BELIEF IN GHOSTS IN POST-WAR ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

This project examined, by qualitative investigation, the actual content and mechanics of ghost beliefs in Britain today. Through questionnaire, personal interview, and e-mail correspondence, the beliefs and experiences of 227 people were assessed, and considered against historical and international analogous material. The research began with some basic questions: who believes; what do they believe; how do they narrate their stories; and how do they understand this in the context of other beliefs? This research found a broad social spread of ghost belief. The circulation of ghost narratives takes place within social groups defined in part by their seriousness about the discussion. This does not preclude jokes, disagreements or the discrediting of specific events, so long as the discussion considers ghosts attentively and seriously. Informants brought a sophisticated range of influences to bear on narratives and their interpretation, including some scientific knowledge and understanding. Informants discussed a broad range of phenomena within a consideration of 'ghosts': there is no easy correlation of a narrator's interpretation and the kind of manifestation being described. Some accounts were related as polished stories, but this did not impact directly on their belief content. The interrelationship between oral narrative and artistic representation highlights the shaping and exchange of stories to accommodate belief content. This ability to adjust between apparently different registers of discussion also illustrates how ghost beliefs fit the structures of other, more institutional, belief systems held by informants. A key finding, considering sociological discussions of secularisation and historiographical associations of heterodox beliefs with political radicalism, is that personal folk beliefs are slower developing and more conservative than institutional forms, which respond more quickly to socio-economic changes. Immediate institutional responses to changed conditions may not, therefore, correlate directly with a corresponding change in ghost belief.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

I have used the following abbreviations throughout:

ASPR, American Society for Psychical Research

JAF, *Journal of American Folklore*

JASPR, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*

JSPR, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*

PSPR, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*

SNU, Spiritualist National Union

SPR, Society for Psychical Research

Introduction

Why study ghost belief now, and how? Outline and scope of this research

'Thou art a scholar; speak to it … Question it'[1]

Ghosts are a stubborn presence in British culture, despite historically conditioned expectations that belief in them belongs to the past, and the presentation of local ghostlore as something that predates, and is threatened by, contemporary social change. Polls suggest ghost belief has more than doubled since the Second World War.[2] The pattern is mirrored elsewhere, sometimes with higher percentages.[3] A British tabloid, with an average daily circulation exceeding three million,[4] recently reported a hospital ghost as front-page news.[5] In the same month a broadsheet devoted a page to a reported apparition.[6] Ghosts remain ingrained in our culture and language. They are no underground phenomenon, although often treated as such.

This research examines the mechanics of such belief and discussion as they exist in Britain today. It looks at how people discuss and understand their own beliefs, how those beliefs are structured, and how an interacting network of representations and expressions of belief and experience continues to shape those beliefs. This interaction is complex, taking place within a society already significantly changed by post-war demographic shifts. This research reflects negotiations of ghost beliefs within some of the broad scope of contemporary British society. These questions are more pressing given the long intellectual and religious pressure against such beliefs in Britain, and the attendant expectation of a decline that never happened. Forty years ago Keith Thomas listed ghosts among things 'now … rightly disdained by intelligent persons.'[7]

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[1] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), I.1.54, 58.

[2] R. Gill, K. Hadaway, and P. Marler, 'Is Religious Belief Declining in Britain?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37 (1998), 512-3. A 2005 poll gave a cross-population figure of 34%, Populus, 'Moral, Ethics and Religion Survey for *The Sun*', <http://populuslimited.com/uploads/download_pdf-090405-The-Sun-Moral-Attitudes.pdf> [accessed 20 February 2008], p. 31.

[3] Daniel Boy, 'Les Français et les para-sciences: vingt ans de mesures', *Revue Française de sociologie*, 43.1 (2002), 38-9; Humphrey Taylor, 'The Religious and Other Beliefs of Americans 2003', *The Harris Poll*, 11 (26 February 2003), <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=359> [accessed 20 February 2008].

[4] Paul McNally, 'January ABCs: *Daily Star* Is Lone Riser after Price Cut', *Press Gazette*, 6 February 2009, <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=43022&c=1> [accessed 15 March 2011].

[5] Tom Wells, 'Haunted Hospital Calls in Exorcist: "Cloaked Ghost" Stalking Wards', *The Sun*, 30 January 2009, 1.

[6] Paul Lewis, 'Coalisland's Ghostly Attraction', *The Guardian* (10 January 2009), Main Section, 17.

[7] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. ix.

Evidence suggests that was aspiration rather than description. The current boom in academic writing on ghosts is itself part of this persistence. Scholarly comment is contingent upon, and reflects, the persistence and resurgence of belief.[8] Recent posters declared 'Ghosts do not exist. So why do 30% of us believe in them?'[9]

The inherent and interpretative meanings of these data are rich with theoretical problems. If all questionnaire respondents in the last 60 years have shared common understandings of questions and answers (and posing it thus highlights the weaknesses of the assumption) we must ask what changes might have triggered such a development. This apparent growth in belief comes during a period when sociologists suggest Britain has been secularising. We must examine possible relationships between these trends.[10] The secularisation debate has largely addressed declining institutional practice, so we must consider whether this can be reconciled with increased ghost belief, or at least with greater willingness to admit such informal extra-institutional beliefs.

The mass media have widened access to reports of ghostly experiences and to popular representations in artistic genres. Less acknowledged in this context is the impact of significant academic research over the same period. Keith Thomas's central work came out at the same time as *The Exorcist*. The comparison is not entirely flippant: certain key texts continue to dominate academic discourse much like key artistic representations. It seems easier now to discuss believing in ghosts. This might just reflect greater willingness to admit unchanged beliefs. Fear of the dead is commonly argued to be fundamental to humanity. Even if that accounted for the belief's persistence, it would not account for fluctuations in declaring them. Ghost beliefs may help unlock conundrums about social thought now, and about the historical course of widely held informal modes of thought.

Understanding ghost belief must begin with how those who profess or reject it themselves understand the concepts involved, and how these might have changed historically. This poses two tasks. It is necessary to establish the current mechanics and extent of contemporary belief. This requires overcoming the methodological weakness of simply asking whether people believe in ghosts (and retrospectively interpreting data gathered this way). That weakness is based on an uncritical use of historical records from various sources, but it is impossible to identify continuity or discontinuity without more seriously examining belief and experience. The second task is therefore to use this investigation of content for a deeper historical appraisal of the trajectory of ghost beliefs. It should thus be possible to avoid dehistoricising ghost reports by removing them from their cultural context, or viewing them solely in their immediate historical context. Both positions have generated unsatisfactory speculative interpretations of poll data. This synthetic approach may indicate ways of establishing a sounder analysis of social meaning.

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[8] For an example relating to this project, see *Ghosts: A Social History*, ed. Owen Davies, Vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), p. ix.
[9] Advertising Richard Wiseman, *Paranormality: Why We See What Isn't There* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2011).
[10] See, for example, the essays in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

The first task suggests a research method grounded in ethnographic and oral historical documentation of personal histories to highlight the traditional themes and motifs used in, and informing, ghost discussions. This will also illuminate the place of popular representations in renewing the circulation of narratives and beliefs. The historical lifespan of traditional themes may directly inform the second task, and outline a way forward on the question of 'folk' or informal religion and belief, as well as providing clues to the possible further social and historical development of beliefs. Given the range of academic writing in discussing ghost beliefs, a single disciplinary approach is inadequate. This introduction surveys several disciplinary approaches to the subject, the specific strengths of which will contribute to a research method allowing a study of beliefs in some depth.

Conjuncturally and historically England makes an interesting case study. It has a long reputation for ghostliness.[11] This creates favourable conditions for discussion, and provides a body of published material against which believers and commentators alike can consider new narratives. This is heightened by recent socio-political shifts. Britain industrialised early and colonised extensively. It has a particular place in the political changes of the last 60 years that might collectively be taken as a trend towards globalisation resting on widespread technological development. Post-Second World War settlements established closer links within trade blocs. This, coupled with improvements in international transport, led to greater exchange across borders. For the former imperial power Britain this was augmented by inward migration from former colonies after independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Commonwealth structures further facilitated this process, accelerating the earlier interchange of populations at the time of colonial power. This long cultural interaction is rarely acknowledged, even when hinted at, in writing on ghost traditions.[12] The collapse of the Soviet Bloc has triggered new migration exchanges. This ebb and flow of elements of belief from a wide variety of cultural sources is part of the current state of thinking addressed here but not reflected in previous studies. Some international analogous material is also considered here. This is not simply a comparison of apparently similar material: it reflects the scope of incorporated material under new conditions of global interaction, and the ways in which such disparate materials are introduced and compared by believers themselves under these conditions. It also offers some useful counter-examples, for example in countries which urbanised more recently and rapidly.

Such demographic changes, and the new elements they feed into discussion, illustrate how ghost beliefs are negotiated and elaborated. They complicate notions that ghost beliefs simply reflect local traditions. The persistence and development of such beliefs in a period of scientific and technological advances suggests that straightforward identification of belief and primitivism is reductive. The existence for half a century of a political bloc with an official intellectual position of rational disbelief has been important in shaping the belief climate generally, and has had a

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[11] Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 1.

[12] Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984); Terence Whitaker, *England's Ghostly Heritage* (London: Robert Hale, 1989), p. 9; Eric Rosenthal, *They Walk in the Night: True South African Ghost Stories and Tales of the Supernormal* (Cape Town and London: Howard B. Timmins and George Allen & Unwin, [1949?]), pp. 193-195.

specific impact in Britain. Acknowledging this position does not mean uncritically accepting its unofficial influence. The resilience and resurgence of ghost beliefs across the former Soviet Bloc has implications for the interaction of official and unofficial modes of thought. State non-belief of a kind not found here in Britain raises political questions, and offers valuable insights into changing cultures of belief. Secularisation scholarship deals chiefly with dominant official forms of belief, and is noticeably unsuccessful in accommodating unofficial beliefs. Secularised or not, our society still has ghosts, which change and adapt.

Earlier attitudes towards ghost belief still influence discussion. During the Reformation the spirit-world was another battleground against Catholic 'superstition'. A century later Enlightenment rationalists addressed the unexpected persistence of ghosts by enthusiastically and prematurely announcing their end thanks to a new scientific understanding. Survival of the beliefs was attributed to a failure to pursue an adequately aggressive educational policy.[13] Positivism persists in confident assertions of the decline of experiences and beliefs that stubbornly are not declining. It may also inform some casual categorisation.[14]

The disjunction between assertions of a decline in ghost-belief and its reported increase has curious manifestations. Into the nineteenth century scientific developments provided one basis for a resurgence in belief. Informants today are accommodating greater technological developments. Even sympathetic commentators claim belief is declining, while ghost researchers cannot agree what is being reported. A recent regional survey reports apparitions declining sharply relative to auditory experiences, while an SPR survey suggests only a minor fall in visual apparitions as a percentage of experienced phenomena.[15] We have not come very far since 1767: 'We no longer believe in ghosts? Who says that? Or rather, what does it mean?'[16]

The confusion is exacerbated by disparate disciplinary approaches. Some disciplines address beliefs and narratives as cultural expression: this is broadly true of historians, folklorists, anthropologists, and sociologists. Others engage more actively and experimentally with the veracity or otherwise of the phenomena: here we find psychology and parapsychology, particularly, with their experimental and statistical focus, and latterly some anthropologists, too, who have aimed at epiphenomenal proof. This latter group largely treats belief as subordinate to experience, but their work often offers practical examples of the kind of belief systems examined by the first group. The essentialism involves a cross-cultural amalgamation of accounts that is less common, though not unknown, among the first group of scholars. (The two groups are not mutually exclusive). Although they presuppose commonality from

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[13] Charles MacKay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1995), p. 514; Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 2nd edn (London: Black Swan, 2007), pp. 115-6.

[14] Paul Chambers, *The Cock Lane Ghost: Murder, Sex and Haunting in Dr Johnson's London* (Stroud: Sutton, 2006), p. 62.

[15] David Wood, 'Where Have All the Apparitions Gone? Conclusions of a Census of Hauntings', *Paranormal Review*, 46 (2008), 10-13; Alan Murdie, 'Ghostwatch', *Fortean Times*, 243 (December 2008), 20-21.

[16] Gotthold Lessing, quoted in P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts: A History of Phantoms, Ghouls, and Other Spirits of the Dead* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), pp. 173-4.

consideration of the veracity of the experiences, their clumsy comparativism does highlight some shared themes and motifs.

Ghosts stalk many disciplines. Literary and cultural studies address artistic representations that operate in a dialectical relationship with ethnological understandings of ghosts. Geographical studies have taken up sociological concerns with hauntings of place and their intersection with cultural histories. Medical and social work scholars and practitioners now take a greater interest in ghosts as a cultural context rather than simply a diagnostic matter.

An interpretative gulf stretches between their critical frameworks.[17] Notwithstanding this, they examine broadly the same phenomena, experiences, and narratives. The lack of an agreed understanding of the decline/persistence/growth of ghostly phenomena is exacerbated by disciplinary isolation, which then hampers attempts to understand how any more fundamental belief works. The confluences and divergences pose a challenge of how to comprehend all these interpretations, while unifying them in order to focus on those experiencing, narrating, and believing. To simplify the questions: **who** believes; **what** do they believe and experience; **how** do they narrate their stories; and **how** do they understand this in the context of their other beliefs? That challenge has guided this research and its attitudes to other approaches.

