortem Narrations to Postmodern Novels: Spiritualism and the Reception of Past Voices in Neo-Victorian Literature

In A. S. Byatt's prized novel *Possession* (1990), the fictional Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash proposes a self-reflexive comparison between spiritualists, writers, critics, and historians, all of which are bound to deal with "the noble letters of the dead" in some way or other (Byatt 103). Truly, the correlations among such occupations are many, and, as various scholars have observed, Neo-Victorian literature, in particular, presents an almost obsessive concern with lifting the thin veil between the present and the past, a purpose for which its numerous rewritings of nineteenth-century Spiritualism seem all the more suitable. Coined by Dana Shiller in 1997, the generic term englobes novels "set at least partly in the nineteenth century" that adopt "a postmodern approach to history", including works that "revise specific Victorian precursors, texts that imagine new adventures for familiar Victorian characters, and 'new' Victorian fictions that imitate nineteenth-century literary conventions" (Shiller 558). As noted by Marie Louise Kohlke, this definition continues to trigger scholarly debates, since, like the multi-layered and heterogeneous Spiritualism it so often brings back to life (Braude 7), Neo-Victorianism is characterized by its "diffusiveness, which currently undermines efforts to get to grips fully with the subject matter" ("Speculations" 1). Although it is "near impossible to gain some sort of genuine overview" of the full scope of the genre due to its blurry "generic, chronological, and aesthetic boundaries" (*Ibidem* 2), Kohlke draws attention to how the

[112] All references to Kontou's observations in this chapter belong to her work *Spiritualism and Women's Writing* (2009).

impressive production of Neo-Victorian artefacts in the fields of film, literature, and popular culture during the last decades of the twentieth century has become "too prolific to be contained as a ghost in the corner of the Victorian Studies parlour, relegated to the margins of an established field" (*Ibidem* 1). Figuratively speaking, Victorian phantoms have certainly taken over a large section of historical fiction in an explosion of present-day reworkings of the nineteenth century which Kucich and Sadoff read as sign of "postmodernism's privileging of the Victorian as its historical 'other'" (*Victorian Afterlife* 11).

Moreover, glancing back upon the origins of modernity entails, as Shiller stresses, a postmodern awareness of the porousness of temporal boundaries, of how the past "pervades the present and irrevocably shapes it, just as the present shapes the interpretation of the past" (Shiller 544). Due to this transhistorical permeability (Hewitt 395), Kohlke argues that the Neo-Victorian phenomenon may even be conceived beyond "the limiting nationalistic and temporal identifications" that the term "Victorian" conjures up in itself, thus alluding to the long nineteenth century as a whole, and to stories not necessarily set within British and British colonial spaces ("Speculations" 2), as is the case with this year's much-acclaimed film adaptations of Louisa May Alcott's American classic *Little Women* (1868)[113] and Jane Austen's Regency comedy *Emma* (1815).[114] More specifically, as evidenced by the prominence of similarly female-centric works in the Neo-Victorian trend (Kaplan 155), the cultural afterlife of the nineteenth century constitutes a fertile area for the recovery of muted voices and erased perspectives through spectral encounters with our era's "historical 'other'" (Kucich and Sadoff 11).

In addition to providing a seemingly inexhaustible source of literary inspiration, resurrecting the Victorians in new and constantly mutating forms allows what Shiller identifies

[113] Gerwig, Greta, director. *Little Women*. Columbia Pictures, 2019
[114] De Wilde, Autumn, director. *Emma*. Focus Features, 2020.

as a "revisionist approach to the past" by means of visibilizing private moments and undocumented acts of anonymous individuals (540). In Shiller's view, Neo-Victorianism responds to the challenge posed by the postmodern historiographical crisis of the late twentieth century due to its potential for recapturing the past "in ways that evoke its spirit and do honor to the dead and silenced" (546). Countering Frederic Jameson's critique of postmodern historical fiction as a "random cannibalization of styles of the past" through the projection of contemporary standards onto the "resurrection of the dead of anonymous and silenced generations" (*Cultural Logic* 18), Shiller convincingly argues that postmodern novels supply the possibility of reinterpreting the Victorians without effacing them, recycling historical discourses responsibly while respecting the radical difference of bygone eras (539), and thus contributing to restoring "the essential *mystery* of the cultural past, which . . . is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and deliver, its long-forgotten message" (Jameson, *Political Unconscious* 19, original emphasis).

Therefore, recovering the voices of the dead is part of the "essentially revisionist impulse" which motivates Neo-Victorian literature to conjure up fictional missing fragments of dominant historical records (Shiller 541). One of the most evident examples of this effort to infuse new life into the past is the recurrent tendency to draw on the nineteenth-century voices of oppressed individuals within the Neo-Victorian genre, thus generating ethically engaged narratives foregrounding the points of view of women, members of non-white communities, and gay or lesbian characters (Kohlke, "Speculations" 13). As a particularly apt example, Belinda Starling's intersectional work *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2007) grants the reader a redressing glimpse into socially outcast experiences of the Victorian context by assembling female, black, homosexual, and working-class individuals, all of which converge around the protagonist's book-binding workshop. Another telling case involving black protagonists and queer sexualities is that of David Rocklin's *The Night Language* (2017), a love story between

Prince Alamayou of Abyssinia and his guardian as they are taken from their home Ethiopia to the court of Queen Victoria. In this way, many Neo-Victorian novels are characterized by remaining mindful of the long-term consequences of "socio-political policies, strategic decisions, and ideologies that continue to reverberate in the cultural echo chamber over a hundred years later", as Kohlke observes ("Speculations" 5). Furthermore, by exploring figures that have been left out of the grand narratives of Western culture, Neo-Victorian literature encourages us to muse upon "the certitude of our historical knowledge" and the nature of our access to the past (Shiller 541).

Sharing, in Kym Brindle's words, the "postmodern climate of doubt" (283), Neo-Victorianism frequently embraces the skeptical conception of both historical records and fiction as human constructs, exposing how the way we choose to tell stories is subject to inevitable permutations (Shiller 540). As noted by Cora Kaplan, truth is often elusive in the Neo-Victorian novel, bulging with unreliable narrators and undisclosed secrets, "not all of them meant to be unpacked" (159). For instance, *The Goddess and the Thief* draws attention to the fragmentary character of the retrievable past, which flickers depending on personal or communal agendas (Kohlke, "Speculations" 9), through its variation of narrative agency depending on the characters' perspectives. Additionally, the presence of epistolary clues in Fox's text contributes to the Neo-Victorian fictionalization of unsettling archives which expose the ambivalence of documented history by "impel[ling] readers to assess 'evidence' in the context of a Gothic excess of competing accounts" (Brindle 295). Although Alice's mediumistic voice assumes the leading role, the novel conveys a polyphonic storytelling by intertwining her accounts with diverse points of view manifested through a letter never sent by whom the protagonist believes to be her mother (3), her father's unread diary (43), her aunt's secret thoughts (173), her husband's concealed nightmares (235), and her Indian mother's almost forgotten tales and unanswered prayers (302). Taking into account the abovementioned

considerations regarding the revisionist approach to the Victorian past in contemporary fiction, Fox's organization of this heteroglossia around the central trope of Spiritualism highlights the potential of occultist imagery as a helpful vehicle to revisit the nineteenth century.

4.1.1 Ghostwriting the Victorians: Mediumship, Storytelling, and Historical Fiction

As Arias and Pulham point out in the introduction to *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010), "literature is permanently haunted by ghosts, revenants and spirits which travel across time and space and appear in the form of textual/spectral traces" (19). Phantasmal visitors are certainly present in historical fiction, both on a literal and figurative level. Such paranormal attributes are made especially apparent through the recurrent presence of Spiritualism in Neo-Victorian works, which, as noted by Kohlke, are brimming with "mediums, spirit guides, séances, possessions, and dark circles . . . together with the paraphernalia of accompanying trickery and possible misrepresentation", acting as a "metaphor and analogy for our attempted dialogue with the dead" ("Speculations" 9). In agreement with Arias and Pulham (13), Neo-Victorianism echoes its predecessors' preoccupation with the burdens and uses of history and shares the nineteenth-century Occult revival's curiosity toward the voices that contribute to shaping diverse accounts of the past. The Victorians, Robin Gilmour explains, were "fascinated by time because they were conscious of being its victims" (25). Séance narratives and Occult novels such as *Of One Blood* and *The Blood of the Vampire* demonstrate how "in almost every area of Victorian intellectual life, one encounters a preoccupation with ancestry and descent, with tracing the genealogy of the present in the past, and with discovering or creating links to a formative history" (*Ibidem*). In like manner, Neo-Victorianism presents a penchant for scrutinizing the origins of modernity by exploring the nineteenth-century genesis of central twentieth-century discourses like feminism, sexual science, contemporary consumerism, medicine, ethnography, or technology (Kucich and

Sadoff 10). For this purpose, Spiritualism serves as a peeking hole to explore the social innovations and varied areas of Victorian intellectual life encompassed by the Occult revival.

Spiritualism has adopted various shapes throughout its re-emergence in Neo-Victorian fiction. Beyond operating as a decisive plot device in renowned works such as Sarah Waters' *Affinity* (1999), or Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), entranced psychics, Ouija boards, and even spirit photography have remained persistently haunting during the last two decades, appearing, for instance, in A. S. Byatt's *Angels & Insects* (1992), Joanne Harris' *Sleep, Pale Sister* (1994), Michèle Roberts' *In the Red Kitchen* (1999), Melissa Pritchard's *Selene of the Spirits* (1999), Victoria Glendinning's *Electricity* (1995), John Hardwood's *The Séance* (2008), and Michelle Black's *Séance in Sepia* (2011), to name but a few. Feminist reinterpretations of spiritualist practice abound in Neo-Victorian literature, drawing attention to the gendered subjectivity of the past in novels emphasizing female perspectives left out of historical records (Kontou 3). Just as in Victorian séance circles, mediums occupy a central position in such texts, whether as deceitful clairvoyants like the infamous Lucy Collins in Alan Finn's *Things Half in Shadow* (2014), occultist actresses as those in Barbara Ewing's *The Mesmerist* (2007), or as reimagined historical figures, such as the founding Fox sisters in Deborah Noyes' *Captivity* (2010), the entranced and sedated pre-raphaelite muse Effie Gray in Harris' *Sleep, Pale Sister*, and the celebrated Florence Cook, fictionalized as Flora Milk in Roberts' *In the Red Kitchen*. According to Diana Wallace, these reinventions may be read as a reminder of the ways in which the Neo-Victorian text alters temporal boundaries, since "the female medium becomes a suggestive figure of the historical novelist herself, ventriloquizing the voices of the past" (208). Likewise, Tatiana Kontou establishes an analogy between these literary occultists and the mediumistic role of contemporary authors exploring the Victorian period, writers who will eventually, in their turn, "become one the dead voices that he or she now invokes", joining a "diachronic wave of ghostly energy that others will give shape to in the future" in an

intertextual process of "constant reinterpretation and reinvention" (1). In accordance with this metaphor, female occultists often become one of the main narrative voices in Neo-Victorian fiction, turning the tables of spiritualist discourse by replacing the nineteenth-century conception of the passive, entranced clairvoyant by that of the cunning storyteller who mesmerizes her audience or transcribes spectral narratives, blurring the distinction between fact and fiction. As an example, links between mediumship and authorship are suggested through Lilias Papagay, the perceptive medium in Byatt's "The Conjugial Angel", who tries her hand at a novel before turning to automatic writing:

> Mrs Papagay liked stories. She spun them from bobbins of gossip or observation; she told them to herself at night, or when walking in the streets; she was tempted constantly to step too far in tittle-tattle in order to receive reciprocal nuggets of other lifetimes, other chains of cause and effect (192).

Similarly, the enigmatic Flora Milk in Roberts' *In the Red Kitchen* feels like a recycler of narratives, "a magnet for souls rushing irresistibly towards [her] and depositing in [her] their anguished histories" (Roberts 92), thus providing solace to the ghostly voices of silenced women who whisper relentlessly: "what about my story?" (Harris 316). As it shall be argued in subsequent sections of this chapter, Alice Willoughby also contributes to the Neo-Victorian interplay involving mediumship and storytelling. In opposition to her fraudulent aunt Mercy, who, like Marryat's Baroness Gobelli, fools séance sitters by "shuffling her tarots, conjuring ghosts, directing her theatres of the dead" (Fox 42), Alice demonstrates an inevitable impulse to give voice to other lifetimes, other perspectives, and other cultures, no matter how distant.

Therefore, spiritualist techniques like possession and 'ghostwriting' highlight not only the potential of Neo-Victorian literature to "reanimate the complicated literary genres of the past" (237), as Hilary Schor interprets,[115] but also its capacity to grant narrative agency to

[115] Schor refers to A. S. Byatt's intertextual recovery of Victorian concerns and narrative devices in *Angels and Insects*, which she labels as "ghostwriting . . . in a double sense . . . first, that of the 'borrowings' ('writing

invisibilized subjects, thus fomenting the representation, for instance, of marginalized histories of sexuality and post-colonial readings through what Helen Davies identifies as a process of "re-voicing" the Victorians (2). Correspondingly, Kohlke argues that textual mediumship can compensate the ghostliness of subjects who have been absent from the traditional master discourse of history: "spectrality links to the Neo-Victorian preoccupation with liberating lost voices and repressed histories of minorities left out of the public record" ("Speculations" 9). In this sense, both Spiritualism and Neo-Victorianism have the restorative power of expressing personal or collective accounts related to the era's "temporal convergence of historical traumas still awaiting appropriate commemoration and full working-through" (*Ibidem* 7). Just like the Occult revival provided tools for silenced communities to process and verbalize their oppression, as exemplified in African-American works like Hopkins' *Of One Blood*, so does historical fiction challenge dominant Western narratives of empire-building by addressing pervasive traumas and social ills caused, for instance, by Victorian imperialist policies, the atrocities of colonialism, class conflict, trade wars, clashes of opposing cultures, and the unspeakable horrors of slavery (*Ibidem* 7). Returning to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's concept of transgenerational haunting (175), and taking into account Arias and Pulham's fitting application of this phenomenon to the flexible temporal boundaries of the spectral Neo-Victorian text, such a notion reads not only as a symbol of the "gaps and silences" which haunt a subject, or a community (Arias and Pulham 12), but also as "interpretive of . . . the magic words a culture does *not* say to itself" (Lloyd Smith 306, original emphasis). Therefore, in line with Allan Lloyd Smith's interpretation of Abraham and Torok's ideas in relation to collective fantasies affecting issues of race, class, and imperialism; the prevalence of spiritualist elements in *The Goddess and the Thief* enables a similar revision of Britain's haunting relationship with

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like…') . . . and second, a ghostwriting that is speaking with the dead, not so much as writers but as mouldering bodies, decaying forms" (237).

its imperial past. At the same time, in agreement with Kohlke, the ambiguity of spiritualist discourse alludes to the "malleability, unreliability, and performativity of memory", an ambivalence that calls attention to who records past events and who remembers them ("Speculations" 9). "Trauma always raises uncomfortable questions as to whose trauma is being represented, by and for whom, and with what degree of verifiable 'authenticity'", she argues (*Ibidem* 7). Such pertinent interrogations about narrative agency apply easily to spiritualist practice and complicate the role of the medium as an unreliable narrator, since, as Kontou inquires, "to what extent do these author-mediums *ventriloquize* the dead?" (2, original emphasis). Once more, the appropriation of identity involved in speaking for the Other arouses issues concerning the limited translation of past voices through bits and pieces of automatic writing. After all, allowing the dead to speak requires a certain form of Lévinasian ethics: it implies coming to terms with "the strangeness of the Other" (Lévinas, qtd. in Hollander 10), not only in the radical difference of bygone eras (Shiller 539), but also in the liminal presence of non-Western voices in nineteenth-century histories. Although the fictionalization of forgotten accounts of the Victorian period enables the redemptive act of bearing "retrospective testimony to past injustices" (Kohlke, "Speculations" 6), usually demanding an empathetic perspective, the transhistorical mediation of the experience of colonized subjects through the lips of a British medium-author inevitably poses dilemmas that call for an examination in the light of Hollander's Lévinasian notion of narrative hospitality. For instance, while Alice Willoughby's articulation of the experiences of Maharajah Duleep Singh certainly challenges imperialist narratives of the Anglo-Sikh wars, this paranormal transmission is at risk of "translating the experience of the Other in terms of the Self", thus "failing to recognize the full human complexity" of the colonized subject's estranged story (Hollander 3). Nevertheless, the culturally syncretic configuration of Spiritualism in Fox's Neo-Victorian text makes space for subversive phantasms, nourished by postcolonial reinterpretations of the nineteenth century.

