

Science, Ghosts and Vision: Catherine Crowe's Bodies of Evidence  
and the Critique of Masculinity

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**Abstract**

This chapter looks at the ghost tales of the prominent mid-Victorian spiritualist Catherine Crowe. In an early precursor to the Society for Psychical Research's 1895 'Census of Hallucinations', her most famous book *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) published people's tales of poltergeists, prophetic dreams, ghost sightings and uncanny coincidences through stories, anecdotes and reported personal experience. Crowe believed in the naturalness of the supernatural and her intention was to present the plethora of what she saw as 'evidence' to the scientific community for a hearing and as a starting place for examination. The body of evidence Crowe presented however, was, far from being objective, distanced, testable or repeatable, subjective, personal, anecdotal and transient. Placing emphasis on intuition and experience, Crowe wanted science to *look in a different way* at psychic experiences, and to expand its narrow, supposedly rational and objective vision. Her tales look directly at white, upper class Victorian men, and their bodies are presented for scrutiny as part of the evidence she wants (masculine) science to look at. This chapter argues that these ghost tales disrupt any narratives of unified, whole masculinity through the visibility and the presence of the male body and the questioning of science and rationality. Today, Crowe has fallen out of fashion; however, her work has proved to be prophetic in its concerns. This chapter argues that in Crowe's own bodies of evidence, she blends the empirical and the spiritual, the objective and the subjective in a way that undermines the dominant certainties of science, empirical vision and masculinity.

**Key Words:** science, experience, vision, insight, evidence, masculinity

The Victorian era, albeit one of rationalism and fictional realism, was filled with ghost stories and the ghost stories of Catherine Crowe were among the most popular of all. A prominent mid-nineteenth century writer, Spiritualist and genuine believer in ghosts, Crowe is largely forgotten today. *The Encyclopedia of British Writers*, however, claims that she was one of the most popular writers in her time (97), and Colin Wilson asserts that Crowe ‘was once as famous as Dickens or Thackeray’ (v). For a long time now though, she has fallen out of fashion. Scholars and critics often cite her work but there has been less sustained investigation of either her novels or her ghost stories. This essay argues that despite this Crowe is an important and quite radical mid-Victorian figure who took an early feminist stance, questioning masculinist, rational science and Victorian ideals of masculinity as well as upholding women’s rights in her novels. Crowe passionately believed ghosts and paranormal phenomena to be real and one of the main reasons she published her ghost stories was in an attempt to get science and scientists to take the subject seriously. Her ghost tales are unusual for Victorian ghost stories in that most of them claim to be real. The Victorians were of course used to ghost stories but these were invariably fictional and written merely for purposes of entertainment. Crowe, however, presented her ‘true’ tales as evidence to the scientific community. Crowe advocates and champions a feminised science, one that is ‘humble’ and enquiring and which is willing to investigate the supernatural (*Night Side* 17). In the content of her stories too, her representations of male ghosts and male ghost seers question the conventional forms of masculinity apparent in the mid-Victorian period. It is often argued that Victorian ghost stories are radical particularly in relation to gender roles and representations, and this is particularly true of Crowe.<sup>1</sup> This essay looks at the concept of the ‘real’ or ‘told’ ghost story and argues that through her tales Crowe questioned, challenged

and interrogated the bastions of Victorian masculinity: science, rationality, vision and the male body.

Crowe claims veracity for her ghost stories. Stretching the boundaries of the idea of the 'ghost story' her tales come from accounts of personal experience. As Gillian Bennett notes,

She gathers together a huge number of narratives from respectable people who have actually had psychic experiences and hopes that the stories will speak for themselves.

Traditional legends from literary sources are placed beside contemporary stories, family legends and personal experience stories which [Crowe] has either sought out or picked up (Bennett 12–13).

