

Other Futures, Other Worlds, Reading Peacemaking, Sustainability and Ecology Today

Victorian Spectres of Nature: Catherine Crowe and the Consolation of the (im)Material Natural World.

The paper is about the super-natural, nature, and ecology.

There has been a lot of work done on Victorian beliefs and explorations of ecological points of view.

However, what has been less examined are their explorations of the supernatural in relation to ecological imaginings.

Much of the work that there is about Victorian ecology understandably focusses on texts written after Darwin's Origin of Species published in 1859.

The Victorian writer I am concentrating on however, was writing before.

This paper resurrects the prominent Victorian author Catherine Crowe (1790-1870), as an important and radical ecological writer.

PP portrait

The likelihood is that you won't have heard of her.

Yet, Crowe's works were extremely popular, and Colin Wilson states that Crowe 'was once as famous as Dickens or Thackeray,'ⁱ both of whom she was friends with.

She also knew George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte.

PP Letters

And in fact a very young Dante Gabriel Rossetti sketched characters from her first novel, *Susan Hopley*.

PP Rossetti images

In 1978, near the beginning of the ongoing project that reclaims and revalidates women writers' work, Elaine Showalter wrote:

Criticism of women novelists, while focusing on those happy few, has ignored those who are not "great," and left them out of anthologies, histories, textbooks and theories. (p. 7)

Crowe is one of these 'lost' women writers, but I think she is worth rediscovering.

She was a very popular novelist, but her main claim to fame came as a collator of 'real' ghost stories.

Her most famous book called, *The Night Side of Nature: Or of Ghosts and Ghost Seers* was published in 1848.

PP Cover One

Amassing a vast amount of material, she published people's tales of poltergeists, prophetic dreams, ghost sightings and uncanny coincidences.

Crowe collected a plethora of material including direct reports of people's experiences of the supernatural, letters, newspaper reports, legends and contemporary myths.

The result is a strange mish-mash of tales and reports and experiences that the Victorians loved.

For us today however, it is not an easy read, and a lot of it is actually quite boring!

Gillian Bennett in the Folklore Society edition of *The Night Side of Nature* has this to say:

Traditional legends from literary sources are placed beside contemporary stories, family legends and personal experience stories which the indefatigable author has sought out or picked up. Random as this sometimes seems, it actually indicates where popular interest lay in mid-century Britain. [...] It is indeed a massive collection, of interest for itself and for cultural analysis. (2000, p. 13)

This strange book was a phenomenal success, selling at least 65,000 copies in Britain, with French and German translations,

Colin Wilson says that it “was never out of print for more than a century” (Wilson 1986, p. ix).ⁱⁱ

While George Routledge happily proclaimed it “a most profitable book” (Larken, p. 366).

And in a review Charles Dickens called it “one of the most extraordinary collections” of ghost stories ever published, (1848, p. 1).

PP Cover 2

Crowe was writing in the 1840s and 50s.

The term Ecology was coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866.

Wendy Parkins and Peter Edkins say, ‘ ‘ecology’ named the study of ‘the relationship of the organism to the surrounding exterior world, to which relations we can count in the broader sense all the conditions of existence’. ⁱⁱⁱ

We are all connected to each other and the world.

Parkins and Edkins cite what they say are ‘the changing relations between humans, animals, and their environments during the long nineteenth century. ‘

Industrialisation, changing farming methods, the displacement of people, new technologies, from the steam trains, to the telegraph; from Darwin to the invention of photography and microscopes, and much more powerful telescopes, the human place in the world, and indeed the universe was being shaken and questioned.

John Parham claims that in the Victorian era, ‘the awareness of humankind’s interdependence on other species and the physical environment led to the emergence of “an early environmental activism and ‘green politics’” (4)

One of the big shifts was an increasing awareness of the importance and interconnectedness of the non-human.

Laurnece Mazzeno and Ronald Morrison look at other Victorian writers such as Browning, for who, they say:

“nature” was not so much a category distinguished by its ‘otherness’ as it was a part of a continuum of living creatures (as well as non-living natural entities) that helped humans to understand their own role in ecological systems [leading to an] appreciation of the brevity of life and the value of living in the moment, especially in terms of our awareness of the nonhuman around us’ (2017, 6).