Definitions: belief

This research flags questions of the relationship between beliefs and the stories based on them. Some preliminary comment is necessary. Assertions of declining ghost narratives have paralleled, and are related to, assumptions of declining ghost belief.[18] Yet such narratives may explore lack of belief. Those having anomalous experiences may acknowledge them without drawing belief conclusions from them. Similarly, belief may not be expressed in narratives, or may remain tacit until some experience triggers its open articulation. Some experiences may not be narrated until they can be fitted appropriately to a belief system.

'Ghost belief' is used here for a systemic understanding that the phenomena under discussion are a) real in some sense, and b) different to the usual material experience of the believer's life. The sense in which phenomena are real is part of the negotiation undertaken by the believer: it may include assessment of contact by the dead made in physical (apparition, smell, sense of presence) and non-physical (dreams) form. Point (b) easily encompasses the anomalousness of the experience: it also includes the level of difference from the world of the living identified by those who see a constant presence of the dead around us. Such belief systems may not be openly stated as such, and may not even be understood to be such by the believer. They may interlock with, or run counter to, other beliefs held by the same person. Narratives may rest on and express, or work against, underlying beliefs. Connections between experience and belief are popularly drawn, but the actual relationship requires study.[19]

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[17] William J. Dewan, '"A Saucerful of Secrets": An Interdisciplinary Analysis of UFO Experiences', *JAF*, 119.472 (2006), 198.

[18] M.A. Murray, 'England as a Field for Folklore Research', *Folklore*, 65.1 (1954), 7.

[19] See the comment 'Without experiences people don't believe', *Across the Forest*. Dir. Justin Blair and Matthew Vincent. Distributed by the producers. 2009.

Definitions: 'ghost'

Even more basic is the question: What is a ghost? Simply asking whether people believe in them presupposes a shared understanding that may not exist. Comparison of post-war surveys suggests research design has not always addressed this problem. Ghosts are 'complicated beings appearing in all shapes and forms'.[20] '[S]lipperiness of language and … face-saving ambiguity' are key to testimony on belief.[21] This plays out in the interrelationship of oral and written records. Any examination of definitions must acknowledge their operation in an historical framework. Written sources show the development of a broad consensus which Davies summarises, using the general definition of 'the manifestation of the souls of the dead before the living'.[22] 'Haunting' refers generally to a repeated presence in a specific location. This allows a hypothetical definition, even if it does not cover all native definitions. Bennett noted 'ghost' for a malign presence, distinct from more common benign domestic experiences, which were described more vaguely. Landsburg fixed 'ghosts', behaving like 'psychotic human beings', to a location. 'Spirits' continue a reasonably normal life post mortem, and can attempt deliberate communication, so his 'ghosts' are less purposefully malign than Bennett's.[23] 'Ghost' is contested, and its negative connotations may restrict some research. This should be remembered when assessing surveys reliant on standard usages without qualitative consideration. However, 'ghost' remains the most frequently encountered term for spirit and supernatural experiences, and an accepted key to discussions of native understandings. It is a valuable touchstone in the nuances of vernacular use and definition, and their consideration against academic use, but it has limitations.

'Ghost' here broadly covers all post mortem contact with the living. Referring to the incident rather than the entity I use several terms, most frequently 'anomalous experience'. Although not neutral, this still conveys something of the distinction between these phenomena and the daily run of informants' lives. It remains to be seen how far the delimiting parapsychological definitions enter vernacular use and retain their technical meanings. Their 'apparitions' fall into four categories:

1   Hauntings and apparitions of the dead
2   Apparitions of the dying and those undergoing a crisis
3   Apparitions of the living
4   Encounters with spirits, aliens and other beings[24]

Here the native interpretation of the character and source of any supernormal encounter – the belief content – is left open. Interpretations of encountered beings change over time.[25] Irish fairies, for example, are now likened to the dead rather than

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[20] Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *True Ghost Stories of Our Own Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 3.
[21] Gillian Bennett, *Alas, Poor Ghost! Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1999), pp. 14-15.
[22] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 2.
[23] Alan Landsburg, *In Search of Strange Phenomena* (London: Corgi, 1977), p. 67.
[24] Andrew MacKenzie and Jane Henry, 'Apparitions and Encounters', in *Parapsychology: Research on Exceptional Experiences*, ed. Jane Henry (Hove: Routledge, 2005), p. 175.
[25] Fred van Lieburg, 'Ghosts, Animals, or Angels: Christian Story-Telling in a Modern World', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 20 (2002), 18-37, <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol20/ghosts.pdf> [accessed 16/05/08].

the fallen angels of older cosmology, but this apparently recent development incorporates older motifs.[26] Its relative epiphenomenal neutrality has much to recommend it, but 'apparition' may be misleadingly restrictive since so many experiences are not visual.

Bennett's informants spoke of odd sensations and feelings. My research was not planned to cover apparitions of the living, but MacKenzie and Henry's definitions indicate a continuum of experiences rather than discreet categories. Some informants related bilocation phenomena to ghosts. Testimony of apparitions or other contact with the dead could accommodate dying and crisis accounts. Some described apparitions of the dying, a model that remains influential because of the SPR's focus on it. These must be understood within a broader interpretation of death, which may be historically conditioned by prevailing understandings of the moment of death.[27] Information on these or other paranormal phenomena was not invited, but was documented where offered.

There is an eschatological question of how people understand ghosts as a continuing relationship with the dead of their social group. MacKenzie sought to broaden the range of investigated phenomena by claiming a widespread abandonment of the connection of hauntings with the dead. He used this unsupported claim of rejection to justify his premise, but his comments still acknowledge that popular association.[28] This disregards how percipients interpret apparitions.[29] For the column 'My Proof of Survival' the magazine *Fate* solicited stories dealing with 'an actual experience proving spirit survival'.[30] Such popular associations may be an obstacle to some parapsychological research. This may, in turn, prevent examination of the beliefs.[31]

Using 'ghost' for all post mortem contact with the living is a way of examining the idea that 'their dead form a community which is an extension of the living.'[32] This informs much historical writing, particularly on the Reformation, where the 'new theology' supposedly ended that community.[33] Anthropology also explores the

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[26] Patricia Lysaght, 'Traditional Beliefs and Narratives of a Contemporary Irish Tradition Bearer', in *Folk Beliefs Today*, ed., Mare Koiva (first pub. Tartu, 1995), Haldjas e-publications, <http://www.folklore.ee/rl/pubte/ee/usund/ingl/> [accessed 11/02/08]; S.O. Addy, *Folk Tales and Superstitions*, ed. J.D.A. Widdowson (Wakefield: EP, 1973; first pub. 1895 as *Household Tales with Other Traditional Remains*), pp. xii-xiii; Edwin Sidney Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales* (London: Walter Scott, 1891), p. 348; J. Wentworth Day, *Ghosts and Witches* (New York: Dorset, 1969; first pub. 1954).
[27] Hilary Evans, *Seeing Ghosts; Experiences of the Paranormal* (London: John Murray, 2002), pp. 28-9; Rosemary Horrox, 'Purgatory, Prayer, and Plague: 1150-1380', in *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), p. 92; Kristin Zeiler, 'Deadly Pluralism? Why Death-Concept, Death-Definition, Death-Criterion and Death-Test Pluralism Should Be Allowed, Even Though It Creates Some Problems', *Bioethics*, 23.8 (2009), 451-453.
[28] Andrew MacKenzie, *Hauntings and Apparitions* (London: Heinemann, 1982), p. 212.
[29] Alan Gauld, 'Survival', in *Parapsychology*, ed. Henry, p. 218.
[30] Quoted from 10.1 (January 1957), 103: Alan Baker, *Ghosts and Spirits* (London: Orion, 1998).
[31] Michael Tymn, 'The History of Survival Research', *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, 2.1 (2011), 2-5.
[32] Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts*, p. 11.
[33] Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts*, p. 81.

concept that death is 'a departure and not a complete annihilation.'[34] Death may not even physically separate the deceased from a kinship group.[35] Physical comparisons may not apply directly, although British funerary and commemorative practices require further attention. Ghost research can open a richer understanding of social groups and their interactions, regardless of individual positions on the phenomena themselves. A ghost 'is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead us to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life.'[36] Gordon's metaphors are problematic, but this also contains a literal truth.[37]

It is therefore necessary to address approaches largely outlined separately. It will be convenient to consider them individually, although this is somewhat arbitrary. Some disciplines show greater willingness to address the findings of others, and emerging minority subjects are attracting inter-disciplinary researchers. Previously, emergent disciplines kept a frustrating distance.[38] Considering disciplines separately outlines useful themes, and valuable approaches. Dégh's comment applies broadly:

> Parapsychologists ask whether the experience is for real or not; folklorists ask what is the nature of human creativity to be discerned through the report of such experiences. The two quests differ, there may or may not be a bridge to connect the two, and it is a challenge to try to cross boundaries.[39]

History

Oral history methodologies have greatly informed the field methods here. More generally, much of the framework for seeing ghost beliefs contextually is offered by a broad sweep of historical research. History elaborates the contemporary context in which these ghost beliefs and their expression take place, as well as informing the longer trajectory of the transmission of cultural items. If the first of these indicates, too, the contributions of sociology, the latter highlights other disciplinary interactions. Considering how informants themselves incorporate historical sources into a belief system addresses the use of doctrinal and other texts. Historical research on popular culture has often addressed folklore material.[40] The history of religion has dealt with orthodox beliefs and interdenominational disputes centred on heterodox beliefs. Historians of death have dealt with religious history alongside popular representations

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[34] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), p. 152.
[35] Mary Noble, 'Yoruba Death', *Shadow*, 3.2 (1986), 61-2.
[36] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, new edn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008; first pub. 1997), p. 8.
[37] Ulo Valk, 'Ghostly Possession and Real Estate: The Dead in Contemporary Estonian Folklore', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 43.1 (2006), 32.
[38] Andrew Lang, 'Protest of a Psycho-Folklorist', *Folklore*, 6.3 (1895), 244.
[39] Linda Dégh, 'Foreword', in Leea Virtanen, *'That Must Have Been ESP!' An Examination of Psychic Experiences*, trans. John Atkinson and Thomas DuBois (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. xii.
[40] E.P. Thompson, 'History and Anthropology', in *Making History: Writings on History and Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1994), p. 202.

of death and the afterlife. The recent historiography of ghosts has worked broadly within social history.

This question of folk religion/popular religion is crucial here, although many of the terms are controversial.[41] They attempt, from various perspectives, to capture interactions and ruptures between an official doctrinal institution and vernacular practice. This is conceptually problematic, as it could incorporate: heterodox idiosyncratic beliefs without congregational or institutional form; the heterodox practices of people who nevertheless identify themselves with a religious body in which they do not participate; concessions to heterodoxy by otherwise loyal and practising congregants; and, potentially, even the vernacular pursuit of quite orthodox practices, in the 'popular' impact of an institutional body.

There is some question whether ghost belief might be included within these notions of 'popular religion'. Ideas of a folk practice of other religions (Judaism, Islam) provide useful analogies here. Some institutional forms, as we shall see, may be better suited to accommodate such negotiations than others. Examining ghost beliefs in relation to more institutional forms of belief practice also incorporates some doctrinal disputes. The historiography of Christian ghost beliefs has often drawn attention to discussions of the Witch of Endor. This story is still negotiated doctrinally today, and has been discussed in the context of psychical research over the last century. Actual inquiry into what people believe, and how, allows us to overcome problems with the very important scholarship of an earlier period, for example using 'traditional religion' to 'denote the identity between official Roman Catholicism and common religion'. More useful here has been the concept of 'popular religion' as 'a syncretism of orthodox religious belief and practice, appropriated and reinterpreted within local culture, folk religion and popular superstition', although that also raises questions.[42] Ethnographic inquiry allows a further problematising of recent influential historiography that has reincorporated 'survivalist' conceptions of early folklore. Again, we face here the lengthening influence of certain key texts.

These disputes, particularly over the Reformation, highlight ghost historiography's political character. This was not always linked directly with their wider cultural and social significance,[43] although earlier writers did make the connection.[44] Political historiography remains significant when considering changing conditions today. The re-emergence of ghost, supernatural, and religious beliefs in countries formerly under Stalinist control raises general questions about the relation of networks of popular culture and the political superstructure. Viewing the interaction will enable certain political points to be made from consideration of popular representations and beliefs.

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[41] Don Yoder, 'Toward a Definition of Folk Religion', *Western Folklore*, 33.1 (1974), 2-15.
[42] Richard Sykes, 'Popular Religion in Decline: A Study from the Black Country', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56.2 (2005), 289-290.
[43] Philip Morgan, 'Of Worms and War: 1380-1558', in *Death in England*, ed. Jupp and Gittings, p. 131.
[44] Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary: With a Collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions*, new edn (London: Edward Jeffery, 1811; first pub. 1787), p. 249.