Amassing a vast amount of material, she published people's tales of poltergeists, prophetic dreams, ghost sightings and uncanny coincidences in two books: *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) and *Ghosts and Family Legends: A Volume for Christmas* (1859). It is interesting to note that the publication of *The Night Side of Nature* just predates the advent of Spiritualism in England. Although Spiritualism began in 1848 with the Fox sisters in America hearing rapping from the spirits, the movement which followed this event did not reach England until 1849, the year after Crowe's book was published (Wilson x). Uninfluenced by the phenomenon that Spiritualism was to become, Crowe's work shows independence of thought and a clear feeling for the spiritual needs of her time. The research methods Crowe uses in *The Night Side of Nature* also anticipate the modes of investigation adopted nearly fifty years later by the respectable (and largely male) Society for Psychical Research [SPR] in their massive 'Census of Hallucinations' where they too collected people's 'real' experiences of ghosts and supernatural phenomena (Davies 8). In 1897, Adeline Sergeant noted that 'if Mrs Crowe had lived in these days she would have found herself in intimate relations with the Society for Psychical Research and would have had no reason to excuse herself for the choice

of her subject' (152). For the SPR the correspondence they received detailing people's experiences of ghosts provided testimony from which they hoped they might be able to 'promote a scientifically valid theory of the ghost' (McCorristine 133). Likewise, for Crowe the primary intention of collecting the tales was to present the testimony of people who had witnessed phenomena to the scientific community for investigation and she was adamant that it was science and scientific method that was needed to prove the truth.

Crowe believed that the supernatural was a part of the natural order and would eventually be encompassed into the scientific view of nature. In *The Night Side of Nature* Crowe writes that 'of the phenomena in question, I do not propose to consider them as supernatural; on the contrary I am persuaded that the time will come, when they will be reduced strictly within the bounds of science' (22).<sup>2</sup> The whole of the introduction to *The Night Side of Nature* provides an impassioned plea to science to put aside what she sees as biased scepticism. She believed that, '[i]f scientific men could but comprehend how they discredit the science they really profess, by their despotic arrogance and exclusive scepticism, they would surely, for the sake of that very science they love, affect more liberality and candour' (*Night Side* 16). Crowe saw it as science's duty to investigate ghostly and supernatural phenomena and to be less certain and arrogant. She believed that by refusing to investigate, scientists were invalidating the scientific method and indeed science itself. 'No one that lives can assert that the reappearance of the dead is impossible', she writes, 'all he has a right to say is, that he does not believe it' (*Night Side* 19). Without evidence and without rigorous examination the denial of ghosts and apparitions is itself merely an unfounded belief.

For a modern reader the way that the mid-Victorian public took to Crowe's work is somewhat baffling. The tales are all jumbled up together, they are often very short, the narrative is disjointed and they do not equate to the flowing realism we are accustomed to in

Victorian ghost stories. One reason for this style of ghost stories is that Crowe's work is deeply rooted in oral traditions. Folklore and ghost tales had been collected before and used as evidence to prove the reality of spirits to the public at large and Crowe's narrative style equates more to these Eighteenth Century picaresque narratives.<sup>3</sup> *The Night Side of Nature* is at its core a folklore narrative, or more specifically a collection of folk tales published long before the Victorian/Edwardian re-turn to the English oral tradition that came later in the century.<sup>4</sup> At the time that Crowe was writing, oral narratives and folklore were not seen as serious forms of story-telling. The stories Crowe documents, gleaned from talk or gossip about ghosts, far from being objective, distanced, testable or repeatable, are inevitably subjective, personal, anecdotal and transient. This is apparent in the following quote taken from the 'Haunted Houses' chapter:

The story of the Brown Lady at the Marquis of T's. In Norfolk is known to many. The Honorable HW told me that a friend of his, while staying there, had often seen her and had one day inquired of his host, 'Who was the lady in brown that I meet frequently on the stairs?' Two gentlemen whose names were mentioned to me, resolved to watch for her and intercept her. They at length saw her, but she eluded them by turning down a staircase, and when they looked over she had disappeared. Many persons have seen her.

There is a Scots family of distinction, who, I am told, are accompanied by an unseen attendant, whom they call 'Spinning Jenny'. She is heard spinning in their house in the country, and when they come to town she spins here; servants and all hear the sound of her wheel. I believe she accompanies them no farther than to their own residences, not to those of other people. Jenny is supposed to be a former housemaid of the family, who was a great spinner, and they are so accustomed to her presence as to feel it no annoyance.