4.1.2 Rewriting Otherness: Neo-Victorianism, Imperialism, and Race

Stretching the analogy between the spiritualist séance and the Neo-Victorian text, one may argue that both phenomena encourage networks of "disruptive storytelling" (Tromp 10) by acknowledging the "existence of many possible narratives for any given set of historical facts" (Shiller 541). As the medium's body, like the postmodern literary page, is turned into "a site of multiplicity and contradiction" (Kucich 11), these two forms of dialogue with the dead facilitate the reception and expression of diverse perspectives belonging to alienated ethnic communities. For example, the sceptical alienist Doctor Jordan in Atwood's *Alias Grace* seems annoyed by the potential openness of occultist circles, which transgress the boundaries of the respectable Victorian home: he observes how the spiritualist craze affects "the women especially", causing them to "gather in darkened rooms and play at table-tilting . . . Worse, they populate their drawing rooms with fakirs and mountebanks . . . and the rules of society dictate that one must be polite to them" (95). Besides alluding to the female-centric character of Spiritualism, the passing reference to the unusual presence of fakirs in a conventional Victorian home, a term "specially applied to a Mahommedan religious mendicant, and then loosely, and inaccurately, to Hindu devotees and naked ascetics" (Yule and Burnell 347), hints towards associations between Occultism and Eastern systems of belief. According to Gauri Viswanathan, the nineteenth-century Occult revival facilitated an "encounter with a past suppressed by the onset of Western modernity and secularism", offering "a more inclusive account of the world than the one allowed by imperial, secular histories", one that "would make room for the histories of the people whose knowledge is mined and appropriated" ("Ordinary Business" 19). Following Viswanathan's postcolonial reading, Denise Buell also highlights the utility of Spiritualism as a passageway into what Chakrabarty denominates "subaltern pasts", that is to say, "life-worlds subordinated by the 'major' narratives of dominant institutions"

("Minority Histories" 101). In a similar way, Neo-Victorian fiction transports us into "worlds [that] are never completely lost", allowing us to "inhabit their fragments" (*Ibidem* 112), thus enhancing "the capacity of the modern person to historicize", depending on "his or her ability to participate in nonmodern relationships to the past that are made subordinate in the moment of historicization" (*Ibidem* 101). Drawing, to a certain extent, on what Cora Kaplan considers "anti-imperialist Victoriana" (155), *The Goddess and the Thief* combines Viswanathan's view of esoteric practice with the mediumistic act of foregrounding postcolonial subjectivities regarding the political interests of minority groups and non-Western civilizations in literary reinterpretations of the nineteenth century (Kucich and Sadoff 20). Although, as discussed in previous chapters, this interweaving of Spiritualism and the encounter with racial and cultural Otherness was a significant aspect of nineteenth-century Occultism (Ferguson, "Other Worlds" 181) and Victorian supernatural fiction (Brantlinger 227), such an intersection is rather rare in the Neo-Victorian genre. Allusions to the presence of ethnic minorities within the specific framework of Anglo-American Spiritualism are usually limited to minor references, as in Byatt's "The Conjugial Angel", in which the narrator mentions how "Spiritualists were always being exhorted to look at the Red Indians, whose English-speaking souls were regular guests to many British drawing-rooms" (319-320). In fact, despite the relevance of spiritualist tropes as a resourceful metaphor for the expression of censored or repressed stories, contemporary narratives involving mediums and table-rapping tend to concentrate on the perspective of British women (Kontou 6), thus privileging Western female voices over the rest. Moreover, as Anne Humpherys points out, Neo-Victorianism as a whole seems more focused on describing first "women's experiences and consciousness, and then those of race, ethnicity, and imperialism" (447). Although textual reinterpretations of the nineteenth century contribute to making space in the canon for non-white and non-Western outlooks by channelling their

phantasmal presence in historical records, such representations remain somehow problematic and relatively unexplored.

In the opening line of her seminal article "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), the postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states that "[i]t should not be possible to read nineteenth century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (243). Yet when it comes to the cultural representation of Victorian England to contemporary readerships, the memory of Empire seems to occupy a secondary position, granting the rarely included enslaved or colonized individuals an ambivalent narrative authority.[116] Despite the fact that Neo-Victorianism constitutes, in Elizabeth Ho's words, "an expression of such colonial hauntings in which the international reappearance of the nineteenth century works as a kind of traumatic recall" (11), determining whose experience is fully recognized in present-day reconstructions of the period demands paying attention to diverse factors, such as the contrast between trauma narratives penned by descendants of Western imperialist cultures and those of indigenous background or formerly colonized populations (Kohlke, "Speculations" 7). Furthermore, such considerations depend on the extent to which certain works may be classified as strictly "Neo-Victorian". In 2014, Marie-Louise Kohlke provisionally defined Neo-Victorianism as an umbrella term encompassing "virtually all historical fiction related to the nineteenth century, irrespective of authors' or characters' nationalities, the plots' geographical settings" ("Mining the Neo-Victorian Vein" 27). This broad applicability would therefore make space for African and Native-American voices in addition to postcolonial perspectives, including revisions which

[116] Van Dam points out how, although "many authors of neo-Victorian literature have . . . made use of the tension between present and past . . . by looking back on the British Empire of the nineteenth century", there is "an even larger number of neo-Victorian authors" who "do not refer to Britain's colonial history at all" (26-27).

extend far beyond the borders of the British empire, like Toni Morrison's Neo-slave narrative *Beloved* (1987),[117] Barbara Chase-Riboud's biofiction of Sarah Baartman, *Hottentot Venus* (2002), or, perhaps, even Louise Erdrich's transgenerational Ojibwa tales in *Tracks* (1988).[118] Nourished by critical innovations and progressive historiographical reconsiderations, the rise of more empowering literary texts by or about people of non-white or non-Western background has given way to empathetic retellings which bear witness to unspoken nineteenth-century traumas. Works such as Rhys' landmark *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Manohar Malgonkar's *The Devil's Wind* (1972),[119] Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999), or Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy (2008-2012)[120] examine the troubled legacy of colonial knowledge on formerly colonized societies, breaking down dominant accounts of nineteenth-century British imperial hegemony by foregrounding the narrative agency of those whom the intricately linked Victorian discourses of race and Empire configured as the colonized Other. However, although part of the Neo-Victorian author's mission is to "expose the skeletons closeted in the metropole's house of culture" (Kaplan 156), this task is frequently crippled by, firstly, a rather widespread oversight regarding the relevance of racial issues and their interconnection with Victorian imperialist ideologies,[121] and, secondly, the prioritization of Western viewpoints.

In spite of the Neo-Victorian eye for "the significant gaps and omissions of the Victorian novel" (Humpherys 444), contemporary texts set in the nineteenth century seem less keen to "tackle racial issues within as well as outside Britain" than historical novels set in the

[117] The Neo-slave narrative has been categorized as a Neo-Victorian subgenre by scholars such as Louisa Hadley (85), Kate Mitchell (27), or Marie Louise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben (12).

[118] In *Neo-Victorian Cannibalism*, Tammy Lai-Ming Ho mentions Louise Erdrich as an example of twentieth-century women's attempts to "redress history through fiction" (77).

[119] Kohlke refers to Malgonkar's book as one of the few novels dealing with the 1857 Mutiny from an Indian perspective ("Tipoo's Tiger" 380).

[120] Ghosh's novels *Sea of Poppies* (2009), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2016) deal with the East India Company opium trade between India and China.

[121] For more examples of non-white representation in Neo-Victorian works, see Cora Kaplan's "Afterword: The Empire at Home" in *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism*; Daný van Dam's "Making It Right? Writing the Other in Postcolonial Neo-Victorianism"; or Elizabeth Ho's *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire*.

Georgian period, "as if the abolition of colonial slavery just before Victoria took the throne made race a redundant issue" (Kaplan 156). Kaplan's observation is similarly endorsed by Daný van Dam, who remarks:

> For a genre that has its foundation in, among others, a text with such postcolonial critical ramifications as *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the comparative lack of attention given to questions of race . . . seems odd, especially when adding the extra complication of multiple temporalities (59).

Within the limited room currently left for a hospitable reception of racial Otherness in Neo-Victorian fiction, novels with mixed-raced protagonists like *The Goddess and the Thief* provide opportunities to re-evaluate biracial identities and interracial relationships from a more updated perspective. The genre as a whole appears surprisingly quiet in regard to nineteenth-century anxieties about racial miscegenation (Kaplan 156), which, as previous chapters have shown, remained a persistent trope in Victorian writing long after abolition. Interracial liaisons such as the one between Alice Willoughby and Lucian Tilsbury in Fox's novel are largely underrepresented, some exceptions being the romance between Arabella and Aubrey in Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* (2001), and the intimate affair between Dora and Din in *The Journal of Dora Damage*, whose interracial love "clashes with the widespread Victorian abhorrence on miscegenation" and allows them to "transcend their initial coloniser-colonised relationship", as argued by Juan José Martín-González (194). Moreover, Van Dam insightfully notes how "of the few neo-Victorian novels that reference mixed-race relationships, even fewer concern themselves explicitly with this perceived danger of racial mixing" (38). Therefore, most Neo-Victorian characters show little awareness of the complex politics of mixed-raced identity, a shortage redressed by novels such as Julian Barnes' *Arthur & George* (2006), Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* (2001), and, albeit less directly, *The Goddess and the Thief*. Although Alice Willoughby's Indian heredity is not made explicit until the last page of Fox's work, her racial and cultural hybridity is foreshadowed throughout the novel by means of supernatural elements which frame her relationship with her motherland with mostly positive

overtones. Yet this reception across time and space presents significant shortcomings which shall be taken into account throughout the forthcoming analysis, since, in embodying the voice of the Other, Alice's transcultural mediumship mirrors Fox's role as a caucasian British writer borrowing Indian historical and religious motifs in an attempt to represent an experience of Victorian imperialist policies from the point of view of a colonized subject.

The prevalence of Western authors designing purported decolonizations of the Victorian past is a recurrent and controversial issue in Neo-Victorian fiction published in English.[122] Once again, the nineteenth-century spiritualist séance serves as a useful symbol to pose pertinent questions regarding contemporary texts, since as articulated by the dark circle sitters in "The Conjugial Angel", it is necessary to repeatedly ask "To whom and from whom . . . is this message addressed?" in order to find out who is rewriting bygone times, who translates the unspeakable, and which versions of the past remain lost in translation (Byatt 236). As Van Dam mentions in her thorough examination of postcolonial Neo-Victorianism, Amitav Ghosh and Ahdaf Soueif are only two of the rare exceptions of Neo-Victorian writers belonging to formerly colonized cultures, the majority of novels in the genre being composed by British authors (44), which entails that literary depictions of colonial encounters are mostly created by authors who "were raised in cultures that were once responsible for taking the voices of the people they write about" (*Ibidem* 270). Some examples of this tendency include Matthew Kneale's maritime story *English Passengers* (2000); Philip Hensher's *The Mulberry Empire* (2002), set during the first Anglo-Afghan war; or David Rocklin's *The Luminist* (2011), an evocation of Julia Margaret Cameron's life in colonial Ceylon, to mention but a few. Australian novels delving into the tense relations between Britain and the former colony constitute a

[122] Van Dam calls attention to how "the influence of the former British Empire remains visible" in the fact that "most [Neo-Victorian] novels receiving critical acclaim are published in English, and English-language texts are able to reach a significantly more widespread public than texts in other languages (33).

notable exception, though, nonetheless, works as the critically acclaimed *Jack Maggs* (1997), by Peter Carey, Gail Jones' *Sixty Lights* (2004), and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008) were penned by postcolonial descendants of Europeans settlers in Oceania. In addition to this problematic absence of authorial variety, critics like Spivak (271), or Leonie Pihama (115) have outlined the glaring partiality of narrative agency in Neo-Victorian fiction, which privileges "the story of European settlers over that of the non-white or indigenous population of the colonies" even in the most anti-imperialist texts (Kaplan 156). Consequently, in agreement with Van Dam, it would be imperative to call into question "whether an author writing about colonial life in the Victorian era is making reparations", or is, instead, simply "repeating the colonising processes of the Victorian period by assuming the right to speak for someone else" (270). Despite the Neo-Victorian project of writing back against the centres of power from marginalized perspectives in its attempt to exorcise "the long shadow that the imperial imagination cast on colonisers and colonised" (Kaplan 154), numerous contemporary texts are still haunted by reproductions of nineteenth-century imperialist rhetoric. As it shall be argued, the use of spiritualist imagery for the reception of the non-Western Other in *The Goddess and the Thief* simultaneously reverses and maintains imperial Gothic tropes, thus constituting an example of what Cora Kaplan identifies as a paradoxical type of "anti-imperial Victoriana" which "retroactively counters some Victorian prejudices, but leaves others, if not only by default, in place" (155).

Among works that linger between the reconstruction and deconstruction of nineteenth-century conceptions of Self and Other, India stands out as a source of fascination for Neo-Victorian writers (Kohlke, "Tipoo's Tiger" 367). Although the former colony itself has "not been a robust producer of neo-Victorian narratives" (Ho 184), contemporary novelists seem far more inclined to write about India than they do, for example, about the Middle East and other

colonial territories (Van Dam 44).[123] Fictions about Victorian and Edwardian colonialism filtered through Western authorship, such as E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924),[124] John Masters' *Nightrunners of Bengal* (1951), James Gordon Farrell *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973), M. M. Kaye's *Shadow of the Moon* (1957) and *The Far Pavilions* (1978), or Julian Rathbone's more recent novel *The Mutiny* (2007) overflow with diverse re-enactments of the traumatic history of British rule in India, some of which Fox identifies as sources of inspiration for *The Goddess and the Thief* (Fox 324).[125] Despite the liberating role of Neo-Victorian authors as "subaltern historians" (Kohlke, "Tipoo's Tiger" 376) who are meant to ventriloquize the voices of the dead to "talk back" to the Victorians (Davis 2), it would appear that the nineteenth-century orientalist infatuation with the conceptualized East lives on in contemporary texts, along with the "exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other" which, in Homi Bhabha's words, characterized the period's artificial opposition between the Orient and Occident (29).[126] According to Elizabeth Ho, the coexistence of imperialist phantoms with the genre's deconstructionist impulse requires an acute awareness of the extent to which Neo-Victorianism "includes 'writing back' to empire . . . as an act of revision" and, simultaneously, producing "noncontestatory, even celebratory evocations of the nineteenth century" (Ho 11). Such reconsiderations should begin with the term "Neo-Victorian" in itself, a designation not free of "colonizing potentials" for which "neo-Victorian studies might be seen as implicated in its own 'Victorian' project to colonize all historical fiction set in the

[123] Van Dam identifies Egypt as the exception, since it is the only Middle Eastern colony to appear regularly in Neo-Victorian fiction (44).

[124] Fox cites Forster's novel in the list of "fiction that inspired [her] writing" despite it being set in the 1920's and not the Victorian period (324).

[125] Such representations range from the early-twentieth-century historical romance and biographical novel, to the more recent and revisionist trend of Neo-Victorian fiction. For more information, see Mariadele Boccardi's *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (2009); and Keith M. Booker's *Colonial Power, Colonial Texts: India in the Modern British Novel* (1997).