Political questions have dominated the historiography since Spiritualism's emergence created an institutional framework for post mortem communication.[45] Where Reformation arguments preoccupied the earlier historiography, Spiritualism and the SPR provide the dominant paradigms for nineteenth century ghost beliefs. Limiting attention to congregational Spiritualism overlooks the spread of its influence further, for example into contemporary ghost investigation methods. Concentration on its political characteristics has addressed less well its adaptation of traditional ghost legends and beliefs. Historians have studied various radical associations of nineteenth-century Spiritualism.[46] Sociologists have located Spiritualism's development in unsettled social conditions.[47]

This is suggestive of a deeper social context to ghost beliefs, although there have been limitations in how far this has been explored. Spiritualism's progressive character, possibly overstated by radical historiography, has not always been seen in terms of the fortunes of political movements.[48] The historical trajectory of political and philosophical content has been downplayed. Spiritualism still influences ways of understanding post mortem contact despite its relative institutional insignificance. The 2001 Census, the first to record religious affiliations, identified only 32,404 Spiritualists of a total reporting population of 52,041,916. Spiritualism was a write-in option, so some Spiritualists may have been recorded elsewhere or excluded.[49] Even allowing for a substantial margin of error this is negligible, but a cultural legacy remains. Not isolated from existing religious practice, Spiritualism has fed into eclectic and often apparently secular new belief systems.[50] It established a dominant (although not universally accepted)[51] mode of contacting the dead even as its congregational influence dwindled, and it remains within the network of influences informing contemporary afterlife belief.

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[45] Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters* (London: Arrow, 2007), pp. 16-19; Antonio Melechi, *Servants of the Supernatural: The Night Side of the Victorian Mind* (London: Heinemann, 2008), pp 161-163; Kenneth D. Pimple, 'Ghosts, Spirits, and Scholars: The Origins of Modern Spiritualism', in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker (Logan: Utah State University Pres, 1995), pp. 75-89; Ernest Isaacs, 'The Fox Sisters and American Spiritualism', in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 79-110.

[46] Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Lisa Abend, 'Specters of the Secular: Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century Spain', *European History Quarterly*, 34.4 (2004), 528-530; John Warne Monroe, '*Cartes de visite* from the Other World: Spiritism and the Discourse of *Laïcisme* in the Early Third Republic', *French Historical Studies*, 26.1 (2003), 119-153.

[47] G.K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); R. Laurence Moore, 'Spiritualism and Science: Reflections on the First Decade of the Spirit Rappings', *American Quarterly*, 24.4 (1972), 474.

[48] Adler, *Drawing down the Moon*, pp. 273-282; Andy Letcher, '"Virtual Paganism" or Direct Action? The Implications of Road Protesting for Modern Paganism', *Diskus*, 6 (2000), <http://www.basr.ac.uk/diskus/diskus1-6/letcher6.txt> [accessed 22 November 2010]; Adrian Ivakhiv, 'Nature and Ethnicity in East European Paganism: An Environmental Ethic of the Religious Right?', *The Pomegranate*, 7.2 (2005), 194-225.

[49] Focus on Religion, 2004, prepared from the 2001 Census by the Office for National Statistics, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=13209> [accessed 1st March 2009].

[50] Nelson, *Spiritualism*, pp. 147-150.

[51] Harry Price, *Fifty Years of Psychical Research: A Critical Survey* (New York: Arno, 1975; first pub. 1939), p. 190.

The political association was initially possible in part because Spiritualism presented itself as a scientific method of communication. Psychical research also developed as a scientific movement, even for those wanting to prove survival of death. Witnesses expected to be taken seriously 'because they regarded their accounts as independent of belief'.[52] This continues.[53] Spiritualism thus rests on Enlightenment developments in scientific thought, developments which have also had an impact on ghost beliefs more directly. Jung argued that ghost belief had been counteracted by rationalism and science, but these factors then informed resurgent belief at a higher scientific level.[54] Historical research in this area has valuably tackled such shifts in a general philosophical landscape. Historians of ghost belief inevitably find themselves dealing with underlying questions of philosophy. Jung, although no historian, identified the groundwork for European Spiritualism in trends of Romantic thought, particularly the work of Schopenhauer.[55]

Such historical appreciations have usefully informed much work on popular cultural systems generally, particularly in regard to disputes over the Reformation, which fed into later understandings of ghosts.[56] Folklorists and some historians have enthusiastically studied popular customs surviving the Reformation.[57] Rather less attention has been paid to the continuities and discontinuities with earlier beliefs in the related development of Spiritualism gained adherents and opprobrium from established institutions, while its connection with traditional material is sometimes overlooked.[58] Caveats that Spiritualism might not work, for example, are not read in relation to earlier folk beliefs.[59]

Sociology

Spiritualism's adaptive capacities, and the possibility of emergent syncretic belief systems, have been studied by sociology, although not always comfortably. A sociological survey of twentieth-century British Spiritualism concludes by

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[52] Peter Lamont, 'Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence', *The Historical Journal*, 47.4 (2004), 919.

[53] Fiona Bowie, 'Methods for Studying the Paranormal (and Who Says What Is Normal Anyway?)', *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, 1.1 (2010), 5.

[54] C.G. Jung, 'The Psychological Foundations of Belief in Spirits', in *Psychology and the Occult* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008; first pub. 1982), p. 129.

[55] Jung, 'On Spiritualistic Phenomena', in *Psychology and the Occult*, p. 109.

[56] Davies, *The Haunted*; Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural* (London: Penguin, 1987), especially Chapter 6; R.C. Finucane, *Ghosts: Appearances of the Dead and Cultural Transformation* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1996; first pub. 1984, as *Appearances of the Dead*), Chapter 4.

[57] Ronald Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore', *Past and Present*, 148 (1995), 89-116; Theo Brown, *The Fate of the Dead: A Study in Folk Eschatology in the West Country after the Reformation* (Ipswich and Totowa, NJ: D.S. Brewer and Rowman and Littlefield, 1979); Jo Bath and John Newton, '"Sensible Proof of Spirits": Ghost Belief During the Later Seventeenth Century', *Folklore*, 117.1 (2006), 1-14; Alexandra Walsham, 'Reformed Folklore? Cautionary Tales and Oral Tradition in Early Modern England', in *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500-1850*, ed. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 186-187.

[58] Pimple, 'Ghosts, Spirits, and Scholars'; Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (London: Longmans, Green, 1894), p. 64; Barrow, *Independent Spirits,* pp. 23-24.

[59] Barrow, *Independent Spirits,* pp. 23-24.

questioning its own disciplinary purpose.[60] Nelson's concentration on individual psychology over social structures stems apparently from his assessment of psychic abilities, like some parapsychology.[61] This may not be generally typical of sociology, but does reflects its problematic engagement, like history, with persistent 'superstition':

> sociologists have, first and foremost, to explain why superstition has continued to be a feature of modern societies. On the other hand, in so far as sociologists have actually addressed the problem of explaining the persistence of superstition in modern advanced societies they have generally proceeded by drawing upon theories (or theoretical perspectives) which were developed in order to explain a [sic] different phenomena.[62]

Sociology's valuable descriptive strengths tell against it here. Nelson's reactive model of change within social organisations and groups cannot accommodate active adaptation, or deliberate destruction, of previous structures by participants. The focus on social position remains useful. Nelson identifies social transition as promoting belief, pinpointing higher levels of belief among mobile social groups, which he attributes to detachment from their subcultures.[63] This is hardly definitive.[64] It may reflect change or caution about expressing cultural identity.[65]

Attempts to chart distinctions across a community's social spectrum highlight sociology's value here, and its limits. Nelson identifies a higher incidence of visual apparitions among the manual working class. Two contemporaneous post-war commentators suggested 'the middle class, while not believing in ghosts as such, will be quick to tell of … a revenant which they accept as … "one of those things that can happen"' and that the 'more stolid labouring classes' are less likely to have hallucinations.[66] Haunted houses are rarely said to be owned by ghost percipients, but ghosts are also reported inflating house prices.[67] Boy identifies beliefs in the paranormal predominantly among groups he links by their uncertain social position and anxieties about the future.[68] Such findings can be compared with other poll data to assess the statistical significance of such distinctions. A 2005 survey for *The Sun* found little differential in belief levels across all social groups.[69] A sociological

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[60] Nelson, *Spiritualism*, p. 270.

[61] G.K. Nelson, 'Towards a Sociology of the Psychic', *Review of Religious Research*, 16.3 (1975), 171.

[62] Colin Campbell, 'Half-Belief and the Paradox of Ritual Instrumental Activism: A Theory of Modern Superstition', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 47.1 (1996), 151-152.

[63] Nelson, 'Sociology of the Psychic', 171.

[64] Shelley R. Adler, 'Terror in Transition: Hmong Folk Belief in America', in *Out of the Ordinary*, ed. Walker, p. 188.

[65] Peter L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 48.

[66] Erminie W. Voegelin, 'Revenant', in *Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend,* ed. Maria Leach (London: New English Library, 1975; first pub. 1949), p. 933; D.J. West, 'A Mass-Observation Questionnaire on Hallucinations', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 34.644/5 (1948), 188.

[67] Theo Brown, *Devon Ghosts* (Norwich: Jarrold, 1982), p. 4.

[68] Daniel Boy, 'Vingt ans', 44-5.

[69] Populus, *The Sun*.

approach helps with understanding the nuances in social distinctions of belief. It is useful for the question of who sees ghosts. Also useful are its methodological contributions.[70] Some sociological researchers have unconsciously loaded questions, casting doubt on their data.[71] This is widespread. Researchers operate with their own beliefs and positions. If these remain unidentified by the researcher, 'social scientists [might be] telling us more about how they themselves function than about how the world works.'[72] Sociological reflexivity is invaluable, if not the final word on the subject.

Sociological research is limited to some extent by its focus on organisations and structures, which distracts from sub- or extra-institutional beliefs. This is clear when discussing the secularisation or otherwise of western society. Socio-economic context is vital for understanding how ghost beliefs might fit into more orthodox belief systems. Probing this is important in assessing the cultural diversification of post-war Britain. This has already been raised as an obstacle to some assumptions about secularisation, particularly its links with urbanism.[73] Heterodox non-congregational beliefs are acknowledged, but both sides of the secularisation debate concentrate on the relative fortunes of the established churches. Tortured formulations highlight how far popular beliefs are seen through the prism of official congregations. Compounding the definitional problems, vernacular beliefs are hinted at statistically but not explored.[74] Self-identified adherents may not have orthodox positions, but this hardly demonstrates secularisation. Church 'membership' of congregants who attend only rite of passage and festival services is a recognised conundrum. A connected problem is interpreting non-congregational beliefs as caused or promoted by orthodox beliefs.[75] Institutional religion dominates the available conceptualisation, with '"religious" … virtually synonymous with adherence to an organized religion'.[76] Institutional doctrines will be addressed here after the practices and beliefs described by informants in relation to ghosts. Otherwise we risk overlooking informal belief elements through an over-formal adherence to institutional models.

Less helpful is a trend away from empirical data. Post-modernist sociological writing has championed metaphorical usages of 'ghost' and 'spirit.' Vernacular metaphors require further investigation. Derrida made such metaphors 'fashionable in academic discourse'.[77] They proliferate.[78] Many scholars claim legitimacy for their metaphor

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[70] C. Kirk Hadaway, Penny Long Marler, and Mark Chaves, 'What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at US Church Attendance', *American Sociological Review*, 58.6 (1993), 750.
[71] Reginald W. Bibby, 'Searching for Invisible Thread: Meaning Systems in Contemporary Canada', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 22.2 (1983), 101-119, especially 103ff.
[72] Bibby, 'Invisible Thread', 116.
[73] Clive D. Field, 'Faith in the Metropolis: Opinion Polls and Christianity in Post-War London', *London Journal*, 24.1 (1999), 68-84; Greg Smith, 'The Unsecular City: The Revival of Religion in East London', in *Rising in the East? The Regeneration of East London*, ed. Tim Butler and Michael Rustin (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), pp. 123-145.
[74] Hadaway, Marler, and Chaves, 'Polls'.
[75] James McClenon, 'Chinese and American Anomalous Experiences: The Role of Religiosity', *Sociological Analysis*, 51.1 (1990), 51.
[76] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1989), p. 7.
[77] Marilyn Motz, 'The Practice of Belief', *JAF*, 111.441 (1998), 339; Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

from Marx.[79] An influential contemplation of sociology and post-modernism, Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* does speak to scholars of ghost belief,[80] but its extended search for metaphors is hampered by disregard for any ethnographic meanings these might also have.[81] The shortcomings are exemplified in expropriations of 'ghost' from non-metaphorical usage resting on inadequate reflexivity.[82] This is better handled elsewhere.[83] Such approaches reveal blindness to persistent vernacular meanings, and to other literary discussions.[84] Gordon remains the cornerstone, despite such criticisms.[85] Its impact can also be seen in ethnography.[86] Gordon's chapter on Argentina never considers the disappeared ethnographically.[87] This is frustrating given work on ghost narratives generated by local tragedies and the interrelationship between legend and belief, which could have opened fruitful areas.[88]

Ghost metaphors are widespread in post-colonial literatures.[89] Their metaphors tend towards foolish rhetoric and circular self-contemplation.[90] This research looks to ethnographic usage and practice, but metaphors cannot be dismissed. Some post-colonial writing does illustrate subtextual complications.[91] Only by viewing the broader cultural spread of contemporary society is it possible to make an appraisal of the interactions between ethnographic use and practice and adaptive use of related rhetoric. Some disciplines recognise metaphorical usages but get no further.[92] By not

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[78] Gray Kochhar-Lindgren, 'The Haunting of the University: Phantomenology [sic] and the House of Learning', *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, 9.1 (2009), 3-12.