The following very singular circumstance was related to me by the daughter of the celebrated Mrs S. [ . . . ] (*Night Side* 222)

This type of narrative makes up much of the book. Like folktales, there is little atmosphere and, despite being directly about haunting and ghost-seeing, there is a curious lack of emotion. No one seems scared of the ghosts mentioned and they seem to lack mystery or menace: they just exist. The tales are bare, there is no characterization, and the ghost seers are not named. The tone of the narrative is of Crowe reporting what she has heard in what appears to be a quite objective fashion. The stories themselves are mere snippets; disjointed and uncontextualised. All of these tales have been ‘told’ to Crowe, and there is an overlying sense that they are also ‘known to many’ and that these ghosts have been witnessed by more than one person. This underscores the idea of ‘evidence’. The ghosts have been seen by a community of people and most people she argues have had some experience of ghosts. She points to the weight of personal evidence, stating,

I scarcely meet anyone, man or woman, who, if I can induce them to believe that I will not publish their names, and am not going to laugh at them, is not prepared to tell me of some occurrence of the sort as having happened to themselves, their family or friends. (*Night Side* 142)

We have all, she suggests, experienced something unaccountable or heard of it happening to someone who is close to us. These stories are worth retelling and have value.

The call to science to take the idea of the supernatural seriously became much more widespread as the nineteenth century progressed, and in the latter part of the century, eminent scientists who were also Spiritualists, such as William Crookes and Alfred Russel Wallace, emerged. However, in the 1840s and 50s, Crowe’s views and her work were received with ridicule in many quarters. In a review of *The Night Side of Nature* in 1858, Roscoe William Caldwell writes that,

The more wonderful a story is, the more ardently she welcomes it; the more incredible it is, the less is she inclined to question the foundation on which it rests; and in her own heart she believes it impossible that it should be false, provided it be but sufficiently near being impossible. If she speaks of evidence at all, it is boldly to reverse all the usual and natural practice of the mind. (*National Review* 2)

Newby questions the entire body of evidence that Crowe presents and she herself is seen to be partial, biased and irrational. He deemed the stories to be irrational, untrustworthy and often just downright untrue. Newby's was not the only mocking and pejorative review or notice that she received. Many people were extremely rude about Crowe, including Charles Dickens who wrote 'there is the common fault of seeking to prove too much. [ . . . ] She stands by her weakest ghost at least as manfully as her strongest' (quoted in Barnard 202). Dickens, of course, wrote ghost stories, but he often mocked the genre in his own work and they were very firmly fictional pieces which, it seems, saved them from tipping over into the ridiculous. There were also rumours about Crowe's sanity and later she felt the need to refute an apocryphal story about her running naked through the streets of Edinburgh convinced that she was invisible (*Daily News* 1854). Colin Wilson says though that by the time *The Night Side of Nature* was published, 'Mrs Crowe was a lady of considerable celebrity and she was not to be silenced by ridicule; it only put her on her mettle. She was deeply convinced that the correct attitude towards the unknown was an open minded willingness to investigate' (Wilson viii). Not to be put off, Crowe continued in her determination to make science listen, to persuade it to examine and observe the ghostly and to pay serious attention to people's own stories.

Although Crowe presented her ghost stories as evidence to science, she was sceptical about science itself and whether it was equipped to deal with the subject of the supernatural. She argues that,

To minds which can admit nothing but what can be explained and demonstrated, an investigation of this sort must appear perfectly idle: for while, on the one hand, the most acute intellect or the most powerful logic can throw little light on the subject, it is, at the same time [ . . . ] equally irreducible within the present bounds of science; meanwhile, experience, observation, and intuition must be our principle if not our only guides. (*Night Side* 16)

Current scientific method, its assumptions and ideals will, she argues not throw light onto the subject or onto the ghosts themselves. What is needed is a change in science in order to be able to investigate such phenomena. Crowe cites the necessity of experience and intuition, (both associated with the feminine), and she argues, it is these that will allow contemporary scientific practice to expand its view and its scope of observation. She wanted science to look in a different way at psychic experiences, to widen its narrow, supposedly objective vision. Science had for a very long time been associated with the masculine, the logical, the rational and the objective, and many twentieth-century feminists argue that science has been historically almost exclusively the province of the male and the masculine.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in terms of the very male-dominated mid-Victorian scientific community, Crowe was trespassing into male territory. In addition to this she was advocating, not logic or pure reason, but intuition, experience and insight and presenting science with ‘evidence’ presented through a feminised form of story-telling.