[126] The use of the term 'orientalist' in the present work conforms to Edward Said's interdependent definitions of Orientalism as a notion englobing, simultaneously, the academic tradition dealing with Eastern cultures (2), Western imaginary configurations of the 'Orient' (2), and "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3).

nineteenth century, regardless of geographical or cultural differences" (Ho 10). Similarly, Kohlke stresses the need to re-evaluate this label and its questionable application to post-independence Indian fiction, a classification which may be "seeking to claim it for an anglicised or Western dominated genre" ("Tipoo's Tiger", 369). Paralleling, once again, the Victorian spiritualist movement's attempt to homogenize all global manifestations of the supernatural through the same Eurocentric lens, Neo-Victorianism's universalizing tendency is at risk of falling into the same perspectival bias endorsed by the historical period it intends to question. Despite the fact that crucial postcolonial interventions like Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) have shed light on the nineteenth-century power dynamics between the Western Self and the Eastern Other, such imaginary constructions are often reinforced in Neo-Victorian writing (Kohlke, "Tipoo's Tiger" 374). The pervasiveness of orientalist stereotypes can be observed, for instance, in the recurrent estrangement of the exoticized non-Western Other's arrival to Britain (Van Dam 31), which echoes the way in which European culture "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 3). However, although Fox's characterization of Indian subjects may be labelled as one of these Neo-Victorian "improper postcolonialisms" (Ho 1), and certainly bears traces of the orientalist notions upon which Victorian identity construction so strongly depended, *The Goddess and the Thief* manages to breach the imperialist Self-Other binary through diverse mediumistic practices that mirror the nineteenth century's intricate convergence of the Occult and the ideological reception of India.

4.2 Orientalist Mediums: Anglo-Indian Encounters and Cultural Appropriation in Victorian Occultism

Fox's evocation of Victorian esotericism reveals the miscellaneous significance of the culturally syncretic aspects of Spiritualism, providing a supernaturalized arena for the exploration of the protagonist's complex relationship with her motherland. As one of the most evident manifestations of the period's interest in the 'Orient', the nineteenth-century Occult revival englobed diverse South Asian religious and philosophical influences which manifested the encounter between East and West. By borrowing elements from this underrepresented side of Spiritualism in Neo-Victorian literature, *The Goddess and the Thief* provides a framework for cross-cultural communication which contributes to visibilizing the protagonist's Indian matrilineal heritage. In this way, the paranormal events narrated in the novel underscore the nineteenth-century Occult revival's capacity to challenge Western accounts of British colonial history by channelling "subaltern pasts" (Buell 866). Although it would be naïve to depict Victorian occultists as free of imperializing baggage, scholars such as Peter van der Veer argue that "spiritualism, and Theosophy in particular, played a significant role in the development of a radical, anticolonial politics both in Britain and India" (Van der Veer 58). Ranging from the arrival of British occultists like Annie Besant and Blavatsky in India, to the interest in South Asian religions and the presence of 'oriental' ghosts in England, spiritualist phenomena functioned as a vehicle to explore urgent questions regarding India, its place in the world, its relation to the metropolis, and the role of its cultural legacy in the fields of Western history, literature, theology, and ethnology. According to Gauri Viswanathan, "it is within the colonial context that spiritualism is seen most powerfully to loosen boundaries between closed social networks", thus facilitating interreligious transactions and anti-imperialist activism ("Ordinary Business" 2-3). Therefore, the configuration of India in the spiritualist imaginary implied a reception of the exoticized Other within the Western Self by means of borrowing sacred concepts such as trance, levitation, or reincarnation (Rawlinson 5). "Rather than simply representing 'natives' because they cannot represent themselves", claims Buell, "Theosophists

and spiritualists were prepared to hear spiritual truths from 'native' spirits whose teachings might lead to critiques of colonial administration" (865). However, it would be problematic to examine this dialogue with cultural, spiritual, and racial difference as a balanced cross-cultural exchange, since this concept may suggest a peaceful interaction which is far from the "power politics, cultural brainwashing and social discrimination" which characterized the British Raj (Diego and Navarro 105). Despite its attempts to establish an equitable conversation with the Other, the period's orientalist Occultism denoted, at best, a romanticized view of colonized cultures, paralleling the "noble savage fantasy" manifested by certain spiritualist anthropologists (Ferguson, "Other Worlds" 181), and, at worst, a random appropriation of Hindu and Buddhist religious symbolism, adapted and reinterpreted for Western spiritualist purposes (Tryphonopoulos 45). This orientalization of the Other Side, rooted in the ideological construction of the East as the main origin of mystical revelations, responds to the notion of the 'Orient' as "a European invention" which, in addition to being "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences", was also "the place of Europe's richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said 1). Therefore, the beliefs and practices endorsed by orientalist spiritualists and theosophists reveal the ambivalent nature of Anglo-Indian relations, as well as reflecting the wavering reception of Indian culture, or, more specifically, Indian religions, throughout the Victorian era.

Prior to nineteenth-century imperial expansion, Indian spiritualities had long been haunting European literature, philosophy, and theology as a result of cross-cultural contacts which can be traced back to antiquity. In his chapter "India in European Literature and Thought", Hugh G. Rawlinson examines the long history of commercial and ideological intercourse between East and West to provide thorough evidence of Indian influence on European culture, from ancient Greek philosophy to German Transcendentalism and the

English Romantic movement. As shown in texts by Pythagoras, Plato, and Herodotus, these traditions looked towards the East as the origin of esoteric mysticism, adopting concepts like the transmigration of the soul from body to body, or the cyclical philosophy of *karma* (Rawlinson 5-6). Such approaches lay the foundations for the perception of India as "the cradle of primitive purity, especially religious purity" (Trautmann 53), a notion which would be magnified during the nineteenth-century Occult revival. From the sixteenth century onwards, the British incursion and colonial settlement in India, along with the arrival of European missionaries, afforded the English public a more direct access to translated Hindu and Buddhist texts (Rawlinson 27).[127] However, most European travel literature depicted Indian subjects as "degraded and superstitious", an attitude which was "strengthened by the publication of works by missionaries like the Abbé Dubois, who saw only the darker side of Hinduism" (Rawlinson 30). Although the dominant view on South Asian religions coincided with Abbé Dubois' perception, other missionaries, such as Évariste Régis Huc and Joseph Gabet, made remarkable efforts to find interreligious affinity between non-Western systems of belief and Christianity.[128] The conjunction of disdainful religious prejudice, hesitant curiosity, and genuine interest in Indian systems of belief pervaded Western culture throughout the nineteenth century, fluctuating between two conflicting stances that Thomas Trautmann defines as "Indomania" (62) and "Indophobia" (99). According to Geoffrey Garratt, the 1830's presented a remarkable transition in Anglo-Indian colonial relations, as the British East India Company withdrew its support of South Asian spiritualities due to factors such as "the evangelical revival in England,

[127] Rawlinson identifies Father Thomas Stevens, the first Jesuit missionary sent to India in 1579, as one of the earliest Europeans to take an interest in Indian languages and dialects such as Konkani, Sanskrit, and Marathi (27).

[128] During their stay in Lhasa in 1842, they noted: "The crozier, the mitre, and chasuble, the cardinal's robe . . . the chants, the exorcism, the censer with five chains, the blessing which the Lamas impart by extending the right hand over the heads of the faithful, the rosary, the celibacy of the clergy, their separation from the world, the worship of saints, the fasts, processions, litanies, holy water – these are the points of contact the Buddhists have with us" (qtd. in Rawlinson 20).

the rapid development of industry and science, the social reform of the thirties", which "reflected in the changed outlook of a new generation of officials" who refused "being 'wet nurse to Vishnu', and 'churchwarden to Juggernaut'" (Garratt 398).[129] These circumstances resulted in an enhanced awareness of the British Empire's Christianizing mission (Sullivan 144), a task which entailed the erasure of the natives' allegedly superstitious beliefs. Expressing his self-righteous confidence in this imperial duty, Thomas Babington Macaulay, author of the famous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), declared in 1836:

> No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. It is my firm belief . . . that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence (qtd. in Garratt 723).

Although this contemptuous sense of racial superiority pervaded through British colonial administration during the Victorian era (Garratt 396), the period also produced a steady stream of literature attempting to decipher and understand what was configured as the mysterious 'Orient'.

In contrast with the hostile view of Indian religions endorsed by the majority of English settlers, who "came to India as merchants, not as antiquarians or explorers", and were "little interested in the religion or culture of the country" (Rawlinson 27), a long line of orientalist scholars followed in the steps of the influential British linguist William Jones to encourage the study of Indian languages and sacred customs through the translation of the sacred texts of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam (Jayawardena 110). As Sharada Sugirtharajah comments, the "construction and appropriation of Hinduism" in Jones' works denotes a "yearning for the 'primitive' and 'natural'" which became a "major source of inspiration for romantic orientalism" (2), a trend which would culminate in the subsequent branch of orientalist

[129] Garratt reports: "The East India Company in early days patronized both the Hindu and Muslim religions. Offices were open on Sunday but closed on Indian holidays. Troops were paraded in honour of Hindu deities. A coco-nut was solemnly broken at the beginning of each monsoon, and British officials assisted in the management of Hindu religious trusts" (398).

Occultism.[130] Orientalist tendencies permeated much of the syncretic roots of Spiritualism, manifesting conscious reminiscences of Hindu thought through Wordsworth and Shelley's romantic pantheism (Rawlison 33), Swedenborgianism, German idealism (Rawlinson 34), and American Transcendentalism (Bevir 747), all of which contributed to the foundations of the Victorian Occult revival (Carroll 111). Therefore, it is no wonder that nineteenth-century esotericism presented an evident impact of Western conceptions of Eastern theology when mediums and spirit-rappers also fell, in their turn, under the spell of the "Silken East" (Jayawardena 108).

The *fin-de-siècle* loss of faith in traditional beliefs and conventional values was illustrated not only in the appearance of the Occult revival, but also in the popular fascination with South Asian spiritualities and the mystical revelations they supposedly contained. As an age which "delighted in stories of lost and buried cities" and "could be even more impressed by resuscitations of ancient wisdom" (Ellwood 316), the Victorian period satisfied its thirst for supernatural tales from the "far reaches of the Empire" through the cross-cultural mobility offered by the world of telepathy, séances, and psychical research (Brantlinger 228). As stated by the theosophist writer George S. Mead in his article "The Rising Psychic Tide" (1911-12), "the bringing in of new gods . . . the blending of cults and syncretism of religions" were essential traits of the "revivals of divination, seers and soothsayers . . . necromancy and communion with spirits" resulting from the Victorian crisis of faith (qtd. in Tryphonopoulos 22). Mead had previously touched upon the ways in which importing the presence of "new gods" into Late Victorian Britain opened up possibilities for transnational and transhistorical dialogue. In *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (1900), he compares Late Victorian Occultism to the trans-cultural "melting pot" of the idealized Alexandria of Hellenistic times

[130] Specifically, Sugirtharajah refers to the essays and speeches collected in the six-volume edition of *The Works of Sir William Jones* (1766).

(Tryphonopoulos 23), "where Egypt and Africa, Rome and Greece, Syria and Arabia met together" to engage in harmonious religio-philosophical exchanges (Mead 120). Accordingly, Orientalism and mediumship often went hand in hand in this phantasmal reception of the Eastern Other, since Victorians who converted to Buddhism or Hinduism usually "reflected similar interests in spiritualism and the occult" (Abd-Allah 56), and, likewise, prominent spiritualist practitioners incorporated Eastern doctrines into occultist cosmology. Although Brantlinger recognizes Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* (1877) as the origin of this orientalist trend in Victorian Occultism (Brantlinger 228),[131] such syncretic efforts can be traced further back to the early days of the spiritualist movement, as can be appreciated in Andrew Jackson Davis' considerations on "Brahma's Thoughts Reviewed" in *The Great Harmonia* (1852). In his reading of Hindu philosophy, Davis calls attention to the inaccurate Western othering of Eastern cultures, arguing that Brahma's dogmas "do not seem extravagant or unnatural" (79), but, instead, "are fanciful and marvellously absurd only when contemplated and measured by the standard of feeling and utilitarianism so popular in modern Europe and young America" (79). Davis' confidence in the possibility of finding "much of the best, the truest, and the wisest inspirations of eternal Truth" (79) in the bridge between Western Spiritualism and South Asian religions was put into practice by Late Victorian clairvoyants who opened their consciousness to messages from Indian spirits and spiritualities.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, notorious spiritualist women travelled to colonial territories in South Asia and dove into Hindu and Buddhist sacred texts in search of what they perceived to be an evasion from the materialistic West (Jayawardena 108). For instance, Florence Farr, an actress and medium "steeped in mysticism" and "most closely

[131] Blavatsky's milestone was followed by Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879) and Alfred Percy Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), which also provided a common spiritual ground between Western Occultism and South Asian religious doctrines.

connected with the East" (Dabić 162), published interrelated interpretations of Vedanta philosophy, Egyptian mythology, and the Kabbalah[132] before finally settling in Ceylon to run a school for Hindu girls (Jayawardena 175). As the "Praemonstratrix" of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and a member of the Theosofical Society (Jayawardena 138), Farr conceived cross-cultural Occultism as an instrument to undermine the patriarchal establishment of Victorian morality (*Ibidem* 183), thus matching the interests of another orientalist New Woman: Annie Besant.

A fervent anti-imperialist and feminist occultist branded as "an agitator, a firebrand, to the orthodox society" (Kumar 31), Besant taught herself Sanskrit and conducted intensive studies of Hindu and Buddhist texts to develop "a form of clairvoyant meditation inspired by the yogic traditions of India" (Bhattacharya 197).[133] Her orientalist occultism provided a framework for anti-colonial activism, through which she became involved in the Indian Independence movement and campaigned against oppressive imperial policies in India, Burma, Egypt, and Afghanistan (Kumar 31). In 1893, she moved to Madras to succeed Madame Blavatsky as leader of the Theosophical Society (Bhattacharya 199), hoping, like her charismatic predecessor, to unveil the Eastern keys to the spiritual dilemmas of the West (Bevir 748). Blavatsky had been a prominent figure in the spiritualist movement and the Occult revival (Bevir 749), renowned for her sensationalist séances as well as for yoking arcane Hindu epistemologies into her synthetic compilation of Buddhist, Gnostic, Cabalistic, Rosicrucian, and Masonic theories (Tryphonopoulos 45). Her work presents some of the most evident examples of the orientalist trend of Victorian Occultism, since she perceived India as the main

[132] Compiled in *Magical Essays and Instructions* (2019).

[133] For instances of Besant's inclusion of Hindu and Buddhist concepts in her work, see *The Ancient Wisdom: An Outline of Theosophical Teachings* (1897).

source of ancient esoteric wisdom (Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* 626).[134] Claiming to have been chosen telepathically by invisible "mahatmas" to channel their revelations and act as the spiritual intermediary between East and West (Tryphonopoulos 45),[135] she travelled to India in 1878, converted to Buddhism in 1880, and established the headquarters Theosophical Society in Adyar in 1883 as a "natural outcome of the movement's efforts to blend the philosophies of East and West" (*Ibidem* 47-48). Blavatsky's "esoteric and exoteric" interpretations of Indian culture contributed to "the widespread belief that a knowledge of Eastern literature was necessary for true self-understanding" (Kuch 9), and while her "championship of Indian religion and philosophy" contributed to "the country's growing self-assertion against the values and beliefs of European colonial powers" (Goodrick-Clarke 12), the orientalist shift of Victorian Occultism paradoxically configured India as its spiritual colony, a land of mystical riches from which English mediums could borrow, steal, or reinvent religious ideas and practices (Tryphonopoulos 23). The paranormal messages from the unseen "mahatmas" turned out to be a product of Blavatsky's imagination transcribed in her own handwriting, for which she was eventually uncovered by the Society for Psychical Research as "one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors in history" (qtd. in Oppenheim 178). By thus imagining the East through their role as importers of Indian spirituality into the metropolis, *fin-de-siècle* occultists such as Blavatsky, Besant, and Farr nurtured Western fantasies in which the Eastern Other remains perpetually shrouded in mystery.