[79] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 163-4; Jann Matlock, 'Ghostly Politics', *Diacritics*, 30.3 (2000), 66.

[80] Annette Hill, *Paranormal Media: Audiences, Spirits and Magic in Popular Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 14.

[81] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. 151.

[82] Michael Mayerfeld Bell, 'The Ghosts of Place', *Theory and Society*, 26.6 (1997), 813-836.

[83] Jasna Capo Zmegac, '"Death Primarily Belongs to the Dying": A Contribution to the Anthropology of Death and Dying', *Narodna Umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research*, 47.1 (2010), 50-1.

[84] Bell, 'Ghosts of Place', 816, and 834 footnote 14, overlooks Freud's discussion of contradictory meanings of *heimlich*, Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson, Pelican Freud Library, 14 (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 345.

[85] Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 2-3, and, quoting Renée L. Bergland, p. 212.

[86] Linda Dégh, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 18.

[87] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, Chapter 3, pp. 63-135.

[88] Ilana Harlow, 'Unravelling Stories: Exploring the Juncture of Ghost Story and Local Tragedy', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 30.2/3 (1993), 177-200, especially 195.

[89] Marlene Goldman and Joanne Saul, 'Talking with Ghosts: Haunting in Canadian Cultural Production', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 75.2 (2006), 645-6, and other articles there.

[90] Ross Gibson, *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2002), p. 165: see also *Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors*, ed. Tanya Dalziell and Paul Genoni (= *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Special Issue 2007), (Adelaide: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 2007).

[91] Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Childhood among Ghosts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

[92] Jo Frances Maddern and Peter Adey, 'Editorial: Spectro-Geographies', *Cultural Geographies*, 15.3 (2008), 292.

distinguishing metaphorical and literal usages, ethnographic traditions of discussing ghosts are not recognised.[93] Some scholarship, without being convincing on oral narrative, does contextualise ghost walks better on this question.[94] Closer fieldwork illustrates the complex relations at work, posing useful questions about traditional legend material in contemporary culture.[95]

Parapsychology

Conflicting disciplinary interpretations may themselves become elements in the negotiations considered here. Psychical research feeds into native understandings of belief in ways not directly reflecting its research findings. Experimental parapsychology is primarily concerned with testing the validity of phenomena, leading to accusations that it is 'the only academic research orientation which has always been compelled to legitimize its own justification for existence by proving the existence of the objects being investigated.'[96] Any scholar encountering ghost stories is approaching 'the outer boundaries of science', where philosophical questions are unavoidable.[97] Parapsychology was shaped by Empiricist models of scientific research, and Humean and Popperian theoretical structures are advanced.[98] Thus concepts such as survival and apparitions are separated, because no causal link can logically be established. For experimental purposes this could be defended, but it is unsatisfactory when dealing with popular perceptions and the transmission of beliefs. The resort to an over-extended metaphor, the meme, which disregards social research into the transmission of culture and belief, is a result of such arguments. This theory of science may also prevent an assessment of the development of broadly scientific worldviews.[99]

The history of parapsychology is marked by disputes over using investigations to comment on belief.[100] It speaks more about belief than results when research is discovered to have built the phenomenon being tested into its model premise, or to have assumed as constant the variables being tested.[101] Variables are found measured against other variables, or explained by postulating further untested variables.[102]

[93] Julian Holloway and James Kneale, 'Locating Haunting: A Ghost-Hunter's Guide', *Cultural Geographies*, 15.3 (2008), 299; 301-302.

[94] David Inglis and Mary Holmes, 'Highland and Other Haunts: Ghosts in Scottish Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30.1 (2003), 57-61.

[95] Glenn W. Gentry, 'Walking with the Dead: The Place of Ghost Walk Tourism in Savannah, Georgia', *Southeastern Geographer*, 47.2 (2007), 233.

[96] Peter Assion, 'A Critique of Parapsychological Folklore', in *German Volkskunde: A Decade of Theoretical Confrontation, Debate, and Reorientation (1967-1977)*, ed. and trans. James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 159.

[97] Guntis Pakalns, 'Contemporary Legend and "Ghost Stories" in Post-Socialist Latvia', *FoaFTale News: Newsletter of the International Society for Contempary Legend Research*, 37 (June 1995).

[98] Christopher C. French, 'Scepticism', in *Parapsychology*, ed. Henry, pp. 80-81.

[99] Daniel Boy and Guy Michelat, 'Croyances aux parasciences: dimensions sociales et culturelles', *Revue Française de sociologie*, 27.2 (1986), 201.

[100] Edward Clodd, 'A Reply to the Foregoing "Protest"', *Folklore*, 6.3 (1895), 253.

[101] MacKenzie, *Hauntings and Apparitions, passim*.

[102] Peter A. McCue, 'Theories of Haunting: An Overview', Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, 66.1 (2002), 18; Charles McCreery, *Science, Philosophy and ESP*, Proceedings of

Criticised for their scientific failings, such treatments may still find a popular response.[103] Popular works on the paranormal appeal inaccurately to scientific laws.[104] Sceptical science may even be dismissed entirely.[105]

Sceptical research may also find a popular response amongst believers. Experimental disproof often overlooks active interpretations by subjects. The television show *Most Haunted* is typically criticised by believers not for fraud, but for the impossibility of its consistency.[106] Believers include material explanations in their worldviews.[107] Following Hufford's work on sleep paralysis, which might support a purely physiological explanation, a victim of nightmare attacks wrote that he might have 'discovered the neurophysiological mechanism by which these entities gain access to us.'[108]

Ghost narratives are reported as spontaneous cases, unsought and unanticipated, and not expected to be replicable under laboratory conditions. A known record of scepticism amongst researchers may deter their relation.[109] The establishment of the SPR's Spontaneous Cases Committee attempted to square the circle by finding sufficient data around spontaneously occurring cases to lend them experimental evidential authority retrospectively. Non-replicability is problematic for a discipline that widely accepts Popperian falsifiability as its definition of science, but field experiments have greatly expanded our understanding of unsettling phenomena.[110]

Psychology

Similarly, psychologists examine possible causes, with hypotheses long debated.[111] Scientific rejection may not prevent these debates from entering vernacular narratives, and scientific evidence alone does not explain incorporation into belief systems.

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the Institute of Psychophysical Research, 3 (Oxford: Institute of Psychophysical Research, 1977; first pub. 1967), p. 17; Tymn, 'Survival Research', 2-5.

[103] Richard Wiseman, '"Heads I Win, Tails You Lose": How Parapsychologists Nullify Null Results', *Skeptical Inquirer*, 34.1 (2010), <http://www.csicop.org/si/show/heads_i_win_tails_you_loser_how_parapsychologists_nullify_null_results> [accessed 21 May 2010]; and Robert L. Park, *Voodoo Science: The Road from Foolishness to Fraud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 39-40.

[104] Landsburg, *Strange Phenomena*, p. 69.

[105] 'Leave it to Mr. Science to think he found a potential flaw': Nancy L. Zingrone, comment on the SPR Facebook page, 19 November 2010, responding to Richard Wiseman, 'Bem's ESP Research …', *Richard Wiseman: Blog*, 18 November 2010 <http://richardwiseman.wordpress.com/2010/11/18/bems-esp-research/> [accessed 26 November 2010].

[106] Mikel J. Koven, '*Most Haunted* and the Convergence of Traditional Belief and Popular Television', *Folklore*, 118.2 (2007), 183-202.

[107] David J. Hufford, 'Traditions of Disbelief', *New York Folklore*, 8.3/4 (1982), 53.

[108] David J. Hufford, 'Reasons, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology Versus Folk Belief', *New York Folklore*, 11.1/4 (1985), 191.

[109] Richard A. Kalish, and David K. Reynolds, 'Phenomenological Reality and Post-Death Contact', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 12.2 (1973), 219.

[110] Vic Tandy and Tony R. Lawrence, 'The Ghost in the Machine', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 62.851 (1998), 360-364.

[111] G.W. Lambert, 'Poltergeists: A Physical Theory', *JSPR*, 38 (1955), 49-71; Andrew Mackenzie, *The Unexplained* (London: Arthur Barker, 1966), pp. 6-7.

Examining consistency to reported locations of anomalous phenomena, it is suggested that specific 'variables … may account for some haunting experiences.' Further, 'visual features might match the stereotype of a typically "haunted" place … and thus induce mild psychosomatic and hallucinatory experiences … [or] directly cause unusual physical and psychological experiences.'[112] This speculation might be supported anecdotally.[113] Persinger insists that 'To date … not … a single type of paranormal experience … is not understandable in terms of known brain functions.'[114] The presence of stimuli, however, provides no immediate solution why the percipient should have chosen that specific interpretation. 'Media reportage' has been suggested as an influence.[115] Popular representations are clearly among the influences on narrative negotiations of belief, but this does not mean media coverage creates belief.[116] Believers are not duped by stories. They are not, as one folklorist disgracefully describes them, 'gullible masses' influenced by 'absurd rumors'.[117] Informants weigh evidence. They assess the world in which they hold their beliefs and tell their stories, including its media.[118] This negotiation of registers is missing from some psychological research, which assumes direct influence instead.

Lange and Houran produced models of the development of experiences to explain why 'delusions are resistant to change'. (The technical term 'delusions' has negative vernacular connotations). Failure to find a standard explanation for ambiguous stimuli results in paranormal delusions. These 'start with ambiguous experiences, such experiences lead to denial and fear, and fear eventually induces belief, thereby reducing the fear' in a negative feedback loop.[119] They then produced a model of a positive (self-reinforcing) rather than a negative (self-correcting) feedback loop to tackle 'more pervasive delusions in which fear cannot be neutralized simply by applying a "paranormal" label.'[120] They usefully attempt to consider all environmental stimuli, including culture.[121] It raises questions in contemporary evidence. Few contemporary ghost narratives are frightening. One solution would be to treat these as subsequent experiences under their schema. This would require greater documentation. Their broad view might need further extension beyond experimentally-assessable evidence. It requires an equally sensitive and rigorous

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[112] Richard Wiseman *et al*, 'An Investigation into Alleged "Hauntings"', *British Journal of Psychology*, 94 (2003), 208-209.
[113] Richard Barden, 'Nocturnal Illusion', *Fortean Times*, 247 (April 2009), 75.
[114] Michael A. Persinger, 'The Neuropsychiatry of Paranormal Experiences', *Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 13.4 (2001), 523.
[115] Wiseman *et al*, 'An Investigation', 196.
[116] Koven, '*Most Haunted*'; Emily B. Edwards, 'A House that Tries to Be Haunted: Ghostly Narratives in Popular Film and Television', in *Hauntings and Poltergeists: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. James Houran and Rense Lange (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), pp. 82-120.
[117] Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, p. 122.
[118] Elizabeth A. Warner, 'Russian Peasant Beliefs and Practices Concerning Death and the Supernatural Collected in Novsokol'niki Region, Pskov Province, Russia, 1995, Part I: The Restless Dead, Wizards and Spirit Beings', *Folklore*, 111.1 (2000), 85.
[119] Rense Lange and James Houran, 'Delusions of the Paranormal: A Haunting Question of Perception', *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 186.10 (1998), 637-645.
[120] Rense Lange and James Houran, 'The Role of Fear in Delusions of the Paranormal', *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 187.3 (1999), 159-166.
[121] Lange and Houran, 'Delusions of the Paranormal', 637-645.

assessment of cultural phenomena and their transmission to prevent unrecognised cultural assumptions influencing analysis.[122]

Such analysis has been undertaken in associated fields. Psychoanalysts have drawn attention to neurotic inner states in ghost experiences, prioritising their treatment as disorders before analysing their cultural significance.[123] Social work and medical anthropology increasingly add a qualitative approach to reports rather than simply assessing veracity.[124] During a dementia evaluation, a clinical team eventually accepted that belief in spirits was cultural, not a diagnostic feature. That proved to be an unexpected attitude change towards the cultural feature.[125] This has obvious application in studying mourning.[126] Cultural appraisals must be incorporated into experimental or scientific assessments. Scientific research has been less successful when attempting to produce scientific explanations for cultural phenomena, although many of these clearly speak to belief systems.

Anthropology

Anthropological research has been more successful in tackling the relationship between supernatural and natural phenomena, like the long historical traditions of supernatural attacks and medical conditions.[127] Diverse anthropological studies of medical causation and spirit possession usefully highlight how far believers' worldviews also incorporate material facts.[128] This undermines simplistic scientistic accounts of belief, not least by reducing expected imposture.[129] Even where spirit possession is interpreted medically, it retains its cultural weight.[130]

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[122] For a very odd example, Laurence L. Bendit, *Paranormal Cognition: Its Place in Human Psychology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p. 45.

[123] Ernest Jones, 'Psychoanalysis and Folklore', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 100-1.

[124] Martin Smith, 'The Divine or the Physician? Fears of Ghosts and the Supernatural in Approved Social Work', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 22.3 (2008), 290.

[125] Kathryn S. Elliott and Mariann Di Minno, 'Unruly Grandmothers, Ghosts and Ancestors: Chinese Elders and the Importance of Culture in Dementia Evaluations', *Journal of Cross Cultural Gerontology*, 21 (2006), 171ff.

[126] W. Dewi Rees, 'The Hallucinations of Widowhood', *British Medical Journal*, 2 October 1971, 4, 37-41.

[127] Eivind Haga, 'The Wet Grave, Sudden Death and the Bereaved', *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 39.1 (1985), 26.