In contemporary criticism the ghost story is a genre that is very often cited as a female one.<sup>6</sup> Diana Wallace states that ‘The ghost story as a form has allowed women writers special kinds of freedom, not merely to include the fantastic and supernatural, but also to offer critiques of male power and sexuality which are often more radical than those in more realistic genres’ (57). Crowe’s ‘real’ ghost stories have these critiques embedded in them in both form and content. One of the reasons that ghost stories in general are seen as radical and



subversive is through the very presentation in the narratives of the ghost itself; particularly the female ghost. The manifestation and observation of the female ghost allows for some visibility, agency and physical presence for women.<sup>7</sup> Ghost stories allowed women to be seen and to occupy a place that was not just within the domestic space or bounded by the physical body. Vanessa Dickerson argues that women in middle class Victorian homes were often invisible and taken for granted. The female ghost, however, cannot be ignored, and in this way, the female ghost body is often seen as radical and transformative (Dickerson 1996). Not all ghosts are those of women; Crowe's work includes many ghosts who are male.

In terms of gender position, seeing a female ghost is very different to seeing the ghost of a man. Sight and vision were extremely important to the Victorians and much has been written about the rise of the importance of vision in Victorian culture and society.<sup>8</sup> In relation to the concept of vision, many theorists working from the margins argue that there has been an historical privileging of sight itself: *ocularcentrism*, wherein there is a complicity of the privileging of sight with white, Western, masculine power (Crary 1998). The main criticisms are of the objectifying, objective, scientific, medical gaze, which predominates in Western culture from the Enlightenment onwards and which peaks in the Victorian era. The argument is that during the Enlightenment, with the decline in religion, with the rise of the 'rational' sciences and the changing views of nature as something to be conquered, there came a change in the way that people actually saw things. Vision became the predominant sense; but a certain kind of scientific, classifying, objective vision. This gaze, in colonial times and beyond, was turned on to the other, taking a 'scientific', 'objective' stance that was intimately bound up with those who were in the position of power and could look, as opposed to those who were disempowered and were looked at. And in colonial, Victorian times, it was white, upper class men who could look. They themselves were emphatically not to be objectified, or

in any real or metaphysical sense to be made visible at all. Victorian men were not meant to be looked at.

Crowe's ghost stories interrogate this type of vision, but they were not the only ghost tales to do so. The question of vision is integral to the ghost story genre. Is seeing believing? Victorian ghost stories are usually about seeing ghosts and very often the ghost returns in order to be seen. Ghost stories often tell us that ghosts come back for a reason: in order to redress a wrong that has happened to them, or to atone for a crime they committed whilst alive, or to show relatives where they hid money or other things that were precious to them.<sup>9</sup> And in all these cases ghost bodies need to be seen. Ghost stories in this way often reverse the gender binary of the concepts of body and mind and the relations between those who can look and those who are seen. These stories which feature male ghosts enforce a radical re-embodiment onto white men by making the male (ghost) body subject to scrutiny.

In Crowe's ghost stories it is often men and their ghosts that are visible. In her 1859 book of ghost stories *Ghosts and Family Legends: A Volume for Christmas* there are many male ghosts that seek attention and who make themselves visible to the living for a specific purpose. In 'The Swiss Lady's Story' a young soldier called Louis is murdered by his brother for money. A family move into the house where he was killed and some of the women of the house see his ghost as it lingers on the stairs. Crowe tells us what happens to a maid who saw the ghost for the first time. We hear that

as she got to the foot of the stairs, she saw an officer in uniform, going up before her. He had his cap in his hand and his sword at his side; and supposing he was some friend of her masters, she was going to follow him up, but when he reached the landing, to her surprise and horror, he disappeared through the wall. (*Ghosts and Family Legends* 87)

The ghost of this young man has the accoutrements of middle class masculinity and manliness; he is a soldier, an officer, recognizable by his uniform, his cap and his sword, and he does not look out of place in this upper-middle class house. He could be a friend of the master of the house. However, he is seen disappearing, penetrating and penetrated by the wall. Louis's body has been interred in this wall by his murdering brother and his ghost only ever appears in the domestic space on the stairs near to where his body lies. Louis is a ghost with a purpose in mind: his spirit needs to be seen in order that someone will discover the remains of his walled-up body and give it a proper burial. This is a not unusual account of the ghost of a murder victim; however, if we consider this within the context of white, middle class Victorian masculinity this seemingly simple story becomes more radical and more disturbing. Louis's body is confined to the domestic space, and it is only visible to the women of the house – first the maids and then the brave daughter of the house, Mary. His body is thus entirely open to scrutiny from women and from the lower classes. There is nothing left of this young man apart from the manifestation of his body and the *raison d'être* for the apparition is that his body needs to be seen in a way that is entirely antithetical to the ideal of Victorian manliness.