This paper is of course looking at the supernatural and therefore the idea of the non-human takes on a different slant and the continuum of living creatures certainly includes the non-living.

For Crowe the natural and the supernatural were intermingled and intertwined – creating a mesh and a connection between them: between the human and the non-human.

She looks towards a productive, emotional, and symbiotic relationship between super-nature, humans and animals that is radical and potentially transformative.

Robert Geary claims that, “The future [Crowe] envisions is one with an expanded and unified view of reality which assumes an element of spirit in human nature and in the cosmos” (1995, p. 49).

Taking an ecocritical approach, this paper argues that Crowe’s work really does present the possibility of ‘other futures’ and ‘other worlds’.

We now move onto things that Rosario knows a lot about,

Victorian Ghosts

The Victorians loved ghosts.

But People had been seeing/experiencing ghosts and talking and writing about them for thousands of years before this.

Indeed, the oldest drawing of a ghost (so far) has just been found on an ancient Babylonian clay tablet and it is 3500 years old.

So ghosts have always been around, but the Victorian period saw a massive increase in both interest in and literature about ghosts.

The Victorian era, albeit one of rationalism and fictional realism, was filled with ghost stories

We know that there was a huge rise in literacy rates as the nineteenth century progressed in Britain due in large part to industrialisation and urbanisation, and this led to a great increase in print culture, including pamphlets, magazines, novels published in parts, and short stories.

And it is the period that has been called 'golden age' of the ghost story.

PP Christmas Carol

Cox and Gilbert contend that:

'[g]host stories were something at which the Victorians excelled' (Cox and Gilbert 1991: x).

Short, punchy and phenomenally popular the Victorian age is infested by ghost stories.

Realism and Folklore

In *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story*, Simon Hay suggests that in the nineteenth century,

"ghost stories emphatically and repetitively frame themselves as reported or enacted oral narratives" (2011, p. 18).

People have always told ghost stories – round the fire, in the drawing room at Christmas time or by the bedside of a frightened child.

Often associated with folk tales, Gillian Bennett suggests that the mid-to-late nineteenth century saw the ‘making of folklore into literature’ (200).

The nineteenth century saw the rise of the Realist novel, exemplified by the contemporary “greats” such as Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens and, in particular, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy.

These authors aspired to create novels that imitated life and which had a ring of “truth” in their plots and characters.

So we could say, the idea behind many Realist texts was to keep things believable.

Hay argues that, “counterintuitive though it might seem, the ghost story is in fact in crucial ways engaged in the same project as the realist novel, the project of making the world comprehensible to readers” (2011, p. 59).

Perhaps death was not the end.

Perhaps there was meaning beyond this material world.

PP Ghost on stairs

Spiritualism

These ideas manifested in the mid-nineteenth century in the Spiritualist movement.

Spiritualism was one of many counter-cultural movements such as the anti-vivisection movement and vegetarianism.

At the same time, because of Industrialization, there was a great increase in environmentalism.

And where environmentalism was concerned with nature and the sustainability of the natural environment, Spiritualism was concerned with life and death and the possible sustainability of life after death.

Spiritualism began in 1848 with the Fox sisters in America hearing rapping from the spirits, (supposedly) proving life after death, and providing a way to communicate with the dead.

The movement took off and became a huge phenomenon with thousands of followers and celebrity mediums doing vastly popular shows.

PP Photo of sceance

Spiritualism reached England in 1849.

It is worth noting however that, *The Night Side of Nature* was published the year before.

Spiritualists believed one could commune with the dead and set about trying to provide proof.

Crowe's intention with *The Night Side of Nature* was similar.

The book was meant to gather evidence which could provide seemingly authentic accounts of ghost seeing and other experiences which could perhaps pave the way to the discovery of the truth of the supernatural.