[128] Robert W. Wyllie, 'Do the Effutu Really Believe That the Spirits Cause Illness? A Ghanaian Case Study', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 24.3 (1994), 228-240; Alison M. Spiro, '*Najar* or *Bhut* – Evil Eye or Ghost Affliction: Gujarati Views About Illness Causation', *Anthropology & Medicine*, 12.1 (2005), 61-73; Ezekiel Alembi, 'Issues in the Socio-Cultural Perceptions of Death as Reflected in the Abanyole Dirges', *Indian Folklife*, 27 (2007), 18.

[129] W.H.R. Rivers, *Medicine, Magic and Religion: The Fitzpatrick Lectures Delivered Before the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1915 and 1916* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1924; repr. London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 47.

[130] Stanley A. and Ruth S. Freed, 'Spirit Possession as Illness in a North Indian Village', *Ethnology*, 3.2 (1964), 152-171.

Anthropological writings also usefully insist on integral cultural structures. Anthropologists have written extensively on burial ritual.[131] Funeral rites are identified primarily as rites of incorporation into the world of the dead.[132] With ritual variation this bears directly on ghost belief, as appropriate observations (ritual or informal) ensure the spirit's transition and emphasise relations with the dead.[133] Anthropology has also examined observations regulating those relations after burial.[134] These are not foreign to this fieldwork area.[135]

Some anthropologists start not from experience but from 'a prior acceptance of authority which transforms that experience.'[136] This may also be problematically one-sided, but it allows access for examining the workings of cultural networks rather than just their socio-economic context, enabling a closer examination of the relationship between belief and practice. Anthropologists have usefully noted degrees of variation within the correlation of belief and behaviour.[137] Much has been assumed about whether ghost belief is conditioned by experience. A theological argument suggests experiences are probably genuine where they contradict the subject's 'basic philosophical or theological assumption' and cannot 'be dismissed simply as … wish-fulfilment'.[138] Such counter-intuitiveness is also proposed for scientific thinking.[139] Self-authentication accords with belief-narration containing within itself an examination of those beliefs.[140] A questioning voice may be vital: straightforward identification of existence and function may be a simplification.[141] Schmitt warns against treating reified belief as 'something established once and for all' which only needs expression and transmission. Belief, rather, is 'precarious, always questioned, and inseparable from recurrences of doubt.'[142]

Questioning of the concepts 'supernatural' and 'superstition' has also been useful. Reticence about such words is documented from informants happy to use other

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[131] Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); *Death, Mourning and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, ed. Antonius C.G.M. Robben (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), Part V: Mortuary Rituals, pp. 195-262.

[132] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 146.

[133] David M. Knipe, 'Make That Sesame on Rice, Please! Appetites of the Dead in Hinduism', *Indian Folklore Research Journal*, 5.8 (2008), 28; Ed van Eeden, 'From Announcement to Cemetery: Deceased, Buried and Mourned in the Netherlands', trans. Nancy Forest-Flier, *The Low Countries: Art and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands*, 8 (2000), 36.

[134] Valery Dymshits, 'The Jewish Cemetery: A Place Where One Does Not Go', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 37.3 (2007), 319-333.

[135] Nigel Barley, *Native Land* (London: Penguin, 1990), Chapter 4, pp. 84-116.

[136] Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton, ASA Monographs 3 (London: Tavistock, 1968), p. 25.

[137] Benson Saler, 'Beliefs, Disbeliefs, and Unbeliefs', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 41.1 (1968), 29.

[138] Elmer O'Brien, summarised in I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 23.

[139] George Miller Beard, 'A New Theory of Trance and Its Bearing on Human Testimony', *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 4 (1877), 42.

[140] Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, p. 97.

[141] Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic,* p. 723.

[142] Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 7.

terms.[143] '[S]upernatural' implicitly posits a 'natural'.[144] Recent debates discuss rehabilitating 'supernatural' as functionally effective, often on pragmatic grounds.[145] Bosco's argument for an etic disciplinary understanding rather than reliance on a single framed emic conception is persuasive.[146] More basic is the point that data are not 'purely presented … by nature'. Our observations 'are themselves low-level interpretations, informed by some theoretical interest or bias.'[147] This needs reiterating given recent trends towards validating belief structures around spirit possession. This has a directly political dimension, and the afterlife's cultural world needs to be considered in relation to contemporary social life. Bubandt's careful exploration treats the spirit advisers of political discussions as methodologically, not ontologically, real.[148] Less scrupulous observation can be found among his champions.[149]

Awareness of 'low-level interpretations' is essential when considering what informants choose to share. Sensitivity to native usages, including our own, is vital. This acquires additional weight as official religions often do not see themselves as supernatural, although covering similar areas to popular beliefs. This is not clear-cut. An air of disapproval about some terminology demands our caution. This informs the breadth of research. In 1968 anthropological study of 'religious non-commitment' was 'non-existent'.[150] Disbelievers need to be acknowledged within surveys of informal networks of beliefs, to historicise the research by accommodating demographic shifts and to contextualise the believers as an apparently sizeable minority of the population.[151] Attempts must be made to understand how their beliefs differ. Gaps in research into 'religious non-commitment' reinforce the necessity for remaining alert to cultural assumptions.

Folklore

'Superstition' is even more problematic, having acquired negative weight in native usage, and operating within this negotiation of significance.[152] This problem and its

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[143] Bennett, *Traditions of Belief*, p. 26.

[144] Benson Saler, 'Supernatural as a Western Category', *Ethos*, 5.1 (1977), 33-4.

[145] *Anthropological Forum*, 13.2 (2003) discusses Morton Klass's rejection of the term; Charles Fort, *Lo!* (1931), reprinted in *The Books of Charles Fort* (New York: Henry Holt for the Fortean Society, 1941), p. 655.

[146] Joseph Bosco, 'The Supernatural in Hong Kong Young People's Ghost Stories', *Anthropological Forum*, 13.2 (2003), 141-149.

[147] Saler, 'Western Category', 50.

[148] Nils Bubandt, 'Interview with an Ancestor: Spirits as Informants and the Politics of Possession in North Maluku', *Ethnology*, 10.3 (2009), 298; Edith Turner, 'The Reality of Spirits: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study', *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 4.1 (1993), 9-12.

[149] Fiona Bowie, 'Devising Methods for the Ethnographic Study of the Afterlife: Cognition, Empathy and Engagement', (2010), 1 <http://www.box.net/shared/4qmyybn09p> [accessed 30 April 2010]; Jack Hunter, 'Anthropology and the Ontological Status of the Paranormal', *Rhine Online: Psi-News Magazine*, 2.2 (2010), 4-5.

[150] Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', p. 43.

[151] David J. Hufford, 'Traditions of Disbelief', 53.

[152] Paul Cowdell, '"You Saw the Ghost, Didn't You? There's Someone Wants to Ask You about It": Occupational Ghostlore, Narrative, and Belief', *Contemporary Legend*, New Series, 9 (2006 [published 2010]), 75.

proposed solutions are not exclusive to English.[153] Denominational uses may invert its common application while retaining its judgemental character.[154] One defence of 'superstition' is that its alternatives are equally loaded.[155] A further complication is the suggested separation of 'superstitions' from their expressive forms.[156] More fruitful than this emphasis on artefacts rather than cultural systems is the notion that narratives cannot be investigated 'without a knowledge of the superstitious concepts … present in the content and characteristics of these tales', as '[i]nstruction in a superstitious skill and a legend about the application of the same are found together.'[157]

Folklore research has focused on informal belief systems, sometimes at the expense of more orthodox institutional systems.[158] Even so, it has developed a sensitive research reflexivity to deal with informal belief systems, and discusses well the philosophical implications of research approaches. Hufford drew attention to common experiences not restricted to cultural groups, criticising ideas that these only took place where appropriate cultural references existed.[159] Oral historians had already discussed some of these questions.[160]

Hufford's research demands a serious assessment of informants' own statements on their experiences. Ironically, he was initially somewhat disingenuous about his own position. Its philosophical premise, which Hufford later presented as its conclusion, prevents incautious use of his work. Rejecting positive materialism he excludes contextual explanations of behaviour as 'deterministic (and, therefore, rationally nihilistic)'. This would appear to end the possibility of material causative argument.[161] A persistent tradition, based on physiologically identifiable experiences, does not necessarily remain unchanged when its social context and native interpretation change. Hufford later mentions experiences that 'refer intuitively to spirits without

[153] Bosco, 'Young People's Ghost Stories', 145-146; Willem de Blécourt, 'Bedding the Nightmare: Somatic Experience and Narrative Meaning in Dutch and Flemish Legend Texts', *Folklore*, 114 (2003), 227; Theo Meder, 'Bijgeloof Bestaat Niet: Enkele Aspecten van Geloof in Waterland rond 1900' ['Superstition Does Not Exist: Some Aspects of Belief in Waterland, c.1900'], <http://members.chello.nl/m.jong9/Geloofbijgeloof.htm> [accessed 14 June 2010]; J.J. Voskuil, *Meneer Beerta* (Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot, 1996), p. 90.
[154] Basil Matthews, 'West Indian Beliefs and Superstitions', *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, 6.3 (1945), 140.
[155] Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*, 3rd edn (New York and London: Norton, 1968), p. 300.
[156] Brunvand, *American Folklore*, p. 301.
[157] C.W. von Sydow, with comment, in Kaarle Krohn, *Folklore Methodology: Formulated by Julius Krohn and Expanded by Nordic Researchers*, trans. Roger L. Welsch, Publications of the American Folklore Society, Bibliographical and Special Series, 21 (Austin: University of Texas Press for the American Folklore Society, 1971; first pub. Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research, 1926, as *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode*), pp. 20-1.
[158] Richardson, *Death, Dissection*, p. 17.
[159] David J. Hufford, *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*, Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series, 7 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).
[160] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, trans. H.M. Wright (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 116-7.
[161] David J. Hufford, 'Introduction', in *Reflexivity and the Study of Belief*, ed. David J. Hufford, *Western Folklore*, 54.1 (1995), 6-7.

inference or retrospective interpretation', which begs many questions.[162] Experiences may exist outside of culture, but their interpretation does not.

Vansina warned against over-hastily rejecting the possibility that traditions might be grounded in observed fact, as 'a clear distinction must be made between the facts observed and the interpretation put upon them.'[163] This is not confined to researchers. Case-studies of tradition-bearers should explore a mixture of doctrinal and non-doctrinal beliefs, and the informant's own explanation of their connections. Hufford's research has greatly affected research reflexivity. Anxiety has been expressed that any belief and memorate research involves 'ipso facto taking up a non-believing position' because one does not act according to actual beliefs.[164] This also bears on arguments that 'We don't set out … to prove or disprove the existence of ghosts.'[165] 'Belief', like 'superstition', could be used as 'an exoteric term … which calls into question its own validity.' Motz, pointing to post-modernism's attempted use of folklore (as a system of local narratives) against meta-narratives, writes that folklore's subject matter 'consists precisely of those forms of culture and knowledge that the Enlightenment attempted to submerge.'[166] The false dichotomy suggests that ghosts continue to be available in sophisticated philosophical battlegrounds.

This plays out in problems with unacknowledged assumptions in fieldwork. Researchers may find evidence of a decline in ghost stories because that is what they discuss.[167] A recent study of a Scottish Traveller's beliefs mentions his official 'religious faith' and his folk beliefs 'in ghosts and apparitions' separately, but he had clearly integrated them.[168] Instead the researcher prefers to see 'Belief in the supernatural' as a 'survival' from an earlier period.[169] Such conceptions, from an earlier period of ethnology, have not disappeared.[170] They are now re-emerging in historical writings, but have long been available for emic use in amateur scholarship.[171] Despite specific local conditions, this is not exclusively a British question.[172] This informal research then attracts further scholarly consideration.

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[162] David J. Hufford, 'Beings Without Bodies: An Experience-Centered Theory of the Belief in Spirits', in *Out of the Ordinary*, ed. Walker, p. 28.

[163] Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, pp. 116-7.

[164] Jacqueline Simpson, personal e-mail correspondence, 7th April 2008.

[165] Richard Wiseman, *Quirkology* London: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 116-7.

[166] Motz, 'Practice of Belief', 339; 340.

[167] Vance Randolph, *Ozark Magic and Folklore* (New York: Dover, 1964; first pub. [?]: Columbia University Press, 1947, as *Ozark Superstitions*), p. 211.

[168] Sheila Douglas, *Last of the Tinsmiths: The Life of Willie MacPhee* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), pp. 144, 166.

[169] Douglas, *Last of the Tinsmiths*, p. 149.

[170] J. Vader, 'Walchers Volksgeloof', *Neerlands Volksleven*, 13.2 (1963), 214.

[171] Theo Brown, 'Tom Pearce's Grey Mare: A Boundary Image', in *Boundaries and Thresholds: Papers from a Colloquium of the Katharine Briggs Club*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Stroud: Thimble Press, 1993), pp. 76-83; Ralph Whitlock, *In Search of Lost Gods: A Guide to British Folklore* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), p. 9.

[172] Dolores Turchi, *Leggende e racconti popolari della Sardegna*, Quest'Italia, 69 (Rome: Newton Compton, 2008); Martha King, 'The "Attitos" of Sardinia: An Interview with Dolores Turchi', *Folklore Forum*, 21.1 (1988), 72-76; Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore and Fakelore: Essays toward a Discipline of Folk Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 101-124; Jonathan Roper, 'Folklore Studies in England', *NNF News*, 3.4 (2001), 10-13; J.D.A. Widdowson, 'Folklore Studies in English Higher Education: Lost Cause or New Opportunity?', *Folklore*, 121.2 (2010), 125-142.