As a dead man Louis has no substantial influence or place in the world. He is of here and yet not. Entirely removed from any position of power his is a desiring and a needing (no) body – a reactive (no) body. Pointing the way to a moral conclusion – the discovery of his body and the apprehension of the murderer – he still cannot act upon the world and requires others, here the women, to act for him. Silenced and insubstantial he relies on his visibility. When the heroine of the story, Mary, confronts the ghost this is what we are told she relates afterwards to her family. She tells them,

I was not frightened! [...] and I stopt [sic] with one foot on the next stair, and looked at it steadily, that I might be sure I was not under a delusion. The face was pale, and it

looked at me with such a sad expression, that I thought if it was really a ghost, it might wish to say something; so I asked it.'

'Asked it! They all exclaimed. What did you say?'

'I said if you have anything to communicate, I conjure you – speak!'

'And did it?'

'No, answered Mary, but it gave a sign. (88)

The ghost of Louis is merely visible body, subject to Mary's gaze. Mary looks 'steadily' at 'it'. Louis as ghost is de-humanised, insubstantial and so marginalised he is barely there. This is the visible body of a white, middle class man that is so feminised, so scrutinized and that is referred to as 'it'. And in terms of Victorian masculinity this is an entire reversal of the sanctioned ideal (and supposed reality) of this normalised and powerful position. The ghost story and the male ghost body in this case disrupt any narrative of unified, whole masculinity and show instead the destruction of manliness through the visibility and the presence of the male body.

In Crowe's ghost stories male ghosts are not only visible, they are also compelled to act, seemingly through no volition of their own. In the introduction to *The Night Side of Nature*, Crowe wrote that 'according to St Paul, we have two bodies – a natural body and a spiritual body; the former being designed as our means of communication with the external world – an instrument to be used and controlled by your nobler parts' (25). This means that the male ghost is the *remnant* of the less 'noble' body the one that is used for communication. There is no evidence or suggestion that the ghost is being controlled by anything more noble. The male ghost body is in fact perhaps the most Earthly of all bodies. It is pure body which merely radiates need and desire. This is a common theme in *Ghosts and Family Legends*. In 'The Italian's Story' an uncle murders his nephew, again for money. His memoir is found after his death and gives his account of the murder. He recalls finishing his own dinner after

poisoning his nephew and writes, 'I could not help chuckling as I ate, to think how his had been spoilt' (*Ghosts and Family Legends* 57). But he continues,

the next day we were two of us at dinner! And yet I had invited no guest; and the next and the next and so on always! As I was about to sit down, he entered and took a chair opposite me, an unbidden guest. [ . . . ] I said to myself, I'll eat and care not whether he sits there or no. But woe to him! He chilled the marrow of my bones. (57)

Having committed this terrible crime, the uncle can no longer eat and he nearly starves because whenever he sits down to eat he sees the ghost of his dead nephew before him. This is another ghost that needs to be seen and there needs to be a moral/material change in order for the ghost to dis-apparate. The nephew's ghost wants the money repaid to his family, but the only way he can act, like Louis in the first story is by becoming visible and by being witnessed. Not one of these male ghosts is evil, immoral or degenerate; they are unfortunate victims of another man's greed and violence and in this way too they are feminized and disempowered.

Not all men in Crowe's work are feminised in this way, however, and there are some manly men present; these are some of the men who see ghosts. These tales, which focus on the male ghost-seer, present another view of Victorian masculinity. In the tale entitled 'Round The Fire: Sixth Evening' Captain S, after a 'hard day's shooting' loses his way and is given refuge at a full and merry house. He is placed in one of the less used rooms and in the night perceives a 'vivid light'. We hear that 'He sat up in bed, trying to discover what it was, when he perceived, gradually disclosing itself, the form of a beautiful naked boy, surrounded by a dazzling radiance. The boy looked at him earnestly, and then the vision faded and all was dark' (32). The ghost body of this boy is as visible as possible. It is radiant and foretells power and violence and final defeat. This ghost is called the 'Radiant Boy' by the family and portends that whoever sees the boy will 'rise to the summit of power, and when he had

reached the climax will die a violent death' (32). The teller of the tale confirms that this is what happened to the unfortunate Captain S. The beautiful, radiant naked figure of this male ghost body deconstructs the power and violence of the more conventional masculinity of the ghost-seer himself.