Here is a taste from different parts of the *Night Side of Nature*:

PP Quotes

Mr H, an eminent artist, was walking arm in arm with a friend in Edinburgh when he suddenly left him, saying 'Oh there's my brother!' He had seen him with the most entire distinctness; but was confounded by losing sight of him [...] News came ere long, that at that precise period, his brother had died.

A company were visiting York cathedral, when a gentleman and lady [...] observed an officer wearing a naval uniform approaching them; he walked quickly, saying to the lady, as he passed, "there *is* another world". The gentleman, seeing her greatly agitated pursued the stranger, but lost sight of him. [...] On returning to his companion, she told him that it was her brother, who was then abroad with his ship, and with whom she had frequently held discussion as to whether there was or was not a future life. The news of the young man's death shortly reached the family.

Two young ladies were passing the night in a house in the north, when the youngest, then a child, awoke and saw an old man [...] walking about their bedroom. She said, when telling the story [afterwards], that she was not in the least frightened – she was only surprised! But she found that her sister, who was several years older than herself, was in a state of great terror. [...] The next morning, when they mentioned the circumstance, she observed that the family looked at each other in a significant manner; but it was not till she was older she learned that the house was said to be haunted. (225)

There are tens of pages of the 'sightings', all quite mundane and seemingly ordinary.

In fact, the very 'every-dayness' of these experiences, the repetitious nature of the sightings, form a part of the point Crowe wanted to make.

These sightings occur again and again and cannot be easily dismissed.

And of course, they point to other futures and other worlds.

The soul is sustained beyond the grave.

There is comfort and an offer of hope for the future.

PP Man and ghost

One of her claims to authenticity comes from the idea that the stories in *The Night Side* have been "told" to her: people had really seen ghosts or had strange experiences.

There is an overlying sense that many of the ghosts or tales are "known to many," as well as the fact that often these ghosts have been witnessed by more than one person.

There is a weight of experience coming from many different walks of life.

Gillian Bennett states that,

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. (2000, p. 13)

The Night Side of Nature includes the experiences of Lords, Ladies, military personnel, servants, young and old people.

This means that there is an equalising of those who can provide testimony.

Crowe states that whatever

conclusions we draw, must be the result either of our intuitions, or of observation and experience. Unless founded upon these, the opinion of the most learned theologian or the most profound student of science that ever lived, is worth no more than that of any other person. They know nothing whatever about these mysteries; and all *à priori* reasoning on them is utterly valueless. (1848, p. 17)

Crowe's schema for witnessing, testimony, and investigation is democratic: no one's word, belief, or bias should hold sway over anyone else's.

Science

Wendy Parkins and Peter Adkins contend that:

Victorian literature and culture was engaged with questions of environmental degradation, atmospheric pollutions, resource depletion, and changing species relations [foreshadowing] many of the preoccupations and debates that continue to structure contemporary ecological concerns.

While many Victorian writers grappled with environmental concerns, Crowe came at it from a slightly different perspective.

She saw the supernatural as a part of the natural order and believed that it would eventually be encompassed into the scientific view of nature.

As she writes, “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” (1848 , 22).

One of the main barriers Crowe refused to accept was the scientific aversion to the spiritual and its ridicule of the super-natural.

She saw it as science’s duty to investigate ghostly and supernatural phenomena and to be less certain and arrogant.

Medium and light

She argued that science should work from nature upwards, rather than trying to impose its rationalist agenda and assumptions onto nature.

The evidence should be looked at first, and the evidence here is of and from people – what they have subjectively seen and experienced of ghosts and the supernatural.

She states: ‘no one that lives can assert that the reappearance of the dead is impossible; all he has a right to say is, that he does not believe’.^{iv}

Without evidence and without rigorous examination the denial of ghosts and apparitions is itself she argues, merely an unfounded belief.

In her introduction to *The Night Side of Nature*, she states that

the real worshippers and genuine lovers of [science] for its own sake, have all been men of the most single, candid, unprejudiced and enquiring minds, [...]

not bold and self-sufficient, but humble and reverent suitors, who are aware of their own ignorance and unworthiness. ^v

Crowe advocates a science, that is 'humble', enquiring and intuitive, not aggressive, bold and objective.