Therefore, despite the Occult revival's empathetic intention to mediate a cross-cultural communion between Victorian Britain and India, much of the movement's syncretic efforts

[134] In contrast with the long occultist tradition of attributing the origins of mysticism to Egyptian sources (Garratt 5), Blavatsky argued: "it has been discovered that the very same ideas expressed in almost identical language, may be read in Buddhistic and Brahmanical literature" (*Isis Unveiled* 626).

[135] Blavatsky defined the "mahatmas" as disembodied and supernaturally evolved Tibetan masters who guarded secret, ancient wisdom which they passed on to spiritual seekers by means of paranormal phenomena (Lavoie 193).

were tainted by the reductive Euro-centrism of orientalists who investigated India's exoticized past to unearth supernatural treasures (Bhattacharya 191). Moreover, as stated in the previous chapter, the primitivist view of India embraced by spiritualists and theosophists was problematically connected to theories of racial superiority, popularized by Blavatsky's "Spiritual Darwinism" (Levenda 34). Her claims were based on the idealization of an ancient society where a "higher" Aryan way of life was said to have prevailed (Jayawardena 110),[136] and concorded with the eugenic presumption that, after a long period of "natural selection", the Earth would be populated by the "*noblest specimens of existing humanity*" (Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* 296, original emphasis). Such racist assumptions demonstrate the unclear nature of occultist cross-cultural relations, since they are hardly reconcilable with the theoretical aims of the Theosophical Society, which included the formation of "a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, colour, or creed" (Blavatsky, *Key to Theosophy* 24). Both Blavatsky's version of the Aryan myth and the historical continuity of the spiritual pastiche vaguely classified by Western mediums as 'Oriental wisdom' have been discredited due to lack of sustainable evidence (Tryphonopoulos 22). According to Tryphonopoulos, the Alexandrian "melting pot" and the claims of direct ancient lineage and historical continuity in the works of occultists are a "constantly rediscovered fiction" through which Victorian occultists usurped the Eastern past to borrow "highly eclectic and far too various" South Asian doctrines, myths, and motifs (22, 23). Just like the Neo-Victorian genre takes pleasure in the contemporary appropriation of bygone times by searching for "a past that never was" (Arias and Pulham 11), so must the Victorian orientalist "labour to discover and reassemble the scattered fragments" of an ancient wisdom reconstructed through the lens of the Western imaginary (Tryphonopoulos 20). The conception of the 'Orient' as a site of spiritual fulfilment for

[136] This concept was later famously picked up by both European white supremacists and nationalist chauvinists in India and Sri Lanka (Jayawardena 110).

Western tourists has now become, as Mark Bevir points out, "an integral part of our understanding of Western culture" (747).[137] Consequently, perhaps responding to the orientalist fantasies of contemporary readers, the ambivalent interaction between nineteenth-century mediums and the Eastern Other is emulated by Neo-Victorian writers who recycle such stereotypes into their fiction. As I hope to prove, Fox's configuration of mixed-raced characters through spiritualist imagery in *The Goddess and the Thief* reproduces several of the abovementioned orientalist tendencies of Victorian Occultism, and, at the same time, makes use of the subversive potential of this movement to decode the protagonist's diasporic identity in ways that challenge our fragmentary perception of Indian subjects in the context of Victorian imperialism.

4.3 Transcultural Mediumship: Hosting India through Neo-Victorian Spiritualism in *The Goddess and the Thief*

Conforming to the Neo-Victorian penchant for polyphonic narratives (Shiller 541), Fox's novel presents six different perspectives on the same story, structured around the protagonist's unstable account of events. Alice's telling is unsettled by her blurry and idealized childhood reminiscences; her tendency to enter altered states of consciousness by either fainting, falling into trance, or succumbing to the effects of laudanum; and her closeness with the spirit world. Her mediumistic attributes and inability to distinguish fantasy from reality give shape to a plot riddled with the "mistakes, omissions and ambiguities" characteristic of the genre (Kontou 83), mirroring both the fragmentation of her diasporic personhood, as well as our limited access to marginalized accounts of the Victorian past. Filtered through Alice's

[137] Alex Norman remarks how India has come to be regarded as "the epitome of the spiritually touristic destination" for Westerners in the twentieth century, particularly since the Beatles visited Rishikesh to study with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in 1968 (140).

unreliable memory and impressionable character, the main narrative of Fox's orientalist Gothic work features the medium's coming of age against the backdrop of nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian tensions. Set between colonial Lahore and Victorian Britain, the novel begins with Alice's migration from her idyllic birthplace to the metropolis, a journey which separates her from her warm and colourful childhood and from her beloved ayah, Bhamini, or Mini. From that point onwards, India is represented as Alice's lost paradise, a fantastic land to which she longs to return, only accessed through her trance states and daydreams, intertwined with Bhamini's tales about Hindu deities. Upon her arrival in London, her father, a doctor in the East India Company, leaves her in the care of her aunt Mercy, a spiritualist imposter who takes advantage of mourners' delusions by orchestrating theatrical séances in her parlour. After several years, Alice, by then a young woman, begins to experience flashbacks, ghost-seeing, out-of-body experiences, telepathy, and other strange sensations heightened by her acquaintance of Lucian Tilsbury, an Anglo-Indian spy whom the protagonist recognizes from a mystical vision and who seems determined to take advantage of the medium's gifts. Alice and Tilsbury share a paranormal connection throughout the novel, starting with the mysterious stranger's mesmeric control over her mind and body. By manipulating the heroine through his hypnotic influence, the villain lures her into an eerie world of esoteric trickery, mesmerism, drugs, and insanity, in which she is meant to be a prophesized reincarnation of the Hindu goddess Parvati, destined to act as a portal into outlandish mysteries and secret doctrines. The plot thickens as Tilsbury uses Alice as a pawn in his plan to distract Queen Victoria during a séance at Windsor Castle so as to steal the legendary Koh-i-Noor diamond, sacred sovereign symbol of Maharajah Duleep Singh. Before this task is accomplished, the protagonist experiences a mesmeric trance during which she is seduced into engaging in sexual activity with the Anglo-Indian intruder. Shortly after receiving a silver figurine representing a dancing Parvati as a gift from her enigmatic admirer, Alice discovers she is pregnant with Tilsbury's

child. Her condition seems to intensify her mystical connection to her motherland, as she is recurrently haunted by visions and omens channelled through the voice of her ayah. Furthermore, her psychic abilities provide a framework for a highly significant encounter with Duleep Singh, who is invited to attend a séance at Tilsbury's house. By means of telepathy, Alice internalizes and articulates their host's bitter account of the traumatic events which caused a forced migration from his rightful throne in Lahore to the court of the "Mrs Fagin" in whose name the Koh-i-Noor was taken from his family (Fox 167). Channelling Duleep's thoughts during her trance, Alice not only gives voice to the Maharajah's painful childhood memories, but also unveils the abuses committed by the East India Company after the Second Anglo-Sikh War. During this paranormal conversation, the heroine learns that her new acquaintances intend to use the prophesized magical properties of the Koh-i-Noor to overthrow British rule in the Punjab, "cast all invaders out", and restore the Maharajah to his rightful throne (Fox 168).

Subsequently, the storyline becomes increasingly sensational as Tilsbury, who was engaged to Mercy, tricks Alice into marrying him by exchanging the two women's names in a counterfeit marriage register. After her aunt dies in suspicious circumstances, Alice finds herself trapped by her manipulative husband, who threatens to have her certified as a hysteric if she attempts to leave his lodgings. When she discovers he plans to take her and the child to India, the heroine manages to escape with her infant son and eventually breaks ties with her motherland. Scattered throughout the narrative are missing fragments of the story: unread diary entries, unsent letters, and repressed thoughts which shed light on the other characters' motivation for their actions, thus underlining the blind spots of historical accounts which fall into oblivion in grand narratives. It is not until the last page of the novel that the protagonist's true matrilineal heritage is unveiled. In an unheaded prayer to Lord Shiva, Bhamini identifies Alice as her own daughter, born of her illicit relationship with Mr Willoughby, who replaced

his English wife's deceased infant with "the milk-faced child . . . born to his Indian bibi bride" (Fox 302).[138] Her final disclosure as the "mother never known" grants a decisive significance to Alice's travelling clairvoyance, matching her mother's certainty that, one day, this supernatural potential will "lure her home" (*Ibidem*).

By recycling crucial nineteenth-century topics through a Neo-Victorian lens, Fox 'ghostwrites' not only Victorian genres such as imperial Gothic,[139] but also the uninterrupted ties between the period's Occult revival and concerns with spiritual, corporeal, cultural, and racial borders. The mixed-raced heroine's mediumistic attributes function as the axis around which such themes overlap, thus paralleling Hopkins' and Marryat's use of Occult fiction to articulate controversial questions regarding diasporic identities. Like *Of One Blood* and *The Blood of the Vampire*, Fox's novel addresses the traumatic ghosts of specific military conflicts and consequent transformations in racial relations. *The Goddess and the Thief* is set during a defining historical moment, haunted by the devastating aftermath of the Second Anglo-Sikh War of 1848 and the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which increased the "breach between the two races" and therefore marked a turning point in the relationships between the colony and the metropolis (Garratt 402). Such tensions are addressed throughout the novel's time frame, with the main events taking place in 1862, as can be inferred from allusions to Alice's birth in 1843, the Great Exhibition in 1851, and the Prince Consort's death in 1861. The protagonist's mediumistic reception of distant echoes of colonial violence contributes to blurring cross-cultural and cross-racial borders at a time when the boundaries between the British Self and the Indian Other seemed particularly impermeable due to the violent repression following what

[138] As Sen Indrani explains, 'bibi' was the term used to designate the 'native' concubines of British men in colonial India (*Woman* 44).

[139] Fox's sources of inspiration for her textual reception of Victorian and Edwardian literary traditions are not short of imperialist baggage, a fact which contributes to the novel's ambivalent depiction of the Eastern Other through a Western lens. The author acknowledges the influence of Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868), Richard Burton's *Vikram and the Vampire, Or, Tales of Hindu Devilry* (1870), and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) on her work (Fox 324).

Christopher Herbert defines as "the supreme trauma of the age" (2). Like the Jamaican slave revolts, the Mutiny, also known as India's First War of Independence, "struck at the heart of the Victorians' self-confidence in their destined mission as beneficent rulers of other races", thus throwing into doubt not only the stability of Britain's imperial authority, but also her people's "very identity as a chosen race and nation, the standard-bearers of civilisation" (Kohlke, "Tipoo's Tiger" 370, 371). As Keith Booker points out, the binary power dynamics between imperialist Self and colonized Other established in English representations of the colony were so integral to British national self-image that "the idea of a Britain without India was almost inconceivable" (19). After 1860, the Victorian idea of India was characterized by a "strong racial antipathy to the inhabitants of the country" (Garratt 402), resulting in hostile perceptions of Indian 'nature' as intrinsically violent and barbaric (Kohlke, "Tipoo's Tiger" 368). Although the Mutiny and "the horrors that resulted then" are only explicitly mentioned once in *The Goddess and the Thief* (Fox 276), the reminiscence of this collective trauma hovers over the Anglo-Indian tensions portrayed in the novel, manifested, for instance, in Alice's concealed mixed-raced background. Corresponding to the ghostly qualities of the Gothic heroines of Hopkins' and Marryat's novels, her condition as a child of interracial sexual liaisons configures her as a phantasmal reminder of the intersectional racial and gendered oppression exerted in colonial India. Although the reader is hardly granted direct insight into Bhamini's thoughts, her final revelation contains the key to the protagonist's family history of miscegenation. Encompassing both extremes of the "twin axes of sensuousness and loyalty" dominating the representation of Indian women in colonial discourse (Sen, "Discourses" 119), Alice's mother is both her ayah and her father's "bibi bride" (Fox 302). As Indrani Sen points out, the strongly divisive aftermath of the Indian Rebellion affected the perception of interracial relations, which had been practiced widely and openly during the first half of the nineteenth century (*Woman* 43). The increased mistrust towards Indian subjects after the Mutiny caused

a demonization of miscegenation, and from 1860 onwards British men were encouraged by the government to replace their 'bibi' concubines by white resident wives (*Ibidem* 44). Being a living proof of the much-feared contamination of the racial 'purity' of imperial progeny, Alice's mediumistic body hosts the spectre of such complicated dynamics between colonizer and colonized at the century's climax of Anglo-Indian friction.

The novel's most evident sign of the period's political hostility resides in the presence of Duleep Singh, a key historical figure in the origins of South Asian resistance in Britain (Wainwright 91). Having lost his throne and title to the East India Company at the age of ten, the displaced Maharajah of Punjab was taken to England, where he converted to Christianity and became a remarkable *protégé* of Queen Victoria (Rappaport 230). However, despite his apparent anglicization and the Queen's efforts to "protect him from his former 'heathen' nature" *(Ibidem*), the exiled "Black Prince of Perthshire", as he was nicknamed (Visram 73), eventually rebelled against the British empire in 1886 by returning to his homeland, re-converting to Sikhism, and designing an unsuccessful plan to demand the restitution of his sovereign birthright to the lost kingdom of Lahore (Alexander and Anand 261).[140] Fox's inclusion of Duleep's point of view in her novel constitutes a useful example of the "clear re-visionary and political purpose" of Neo-Victorian commemorations of "marginalised subjects", as well as "the injustice of their historical disregard and silencing" (Kohlke, "Biofiction" 7). Therefore, it is no surprise that the Koh-i-Noor diamond plays such as significant role in the story, since it operates as a reminder of the Maharajah's tragic fate, particularly due to its political and religious value. Also known as the "mountain of light", this precious stone had once been a mythically loaded object moved from India to Iran and Afghanistan before becoming a symbol of the prestige and power of Maharaja Ranjit Singh,

[140] For a detailed account of Duleep Singh's biography, see Michael Alexander and Sushila Anand's *Queen Victoria's Maharajah: Duleep Singh, 1838-93* (1980).

ruler of the Sikh Empire in Lahore, present-day Pakistan (Anand and Dalrymple 82). In 1849, at the end of the Anglo-Sikh War, the diamond was, according to Lord Dalhousie, surrendered to the Queen as a "symbol of conquest" and a token of ten-year-old Duleep Singh's "submission" (qtd. in Kinsey 396). As a material trace of colonial pillage, the Koh-i-Noor now remains located among the British crown jewels collection despite ongoing disputes over its ownership, regardless of the frequent requests made by Pakistan for its cultural legacy to be returned (Anand and Dalrymple 192).[141] Among the manifold connotations associated to the Koh-i-Noor, its central presence in *The Goddess and the Thief* functions as a metonymic reference not only to the fall of the last king of Lahore, but also to the colonizing process of a "miniaturized, feminized, and domesticated India" whose shape was shrunk by half as an ornamental gift for Victoria (Shah 34).[142] Fox's Neo-Victorian representation of the diamond as a pivotal element in her novel denotes the text's reversal of imperial Gothic motifs in order to redress the wrongs committed in the name of British imperialism. In contrast with Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868), another work inspired by the allegedly cursed Indian diamond (Anand and Dalrymple 166), narrative focus is placed on the dispossessed Maharajah instead of on the British keepers of the diamond, thus calling into question the perspectival bias surrounding definitions of invasion and robbery in both texts and justifying India's claim to its sovereign jewel. For instance, through Alice's mediumship, the reader is granted access to Duleep Singh's anguished thoughts at the sight of the Koh-i-Noor in Victoria's hands: "*How can she know the insult – to see how it has been reduced, its facets remodelled, its size cut*

[141] As documented by Anita Anand and William Dalrymple, the first formal request for the Koh-i-Noor to be returned to Pakistan dates from 1976, when the Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto wrote to James Callaghan arguing that such a gesture would be "a convincing demonstration of the spirit that moved Britain voluntarily to shed its imperial encumbrances and lead the process of decolonization", and would therefore be "symbolic of a new international equity strikingly different from the grasping, usurping temper of a former age" (qtd. in 192).