Folklore collections also allow consideration of how popular works might feed into belief narration, as Lang suggested about the Foxes.[173] Such books were originally contributions to contemporary philosophical debates about ghosts, but have since been used – including by academics – as collections of narratives.[174] Crowe's plea for psychic research, now in a cheap paperback, is mainly plundered for stories.[175] Collections are available for comparison, enabling themes to be traced historically. Folklorists have compiled useful catalogues of analogous material that are not always accepted by other disciplines.[176] Concerns have been raised about incautious reliance on these catalogues, which may obscure the content of the narratives they list.[177] Used carefully they enable us to view the circulation of traditional narratives and the weight of those narratives on informants recounting their own experience or family story. This arms us against disregarding narrative pressures, and facilitates some measurement of literary transmission against oral traditions. However, research into popular occult narratives suggests different categories of data may be usefully compared without straining the evidence.[178] This may prevent imbalances in historical analysis.

This comparativism is folklore's major contribution, but it requires some caution.[179] Comparison of international analogues allows us to see certain developmental trends in discussion and transmission, particularly under conditions of more intensive cross-cultural exchange within our fieldwork area. Previous research has been able to explore universality of experience through comparative material.[180] More problematic is a conflation of comparability and identity. Apparent universality of experience may be used to argue for the supernatural character of phenomena, leading to a failure to consider historical context more broadly. That is no reason to dismiss comparative material. It would be an error to analyse 'a folktale (or any other folkloristic item) as if it were unique to a given cultural context, when it is obviously not so.'[181] This attitude dogs research on the supernatural.[182]

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[173] Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane*, p.64.

[174] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 8; *Ghosts*, ed. Davies, Vol. 1, pp. 33-39, pp. 55-61.

[175] Gillian Bennett, 'Introduction' to Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature: Or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (Ware: Wordsworth in association with the Folklore Society, 2000), pp. 13, 9.

[176] E.P. Thompson, 'Review Article: Anthropology and the Discipline of Historical Context', *Midland History*, 1.3 (1972), 43, 45.

[177] Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, 'Introduction', in *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Volume 6: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), p. xi.

[178] Larry Danielson, 'Toward the Analysis of Vernacular Texts: The Supernatural Narrative in Oral and Popular Print Sources', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 16.3 (1970), 130-154.

[179] Alan Dundes,'The Anthropologist and the Comparative Method in Folklore', in *Folklore Matters* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 57.

[180] Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare*, The International Psycho-Analytic Library, 20 (London: Hogarth Press, 1931); Hufford, *Terror*.

[181] Dundes, *Matters*, p. 63.

[182] Vilmos Voigt, 'Towards a Theory of Theory of Genres in Folklore', in *Folklore Today: A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson*, ed. Linda Dégh, Henry Glassie, and Felix J. Oinas (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1976), pp. 486-7.

The Tale Type and Motif indices, which provide basic compilations of available material, have been of some use here.[183] There is much to criticise in them, as comparing like with like remains a key problem.[184] The Motif indices are particularly valuable in identifying shared or related themes here.[185] They also suggest how networks of reports might influence or shape discussions of belief, even where the motifs do not reflect personal experiences. The more frequently stories are told the more they may be tailored for audiences, including being unconsciously fitted to traditional motifs. Memorates also conform to more general laws of folk narration.[186] Ignorance of motifs and their spread will therefore disadvantage anyone attempting to understand the accounts they hear.

Merely amassing comparative data is equally limiting. It has fuelled an artefactualism, a lore independent of the folk, which 'precludes the possibility of generalizing'.[187] The obverse is to treat the indices as a definitive identification of folkloric items rather than a step towards cataloguing them.[188] These indices do not reliably chart a text's transmission back to a point of origin, as intended. It would be a basic error to assume that because things look the same they are the same, but that may be how they are interpreted at a popular level. Folkloric material is easily accessible through popular literature. For those seeking to contextualise their own unexplained experiences, it can provide spurious folk backgrounds: the lack of actual connection can be glossed over by other folk processes.

Work on narrative genre has allowed a probing of the way belief narratives contain some testing of their own credibility and truthfulness, often through an appeal to a critical authority figure.[189] If genre analysis sometimes borders on sterility, it remains valuable for assessing the meaning imparted by narrators themselves. Wider reading indicates recurrent metaphorical comparisons for spiritual contact from a range of sources: generic study may help. It also helps with comprehending historical material, where historians may not be aware of the generic character of the narratives they find.

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[183] Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, 3 vols (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2004) is the latest recension of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson's work. Tales are numbered AT/ATU according to edition.
[184] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd edn rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner, American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series, 9 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 10-11.
[185] Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediæval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, 6 vols, FF Communications 106-109, 116-117 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1932-1936); Ernest W. Baughman, *Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, Indiana Folklore Series, 20 (The Hague: Mouton, 1966). Motif numbers are given in the form E226 Dead brother's return. An asterisk (*) indicates Baughman's index, *E332.3.3.1 The Vanishing Hitchhiker. Categorical subdivisions indicate levels of precision.
[186] Larry Danielson, 'Paranormal Memorates in the American Vernacular', in *Occult in America*, ed. Kerr and Crow, p. 200.
[187] Dundes, *Matters*, pp. 71-2.
[188] Jacques Le Goff, 'Culture cléricale et traditions folkloriques dans la civilisation mérovingienne', *Annales, Histoire, Sciences sociales*, 22e Année, 4 (1967), 785 footnote 1.
[189] Erika Brady, 'Bad Scares and Joyful Hauntings: "Priesting" the Supernatural Predicament', in *Out of the Ordinary*, ed. Walker, pp. 145-158, especially p. 146; Gérard Chevalier, 'Parasciences et procédés de légitimation', *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 27.2 (1986), 213; Finucane, *Ghosts*, p. 154.

It allows flexibility towards the question of who tells what kind of narrative, and whether ghost stories embody beliefs.

Surveying the Field

A thematic survey requires considering many data in various disciplinary ways, and the research method must correlate material from different sources. A key recent study is limited by its rather narrow age and class focus, despite its broad historical contextualisation.[190] This research aims to explore the content of beliefs and experiences in context. By examining various material in various ways, it should be possible to assess the current state of ghost beliefs and their place in historical and social context.

The design was driven by the need to see findings in a broadly sociological context, with consideration given to how (or if) they fitted into more orthodox religious belief systems. This could be viewed through the narrative discussion of beliefs. Ghost stories may have a complicated relationship with beliefs, while beliefs may not directly find behavioural expression. An examination of narrative practice would illuminate this. The major concern was considering how informants actually understood 'ghosts'. The surveys so easily compared across the post-war period may not contain comparable data.[191] Qualitative research would examine how stories are told and their meaning for narrators. An assessment of what stories people tell, how, and when, and how they relate them to their beliefs, is a prerequisite to making sense of any quantitative research.

This kind of assessment is absent from some parapsychological research hoping to use narratives for evidence of survival after death. A recent e-mail survey into 'the survival of bodily death' highlights the limitations. The researcher was disappointed in it, as it 'failed to uncover any highly evidential cases'.[192] Actually O'Connell's data are interesting, but this limited research concern prevents him using them. O'Connell's survey assumes that researcher and informant share understandings, which would have been inappropriate here. It is unclear whether the format might have deterred possible informants, which may be important given the low response rate. (O'Connell does not distinguish scales of circulation and response).[193] He says nothing about the Catholic status of the educational institution in which he conducted his survey, although that might have explained some non-responses. Reluctance to speak needs to be assessed.[194] It needs to be tackled within a general contextualisation and assessment of how beliefs thought to be unusual are negotiated.

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[190] Gillian Bennett, *Alas, Poor Ghost! Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1999), pp. 173-177.

[191] Boy, 'Vingt ans', 38.

[192] Jake H. O'Connell, 'Report on an Email Survey of Apparitional Experiences', *Paranormal Review*, 51 (2009), 12, 13-14.

[193] O'Connell, 'Email Survey', 12.

[194] Julia O'Connell Davidson and Derek Layder, *Methods, Sex and Madness* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 101-103.

This research proceeded chiefly through personal interview, offering a direct arena for ethical judgements.[195] Personal interviews enabled a negotiation of reluctance, caution about sharing stories, or hostility to the research. PE40 was uneasy: she said little, except that ghost beliefs were 'negative' where she considered only the positive. Even rejecting participation, however, she spoke of the possibility, perhaps even likelihood, of such phenomena. PE66 described the limited circle of people with whom she might discuss her experiences and beliefs. PE75 said 'if you'd have had a different vibe, then I would probably not even have mentioned things'. These partial glimpses of complications in belief structures would not have been available through a quantitative survey. In semi-structured interviews it was possible to present specific questions, and follow new emergent directions. Adjustments of terminology and approach from previous studies were instructive. Quantitative survey methods might not clarify the nuances of belief within accounts. They might also serve to prevent the unfolding of narrative sessions that might generate further contributions. This would have placed limitations on considering the contexts in which people do or do not tell their stories.

Concentration on nuances should not prevent social assessments. The interviews hinged on prepared questions to elicit background data. To broaden the reach of the research with limited interviewer resources, and to provide directly quantifiable data, the interview programme ran alongside a qualitative questionnaire. This summarised the focus questions and the thrust of the research.[196] All participants were anonymised to encourage participation, which proved more significant for gatekeepers than informants. There was some crossover with the interviews, but the questionnaire data constitute a self-contained body of material. Only one respondent returned a substantially uncompleted questionnaire, although other questionnaires were circulated without response.

One problem avoidable in a questionnaire is discussion of the researcher's own beliefs. An historiographical tactic has been to treat personal positions as irrelevant to discussing a belief that is 'a social and historical reality'.[197] Davies remains respectful of expressed belief across his historical period, but discreetly evades the question.[198] This attractive tactic may still not obscure underlying beliefs.[199] Some pro-paranormal commentators treat any questioning of belief as hostile, while some scientific commentators refuse to acknowledge cultural complexities around beliefs. This is itself part of their negotiation. Evasion may be a successful (and necessary) compromise. Much of what follows is written from the perspective that my beliefs are irrelevant provided I am sympathetic to the genuine and diverse ghost beliefs of the informants. This may not have been adequate with informants. Previous research pointed to probable scrutiny of the researcher's motives and beliefs. The questionnaire gave potential respondents the opportunity of asking questions before participating. No discussion of my beliefs could have been avoided if it arose.

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[195] The fieldwork (August 2008-March 2010) was approved under University of Hertfordshire Faculty of Humanities, Law and Education Ethics Committee, protocol 07-08.17.
[196] See Appendix A.
[197] Finucane, *Ghosts*, p. 1.
[198] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 9.
[199] Finucane, *Ghosts*, p. 1.

Self-reflexivity is important in understanding interactions with informants. Respecting informants means listening seriously without misleading them. I do not believe in ghosts, and considered the implications of this for fieldwork. Montell describes his concern at not sharing an informant's positions. Asked outright if he believed in ghosts he considered the implications either of lying 'for the sake of perhaps pleasing my informant' or causing the end of the interview by telling the truth.[200] He mentioned 'interesting stories', and she resumed. This may point towards an artefactual approach, perhaps unconsciously hinted at during the interview. Although he draws out some interesting theoretical points, Montell's book can stand simply as a fine anthology of narratives. In part he is happy to rely on belief as generated by a 'cultural matrix' of ghost narratives, an approach which is not quite adequate for a direct discussion of beliefs as well as the stories in which they are embedded.

My anxiety was misplaced. Most informants did not ask about my beliefs. At the least, believers expected a sympathetic hearing. Even where they suspected that our views were not identical, fair treatment in discussion remained a priority. A contradictory position fitted perfectly some negotiations of beliefs. Because these beliefs and experiences were outside usual patterns of agreement, discussion and disagreement were part of assessing how to codify them. Most believers assumed commonality of opinion. At a vigil with PE82's paranormal investigation group, she asked if I was happy to participate at a ouija board. She would evidently not have been upset or surprised at an admission of discomfort from me or anyone else. My agreement to participate, and our ensuing results, may have contributed to the willingness of PE16 to trust me with her experiences.

The Field Data

This negotiation raises another aspect of fieldwork that unfolded in practice. The permission form was intended to cover permission to record an interview and subsequent possible uses of documented material.[201] The interviews were intended to be roughly formal. Between interviews and questionnaires two discreet bodies of documented material were envisaged. Flexibility is required. The documentation of fieldwork becomes more diffuse the wider the survey. The questionnaires are easily quantifiable. Forty-five questionnaires were received, one largely uncompleted. They were coded in order of date received, ensuring anonymity through randomisation. These are identified 'QU' and a number.