A change in science was needed in order to be able to investigate such phenomena.

Crowe cites the necessity of experience and intuition and she argues attention paid to this will allow contemporary scientific practice to expand its view and its scope of observation.

Crowe wanted science to widen its narrow, supposedly objective vision, to use and give credence to other ways of seeing and different types of knowledge.

In terms of the very male-dominated mid-Victorian scientific community, Crowe was trespassing on male territory and masculine authority.

Indeed, the research methods Crowe uses in *The Night Side of Nature* anticipate the modes of investigation adopted nearly fifty years later by the respectable (and largely male) Society for Psychical Research [SPR] where in their massive 'Census of Hallucinations' they too collected people's 'real' experiences of ghosts and supernatural phenomena (Davies 8).

PP SPR sign

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' (Sergeant 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).

This was Crowe's hope too.

Indeed, 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 says:

If 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).

Yet, although Crowe's work challenges the edifices of science, objectivity, and masculinity, she does not reject them.

Instead, she offers a way to pluralise and blend these dominant discourses with the feminine, the subjective, the experiential, and the intuitive.

Gaard and Murphy say of ecofeminism that it rejects 'the notion of absolute difference and the binary construct of inside and outside. The discipline of ecology challenges any such dichotomy. [...] Ecology is a study of interrelationship'.^{vi}

Crowe posits the idea of the inter-relationship between the natural and the seeming super-natural.

She does not see them as separate –there is no inside and outside and there is a productive inter-relationship between life and death.

Other Spiritualists posited the same relationship between the natural and the supernatural, among them, Alfred Russel Wallace, co-inventor of evolutionary science who argued for the naturalism of the phenomenon.^{vii}

And Edward Bulwer Lytton who said in 1857 that 'the supernatural is only a something in the laws of nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant'.^{viii}

Crowe though was writing earlier and her work sees everything as being interweaved and interconnected.

And in this way, she believed, we could commune with other worlds and envisage other futures.

Dogs/Animals

For Crowe this relationship and interconnection also applies to animals.

PP Victorian Animal Dreams

Crowe revered animals and she believed that it is most likely animals who will intuit supernatural phenomena first.

In her view people and men in particular are too bound up with rationality and reason and thought and miss what might be going on around them.

She says that animals:

'exhibit more frequent instances of such abnormal phenomena as I am treating of, than men, we may be, perhaps, justified in considering the faculty of presentiment in a human being as a suddenly-awakened instinct; just as in an animal it is an intensified instinct.'^{ix}

Here, humans may have an 'awakened' instinct, but for animals, this instinct is already there.

Crowe claims that certain people are more likely to see ghosts or experience a haunting or the supernatural.

She argues that 'it is usually the humble, the simple and the childlike, the solitary, the recluse, nay, the ignorant, who exhibit traces of these occult faculties' (201).

Those who are seen as more 'lowly' are more receptive.

And animals are even more aware than humans.

It is worth remembering that Crowe was writing in 1848 and the sentiments expressed must have been really quite radical at the time.

Dogs

PP Man and dog

In her ghost tales Crowe looks at many different types of animals, but she is most interested in ghost dogs and canine ghost hunters.

She says about dogs:there is a deep mystery in the being of these creatures, which proud man never seeks to unravel, or condescends to speculate on.

What is their relation to the human race? Why are these spiritual germs embodied in those forms and made subject to man, that hard and cruel master! who assumes to be their superior, because he is endowed with some higher faculties, the most of which he grossly misuses. How beautiful are their characters when studied? How wonderful their intelligence when cultivated? How willing they are to serve us when kindly treated? But man, by his cruelty, ignorance, laziness and want of judgement, spoils their temper, blunts their

intelligence, deteriorates their nature and then punishes them for being what he himself has made them. Well might Chalmers exclaim, All nature groans beneath the cruelty of man. Why are these creatures, sinless, as far as we see, placed here as the subject of this barbarous unthinking tyrant? That has always appeared to me a solemn question'.^x

In her work, Crowe explores a productive, emotional and symbiotic relationship between humans and dogs whether dead or alive.