This deconstruction of conventional Victorian masculinity is echoed in the entertaining tale of 'Round The Fire: Seventh Evening'. Here the focus of the tale is another properly manly man, Count P, who is brimming with strength, will, and bravery. Count P is an aristocratic young man forced by a storm to seek refuge in a castle. There, the retainers assure him the family never visits as the place is haunted. Our hero Count P determines to uncover the mystery and tells the servants that 'if there is a ghost I should particularly like to see him, and I should be much obliged if you put me in the apartments he most frequents' (39). They beg him not to stay in the haunted room saying others who spent the night there have lost their minds. Count P, however, boasts of himself; 'I have pretty good nerves – I have been in situations that have tried them severely– and did not believe that any ghost [ . . . ] would shake them' (32). He gets his way, and taking his dog, Dido, with him, he is shown to a long gallery of a room with a dais with a chair on it at one end. As he lies on cushions before the fire he sees a misty cloud begin to form in the chair. It takes the shape of a huge white figure that reaches from floor to ceiling. Count P recounts his reaction,

At him, Dido! At him! I said and away she dashed to the steps, but instantly turned and crept back completely cowed. As her courage was undoubted, I own that this astonished me; and I should have fired, but that I was perfectly satisfied that what I saw was not a substantial human form, for I had seen it grow into its present shape and height from the undefined cloud that first appeared in the chair. I laid my hand on the dog who had crept up to my side, and I felt her shaking in her skin. I was about to rise myself and approach the figure, though I confess I was a good deal awe struck,

when it stepped majestically down from the dais, and seemed to be advancing. [ . . . ]  
The figure advanced upon me; the cold became icy; the dog crouched and trembled:  
and I, as it approached, honestly confess, said Count P., that I hid my head under the  
bed clothes and did not venture to look up till morning. I know not what it was – as it  
passed over me I felt a sensation of undefinable horror, that no words can describe –  
and I can only say that nothing on earth would tempt me to pass another night in that  
room. (43)

Count P buries his head in the bed clothes as the terrifying figure of the ghost penetrates his  
body; passing over and through it. He is completely cowed and prone. Unmanned, he is  
rendered passive and blind as his body experiences ‘a sensation of undefinable horror’. In this  
case Count P sees less than he feels. It is his body that takes the brunt of the knowledge of the  
actuality of the ghost. It intuits the ghost as his manly body is penetrated by an apparition.  
Count P does not retain his manliness, he does not objectively observe the phenomenon, he  
does not uncover the mystery; he experiences it. There is a deconstruction of his traditional  
Victorian masculinity and a turn to something far less certain and far more intuitive. Count P  
learns to see things in a different way through his bodily experience.

The idea of seeing things differently suffuses Crowe’s work and she often argues that  
outer vision is faulty. She says,

I beg to remind my readers that what we call *seeing* is merely the function of an organ  
constructed for that purpose in relation to the external world: and so limited are its  
powers, that we are surrounded by many things in that world which we cannot see  
without the aid of artificial appliances. (*Night Side* 27)

What might be seen as objective, empirical vision is flawed; there are *very* many things we  
cannot see. Crowe believed that ‘In the spirit or soul, or rather in both conjoined, dwells, also,  
the power of spiritual seeing, or intuitive knowing’ (26). The rational, objective vision most

often associated with the masculine and the scientific, is not the only kind. In Crowe's somewhat peculiar treatise on Spiritualism entitled *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In*, she argues that the narrow 'objective' vision of science can in fact, obscure and even blind. She imagines Newton looking down on society and marvelling that science cannot see beyond the seemingly trivial manifestations demonstrated in séances, exclaiming, 'I really think he must be amazed at our obtuseness and incapacity for observation – a faculty, by the way, which our scientific men appropriate wholly to themselves' (138). This narrow way of seeing misses the point. It is in fact, 'the "weak and foolish" [ . . . ] women and unscientific persons' who are able to see much more clearly and to satisfy themselves with the truth of the observed phenomena (138). These 'weak and foolish' people employ a different type of vision or insight that is predicated on intuition and experience. Often only these types of more sensitive people can see the ghosts. The dichotomy that becomes important is of the idea of outer, 'masculine', objective, empirical observing practices and the inner more feminine intuitive way of seeing. It is perhaps then, not surprising that in 'The Swiss Lady's Story' it is the women who see the ghost of the dead man, Louis or that ghost-seeing changes and widens Count P's view of both the world and himself. In Crowe's view, if we take the second, more feminine way of seeing, experience, intuition and observation need not be at odds with each other and these differing ways of seeing can and often do work together.<sup>10</sup> There are other ways to observe and the alternative more intuitive way of seeing may prove to be more progressive, open and inclusive, and it may be this way of seeing that allows ghosts to be seen. This distinct type of vision also allows masculine institutions and masculinity itself to be questioned and viewed in alternative ways.