[142] After displaying the Koh-i-Noor at the Great Exhibition, Prince Albert had the stone recut and polished before it was offered to Queen Victoria as a brooch (Anand and Dalrymple 166).

down, but a bauble in a trinket box! As such, am I so different?" (Fox 165, original emphasis). By shedding light on the othered side of colonial conflicts instead of emulating Collins' depiction the precious gemstone and its dark-skinned seekers as a malign influence imported from the 'Orient', Fox's novel favours a hospitable reception of fictionalized Indian viewpoints exposing and denouncing the oppressive policies of Victorian imperialism. For the purpose of analyzing such an invocation of silenced voices, it would be convenient to examine the spiritualist medium as a necessary figure in the ambivalent conversations established across cultural and racial borders of this Neo-Victorian work.

4.3.1 A Bridge Between Two Worlds: Alice's Mediumship and Embodying the Other's Voice

Matching the marginalized in-betweenness of Hopkins' Dianthe and Marryat's Harriet, Alice's characterization as a bicultural woman of colour constitutes an essential element in the novel's transoceanic and transtemporal reception of racial Otherness. More specifically, her mediumistic attributes serve as fundamental instruments to unveil the complications of three different diasporic existences against the backdrop of the hostile conception of colonial India in Victorian culture. Although Fox's text is mainly focused upon Alice's experience of the divisive policies of British imperialism, her psychic abilities make possible the verbalization of two other similarly displaced storylines, those of Tilsbury and Duleep Singh. Moreover, her obsessively recurrent dreams, memories, and trance states present numerous glimpses of Bhamini's presence, providing a deeply emotional link to her motherland which anticipates the final revelation of the protagonist's mixed parentage. As I intend to prove, Alice's narration exemplifies, to a certain extent, the spiritualist medium's function as a transmitter of alienated stories by granting a voice to unspeakable and unheard messages from colonized subjects.

Born in a "foreign land, surrounded by heathen reprobates" (Fox 31), and having received a syncretic religious education combining Bhamini's Hindu tales with a Christian schooling in Lahore before travelling to England, Alice is placed between two contrasting countries, cultures, spiritualities, and even political ideologies. Like many colonial children sent to be educated in England at an early age, she is expected to be purged from any Indian influence by her 'civilizing' contact with the metropolis (Sen, "Discourses" 119). However, her inability to give up the identification with her othered motherland evokes colonial anxieties triggered by the close contact of imperial progeny with their Indian ayahs. As Indrani Sen illustrates, such children would often "grow up speaking the vernacular more fluently than English", which aroused the older generation's fear of their offspring going 'native' if they were not sent 'home' soon enough (*Ibidem*). As remarked in the Anglo-Indian newspaper *The Pioneer*, the ayah's role in nursing British children was paramount, since the young memsahibs would "carry in their hearts their *ayah's* laughter and tears . . . after all else Indian has passed out of their lives" (22 October 1880, 5-6, qtd. in Sen, *Woman* 50). This is certainly true for Alice, who remains literally and figuratively haunted by her ayah's maternal voice. Therefore, her mediumistic condition not only manifests her ability to put herself in the Other's stead, but also the troubling ghosts she conjures up as a mixed-raced child of colonial power structures. Forced to remain in England, where her aunt instructs her to behave like a Victorian lady, she feels at odds in this alien territory and cannot help but look back to India as her standard for understanding reality. Her middle position is therefore a defining trait in her character, which conforms to Kontou's interpretation of the spiritualist medium's body as "the bridge between the two worlds, blurring the distinction between life and death, and fact and fiction" (3).

In addition to lifting the veil between this world and the next, Alice cuts across the borders established by imperialist thought, deconstructing the system's intrinsic binary opposition between Western Self and Eastern Other (Bhabha 29). Since her ambiguous national

identity allows her to identify with the ghostly Other, she may be classified as one of those Victorian imperial Gothic characters which arrive in the metropolis to disrupt the "very boundaries on which British imperial hegemony depended: between civilized and primitive, colonizer and colonized" (Arata 626). However, in a progressive reversal of this nineteenth-century trope, Alice's connection to Indian culture is not depicted as a threat, but as an empowering quality. For instance, the arrival of the magical figure of Parvati in her Victorian home could be easily compared to Bithia Mary Croker's short story "The Little Brass God" (1905), in which a Hindu statue of "Kali, Goddess of Destruction" unleashes chaos in a Western household (55). Whereas, in Brantlinger's words, Croker's text expresses a "version of the return of the repressed characteristic of Late Victorian and Edwardian fiction" by representing the much-feared revenge of the "destructive magic of the Orient" (228), the silver figurine in Fox's novel is brimming with positive connotations, bringing fertility instead of annihilation. In addition to anticipating the birth of Alice's child, Parvati's image provides a source of hope and guidance for the protagonist, triggering her supernatural powers and strengthening her invisible bond with Bhamini. As an example, the goddess is often involved in Alice's trance states, generating cross-cultural invocations similar to those articulated by Victorian mediums who alarmed séance sitters by delivering wild, disconnected utterances in "native" dialects:

> I saw Parvati . . . her eyes staring very hard at mine as if she was trying to enter my mind, to know me, even to be me . . . And every word she sang I knew, and I woke to find myself whispering: *I am mother of the world, holding mystery and riches. I am the goddess of deliverance and marital harmony* (Fox 128).

The complete internalization of the Other's voice entailed by her identification with this Hindu deity is repeated several times throughout the novel, one of its culminating points being the occultist séance held to entertain Duleep Singh, about which Alice recalls: "My mouth opened. My voice began to recite, but none of those words just then were mine" (Fox 164). Alice's unconscious verbalization of the Maharajah's misfortunes reveals an ethical retelling

of colonial history, one which foregrounds his experience of the abuses committed by the East India Company, as well as his diasporic existence in Victorian England, where he has been "reduced to . . . nothing but the exotic prince who provides glamour at society events", just like the majestic Koh-i-Noor has been "reduced to nothing more than a glittering prop at a spiritualist show" (Fox 168, 106). In accordance with Kontou's definition of the trance medium as an otherworldly historian who visibilizes minoritized accounts of the past (6), Alice's offering of her body to host Duleep's voice facilitates a subversive verbalization of the Other's trauma. Such an adaptation of Victorian spiritualist practice to examine and cast out the ghosts of colonial violence haunting nineteenth-century British culture constitutes an example of Arias and Pulham's interpretation of exorcism as a necessary element in the healing process of putting into words the "unspeakable secret which is lodged inside the subject" (17). Paralleling Mira's defiant trance discourse demanding revenge for African-Americans in *Of One Blood*, Alice's channelling of Duleep's critique of colonial power dynamics encourages further critical interrogations regarding the devastating consequences of Victorian imperial administration: "What right have the British to raid other lands for nothing more than material gain, to force the natives to bow to their gods, to depose rightful regents from their thrones?" (Fox 252). Therefore, by welcoming Duleep's perspective into her consciousness, the protagonist's mediumship operates within the Lévinasian empathy which, according to Hollander, requires understanding the Other by "minimizing difference to emphasize commonality" (3). The paranormal connection established during the séance unveils a shared diaspora, thus demonstrating how the restorative qualities of narrative hospitality apply not only to the outcast prince, but also to the heroine's own personal history. As Fox explains in the novel's afterword, "Alice's fate is . . . a mirror for that of the real-life Duleep Singh", also "deposed, parted from his mother when still a child and then exiled to live in England" (318). Consequently, in this supernatural cross-cultural exchange, the medium recognizes herself in the Other's experience

of being "imprisoned between two peoples, in a place where he would never belong" (Fox 162), and, by doing so, simultaneously processes her own traumatic past.

In agreement with Willburn, the séance table may therefore be interpreted according to Pratt's definition of "contact zone", that is to say, a space where "peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 8). Despite the fact that such conditions are not always entirely challenged in *The Goddess and the Thief*, Fox's reinterpretation of the Victorian spiritualist circle as a hospitable context for the expression of historically erased narratives resonates with Gauri Viswanathan and Denise Buell's readings of the Occult revival as an attempt to establish conversations with largely unrepresented "subaltern pasts" (Chakrabarty, "Minority Histories" 101). Granted, Alice's mediumistic act of making space for othered voices presents evident shortcomings, such as the usurpation of identity which is inevitably involved in trance speaking. As it has previously been stated, the spiritualist medium's responsibility for the untold stories of bygone times mirrors the Neo-Victorian author's commitment to ethical retellings of the past, along with the problematic aspects of this dialogue with the dead. Accordingly, Alice occupies the controversial position of the British historical novelist who "becomes (or appropriates the place of) the postcolonial subject" in a textual expiation for imperial sins, as Kohlke mentions in her analysis of contemporary fictions on the Indian Mutiny ("Tipoo's Tiger" 377). Yet although Alice's mediumship can definitely be linked to issues raised by the Western writer's appropriation of postcolonial narratives to purge herself and her Western readership "of the taint of colonialism" by "revealing the perversions and repressions of the Empire" (Narayanan 29), it is also possible to decipher the protagonist's transmission of the Other's perspective as a form of self-discovery of her Anglo-Indian heritage. Rather than denying Duleep's narrative agency, Alice's telepathic articulation of his narrative operates as a device to interact with the

Indian past buried in her unconscious while also interrogating the validity of one-sided accounts of British colonial relations.

4.3.2 Letting the Other In: Alice and Tilsbury's Transgressive Relationship

In addition to verbalizing Duleep Singh's rebellion against his hypocritical reception in Victorian society, Alice's supernatural gifts contribute to the internalization of her othered heritage by means of her symbolically loaded liaison with Lucian Tilsbury. Taking into account the protagonist's configuration as a mesmerized victim and the villain's characterization as the tantalizing exotic invader of *fin-de-siècle* fiction (Arata 642), their mysticized union denotes not only a typically Gothic blurring of psychic and sexual boundaries (*Ibidem* 627), but also additional layers of cross-cultural reception which complicate the application of occultist imagery in the novel's encounter between Victorian Self and Indian Other. The diasporic essence of their paranormal connection is suggested from their first meeting, during which Alice senses that they "shared some secret; though the nature of what that secret was – what could it be but India?" (63). However, she seems initially reluctant to recognize herself in the enigmatic foreigner, noting how, although the "deep colour of his skin was much the same as [hers] had been, before [she] came to England", her appearance had, since then, "turned quite wan, its hue a reflection of [her] aunt's", and "so white it might be ivory" (34). Despite the fact that, strictly speaking, it would be inaccurate to label their relationship as interracial due to the final revelation of Alice's maternal heredity, Tilsbury's haunting presence challenges the heroine's mistaken self-perception as a white British woman, and, although the characters present no explicit trace of the Victorian fear of miscegenation, their dark-haired child is compared to a "strange hybrid" (Fox 241). Far from being unproblematic, their intimate affair, framed within mesmeric domination, reproduces the gendered power dynamics of Victorian

spiritualist discourse while maintaining nineteenth-century orientalist stereotypes connecting the Eastern Other to immoral seductions and sexual perversity (Marcus 268):

> My head began to swim when I smelled the odour on him . . . Something musky and thick and intoxicating. His presence was very affecting. I found myself trapped in his questioning gaze, daunted by . . . dark eyes within which the pupils dilated . . . all at once I was overcome by such a sudden sense of dread, of some imminent danger to myself, something animal, elemental, cruel (Fox 34-35).

Paralleling Marryat's text, such exoticized and eroticized interactions with the simultaneously dangerous and attractive intruder echo the period's fascination with psychic regression and the possible eruption of primordial energies across the borders of the Empire (Arata 625). Taking into account the recurrence of these topics in relation to Davies' comments on Neo-Victorian tropes of mesmerism and trance speech, it would be necessary to consider whether authors like Fox genuinely invoke postcolonial voices, or if "Victorian precursors ultimately dictate the script of neo-Victorian fiction" (Davies 6). For this purpose, the paradoxical villain of *The Goddess and the Thief* epitomizes this ambivalent reception of minoritized perspectives from the nineteenth century.

Tilsbury's disturbingly hypnotic influence is met with the representative *fin-de-siècle* blend of anxiety and desire towards the non-Western invader (Arata 642), as the protagonist remarks on several occasions: "He exuded his glamour, that charisma, which, I must confess, had also bound me in its spell" (57). His mysterious allure dominates the narrative as much as he dominates Alice, who only manages to rebel against his tricks by the end of the novel. What appears to make him dangerous is not so much his Indian origin but his liminal position between the borders of Victorian respectability and the demonized conception of the non-Western Other as innately connected to dark rituals and barbaric cults (Willburn, "Savage Magnet" 164). Unlike Alice, who remains almost entirely oblivious of her hybrid ancestry, Tilsbury is strongly aware of his condition as the "half-caste bastard son of a Bible-thumping

missionary", as it is manifested in his ability to inhabit both sides of the imperial divide while exposing its iniquities (Fox 198). His resulting metamorphosing identity turns him into "an exceptional master of disguise", as observed by British officers who argue that his "swarthy appearance and fluency in Hindustani" makes him "eminently suitable for those roles where he might 'go native' and infiltrate enemy lines" (44). Truly, Tilsbury's mixed background and excellent education destabilize alleged oppositions between East and West, challenging nineteenth-century binary conceptions of racial difference, according to which India "constituted the central problem for Victorian anthropology" due to its "spectacle of dark-skinned people who were evidently civilized" (Trautmann 3). By preserving his Hindu spiritual roots while simultaneously being regarded as a Victorian gentleman, Tilsbury reconfigures colonial barriers to his own advantage before eventually crossing over to embrace his othered side in a supernatural journey comparable to Reuel's heroic quest in Hopkins' Occult novel.

Once again, the collapse of boundaries is manifested through spiritualist phenomena, mystical visions and bizarre occurrences through which Tilsbury's narrations fuse into Alice's porous consciousness in order to reveal details of his life as a wanderer from the East India Company to the necromantic and nomadic Shaivist sect of the Aghori.[143] Mirroring the syncretic fusions of Victorian occultists, the novel features numerous intersections of British mediumship and the "strange gods and 'unspeakable rites'" of the "far reaches of the Empire" (Brantlinger 228), starting with Tilsbury's secret collection of combined texts on Hinduism, Mesmerism, and Spiritualism (Fox 123). Moreover, his experience at the borderland between

[143] Fox's choice to depict Tilsbury as a man who has lived among the Aghori, a reduced group of marginal ascetic worshipers of Shiva, notorious for practicing necro-cannibalism (Parry 88), resonates with the Victorian British emphasis on the darkest and less defensible aspects of Hinduism, such as the *sati* sacrificial ritual (Garratt 400). As mentioned by Garratt, nineteenth-century English literature was similarly filled with shocking representations of Indian religions which reduced the country's immense theological diversity to a set of unorthodox traditions which were already in decline by the time such texts were written (*Ibidem*). While some of the characters of Fox's novel echo such over-simplified representations of India as a hellish land of "burning brides and cannibals" (Fox 12), these traces of imperialist discourse are compensated by the nurturing qualities of Alice's spiritual connection to her motherland.

life and death as a member of the Aghori provides an additional common ground for the paranormal blurring of geo-cultural boundaries. As Frederick Smith illustrates in his study on spirit possession in South Asian civilizations, entranced communion with the souls of the departed is a frequent practice among the Aghori (77), who understand this phenomenon as "a state in which a deity is invited into the body of the . . . practitioner, to his or her benefit" (78). In this way, the common elements between British Spiritualism and non-Western systems of belief offer, once more, a channel for the articulation of shifting conceptions of the diasporic Self in the context of nineteenth-century territorial occupations. Just like African-American Spiritualism permitted its practitioners to address these issues through the medium's "owned or occupied body" (Matory, "The Many Who Dance in Me" 396), so does Tilsbury's multifaceted spirituality contribute to the recognition of the suppressed histories of migrant dispossessed subjects. Paralleling the transatlantic use of phantasmal possession as a "ritual remedy of interpersonal problems" (Pérez 355), the South Asian medium is perceived, in Alexander Macdonald's words, as a healing host who allows disembodied voices to speak, "enabling him to diagnose illnesses and sometimes cure them . . . and clarify present events in terms of their relationship to the past" (128). Yet, although this shared transcultural and transhistorical conception of the clairvoyant as a "privileged intermediary between . . . the past, present and future" (*Ibidem*) relates to Tilsbury and Alice's revisionist task as postcolonial Neo-Victorian characters, the protagonist's forced involvement in the abovementioned paranormal encounters discloses the extent to which the reception of the oriental Other into her entranced female body involves troublesome power dynamics.