And she believes in what Donna Haraway, in a very different time, and in a slightly different context, calls the relationship between dogs and humans: 'otherness-in-connection'.^{xi}

Reginald Abbot notes that the Victorians had a 'preoccupation with and intense love of dogs'^{xii} and Crowe's work expands on this in her explorations of ghost dogs and canine ghost hunters.

In Crowe's schema, as we have seen, dogs are the most intuitive, the most aware species.

Always detecting the supernatural or evil first, dogs are the most reliable ghost hunters.

In another one of her anthologies of real ghost tales, the 1859 volume entitled 'Ghosts and Family Legends' there is the tale told on the seventh evening of a gathering at a country house.

Here the focus of the tale is the properly manly man, Count P, who is brimming with strength and 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 visit as the place is haunted.

Our hero, Count P, 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' (Crowe 1859: 39).

They beg him not to stay in the haunted room saying others who spent the night there have lost their minds but he gets his way.

He goes up to the haunted room and tells us:

with me I had a bull dog, of a very fine-breed that had been given me in England [...]. She followed me up stairs – indeed she followed me everywhere – and I watched her narrowly as she went smelling about, but there were no indications of her perceiving anything extraordinary' (41).

The haunted room is a long gallery with a dais or raised platform with a chair on it at one end.

This is what happens late into the night as Count P. lies by the fire with Dido the dog at the foot of his bed.

Firstly Dido begins to stir and rise up and he tells us:

She stood still with her ears erect and her head towards the dais, uttering a low growl. [...]

I began to perceive something like a cloud in the chair, while at the same time a chill which seemed to pervade the very marrow of my bones crept

through me, yet the fire was good; and it was not the chill of fear, for I cocked my pistols with perfect self possession [...].

Gradually, this cloud took a form, and assumed the shape of a tall white figure that reached from the ceiling to the floor of the dais, which was raised by two steps.

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 and I am sure if Dido could speak you'd find her of the same opinion.' ^{xiii}

There is no more cocking of his pistols and the absolute proof of the terror of the manifestation is shown in the dog's terror.

In *The Night Side of Nature*, Crowe says in several cases of apparitions being present that she knows of, an 'animal had a consciousness of the nature of the appearance, while the persons around him had no suspicion of anything unusual'.^{xiv}

In Crowe's opinion dogs are braver and more sensitive and they can also be more loving and loyal too.

The spirits of the ghost dogs in her stories display love and loyalty in life, but also from beyond the grave and Crowe includes many stories about loyal ghost dogs.

In 'My Friend's Story' a maid gets up in the night and sees a light in the kitchen:

'half-frightened, she advanced on tip-toe and peeped in, when, to her surprise, she saw a lady dressed in white, sitting by the fire into which she was sadly and thoughtfully gazing. Her hands were clasped upon her knees and two large greyhounds – beautiful dogs [...] sat at her feet, both looking up fondly in her face'.^{xv}

These are the ghost and the ghost dogs of a poor wronged wife whose husband married her for her money and in order to be nearer to her sister with whom he had an affair.

We hear that after his wife found out;

She shunned the world; and the world, who soon learnt the state of affairs, shunned her husband's society; so she dragged on her dreary existence with no companionship but that of two remarkable fine greyhounds [...]. Riding or walking, she was always accompanied by these animals – they and their affection were all she could call her own on earth.^{xvi}

And in death they have not left her.

Crowe's ghost dogs and canine ghost hunters are often more admirable than the humans around them.

In 'The Dutch Officer's Story' in *Ghosts and Family Legends*, we meet Mungo the ghost dog.

An old soldier tells our narrator:

'the tradition is, that after the battle of Eonenoy, a large black mastiff was found lying beside a dead officer. Although he had a dreadful wound from a sabre cut on his flank, and was much exhausted from loss of blood, he would not leave the body: and even after we buried it, he could not be enticed from the spot. The men, interested in the fidelity and attachment of the animal, bound up his wounds, and fed and tended him; and he became the dog of the regiment' (GFL 69).