The interview material was wider than the 19 hours of recorded material. There was considerable variation in contact with informants, and the extent of their participation. Simply mentioning it prompted comment and discussion. Not all those happy to discuss that way were also prepared to undertake a formal interview. In some cases opportunistic comments led to impromptu story or legend sessions that could not have been replicated.[202] Directed intervention prompted similar exchanges. Asking staff

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[200] William Lynwood Montell, *Ghosts along the Cumberland: Deathlore in the Kentucky Foothills* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), p. 89.
[201] See Appendix B.
[202] 'Part I: Legend: Definition and Classification', in *The Questing Beast: Perspectives on Contemporary Legend, Volume IV*, ed. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), pp. 27-112.

about a pub ghost prompted an interview with PE77, and a joint discussion with PE11, PE17, and PE80. Some informants advertised the research to others and maintained contact. These informants include e-mail correspondents whom I never met, but whose discussions parallel the face-to-face communication. Some personal informants also completed questionnaires. Contributions ranged from brief comments (PE10 made an observation on a train) to broad ongoing discussions (along with two interviews PE29 rang and e-mailed regularly, attended a related performance event, and introduced further participants). The 110 informants were coded alphabetically and randomised before anonymisation. They are referred to as 'PE' and a number. Where they completed a questionnaire as well their coding under that system is also indicated. Also noted is where they supplemented comments in one medium by contributions in another.

Informants also suggested events where participation might help. Negotiation of contested beliefs is for some informants an arena of practice. PE12, the Secretary of a Spiritualist church, followed our interview with an invitation to a medium service. There was thus some participant observation. This triggered further discussions, reinforcing the significance of the interactions. Some events were public. Attendance at others, like the vigil, was by agreement with the hosts. The vigil was an opportunity to participate and also to conduct interviews during the breaks. It is indicated where comments are based on interview material or participant observation.

This material was unexpectedly supplemented with additional correspondence.[203] Professor Richard Wiseman had invited various contributions to a blog, *The Science of Ghosts*.[204] Around 250 photographs, and much correspondence, were forwarded. Wiseman e-mailed survey participants willing to contribute further, inviting a narrative account of their experience.[205] We received 78 e-mails from around the world.[206] These tackled many concerns heard throughout this material, but are identified separately. Coded randomly in order of arrival, they are listed as 'EM' followed by a number.

Use, Analysis and Outline

These registers of data suggest problems with quantitative comparisons, whilst pointing to a nuanced narrative discussion of beliefs visible across all the data. Even through the skewed prism of investigative fieldwork, we begin to see how and where

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[203] I wish to record my gratitude to Richard Wiseman for his generous assistance.

[204] *Science of Ghosts*, <http://scienceofghosts.wordpress.com> [accessed 27 January 2010].

[205] The e-mail read: 'Hi, Many thanks for recently completing our online questionnaire into ghostly experiences. We are now asking a small number of people if they would be kind enough to provide a bit more information about their experience. When completing this questionnaire, you indicated that you have had a ghostly experience. Would you be able to email me with a brief description of your experience and explain how it has affected your belief in ghosts. Around about 100-200 words would be fine, but feel free to write and [sic] much or as little as you like. Again, thanks for taking part in our research Best Wishes Richard'.

[206] Forty-four e-mails came from the British Isles, five from Europe, seven from the Americas, and one each from Asia and Australia. Some e-mails covered experiences in more than one country, or on more than one continent. One lusophone e-mail address was of unknown origin. Several e-mails contained no clue to their origin or the location of the experience.

people discuss what they believe, and something of the content and operation of their beliefs.

Problems remain with how representative any such survey can be. This was no close survey of a limited area, although the fieldwork centred on Hertfordshire and London. One area of interest was the behaviour of patterns of belief with changing demographics. The research uncovered commentaries from a range of cultural groups, including various religious cultures, and represented a number of regional backgrounds. Given the nature of the investigation, this emerged under conditions of exchange between cultural groups. Even allowing for doubts about representativeness, this offered a dynamic snapshot of actual current cross-cultural beliefs in Britain as they circulate. Even with these limitations, this is new. Design problems still exist: covering all cultural bases would illuminate belief across and between cultural groups, but would not at the same time chart the extent of belief through those groups, which is contingent upon understanding the beliefs actually expressed. The two projects are not resolvable in the same design. Too broad a sweep might have resulted in tokenism. Assessing contributions in social context should overcome some of these problems by laying the grounds for what is required in future surveys and clarifying the results.

Similar points could be made about class and status. This research needed to reach beyond university students, but it is a reality that the campus offers a relatively easy place to begin work within a limited budget and timeframe. The survey was rolled out on University networks and by word of mouth, but efforts were made to expand its reach. Contextual work means campus informants here are seen in a broader social setting. Appealing to a wider informant base through local media had some limited success. Local residents' associations and denominational groups were more fruitful.[207] There was a higher response outside university demographics through individual conversation. Once contact was established, interest in the project became self-supporting, usefully indicating how these discussions unfold.

'Ghost' encourages a certain, not always obvious, self-selection of respondents. The discursive nature of the fieldwork was bound to attract those who wished to recount their experiences. It also managed to reflect the positions of some non-believers. This was important, as simple statements of non-belief may also not be conclusive. Non-believers often engage in the same negotiations as believers: these contested beliefs are not easily quantifiable even by those with the most determined position. We should remain clear-eyed about the scale of participation and achievement here. No far-reaching quantitative assessment of these data appears to be possible, but they go some way to illustrating the character and form of ghost beliefs as they presently exist in England, with considerable comparative material from elsewhere. In their breadth they point to the ways in which such beliefs are continually re-negotiated with new resources feeding into existing traditions.

What follows looks at the beliefs described, how they are told, and how they fit in with other beliefs held by the narrators. Their stories are placed in the context of developing historical themes in ghost narratives and beliefs. The slow transmission

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[207] I am grateful to Diane Kendrick of the University's Community Partnership Office for her assistance.

and adaptation of traditional themes, and their renewed circulation through publications, means that some direct comparisons emerge with older traditions. The first two chapters examine the benefits and problems in a broad historical overview. Both chapters examine how contemporary informants understand 'ghost', historically and anthropologically. The first looks at appearance and representation, while the second addresses reasons for return. This covers the expected appearance of ghosts, and its relationship with discussions of them, as well as ghostly return indicating social problems with burial and mourning, and how this relates to the more directly political characteristics of revenancy. This latter point highlights some of the sociological concerns in historical contextualisation. As this encompasses a long historical timespan, these chapters use immediate contextualisation of historiography to offset the danger of abstraction from typologies or the use of recurring reports to identify characteristics treated as standing outside historical development. Their scope gives some idea of change and persistence through the subject, but this is by selective illustration only.[208]

These themes provide reference points for the subsequent discussion. The combination of the political and socially disruptive, touching on both scale of loss and arrangements to meet after death, points to ways the afterlife is seen. This, more technically, is the subject of Chapter Three, which addresses scientific (and scientific-sounding) conceptions of ghosts and their philosophical foundations. In particular it introduces an historical and conceptual balance into parapsychological discussions that have proceeded as if they were dealing with immutable scientific discoveries. This, with its implicit construction of an authority figure, points towards the direct discussion in Chapter Four of elaborated and performed narrative styles, including the consideration of the moral regulation involved in such stories. While this predominantly applies folkloric narrative theories it also keeps scientific negotiations in its sights. When dealing with ghosts, people maintain an extraordinary range of apparently contradictory intellectual influences simultaneously.[209] This notion brings us to the remaining chapters. Chapter Five explores the relationship revealed between ghost beliefs and more institutional belief structures, informed by historical considerations of doctrinal positions. Chapter Six brings this together with other themes outlined throughout to explore possible changes in belief structures over a period of time. This examines several broadly sociological questions, including questions of how poll data are interpreted. Through scrutiny of the relationship of political change to beliefs at a formal and informal level, this chapter also offers suggestions for how 'folk' and institutional beliefs interact, and what predictions might be made for their future development. Examination of a remarkably constant belief sitting awkwardly between formal and informal registers offers the possibility of making some assessment of the very character of 'folk belief' as a concept. Metaphors of ghostliness are problematic, but they catch a sense of awkward and insubstantial presence. It is not inappropriate that this work increasingly feels like a haunted house. The awkward presences inhabiting it are stubborn and inexplicable.

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[208] Davies's representative selection of documents covering 1660-1920 filled five volumes, *Ghosts*, ed. Davies.
[209] Tony Walter, 'Mediums and Mourning', *Theology*, 110.854 (2007), 98.

The conceptual and physical recognition of ghosts (i): What do ghosts look like, and what are they?

'Are ye my father, the king?'[1]

'Ghost' is a problematic term, applied to a broad range of phenomena, experiences and belief. Much of this work explores problems with the term, and its range of meanings today. We will begin by considering what informants expected ghosts to look like, and how they understood the manifesting forms of ghosts. This addresses both cultural expectations of how ghosts should look, and the interpretative experience of assessing a manifestation. The next chapter deals with similar questions relating to the reasons why ghosts appear.

'Ghost' is used to summarise this range of meanings. It rests on certain historical images, arguments and expectations, so we begin with an image unrepresentative of most experiences documented here. The white-sheeted ghost's connection with current beliefs is largely dismissed, because of lack of recent reporting, and also because of its association with media representations and jokes. It still remained an available point of entry for people who wanted to discuss seriously quite different beliefs. Without necessarily reflecting most experiences or beliefs, it offered a way of representing ghosts to others. It usefully introduces how beliefs are discussed, and the transmission of motifs of appearance and behaviour. It recurs throughout this chapter, usefully illustrating many points in the current negotiation of ghost beliefs through the combination of registers of different transmitted material. This introduces the ways historical material, including published folklore collections, is incorporated into contemporary negotiations of this subject, allowing the possibility of viewing shifts and developments over time. Despite a tendency to see specific ghostly types as confined to historical periods, we find throughout how complicated negotiations are found across the historical record. Trends of rationalisation of apparitions through standardised types are not absolute. The tradition of recognising ghosts by historic apparel persists, although this is not exclusive. We also find ghosts in contemporary, or not noticeably old, clothing. We will consider here some of the ways they are recognised as ghosts.

The white sheet and ghostly clothing intersect at many points, and this allows an exploration of questions of ghostly pallor more generally. Ghostliness was not seen here as inevitably pallid, but contemporary discussions of ghostly appearance are connected generally with older traditions. We will see here how some artistic representations of ghostliness have blended registers of ghostly appearance to create an available image which is then incorporated into subsequent discussions. With footlessness, for example, similar but distinct traditions merge in the formation of a

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[1] 'Sweet William's Ghost' (Child 77), in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads in Five Volumes*, ed. Francis James Child, vol. 2 (New York: Dover, 1965; first pub. [n.p.]: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882-1898), p. 230.

recognised ghostly type. This merging of motifs and ideas recurs throughout: here it includes a consideration of expected ghostly clothing based on burial garb. This fuels popular considerations of the subject, but does not definitively explain ghostly appearance. The complexity of believers' actual thinking has often been subject to an unjust academic reductiveness which fails to reflect these beliefs as dynamic. This is illustrated by a consideration of phenomena often treated in the literature as having relatively static characteristics historically, the Nightmare and poltergeists. Looking at their reporting here, we can consider their emic negotiation and incorporation into developing belief systems, and question how far their identification is, rather, an etic practice secondary to, but informing, individual belief systems. Poltergeist phenomena fuel consideration of other non-visual or non-apparent manifestations, and these are examined these in light of their connection with apparitions. What emerges is a question of interpretation. This scrutiny of how ghosts are recognised as such, and why, goes to the heart of what is actually believed today.

What does a ghost look like? White sheets and E422.4 Dress of revenant

Sitting uneasily with the phenomena described while still conveniently describing them in the absence of another term, 'ghost' encapsulates the relationship between belief, narrative, and popular representation. The almost formless figure draped in a white sheet remains familiar from cartoons and children's films. It is frequently invoked: Irish teenagers were 'dressing up in sheets' during a recent ghost scare.[2] Several informants began with this figure. Asked about the word 'ghost', QU28 began with a film image '(Casper <u>does</u> spring to mind)'.[3] PE66 regarded 'ghost' as clichéd because of this: 'I think of "ghosts" and I think of someone with a giant bedsheet with the holes cut out, swooshing around on rollerskates.' An article on ghost iconography featured the *Ghost Busters* logo.[4] In the 1970s sheeted figures appeared on Swedish and British television and the long-running Belgian comic strip *Suske en Wiske*.[5]

This figure did not reflect their experiences or beliefs, but enabled their discussion. It was a flippant way of introducing serious beliefs. QU28 was sharp on religious orthodoxy but not hostile to ghost belief. He believes the 'possibility that "life" may not end with "death" of body.' Invoking a cartoon suggests some distance between the iconography and his beliefs. This was also true of PE66, who sees spirits regularly. The distinction between representations and experience was explicit for EM27, possibly because her first experience occurred when she was young. It raised the possibility of life after death or 'other entities', but at the time 'The only idea I had of what a ghost probably looked like was the white cartoony kind.'