In line with nineteenth-century 'trance novels' (Willburn, *Possessed* 115), Fox's Gothic storyline evolves around the toxic relationship between the helpless female victim and the manipulative male mesmerist (Poznar 412). Not long after their first meeting, Alice declares: "Without a word, without a threat, I felt his gaze enslave me, as dark and intense as it ever was,

as if he could see into my soul" (63). Reproducing the patriarchal roles addressed in Chapter Two, their eroticized hypnotic affinity soon adopts the same gendered division between the active male conjurer and the "passive, penetrable, malleable" entranced woman (Davies 5): "he somehow projected his thoughts into mine, those thoughts from which I *must* escape – struggling to reclaim my voice" (Fox 250, original emphasis). Tilsbury's possession of Alice's mediumistic personhood soon evolves from mesmeric seduction to sexual domination, resulting in a situation reminiscent of Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859): "He would own my body, own my mind, own anything that I possessed . . . If I tried to object, he would claim me mad" (Fox 226). While such an invasive transgression suggests an evocation of the imperial Gothic fear of reverse colonization, their liaison also raises controversial questions regarding the limits of the allegedly ever-welcoming female body in spiritualist thought (Owen 7).

As David Baker, Stephanie Green, and Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska rightfully claim, Gothic texts in which "themes of domesticity, anxiety and violation intersect" (4) must be viewed critically due to their dubious "representations of the politics of gendered embodiment" (3). Despite the more progressive tone of Neo-Victorian fiction, tropes such as "the presumptions of female complicity in rape" and the reinforcement of "the socio-cultural barriers to inclusiveness and acceptance" (*Ibidem*) are evidently maintained in Fox's novel. The villain's violation of the heroine's psychic and bodily boundaries reaches its peak when he steps over the threshold of her respectable Victorian bedroom to hypnotize and ravish her. Although Alice's blurry memory of this experience comes closer to the idea of seduction than of aggressive sexual abuse, the fact that she "simply lay there in silence, as if . . . trapped in a waking dream" (Fox 79) implies a lack of free will that prevents any articulation of distinctly autonomous sexual consent. Echoing Dianthe's condition as a mesmerized heroine controlled by her lover, this section seems to imitate other literal or figurative violations in Late Victorian fiction, such as Dracula's nighttime attacks on the sleep-walking Lucy (Holte 103). Similar

representations of entranced girls exposed to invasion by corruptive agents emphasize the debatable underpinnings of the period's gendered views on mediumship and spirit possession, since, as Susan Poznar notes, the emergence of equivalent images in Occult séances and sensation fiction coincided with changes involving women's property legislation during the decades of 1870 and 1880 (412). If the recurrent depiction of ravished or mesmerized young ladies could reveal unsympathetic reactions to "women's ownership of their bodies, their children and their property" (*Ibidem*), or, at best, articulate a covert critique of women's social, legal, and economic vulnerability, Fox's incorporation of this trope into her Neo-Victorian text hardly improves her mediumistic heroine's fate.

In addition to underlining Alice's powerless situation as a Victorian woman, the rape scene reproduces *fin-de-siècle* anxieties regarding the presumed fragility of national borders. Much like in "invasion scare" novels such as *The Blood of the Vampire*, Tilsbury's assault on the Anglo-Indian medium's permeable consciousness and vulnerable body conjures up a disturbing reminiscence of the Western colonial privilege to "penetrate . . . wrestle with . . . [and] give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery, as Disraeli once called it" (Said 44). As pointed out by Sara Suleri, rape has become a widely deployed metaphor for colonization in imperialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric alike, driven by "the feminization of the colonized subcontinent" in ethnographic, historical, and literary fields (16). Similarly, Keith Booker adds that this analogy has long remained a particularly exhausted cliché in representations of the British treatment of India (124), as can be observed, for instance, in Jawaharlal Nehru's nationalist critique of the colonial process: "They seized her body and possessed her, but it was the possession of violence. They did not know her or try to know her" (272). In a characteristically Victorian Gothic fashion, this trope is overturned in the form of a supernatural occurrence (Brantlinger 227), thus transforming Tilsbury's mesmeric transgression into a reverse colonization of the medium's body.

Conforming to similar narrative patterns of imperial decline, his arrival in England threatens not only to potentially overthrow the Empire's power over the Asian subcontinent, but also to infiltrate Alice's mind so as to awaken her 'savage' side, causing her to 'go native'. More specifically, Fox's re-enactment of the invasive return of the repressed from nineteenth-century fiction is enhanced by the fact that the heroine's fictionalization of the sexual union is compared to a vampiric attack:

> I did believe it was a dream, for I'd often had such fantasies, those decadent, lucid visions when my mind had embellished greatly upon the plights of romantic heroines in sensation novels I had read. Why, so shameful were my thoughts that at times I even imagined myself to be a victim of Varney the Vampire . . . I had not the strength, or the will in my heart, to resist when I thought of the vampire's mouth, and its press on my lips, and then my neck, and the gush of blood, and the hideous sound of sucking (79-80).

Fox's use of the penny dreadful *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood* (1845-1847) as a source of inspiration for her novel clearly contributes to Tilsbury's characterization as a transgressive invader (Fox 324), since this work marked a turning point in subsequent literary representations of the vampire as a seducer, "entering through windows at night to attack sleeping maidens . . . and displaying hypnotic powers" (Browning 159). Given the absence of blood-sucking beyond Alice's fantasies, Tilsbury may be accurately categorized, like Harriet Brandt, within the Late Victorian occultist concept of the psychic vampire (Ferguson, "Dracula" 62). Correspondingly, his sexual abuse of the protagonist embodies his infiltration across national, racial, geo-cultural, religious, and psychological boundaries, bearing the "implicit threat of violation" which Baker, Green, and Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska associate to the vampire's unrequested presence (1). As mentioned in Chapter Three, the vampire has long reflected human fears of invasion, particularly as a threat to "the familiar and the domestic of dominant values" (*Ibidem* 5). Although Fox's novel does not establish any explicit links between Alice and Tilsbury's interracial affair and the *fin-de-siècle* trope of vampiric miscegenation (Arata 639), their relationship reveals a simultaneous fascination and

mistrust towards "the Eastern mind" and its "unnatural" tendencies (Fox 99), thus replaying nineteenth-century anxieties regarding a literary character's relapse into "barbarism" as a consequence of contact with "more vigorous, 'primitive' peoples" (*Ibidem* 623).

Tilsbury seduces the Gothic heroine in typical mesmeric fashion, luring her into surrendering her consciousness to his influence: "Look, Alice… look into my eyes. Let your mind open and see your potential, the gift of the sight . . . Let the light pour from me and into you" (Fox 80, 82). In line with long-established associations between vampiric rape and unrestrained (often female) sexuality (Baker, Green and Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska 2), the victim is forever transformed after her contaminating intercourse with the assaulter, matching Lucy's subversive change from her former "purity" to an unrecognizably "voluptuous wantonness" after Dracula's bite (Stoker 196). Moreover, echoing nineteenth-century dangerous conceptions of the Eastern male as a figure who "exerts such sexual magnetism that the female virgins . . . whom he takes by force find themselves sexually awakened to their 'true' feminine desires in the very act of rape" (Boone 91), Tilsbury's hypnotic powers unveil the entranced woman's primal instincts, thus threatening to disrupt the surface of her purportedly civilized Self: "the fire I'd seen in his eyes, that fire was burning in my veins, and that fire, it possessed me" (Fox 82).[144] A similar impression of the 'Orient' as a place of "sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire" and "deep generative energies" (Said 188) is conveyed through her English 'mother's' demonizing depiction of Benares early in the novel:

> I could not have felt any further away from our Christian God. And perhaps my soul had been possessed, for I wanted to dance with the temple girls who began to shriek and whirl around . . . All beauty here is treacherous; a thin veneer for the lust and sin that seethes beneath the surface (9-10).

[144] The enforced nature of Alice and Tilsbury's relations presents additional orientalist stereotypes in *The Goddess and the Thief*, since, as noted by Steven Marcus in his study of Victorian pornography, the trope of dark-skinned men raping white female captives was a recurrent image in erotic novels such as *The Lustful Turk* (1828) (268). In agreement with Juan José Martín-González (192), such problematic fantasies have not entirely disappeared from Neo-Victorian fiction, as Fox's novel exemplifies.

After her transformative encounter with the non-Western Other, Alice not only remains haunted by eroticized fantasies involving "many-limbed gods", "dressed in tiger skins with tattooed snakes upon their arms" (136), but also finds herself "thinking about a dream in which [she'd] been given a different name, a name [she] had not remembered, even though the not knowing had gnawed at [her]" (91). Despite the fact that the recovery of her suppressed memories and the disclosure of her mixed ethnicity depend on her mediumistic abilities, her supernatural connection to Tilsbury does not entail a hospitable reception of her othered Indian ancestry. Instead of maintaining the plurality of the Self and the Other required in an ethical encounter with the stranger (Hollander 11), their mesmeric affinity is based upon the possession and suppression of Alice's agency, as well as on the perpetuation of detrimental orientalist stereotypes about the arrival of non-white subjects in the West, thus confirming Van Dam's proposal that contemporary Neo-Victorian novels still "seem to be concerned with the 'threat' of other races coming to Britain" (44). Rather, like Dianthe Lusk in Hopkins' Occult novel, Alice is only reconciled with her heritage through an otherworldly channelling of her mother's presence.

4.3.3 In Search of Mother India: Transcending the Diaspora through Matrilineal Communion

During her quest to sort out her diasporic identity, Alice's semi-conscious attempts to recover her forgotten personhood match Dianthe's efforts to recall her past: "I sometimes dream or have waking visions of a past time in my life . . . But when I try to grasp the fleeting memories they leave me groping in darkness" (Hopkins 196). Likewise, Alice's only connection to her othered ancestry is provided by the intersection between her psychic abilities and matrilineal storytelling. Bhamini's distant voice runs throughout the narrative, haunting almost every chapter, whispering though Alice's lines in the form of fragmentary tales to which

the medium obsessively returns in pursuit of guidance and support. Such ghostly traces of her mother's absence remain ever-present not only as recurrent enchanting recollections, but also as disembodied messages that often take over the protagonist during her trance states: "All around me vibrations were subtle, entering every pore in my body, playing my nerves like an instrument; so sensuous a stirring, and through them a whisper – a whisper that sounded like a spell" (Fox 232). Although the novel's open ending does not include any clear allusion to whether she will eventually discover her mother's true identity, Bhamini's final statement suggests that, one day, her words "*will lure her home*" (302, original emphasis). Her prayer accounts for her daughter's constant wish to return to India so as to be reunited with her mother (whom she believes to be her ayah), a longing which is addressed by means of various supernatural occurrences which facilitate a welcoming reception of the non-Western Other within the Victorian Self. Contrary to Harriet Brandt's utter rejection of her Afro-Jamaican forebearer as a "devilish negress" (Marryat 155), Alice's extrasensory unity with her "guardian angel" (Fox 14) dismantles, to a certain extent, the exclusionary rhetoric of nineteenth-century imperialism by transcending binary divisions between colonizer and colonized so as to offer a more comprehensive depiction of her racialized matrilineal heritage.

Alice's arrival in England is marked by her desire to identify with a maternal figure, as well as by her constant efforts to bridge her separation from her homeland, causing her aunt's exasperation: "You might have been the Miss Sahib, the spoiled princess in India. But now you are in England, and here in England you must stay – not clinging onto India's breasts!" (49). This gynomorphic image of the protagonist's home as a nurturing space evokes the popular anti-imperialist concept of the country as 'Mother India', an emotive image used by the Indian nationalist movement to voice postcolonial and feminist concerns since the late nineteenth century (Sinha 623). Based on a long tradition of mother goddess worship (Bagchi 66), this allegory draws attention to the colonial injustices committed during the British Raj, conjuring

up images of the abovementioned feminization, dismemberment and abuse of the South Asian continent (Suleri 16).[145] Whereas Fox's allusion to this iconography subtly highlights such postcolonial ghosts, the trope is mainly applied as an indicator of Alice's sacralised quest for her motherland.

Her relentless search for her matrilineal legacy is made particularly apparent during her frequently altered states of consciousness, such as her half-imagined encounter with the ghost of her presumed grandmother in a darkened reminiscence of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911).[146] In this maternal refuge, where she feels "cocooned . . . as if in a womb" (26), the heroine pairs the quest for her mother with her quest for identity: desperate to decipher her origins, she investigates the room "to find any clues to my grandmother's life – and some that might have come from mine. Like the elephants carved from ivory, or the hair combs made of tortoiseshell, or the embroidered Kashmir shawls, the sort that Mini often wore" (28). This compulsive search echoes Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh's scrutiny of her deceased mother's portrait, a scene which Gilbert and Gubar recall as a sign of the nineteenth-century woman writer's search for female predecessors, as well as of the multiple contradictory meanings ascribed to their foremothers' ghostly images (118). Sharing this mediumistic pursuit of matrilineal narratives and longing for the coherent meaning which she has been denied as a diasporic daughter of the Empire, Alice's is haunted by the same burning question: "*Is this what my mother looked like?*" (Fox 26, original emphasis). Most notably, she

[145] Although this theme is only mentioned as a passing allusion in Fox's novel, it is reasonable to assume that Alice's condition as a violated woman can be read a haunting re-enactment of her mother's rape, since Bhamini's servant status makes it likely that her illicit relationship with Alice's father was an enforced one.

[146] The protagonist of *The Secret Garden*, also an English child brought up in India, similarly examines carved ivory elephants while exploring her deceased mother's chambers: "Perhaps she slept here once . . . She stares at me so that she makes me feel queer" (Burnett 50). Among its pastiche of nineteenth-century influences, *The Goddess and the Thief* presents evident traces of Burnett's works, emulating the Late Victorian author's ambivalent position regarding othered constructions of India in imperialist ideologies (Strauß 77), as well as her enthusiasm for the *fin-de-siècle* Occult revival (Cadwallader 122). Despite the fact that Fox only mentions *The Secret Garden* among her sources of inspiration, Alice's over-imaginative mind brings her closer to the protagonist of *A Little Princess* (1905).

tries to establish an otherworldly communion with her deceased mother by trying on her wedding gown and going through her belongings:

> [T]he smell of that garment might draw my mother's spirit close. It did not. But still, I found some trace inside those books . . . I liked to stroke the pages, to touch what my mother's hands once touched . . . to try and dream my mother's dreams, to see the things that she had seen (26, 28, original emphasis).