Mungo remains loyal to the regiment even after his death and his ghost is often seen waking soldiers who have fallen asleep during their watch.

A certain Major R. says loudly that he will shoot at the dog if he sees it.

He is strongly discouraged, but, one night he sees the ghost dog and shoots at him.

In consequence, Mungo is not there when Major R.'s own son falls asleep during his watch and is executed for it.

Major R. has broken the equilibrium between the living and the dead and pays the price.

Throughout Crowe's work, dogs are one of the main links between the living and the dead, the natural and the super-natural.

In her work Crowe dismantles many cherished hierarchies and boundaries, such as the human and the animal.

In a somewhat peculiar book of hers entitled *Spiritualism and the Age we Live in*,

Crowe says: PP

man, heedless of any sufferings but his own, is utterly insensible to those of, what he is pleased to denominate, “the lower animals”.

Perhaps if we knew all, we should not be so heedless of these suffering creatures, who are certainly endowed with faculties, of some sort, that we are unable to comprehend, and which we call by the name of instinct; pronouncing it so much inferior to reason. Now, I should like to know, who could construct a honeycomb out of the pollen of the flowers, or build a bird’s nest without hands? Reason is a very valuable endowment certainly, but till it can teach us the way to truth it is quite evident that either we do not know how to use it, or that is not so supreme a gift as the despised gift of instinct’.^{xvii}

Here Crowe puts animals, their abilities, skills and instincts above reason.

In an antithesis of Victorian scientific sentiments at the time she says:

‘we know nothing about ultimate facts, or whether there are any at all’^{xviii}

Carolyn Merchant, speaking about ecology says ‘An ecocentric ethic is grounded in the cosmos. The whole environment, including inanimate elements, rocks and minerals along with animate plants and animals, is assigned intrinsic value’.^{xix}

For Crowe this includes the non-living too; the Spirit that binds us all and which can be manifested in ghosts.

Assured that the supernatural is part of the natural, in contemporary terms, Crowe might be associated with a nature-centred approach as opposed to a human-centred one.

George Sessions argues that:

‘Deep ecology is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all *members* of the ecosphere, but even toward all identifiable *entities* or *forms* in the ecosphere,’^{xx}

For Crowe of course these entities and forms include ghosts.

A deeply egalitarian writer, Crowe dismantles hierarchies between the living and the dead, the animal and the human, science, rationalism and intuition and insight.

She says about society at the time, ‘how needful the assistance of our spiritual friends has become, at a period when life has grown into a struggle and a contention for material existence that threatens to disorganize society, and render all the restraints of morality and religion utterly nugatory, perhaps even incompatible with world prosperity’^{xxi}

For Crowe, materialism is threatening the world and the world itself negates and ignores the non-material at its peril.

Landscape and Place

PP HL book

Roger Luckhurst suggests that ‘it is worth recalling that ghosts are held to haunt specific locales, are tied to what late Victorian psychical researchers rather splendidly termed “phantasmogenetic centres”.

Ghosts are inextricably mixed up with their environments.

Ghosts are part of the landscape.

PP spooky wood

The most im/material of beings have, to exist, to be able to manifest and recognised in the material world.

In cultural geography there has been what has been termed the 'affective turn' where in landscape studies there is a re-turn to the emotions, the body, the material and experience.

Yet affect is more than this.

It is the body's immersion in the world; beyond consciousness, beyond, sometimes, even recognised emotion.

From the point of view of affect theory therefore the landscape is no longer seen as a distant prospect to be looked at, or painted or written about as something removed and external.

From the centuries' old view of the landscape as 'scenery', sublime, beautiful or even mundane, ugly and polluted, these newer conceptions, no longer conceptualise it as 'over there' at all.^{xxii}

The landscape is of the body and the body is of the landscape.

The experience of haunting too, collapses the division between the ghostly or supernatural and the body.

It cannot be 'over there', distanced or properly represented or it will effectively disappear.