Crowe's ghost stories test and stretch many boundaries. The 'real' nature of the tales, the fragmented and multiple narratives push the limits of the genre of the Victorian ghost story. Her calls to science to open its eyes and its perceptions tease at the rigid conclusions



and assumptions manifested by Victorian science and its male scientists. Her injunctions to look properly and observe closely not only challenge science, but by presenting male ghost bodies and ghost-seers, the idea of *what* is meant to be looked at is turned on its head. In Victorian ghost stories, the male body does not evade surveillance. Whether dead or alive, it is inscribed with and by its bodily experience. In Catherine Crowe's tales, from the 'real' bodies of Captain S and Count P witnessing ghosts and embodying the experience, to the ghost bodies of those unfortunates who were murdered, the men she writes about are observed and examined. Her tales are, finally, stories but they are stories which blur and question boundaries of genre, science, evidence, power and gender. It is perhaps the male ghost bodies that provide the most radical (re)vision. The ghost manifests a return to the body; in fact it manifests very little else. Jacques Derrida argues that,

there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh in a space of invisible visibility, like the dis-appearance of an apparition. For there to be ghost there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever'. (157)

The evidence that must be presented in the stories can only be of the visible ghost body. And through these stories it is the evidence of the body, of the ghost, of the ghost-seer, and of those who have experienced supernatural phenomena that Crowe presents to science.

There was obviously not one singular view of either vision itself or of masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century, and I have been arguing that this complication of vision problematizes Victorian masculinity itself. In Crowe's own bodies of evidence, she blends the empirical and the spiritual, the objective and the subjective in a way that undermines the dominant certainties of empirical vision and masculinity. She expands and radicalizes the genre of the ghost story, juxtaposing doubt and veracity, claiming personal inner vision as well as authority. Her tales question Victorian belief systems in a way that fictionalized ghost

stories never can. And, despite Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert's assertion that her work 'has not worn well' (x), I want to suggest that her ghost narratives offer a new way for us to envision Victorian culture and beliefs. Although her work challenges the edifices of science, visuality and masculinity, she does not, however, reject any of them. Instead, she offers a way to pluralise and blend these dominant discourses with the feminine, the subjective, the experiential and the intuitive. In *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In*, Crowe says 'we know nothing about ultimate facts, or whether there are any at all' (9). Her whole world view suggests openness, uncertainty, humility and constant questioning. Through her innovative use of the genre of ghost stories, through their content and the critiques embedded within them, Catherine Crowe presents an alternative way of seeing the world offering a positive re-visioning of that which was so often invisible: Victorian masculinity.

## Notes

1. See amongst many others discussions from Jennifer Uglow her introduction to *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, as well as Vanessa Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural*, and Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story, 1840–1920: A Cultural History*.
2. Unless stated otherwise all quotations for *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) are taken from The Aquarian Press edition, 1986.
3. See for example Daniel Defoe, 'A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs Veal The Next Day after Her Death, to one Mrs Bargrave' (1706). This 'true' account is remarkably similar in tone to some of Crowe's later tales of people's experiences of ghosts and apparitions.
4. The later Victorian movement that found value in oral traditions and folk tales is evidenced by the founding of The Folklore Society in London in 1878.

5. This point is made quite forcefully in Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding.
6. See for example the volumes *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* (1988) and Vanessa Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide* (1996) as well as the widespread discussion of the ghost story and its affiliations to folklore and oral narratives.
7. Dickerson discusses this, as does Thomas Fick. There has been no discussion to date about the radical potential for the male ghost presence.
8. See for example Kate Flint's *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*.
9. This relates to a change in ghost tales Owen Davis traces to the later Victorian period whereby the 'purposeful' ghost of the early modern period gives way to those ghosts who act as 'silent self-absorbed memorials of the fate and activities of the former living' (8).
10. Srdjan Smajić argues against this position when writing about Crowe stating that 'the intuitive and empirical [...] are not quite like two sides of the same coin' (39). He argues that the two types of vision or ways of seeing are in fact incompatible and 'one kind of seeing is enhanced at the cost of another' (43).

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