The contrast between her inability to summon the ghost of her father's wife and the paranormal affinity she shares with her true mother, Bhamini, is only one of the manifold ways in which Fox's inclusion of spiritualist imagery in relation to maternal figures hints towards veiled aspects of Alice's former existence. Her psychic abilities allow her to make space for a transcultural self-perception beyond Victorian constructions of India as the Other, as manifested, for instance, in her syncretic vision of her grandmother, her mother, and herself as a matriarchal "little trinity" cutting across the boundaries of Hinduism and Christianity, like "Brahma and Vishnu and Shiva. Like God and The Son and The Holy Ghost. Like Alice, and Papa, and Mini" (29).[147] Fox's adaptation of Hindu iconography into Bhamini's stories and Alice's trance states also plays an essential role in the transmission of matrilineal heritage, thus contributing to the novel's configuration of the supernatural as portal into self-discovery. The recurrent apparition of Hindu deities marks the medium's internalization of her non-Western ancestry, which begins with her subversive identification with Bhamini's narrations outside fold of patriarchal order and imperial rule: "Whenever my father was not around I often mimicked Mini's voice, what the memsahibs in the regiment church might scorn and call my 'chi-chi' ways" (21).[148] Alice grants agency to Bhamini's silenced voice not only by imitating

[147] Although Alice is not aware of her mother's identity, she imagines her as a Hindu "goddess bride" as she discovers her wedding veil (29). This comparison, along with the allusion to Mini's true role in her family, hints towards the protagonist's unconscious knowledge of her motherline.

[148] Chi-chi: from Hindi *chhī-chhī*, a person of mixed British and Indian descent, or imitative of Hindi speech (Collins 2014).

her mother's speech at the margins of the British colonial context, but especially by continuing to channel her invisibilized matrilineal legacy in Victorian England.

The Gothic heroine's coming of age in the imperial metropolis entails a diasporic separation from the motherland as much as it involves an amnesic effacement of 'Mother India': "deep within my memory her features faded more each year . . . nothing more than shadows then, but glimpses of the Summerland, that place too far beyond my reach" (53). Beyond the Kristevan departure from the maternal body, the heroine's estrangement from her Indian past features the same racialized and gendered erasure exerted on Dianthe, whose othered selfhood is buried in the 'dark continent' of her unconscious. Likewise, it is only in the Summerland, the spiritualist afterlife (Kucich 70), that Alice can overcome this obliteration through the invocation of the same Hindu deities which populate her mother's stories. Through her powers of clairvoyance, the medium comes in contact with apparitions of gods and goddesses who guide her throughout her spectral navigation of the unsteady borders of Anglo-Indian personhood. As the story unfolds, her dreams and visions are populated with images of Shiva, Parvati, and Ganesh that trigger the plot forward by disclosing secrets and awakening comforting memories of her motherland. Her perception of such deities as familiar and nurturing elements challenges British nineteenth-century constructions of Hindu iconography as demonic embodiments of the radical difference of the 'Orient', as Partha Mitter explains: "Indian gods were regarded as monsters because they defied all ideals of rationality" at a time when "classical ideals of order and rationality were especially favoured by art critics" (8). For instance, Alice's mesmeric communications with Tilsbury are often followed by representations of Shiva, a deity who, in Richard Blurton's words, "often inhabits the farther limits of accepted activity" and is characterized by "stepping outside the norms of human behaviour" (Blurton 76). Accordingly, Alice depicts Shiva as an ambivalent figure who destabilizes the mutually exclusive dichotomies of Western logic:

> The palm of one hand was extended, as if it was in blessing. A second wielded an axe . . . this was Shiva. Shiva The Destroyer. Shiva The Cosmic Dancer, whose wheel of fire constantly turned to bring balance and harmony to the world. The light and the darkness, the good and the bad, all were found in Shiva's mind (140).

Shiva's in-betweenness mirrors Alice's condition as a racially liminal subject, as well as her paradoxical heritage as a half-Indian daughter of the British Empire. An even more recurrent image is that of the mother goddess Parvati, an equally paradoxical deity who also encompasses simultaneous forces of creation and destruction (Flood 177). As it has previously been mentioned, Alice's paranormal skills and consequent mystical contact with her motherland are enhanced by the hypnotic qualities of the silver idol, whose associations with female sexuality and fertility undoubtedly allude to Bhamini's presence and the protagonist's future maternal experience.

Moreover, her visions of the goddess as a flexible entity adopting diverse appearances reflect her complex self-perception as a hybrid subject, since it coincides with spiritualist conceptions of the medium's body as a site of contradiction, full of ambiguous dichotomies (Kontou 86). For example, shortly before she manages to escape Tilbury's control, Alice shifts away from the image of divine fecundity to see herself riding a tiger while embodying goddess Durga, Parvati's fierce warrior form (Fox 292). As Kohlke explains, the tiger, now India's national symbol, was once used in imperialist depictions of the Indian Rebellion as a metaphor for the "ineradicable barbarism and cruelty underlying Indian 'nature', requiring ever vigilant control by the British rule of law and order" ("Tipoo's Tiger" 368). However, this trope was later reclaimed not just by Indian nationalist movements (McLane 68), but also by Neo-Victorian retellings of the Mutiny in which it has been reinterpreted from a postcolonial perspective, "more subversively as an emblem of the desire for liberty and self-determination" (Kohlke, "Tipoo's Tiger" 370). Similarly, in opposition to Victorian antagonistic conceptions of the tiger as an allegory of the 'primitive' Indian threat, Alice's transformative perception of

the animal expresses her symbolic reconciliation with her motherland. Her physical and spiritual journey is framed between two contrasting encounters with a tiger, at the beginning and at the end of the novel. When she first sees the animal in India, she fears that her father will have it shot for trespassing their garden walls, and echoes colonial interpretations of the tiger as an allegorical primitive enemy: "I knew, deep in my heart, that the tiger could never be my friend. The tiger was wild and dangerous, a creature of instinct and appetite, a force of nature all its own" (18). However, the tiger's second irruption into her life entails a face to face encounter with the Other which results in an empowering image, as it coincides with her decision to break away from Tilsbury's mesmeric dominance and reclaim her own voice: "I knew the tiger was my friend, and . . . I sensed it was inviting me to climb and ride upon its back" (292). Considering the implications ascribed to tiger-related imagery in imperialist and postcolonial discourses, as well as the reworking of such concepts into Neo-Victorian fiction, Alice's final entranced embracing of the wild animal to adopt the form of goddess Durga suggests a subversive – albeit momentary – acknowledgement of Indian identity within her mediumistic personhood.

However, this final interaction with her othered heredity is followed by an eventual loss of her ability to commune with the dead, and, consequently, an effacement of her matrilineal ties with India: "I had forgotten my ayah's face. And I no longer knew her voice. My Mini no longer told her tales" (272). By the end of the novel, her unsatisfied yearning for her motherland is replaced by other maternal figures: her aunt's spiritualist friends, the Darlymple sisters. The fact that Western Spiritualism is eventually presented as a safer haven, protecting the heroine from strange foreign gods within its Euro-centric borders, confirms the Victorian Occult revival's inability to provide effective tools for the adequate reception of racially othered ghosts. Likewise, just as Marryat's Baroness Gobelli mirrors the *fin-de-siècle* spiritualist author's lack of a meaningful relationship with the non-Western other, Mercy's empty

mediumistic tricks draw attention to similarly hollow conversations with postcolonial phantasms in this Neo-Victorian text. Although the shelter provided by the Darlymple's matriarchal community grants Alice the stability she needs to rear her Anglo-Indian son, Fox's work lacks the definite hospitable encounter with the racial Other which characterises the closure of *Of One Blood*.

4.4 Conclusions

Despite exploring the flexibilization of racial and cultural boundaries through Victorian spiritualism, Alice remains, nonetheless, a daughter of the Empire, and the negotiation of her hybrid identity fluctuates between her privileged perspective as the overindulged 'Miss Sahib' and her cross-diasporic identification with the Eastern Other. Although her spiritual affinity with her matrilineal heritage makes her receptive to non-Western voices, the ghost of systemic colonial oppression which hovers over *The Goddess and the Thief* is never fully exorcized. Various nineteenth-century power structures based on race-class hierarchies remain unchallenged, such as the dynamics of the memsahib-ayah relationship between Bhamini and the protagonist. The re-enactment of such colonial moulds, along with the novel's emulation of the racial stereotypes displayed in Late Victorian 'invasion scare' literature, places Fox's text in a debatable position with relation to Anne Humpherys' distinction between "retro" and "aftered" Neo-Victorian works, that is to say, those endorsing a revisionist view on historical narratives, and those revisiting the Victorian past out of mere nostalgia (444). From a postcolonial point of view, the novel does not appear to engage in a genuine, insightful dialogue with the invisibilized Other, since it ends up reproducing the same imperialist and patriarchal discourses it seems determined to undermine. Although the empowering devices provided by spiritualist tropes facilitate the inclusion of Indian voices to touch upon crucial nineteenth-century preoccupations, such perspectives are rarely manifested through direct narrative

agency, and are, instead, filtered through Alice's mediumship, for which they remain almost as ghostly as in Victorian fiction. Therefore, it would be naïve to classify Fox's novel as an entirely hospitable account of the period's Anglo-Indian encounters, as it demonstrates the extent to which nineteenth-century constructions of the non-Western Other remain deeply ingrained in contemporary culture.

Furthermore, *The Goddess and the Thief* provides evidence of how the challenges posed by Victorian spiritualist discourse continue to be hauntingly relevant in theoretical re-evaluations of the possible limitations to full representation of the Other in present-day historical fiction. Returning to the analogy between the spiritualist medium's appropriation of identities and the contemporary writer's task of speaking for the Other in Neo-Victorian literature, both Alice's paranormal affinity with colonized subjects and Fox's conceptualization of 'India' are comparable to orientalist approaches to South Asian cultures in Victorian Occultism. Like *fin-de-siècle* mediums such as Blavatsky, Fox borrows superficial fragments from Hindu religious iconography in order to yoke them into her own syncretic depiction of Spiritualism: "for the purpose of this novel such tales have been much embellished" she acknowledges, "their threads rewoven to create a fiction that is all my own" (307). Echoing the spectacular inclusion of 'oriental' tropes and spirits as a form of entertainment for Western audiences in the Victorian séance, the invocation of postcolonial ghosts in *The Goddess and the Thief* results in an oversimplified pastiche of sacred imagery belonging to a culture infamously dominated by Victorian Britain.

Granted, the presence of spiritualist and mesmerist elements in the novel contributes to shedding light on the othered side of colonial processes by foregrounding the voice of South Asian historical figures like Duleep Singh, but the filtering of his experience through Alice's mediumistic perception brings one back to the question of whose narrative authority is truly in charge of retelling the Victorian past. In agreement with Van Dam, the fact that many authors

of Neo-Victorian fiction were "raised in cultures that were once responsible for taking the voices of the people they write about" complicates their representation of the non-Western Other, since they often end up "repeating the colonising processes of the Victorian period by assuming the right to speak for someone else" (270). This controversial aspect can be certainly appreciated in Fox's orientalist fictionalization of Anglo-Indian encounters, which denotes the dynamics of "thematization and conceptualization" that, according to Lévinas, "are not peace with the other but suppression or possession of the other", and therefore hinder any attempt at hospitable dialogue (qtd. in Hollander 11). Despite the subversive potential of occultist tropes and postcolonial rewritings of history, mediumship and séance circles in *The Goddess and the Thief* exemplify this effacing affirmation of the Other within a negation of its independence (*Ibidem*), thus demonstrating how the use of spiritualist discourse in Neo-Victorian fiction does not necessarily guarantee an equally redemptive retelling of all forgotten voices, but, instead, can summon the same oppressive ghosts it is meant to cast out.

CONCLUSIONS

> [T]his traffic with the dead was the best way to know, to observe, to love the living, not as they were politely over teacups, but in their secret selves, their deepest desires and fears. They revealed themselves to her . . . as they would never have done in polite society.
>
> A. S. Byatt, *Angels & Insects* (1992)

This thesis has offered an analysis of contrasting literary representations of interracial and cross-cultural encounters through the transoceanic lens of spiritualist discourse in Victorian, turn-of-the-century, and Neo-Victorian texts. One of its main aims has been to examine the various ways in which the phantasmal disclosure of the racialized Other in such works echoes nineteenth-century attitudes towards ethnic difference, thus interrogating the allegedly hospitable approach to the unfamiliar advocated by the spiritualist movement. A comparative study of *fin-de-siècle* and contemporary British and American novels has exposed the complexities of the varied spectrum of adaptations of spiritualist imagery to the reception of othered entities across time and space, ranging from the recovery of Afro-Diasporic and postcolonial perspectives, to the demonization of mixed-raced and non-Western subjects.

This fluctuation between voicing and silencing the Other poses a dilemma when investigating Occult fiction in terms of narrative hospitality. Indeed, as described in Chapter Two, certain spiritualist circles fomented opportunities for dialogue between peripheral and mainstream voices by providing non-white individuals with an empowering vehicle to visibilize their experiences, thus opposing a political background in which they were systematically silenced. Likewise, spiritualist practices sometimes facilitated an empathetic approach to non-Western cultures, as it can be observed in spiritualist anthropologists' attempts to understand foreign systems of belief, or in the syncretic appropriation of Eastern religions

by British occultists. Furthermore, the presence of spiritualist imagery in the Neo-Victorian text enables forgotten voices to return from beyond the grave, claiming their rightful role in fictionalized retellings of invisibilized histories. However, despite the apparently welcoming atmosphere of the spiritualist séance, I have found open cross-cultural conversations to be exceptions amidst the wider scope of literary texts associated with the movement.

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, its organization has pursued the itinerary of literary Spiritualism across the centuries and the Atlantic in order to observe the numerous factors which have contributed to its multifaceted and long-lasting repercussion. Following a preliminary overview of the transatlantic impact of the spiritualist movement on nineteenth-century literary culture, interwoven with the introduction of theoretical concepts which have been taken into account throughout the present study, the three chapters which conform the analytical section of this work have been structured according to shared motifs between diverse spiritualist conceptualizations of ethnic difference and the cross-racial encounters depicted in the literary texts in question. In order to culminate in contrasting examinations of the mixed-raced protagonists' supernaturalized relationship with the racialized Other hosted by their mediumistic Selves, each analytical chapter has begun with a correspondent contextualization of the novel's possible spiritualist influences against the backdrop of séance accounts, relevant cases of cross-cultural contact or intertextual reception within the spiritualist framework, pseudo-scientific theories embraced by the movement, and, only in the final chapter, the significant recovery of similar tropes through Neo-Victorian literature.

Subsequently, in Chapters Three and Four I have commented upon how nineteenth-century political and ideological changes affected the period's attitudes to racial difference, as well as on how these transformations were manifested in spiritualist circles and *fin-de-siècle* sensation fiction. Before tracing connections between the abovementioned aspects and the

work in question, attention has been payed to Hopkins' and Marryat's decisive involvement in occultist circles in order to demonstrate how spiritualist culture served not just as a source of inspiration for New Women writers, but also as a framework which facilitated their active participation in the public arena of scientific and political debate.

Moving on to character analysis, the following sections in each chapter outline the various ways in which the influence of the authors' engagement with Spiritualism and spiritualist-related ideologies such as eugenics or parapsychology can be appreciated in the novels' reception of racial Otherness (or, in Fox's case, her incorporation of orientalist and spiritualist imagery into Neo-Victorian cross-cultural encounters). Special emphasis has been placed upon the power dynamics surrounding the Gothic heroines' transgression of racial, gendered, and geo-cultural borders, thus disclosing how their mediumistic existence disrupts the Self/Other dichotomies maintained by hegemonic discourses of race and empire. More specifically, I have examined the protagonists' diasporic quest for their motherland and its influence on the daughters' self-perception as mixed-raced subjects, investigating whether the paranormal hosting of their othered ancestry entails a positive identification with their non-Western matrilineal heritage, or if, on the contrary, the mother's voice is rejected and smothered.