A haunting is a series, a continuation of feeling and experience that it is hard to catch the essence of.

Haunting, is fluid and experienced by and through the body.

The re-cognition of a ghost, the shock of the realization that a place is haunted, comes after the first body-knowledge of the presence of the supernatural.

In very many accounts people will feel a haunting before they 'know' it.

A haunting is a bodily feeling of *now*, this moment; the feeling or emotion of being haunted.

Being haunted is an experience that is inescapable from the body.

Being haunted is to know that one is haunted or that one is in a haunted place.

Being haunted is to feel the hairs on the back of your neck rising; it is something glimpsed but not quite seen from the corner of your eye, a slight misgiving in the pit of your stomach, a delicate rash of goosebumps rising on cooling skin.

Perhaps paradoxically, given the immaterial nature of ghosts, there is no haunting without a material bodily experience of it.

And in particular, if that which haunts is unseen, it must be *felt*.

In her book *The Queer Uncanny*, Paulina Palmer argues that,

[t]he figure of the ghost is particularly rich in metaphorical significance, both traditional and post modern. As well as evoking connotations of invisibility and fluctuations in visibility...it can operate as an image for liminality and border-crossing, as illustrated by its ability to traverse the boundaries between inside

and outside, present and past and, even more mysteriously, life and death.

(2012, 66)

Ghosts and the conception of haunting are inherently deconstructive.

Haunting disrupts the nature/culture debate that is never far away from discussions around landscape.

Haunting transgresses boundaries as well as binaries.

What is the natural and what the supernatural? Where does one begin and the other end?

This paper has argued that Crowe's view of the super-natural, although early in the Victorian era, echoed these sentiments and cast a new slant on the study of Victorian ecological politics.

John Parham, back in 2011, argued for a Victorian ecology.

He claimed that scientific developments showed the interdependence and interrelations between species and also that:

There emerged out of this proto-ecological [...] understanding a broadly materialist awareness that 'human being', [...] ultimately resides in the nature and quality of humanity's relationship with other species and its surrounding physical environment. (2011,5)

As we have seen, Crowe mixes the material and the immaterial and her vision of the supernatural is in fact veering towards the material as it impacts so much on individuals and the world itself.

In a telling passage in her second novel, *Men and Women*, nature itself cries out against a murder.

An ill-used servant, Vincent Groves, passes through the countryside, intent on committing a terrible and unjustified murder.

Crowe tells us:

And as his eyes were blind, so his ears were deaf, or he would have listened to the strain of the rippling stream as he walked beside it; and to the zephyrs that played amongst the trees - each leaf a voice, and to the song of the beetle's wings, and the merry chirp of the field cricket [...] and to the music of the silent night, that charged low in one harmonious chorus, *Hold!* (1843, vol III, pp. 182)

Thus, where in *Macbeth* it is Heaven that may cry "hold" (Act I, scene 5), here it is nature.

All divisions and binaries dissolve: Nature/Super-nature, people/animals and also landscape or environment and body.

Ghosts often disrupt or call into question established and seemingly safe and stable attitudes and spaces.

Crowe's ghosts point the way to insight, intuition and openness as being the most sustainable way of regarding both the natural and the super-natural.

So, why have we lost her?

Why does a writer who was so influential and well-known fade into almost complete obscurity?

It is impossible to say for sure, but, in 1854 at the age of sixty-four, Catherine Crowe was found wandering the streets of Edinburgh, naked.

She was carrying a handkerchief in one hand and a card case in the other believing that these made her invisible.

She was rescued from the street and taken, for a short time to an asylum where she recovered from her brief psychotic episode.

However, for a Victorian lady, this must have been crushingly humiliating.

The story was widely reported and Charles Dickens (who had been friendly with her) wrote to Emile de la Rue:

PP letter

There is a certain Mrs. Crowe, usually resident in Edinburgh, who wrote a book called the Night Side of Nature She was a Medium and an Ass, and I don't know what else. The other day she was discovered walking down her own street in Edinburgh, not only stark mad but stark naked too. ... She is now under restraint of course (qtd. in Storey, Tillotson and Easson, 288).