In addition to addressing the paradoxical nature of cross-racial encounters in the nineteenth-century Occult revival, I have also intended to prove how spiritualist culture provided useful tools for the renegotiation of the boundaries of racial and national identity, as well as the verbalization of effaced accounts of historical trauma which haunted the nineteenth-century collective imaginary. As it has been argued in each analytical chapter, the mediumistic abilities attributed to the mixed-raced protagonists connote diverse responses to social anxieties caused by turning points in nineteenth-century cross-racial relations, namely, the American Civil War, the Jamaican revolts, the Anglo-Sikh wars, and the Indian Mutiny. For the purpose

of exploring the impact of these military conflicts on the period's British and American personhood, issues connected to Victorian parapsychology and theories of hysteria have been taken into consideration in relation to the medium's process of self-exploration by hosting the uncanny and accessing erased memories. The return of the repressed, which runs through all the novels around which this study is centred, is central to the three Gothic heroines' mediumistic interaction with their past and their racial heredity. Just like the intrusion of ghosts from overseas territories triggered all sorts of reactions in the Victorian séance, so does the main characters' discovery of their othered ancestry result in ambivalent forms of reception. Most significantly, their supernaturalized psychic, hereditary, or sexual contact with the racial Other reveals how transatlantic Spiritualism serves as a useful network to decipher cross-racial relations not only through the lens of nineteenth-century mental science, but also encompassing interdisciplinary viewpoints on further aspects of Victorian culture, such as theories of racial difference and heredity, historiography, the 'Woman Question', African-American and (post)colonial subjectivities, social and geographical mobility and marginality, Orientalism, imperialist policies and anti-imperialist resistance, cross-cultural interactions and influences, as well as the contemporary impact of these issues, which continue to echo across time in Neo-Victorian literature.

The reconsideration of such matters through the trope of Spiritualism in contemporary historical fiction confirms Chakrabarty's thoughts on the relevance of investigating representations of the supernatural in a particular era in order to examine the polysemic ghosts that haunt the culture in question ("Pasts" 113). If conversing with spirits reveals the madwomen in the attic and skeletons in the closet of the nineteenth-century imagination, then the mediumistic act of rewriting the Victorians through occultist metaphors entails not only becoming better acquainted with our historical Other (Kucich and Sadoff 11), but also reflecting upon which of these figurative monsters still loom over our modern selves. As Mrs

Papagay muses in Byatt's *Angels & Insects*, the spiritualist "traffic with the dead" is "the best way to know, to observe, to love the living . . . in their secret selves, their deepest desires and fears" ("Conjugial Angel" 197). While the mediumistic author scrutinizes the Victorian unconscious, disclosing the silences and absences of the traditional master discourse, the textual séance table functions simultaneously as a window into the past and a mirror displaying the inequities that have shaped our present culture, thus managing, as Emily Scott claims, to "prompt the reader to engage in the process of exploring their own psychological terrain and to confront the Other within the self" (71-72). Fulfilling this fearful identification with the uncanny, the persistence of Victorian revenants in present-day works draws attention to the largely unprocessed trauma caused by the long shadow of nineteenth-century imperialist policies, as well as to the disturbing possibility of recognizing similar prejudices in today's conceptualizations of the non-Western Other. For instance, addressing the recurrence of nineteenth-century racist constructs in contemporary literature, Van Dam convincingly argues that "[t]his process of identity construction, which depends on a self-other binary, continues in neo-Victorian fiction, pointing to a present-day insecurity with regard to people's social, (multi)cultural or 'racial' identity" (35). In this way, the traumatic summoning of the nineteenth century may be read as a form of self-evaluation through which Western culture is forced to face its phantoms, albeit not always fully exorcizing them. Returning to the question of which spirits were more likely to be allowed to share their narratives at the Victorian séance table, it is equally necessary to consider which 'subaltern pasts' (Chakrabarty, "Minority Histories" 101) make their way into the Neo-Victorian text, and which suppressed histories remain in oblivion, invisibilized and waiting to enter the mainstream literary canon.

An additional aspect taken into consideration throughout this research is the conceptualization of the mixed-raced female body and mind as mediumistic. Whereas such representations of ghostly women whose mobile in-betweenness allows them to cut across the

racialized and gendered boundaries of the Self/Other binary allude to Victorian fears concerning miscegenation, imperial decline, and emerging forms of social and geographical mobility, their mediumistic attributes also carry an empowering potential which endows them with the ability to transcend culturally established borders. Epitomizing Cixous' vision of a feminine subjectivity that flies above the dichotomies of the patriarchal social order, Hopkins', Marryat's and Fox's novels create a mediumistic sensibility that indulges in "the wonder of being several" and "derives pleasure from this gift of alterability" (Cixous, "Medusa" 889). As argued throughout this study, this destabilization of duality is an essential trait of these "racially phantasmagoric female figures" (Brooks 22). In their attempt to reassemble their fragmented personhood while being configured as "a floating signifier" (Brody 18), these biracial mediums are distinguished by an "(un)readability" and "perplexing, multivalent resonance" (Brooks 20) which matches the ambivalence of the woman writer who, weaving her story from a marginal position, has "inscribed with her body the differential, punctured the system of couples and opposition" (Cixous, "Medusa" 887).

Even though the eventually hospitable reconciliation with a phantasmal matrilineage is only fulfilled in *Of One Blood*, all three 'tragic mulattas' perform their occultist in-betweenness to undermine, to diverse extents, the traditional conceptions of selfhood by which their existence is alienated. For example, Dianthe's trance states connect her to the orature of her African matriarchal lineage, providing an escape from the racist and misogynistic oppression to which she is subjected. In like manner, Harriet's mesmeric skills allow her to redefine the rigid binaries of Victorian femininity and racial identity through her vampiric seduction of white British men as a Creole New Woman. Lastly, Alice's clairvoyance functions as a narrative device to establish cross-cultural links between her porous consciousness and her motherland, thus unsettling conceptual oppositions between the 'civilized' British Self and the 'savage' colonized Other in nineteenth-century imperialist thought.

Moreover, their role as vessels for the disruptive racialized subject, configured through the hardly visible trace of their illegitimate interracial parentage, reinforces the mediumistic potential for verbalizing the unspeakable, giving voice to suppressed histories of sexual violence deeply ingrained in processes of colonization and enslavement: Harriet and Dianthe share their matrilineal link to the oppression of women of African ancestry in colonial Jamaica and the American South, while Alice's heredity is rooted in the objectification of Indian 'bibis' for the pleasure of British men under the Raj. For this reason, their possessed female anatomies not only bear witness to the untold narratives implied by their non-white and non-Western blood, but also give way to additional metaphors regarding the gendered impact of the invasion and exploitation of territories. Whether alluded to by the nineteenth-century power dynamics of interracial mingling, the exertion of male mesmeric control over the heroine's mind and body, or scenes depicting non-consensual sexual unions such as Tilsbury's vampiric seduction of Alice, the rape trope perpetually looms over these Gothic narratives, calling attention to problematic aspects posed by the spiritualist feminization of hospitality. As clearly exemplified in Fox's novel, the dissolution of boundaries entailed by the medium's permeable figure does not always guarantee her autonomous retelling of history. Rather, this possession may suggest a state of vulnerability akin to that of equally feminized conquered territories in imperialist metaphors for colonization (Suleri 16), for which such physical and psychic violations constitute an additional form of resurrecting accounts of systematic coercion and assault which lay at the core of collective traumas of the era.

By the same token, such interactions reveal the limitations of mediumistic hospitality, showing how, despite all their progressive connotations, spiritualist practices can also endorse forms of patriarchal control through enforced intrusions into the female body. Although Harriet's transgressive characterization places her as the invasive vampire rather than as the passive victim, Dianthe and Alice clearly present traits of the Lévinasian feminized notion of

hospitality which configures the woman as a purportedly ever-welcoming intermediary for communication with the Other due to her own inherent Otherness (Lévinas, *Totality* 154). This thesis would have been incomplete without feminist re-evaluations of this concept, mentioned in Chapter Two, but largely applicable to the rest of the study. Thinking back to the complexities arising from supernaturalized constructions of sexual and racial difference in the nineteenth-century imaginary, the unreliable narrative agency assumed by the protagonists can be decoded by observing the correlations between mediumistic hospitality and Lévinas' nullifying vision of the feminine as a silent absence (*Time* 88), a figure written out of patriarchal discourse (Irigaray, "Questions" 110), an unnamed "no-body wrapped in veils" (Cixous, "Sorties" 200). Despite the advantages of mediumistic language as a device to articulate the "repressed counter-narrative" of the dead and silenced (Kucich 95), one is faced with a two-fold dilemma when examining controversies regarding voice, representation and the anxiety of authorship in 'trance novels' (Willburn, *Possessed* 115), since neither the medium nor the ghost can be said to fully hold power over the articulation of their story: the trance speaker's words are not her own, as her dominion is constrained by the passivity and instrumentality ascribed to women's anatomies in spiritualist discourse; whereas the non-Western 'spirits' she channels are bound to talk through someone else, which implies an appropriation of their perspective that makes the reader wonder at what elements might have been lost in translation.

As Spivak mentions in her postcolonial reading of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, full identification with the racialized Other in the nineteenth-century imperialist context leads to insanity (250). It is Antoinette's recognition of "the ghost", the "woman with streaming hair" (Rhys 153), as her own reflection in the mirror what discloses her mental instability and subsequent suicide in accordance with "the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject" as an "allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism" (Spivak 251). Much like Brontë's Creole madwoman, the mediumistic heroines' recognition of othered constructions of

themselves amidst a culture in which the mixed-raced subject is "denied synthesis and meaning" (Ferguson, *Determined Spirits* 121) is followed by death or approaching madness: Dianthe is poisoned and perishes as soon as she is reconciled with her black matrilineage, Harriet is labelled as a dangerous hysteric and commits suicide, and, despite Fox's Neo-Victorian twists, Alice decides to remain separated from 'Mother India' shortly after her identification with the tiger-riding goddess makes her question her sanity: "Was I mad to think those shadows real? Had I truly been infected with Tilsbury's delusions?" (Fox 292). In Victorian culture, hosting the ghost, whether by means of paranormal occurrences or through participation in an estranged African, Creole, or Indian matrilineage entails recognizing oneself as abject. Whereas such preoccupations with the pursuit of phantasmal mothers in the struggle for autonomous expression and self-definition clearly echo the "loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors" (Gilbert and Gubar 50), the doubly silenced mediums' quest for a matrilineal narrative reveals the importance of the interplay between gender and the geopolitics of race, since it is complicated by its internalization of the further invisibilized non-white Other whose annihilation was the price for Western female subjectivity (Spivak 251).

Therefore, another main concern of this study is whether the mediumistic language surrounding the protagonists of the works in question contributes to redressing the daughters' fragmented subjectivity by invoking the disembodied presence of matrilineal precursors, or if, on the contrary, these spiritualized stories comply with the systemic erasure of enslaved and colonized female perspectives. As observed in this thesis, such preoccupations are manifested through the maternal qualities attributed to feminine hospitality (Still 21), evidenced, for instance, by Dianthe and Alice's quest to return to a gynomorphic 'Mother Africa' and 'Mother India'. Besides evoking the birth of nineteenth-century nationalist and anti-imperialist movements which are crucial to the novels' contextualization, such allegories shed light on the

protagonists' mixed reception of their motherlands and motherlines, ranging from the cross-diasporic return to Walker's "mother's garden" (409) in *Of One Blood* to the matrophobic suppression of monstrous ancestry in *The Blood of the Vampire*. Whereas the African mother's voice is reclaimed through Dianthe in a mediumistic process of disruptive storytelling, Harriet's symbolic matricide and subsequent suicide fulfil not just the effacement of her excessively 'savage' expression, but also the eugenic aspiration to wipe out the allegedly corruptive trace of the colonized subject from the imperial gene pool. Lastly, Alice's intricate relationship with India discloses additional complications due to Fox's transgenerational and transhistorical channelling of the absent mother's voice. Despite the fact that her mediumistic abilities clearly facilitate an enriching dialogue between colonizer and colonized, allowing the latter to demand justice by verbalizing marginalized accounts of the Anglo-Indian conflict, the Other's speech is tainted with orientalist constructs, thus avoiding the consolidation of an authentic postcolonial subjectivity. In a similarly ambivalent manner, her paranormal communion with Bhamini's tales involves a positive identification with her non-Western heredity, as well as an indirect mediation of her Indian mother's muffled story, yet this matrilineal transmission is eventually interrupted when the protagonist decides to remain in England and forgets her progenitor's face.

Among the manifold thought-provoking implications suggested by these recoveries and rejections of the maternal territory, there are certain aspects worth highlighting before concluding this dissertation. One of them is the relevance of the ethnicity factor in matrilineal connections, which, as noted by Yi-Lin Yu, may distinguish Gilbert and Gubar's generalized view of matrilineage as the quest for female precursors in the Western literary canon (53) from more specific, underrepresented experiences of transgenerational dialogue among women belonging to racialized, marginalized, or migrant communities (Yu 22). Although matrilineal images are obviously not equally applicable to all female subjectivities, they provide, as

observed in this thesis, fitting symbols to decode the mixed-raced heroine's thwarted self-perception, as well as her labyrinthine process of seeking, gathering and remembering fragments of her dismembered or eradicated family history. Considering this intersectional reading of the mother's voice, the 'trance novels' analyzed in this study include diverse examples of how the complexities arising from the (im)possibility of establishing diasporic matrilineal narratives within a (Neo-)Victorian spiritualist context draw attention to similar obstacles encountered in the creation of othered female literary traditions at the margins of Western intellectual élites.

Taking into account Gilbert and Gubar's assertions on the correlation between matrilineal concerns and nineteenth-century women's writing, it is no wonder that Hopkins, Marryat and Fox borrowed spiritualist concepts to make their doubly silenced heroines speak. Just like Victorian 'mediomaniacs' embraced their allegedly passive or hysterical state in order to subvert traditional notions of femininity (Owen 8), so did unconventional women like the *fin-de-siècle* authors in question make their voices heard by becoming part of occultist circles, publishing sensation fiction, and identifying with their outcast, mobile, invisibilized and entranced heroines. In addition to offering a useful means to deal with the anxiety of authorship by facilitating the pursuit of ghostly maternal precursors, Anglo-American Spiritualism constitutes a crucial source of inspiration for Hopkins' subversive articulation of her Pan-Africanist philosophy through a black matrilineal consciousness, Marryat's flexibilization of Victorian gender roles and the use of her transoceanic background to address the aftermath of the Jamaican revolts and its impact on the *fin-de-siècle* imaginary, and Fox's mediumistic reanimation and re-evaluation of nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian tensions.

Significantly, although the Gothic novels resulting from such occultist influences expose the emergence of increasingly hostile attitudes to racial difference in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is sometimes unclear whether such prejudices are challenged or

(albeit unconsciously) supported in Marryat's and Fox's texts. Given the perplexing diversity of cross-racial relations within the allegedly ever-welcoming spiritualist movement, one may conclude that, much like the ghosts that infiltrated the Victorian séance room, the multi-dimensional reception of racialized Otherness in spiritualist-related literature resists a fixed categorization. Far from always corresponding to the transcultural melting pot which nineteenth-century occultists so triumphally advertised, Anglo-American Spiritualism may, instead, be understood as a fascinating product of its time, reflecting its practitioners' dreams and nightmares amidst an equally intriguing era.

Accessing this particular historical period through the interdisciplinary lens afforded by the literary Occult revival demonstrates how the plentiful meanings of spiritualist culture offer an inexhaustible source of material in the field of (Neo-)Victorian studies, thus extending far beyond the long-lasting impact of the Fox sisters' spectacular tricks. In a certain manner, just like the Victorian clairvoyant delighted in the discovery of the thrilling anecdotes of the dead by scribbling on the planchette, the completion of this thesis has demanded a somewhat mediumistic task from the researcher, who, having concluded her pleasurable inquiry into the polyphonic ghosts inhabiting the pages of the chosen novels, now hopes to continue exploring the liminal presence of further phantasmal voices roaming the transatlantic nineteenth century.

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