Although Crowe had suffered a psychotic episode, she was not, as Dickens reported in another letter, 'hopelessly insane' (285) and she recovered, although her reputation did not.

And, perhaps because of this, Crowe is not really known today.

Her reputation was so thoroughly trashed that it seems to have resonated with critics nearer to our own era.

Elaine Showalter (feminist and advocate of rediscovering lost women's writing), puts this as her entry on Crowe in the 'Biographical Appendix' of her famous book *A Literature of Their Own*:

Catherine Crowe (1800-1876). Novelist. Born in Kent, nee Stevens, educated at home, married an army officer in 1822, had one child. Interested in education reform, women's rights and phrenology. Went mad in 1859.

And that's it.

In 2009 Jarlath Killeen says in his book *Gothic Literature* that:

Tragically Crowe had a nervous breakdown and, in one of the last references to her while she still lived, Charles Dickens reports that she was spotted running through London naked, apparently confirming the link between the occult, femininity and madness. (2009, 139).

These are damning indictments and untrue.

There are inaccuracies and Crowe did not 'stay mad', she recovered and continued writing.

I believe though that her breakdown has led even contemporary critics to ignore her.

It has cast a long pall, but it is time to re-evaluate.

Katy Jordan says 'Each century generates ghosts which are in tune with the social attitudes of the times' ^{xxiii}

Do ghosts exist?

PP seance

In terms of this paper, it doesn't really matter.

What matters is the mixing of supernatural experiences, ghost sightings, and a sense of a continuation of life after death with an ecological sensibility.

In our times there is a move towards green spirituality.

I have a PhD student looking at this in relation to a very broad conception of ecology, climate collapse, and prayer.

We can sometimes feel very alone as small humans in a vast universe faced with ecological disaster.

However, in terms of at least some of our concerns, historically we are not alone.

Many Victorians expressed care for the environment, a desire to live sustainably, and a spiritual sense of the continuation of human energy.

Ghosts and the supernatural *can* be seen as terrifying and almost 'unnatural'.

However, they can also point to other worlds and when meshed with an ecological point of view and seen as part of nature, as in Crowe's work, they can bring peace, hope, a comforting sense of unity and connection and a glimpse of the possibility of other futures.

Thank you for listening.

NOTES

ⁱ Wilson, Colin, 'Introduction' to *The Night Side of Nature*, The Aquarian Press, 1986, p.v).

ⁱⁱ Before *The Night Side of Nature* Crowe had published a translation from the German of Dr Justinus Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* (1845), a text which purportedly told the true tale of the spiritually gifted and mediumistic Friederike Hauffe. Colin Wilson says Crowe's "translation was an instant success" (1986, p. viii).

ⁱⁱⁱ [Parkins, Wendy; Adkins, Peter. 19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century; London Iss. 26.](#) (2018)

^{iv} NSN 19

^v (Crowe 1848: 17).

^{vi} Gaard and Murphy *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, 5.

^{vii} Burdett, Brown and Thurschwell, *The Victorian Supernatural*, Richard Noakes chapter, 30

^{viii} Geary pg 5.

^{ix} (NSN 59).

^x (GFL 9-10).

^{xi} (Donna Haraway *The Companion Species Manifesto* 45.

^{xii} (*Animals and Women* 270)

^{xiii} (Crowe 1859: 43).

^{xiv} (NSN 200).

^{xv} GFL 105

^{xvi} GFL 106

^{xvii} *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In*, 32

^{xviii} (Crowe 1859(b): 9).

^{xix} (*Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* 75-76).

^{xx} Quoted in Greg Gerrard, *Ecocriticism*, 21-2).

^{xxi} (Crowe, 1859(b), 131).

^{xxii} Although Tim Ingold suggests that perhaps landscape was never perceived as separate or distanced from the self. He argues that 'to perceive, as to imagine, is to participate from within in the self-making of the world' (14). We are not and cannot be separate from the world or the landscapes we are part of.

^{xxiii} (Hughes, 2000, 120).

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