Questions arise about what is expected and experienced. Informants described visual apparitions, some known, some more generalised historical figures, some animals. Visual apparitions were not the only manifestations. Informants reported sounds,

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[2] Paul Lewis, 'Coalisland's Ghostly Attraction', *The Guardian* (10 January 2009), Main Section, 17.
[3] *Casper*. Dir. Brad Silberling. Universal. 1995.
[4] 'Lang wit laken' ['Long white sheet'], *De Standaard*, 7 May 2009, an interview with Owen Davies. *Ghost Busters*. Dir. Ivan Reitman. Columbia. 1984.
[5] *Rentaghost*. BBC. 1976-1984; *Het Eiland Amoras,*
<http://www.suskeenwiske.be/nl/mod_db/68/> [accessed 21 January 2010].

smells, a sense of being touched, a vague feeling of presence, and non-figurative visual sensations. There was also some consideration of apparitions in dreams and their relationship to the dead. These are further complicated, because suggesting they were dreams may serve to accommodate potential scepticism rather than express actual interpretation. EM34 described a consolatory experience at a period of anxiety. She woke with someone kneeling beside the bed, speaking to her. She neither saw the figure, nor heard its words, but felt it was her grandfather. The experience reassured her, but 'I may have just been dreaming.' She described other premonitory dreams, suggesting complexities to her category of 'just me having dreams'. Further to their temporally specific characteristics, the form of apparitions rests on historical foundations. The persistence of the white-sheeted figure from earlier iconography suggests the importance of following the development of such imagery. It encapsulates other experiences and other histories.

Rationalisation and standardised apparition types

We should be wary of simply amassing comparative data, or of erroneously assuming identity from similarity. The problems are found in local ghostlore, further feeding popular considerations. Remote traditional motifs are used to contextualise subsequent experiences by providing a spurious folk background. Various narrative devices are used to rationalise and contextualise anomalous experiences. A local historian, PE70, said many early residents of Welwyn Garden City reported seeing processions of monks, and asked about local monastic hauntings. This is a straightforward rationalisation, but it rests on the motif E338.3, Ghosts of monks haunt former cloister. These sightings typify monastery legends documented over the last half-century.[6] Their re-telling points to an oral historical tradition, and to the separate historical course of documentary accounts feeding the interpretative process. PE1 recalled his father believing he had hit someone while driving in fog. PE1 linked this to a 'pilgrim's route' across the road, which related to his interest in ecclesiastical history. Similarly a trainee priest friend of PE78 saw a cowled figure in a church meeting.

These accounts, dating back only to the 1920s, cover a period when the Roman legionary has developed as a familiar British ghost.[7] Roman ghosts are not documented in Britain before 1904.[8] Davies attributes their rise to changes in the curriculum and representations: 'you need to know what a centurion looks like before you can see one.'[9] That was the case with a practical joke in Lincoln: a porter would dress as a Roman when visitors entered the basement to view the remains of the Roman wall.[10] This can generate pseudo-historical interpretations at odds with the apparent representation. A black-cloaked figure in Derby was identified as Roman although he did not look like a Roman.[11] Elsewhere, however, such apparitions were

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[6] Betty Puttick, *Ghosts of Hertfordshire* (Newbury: Countryside, 1994), pp. 45-47, 82-85.

[7] Ian Wilson, *In Search of Ghosts*, (London: Headline), pp. 209-216.

[8] Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 42.

[9] 'Lang wit laken'.

[10] Peter Millington, e-mail to Talking Folklore discussion group, 8 September 2009.

[11] Tom Wells, 'Haunted Hospital Calls in Exorcist: "Cloaked Ghost" Stalking Wards'*, The Sun*, 30 January 2009, pp. 1, 3.

still interpreted in line with older motifs: EM75, describing 'a dark figure in a dark shift with a hood', asked 'could it have been a monk's habit?'

Recognising the long dead

Informants recognise an historical dimension to ghosts, which, in QU1's words, are 'Something which should be confined to the past but which invades the present.' This could combine historically inappropriate clothing with inappropriate presence. The old man in PE79's cottage attracted attention initially by his presence. His clothes were slightly old-fashioned, but he should not have been there. He was subsequently identified from photographs as an early twentieth century occupant of the cottage. Many informants identified ghosts more directly by anachronous clothing. Rare were accounts like PE18's of finding herself in a thirteenth century version of her hometown. PE100's brother had seen an armoured knight, on a horse, in a London cemetery. Accounts mostly related to individuals in clothes of more recent historical periods. PE100 mentioned an experience in which he saw a girl in 'a Victorian pinny'.

Identifying anachronous clothes was sometimes used to validate experiences long after the event. EM67 saw a 'trampy' figure that disappeared suddenly. She later learned that the area of Chatham where she saw him was 'home to the [Napoleonic] French prisoners'. 'I would say the big boots, long leathery coat and straggly hair fits in with this.' PE34 woke in a flat owned by his employers to see the shadow of a man 'with a long head' standing behind him. Later he learned from another tenant that an apparition of a man in a nineteenth-century cape and a top hat had been seen there. Telling the story he appealed to PE67, who had also had strange experiences there. PE67 had not seen any apparition, merely felt 'something wasn't right'. This, with PE67's family history of 'Green Lady' legends at Pitlochry Dam, was corroborative enough.

PE34's narrative highlights another benefit of considering traditional motifs. PE34 opened by establishing his narrative authority as a policeman. He claimed all Police Accident reports involving a police vehicle in Hertfordshire mention a red-eyed black dog at the roadside. The connection was facetious, but depended on the county's Black Dog tradition (E421.3.6 Ghosts as dogs with glowing eyes and tongues; E423.1.1.1 (b) Ghostly black dog).[12] His attitude changed in his ghost narrative, but this framed and contextualised that story.

Informants described apparitions in period costumes. PE33's mother had had premonitory visions of a highwayman in a tricorne hat. EM14 described a 'rather puritan' man in seventeenth century clothes, but this was a psychometric sensation obtained with her eyes closed. Such figures were often seen around historic sites. PE5/QU24 described a 'cavalier'. In interview she shaped the narrative towards the revelation that this was in Pluckley, and she had been unaware of its haunted

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[12] Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Lore of the Land: A Guide to England's Legends, from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys* (London: Penguin, 2006), q.v. 'Black Dogs'; Caroline Oates and Juliette Wood, *A Coven of Scholars: Margaret Murray and Her Working Methods*, Archive Series, 1 (London: FLS Books, 1998), p. 39.

reputation.[13] In line with the merging of traditions, the resident who told her of the hauntings also claimed there are tunnels beneath the village 'from the Civil War days'.[14] One concern is that costumed contemporaries might might be mistaken for apparitions.[15] QU42 recalled a family discussion about a ruined abbey they were visiting. 'My Grand mother suggested that they asked the Monk standing close by, my mother could not see the Monk [sic].'

As in the Chatham story, some informants concluded later that their apparitions' clothing was distinctive, but not because of centuries' difference. They mentioned only minor details. PE11 was in a pub when a 'gentlemanly' figure came into the bar and tipped his cap. He then vanished. PE11 commented on his shiny shoes. Here we are approaching the ghosts of contemporaries, only identified as ghosts by their inappropriate presence. There was nothing extraordinary about the boy in the backseat of PE42/QU4's car except that he was not physically there. Friends following her car saw him, but he was not there when they stopped. PE42 was aware of a presence behind her, but saw nothing in her mirror. She awoke early the next morning and 'there, standing next to my desk with his hand on the chair of my desk, was a little boy with a striped … blue-and-white striped shirt on.' She thought this was an attempt to rationalise the unexplained incident, her 'brain interpreting that experience [in the car]'. She offered no explanation, and could not identify the boy.[16]

The experience of children talking to an invisible or imaginary older person is often interpreted as spirit contact.[17] PE56 depended on family tradition for what he called 'his' story. The experience is often simply reported as speaking to an older person. Anachronous clothing is not mentioned. These older people are sometimes subsequently identified with the family or the location. PE56 met a holiday cottage owner's recently deceased mother. Several categories may apply simultaneously: PE71's brother occasionally saw an old family friend, who had lived in that house, sitting smoking. Figures similarly described are also reported in contact with adults. PE80's mother saw an older man in an Aran sweater, smoking a pipe, who indicated an imminent accident. We are coming to ghosts who dress the same as the living, like the elderly woman seen from a bus by PE20. Failure to distinguish the living and dead

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[13] Antony D. Hippisley Coxe, *Haunted Britain: A Guide to Supernatural Sites Frequented by Ghosts, Witches, Poltergeists and Other Mysterious Beings* (London: Pan, 1975; first pub. 1973), p. 74; Andrew Green, *Our Haunted Kingdom: More than 350 Authentic Hauntings or Case Histories Recorded in the United Kingdom over the Last 25 Years* (London: Wolfe, 1973), pp. 165-168; Andrew Green, *Ghosts of Today* (London: Kaye & Ward, 1980), pp. 99-100; Joan Forman, *The Haunted South* (Norwich: Jarrold Colour, 1989; first pub. 1979), pp. 10-12; Peter Underwood, *The A-Z of British Ghosts* (London: Chancellor, 1992; first pub. 1971), pp. 185-6; etc.

[14] F721.1 Underground passages.

[15] [Anne Moberley and Miss Jourdain], *An Adventure: With a Preface by Edith Olivier and a Note by J. W. Dunne*, 4th edn (London: Faber, 1931).

[16] Quoting her interview transcript.

[17] 'Through Children's Eyes' in Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *True Ghost Stories of Our Own Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 78-82; Susan R. Easterbrooks and P.J. Stice, 'Spiritual Development in Young Children: Preventing the Devolution of Natural Spiritual Awareness', *The Year 2009 Proceedings of the ASSR-SW* (2009), 123.

has a long literary history.[18] Connected traditions point to homogeneous recognised experiences.[19]

General pallor

Nevertheless, a general pallor is sometimes invoked, particularly with occupational ghosts. Haunted hospitals are widely reported.[20] 'Ladies in grey' abound alongside ghosts of other medical staff.[21] Greyness is often attributed to old-fashioned uniforms, and the ghosts are sometimes associated only with older buildings. PE41 said the Grey Lady at Queen Mary's Hospital Stratford did not haunt the post-war buildings. The Grey Lady of St George's Hospital London was associated with the older site, not its current location. PE32, who had worked at both, said the new site had no ghost stories because the buildings were not old enough. PE43 said her grandmother had had several experiences in Northampton Hospital 'which is quite old'. Similar associations between building age and hauntings are widespread.[22] Former nurse PE76 spoke of 'the Grey Lady – and there IS a Grey Lady!' PE77, a security guard, insisted 'there's always a grey lady' about hotels. One night he had met a pale-faced old woman with long grey hair and gown. He was terrified, before realising she was a wandering resident with Alzheimer's disease. His story relied on the familiarity of the trope, and the possibility of misidentifying the living and the dead.

In artistic representations pallor remains dominant, although its technical production has changed. The relationship between reported apparitions and the representation of ghostly figures remains complex. It unfolds in all historical discussion of ghosts, and is closely linked to questions of transmission. Just as academic and intellectual writings become available for non-academic discussions, so popular representations, which begin as attempts to produce in artistic form something close to existing appraisals of phenomena, also become available for lay negotiations. This is important when considering how apparitions might appear and be recognised. Not all ghosts everywhere have been white. Pallor may not have universal cultural implications, but easier global accessibility to representations from other cultures may lead to popular connections being drawn between apparently similar disparate traditions. In Japanese traditions, white clothing indicates untimely death. This

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[18] Daniel Ogden, *Night's Black Agents: Witches, Wizards and the Dead in the Ancient World* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008), p. 169.

[19] Willem de Blécourt, '"I Would Have Eaten You Too": Werewolf Legends in the Flemish, Dutch and German Area', *Folklore*, 118.1 (2007); William Lynwood Montell, *Ghosts along the Cumberland: Deathlore in the Kentucky Foothills* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), pp. 45-6; J. Vader, 'Walchers Volksgeloof', *Neerlands Volksleven*, 13.2 (1963), 213; *Onder de Groene Linde*, ed. A.J. Dekker et al, Deel 1 (Amsterdam: Uniepers, 1987), pp. 104-114; Child, *Ballads*, Vol 5, pp. 58ff; John Glyde jnr, *Folklore and Customs of Suffolk (Being Extracts from The New Suffolk Garland)* (Wakefield: EP, 1976; first pub. 1866), pp. 216-220; Hugh Shields, 'The Dead Lover's Return in Modern English Ballad Tradition', *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung*, 17 (1972), 98-114. Montell identifies *E332.3.3.1, The Ghostly Hitchhiker, but see also *E272.2, Ghost rides behind rider on horse.

[20] Celia Green and Charles McCreery, *Apparitions*, Proceedings of the Institute of Psychophysical Research, 5 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), p. 88.

[21] Green, *Ghosts of Today*, pp. 195-208. Apparitions were grey in 9 of the 27 hospitals there.

[22] *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales*, ed. Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer, and Robert Tallant (Gretna, La: Pelican, 1987; first pub. 1945), p. 271.

culturally resonant image is available to wider audiences through global distribution and remakes of Japanese films.[23]

Ghost lights

Developing media technology shapes expectations of ghostly appearance, but it informs, rather than produces, belief. As the possibility of reproducing strange light effects and creating translucent insubstantiality develops, so does the possibility of expanding descriptive vocabularies. Some apparitions here were transparent. EM35 saw a 'middle-aged woman in a long white dress with an apron. The woman was semi-transparent.' EM38 used the same words for a figure she had seen. PE66 said she could see an apparition 'wasn't real, because there was light coming through her and I could kind of see things behind her.' This use of 'real' is additionally complicating. It referred to corporeality, not the reality of the apparition. PE44 spoke of seeing the 'apparition' of a friend before his death, but she meant something not physically real. Spirits were thus not 'apparitions'.

The orb seems a likely candidate for a newly emergent phenomenon. These photographic anomalies have proliferated with digital camera technology.[24] Their sheer numbers generate scepticism.[25] EM4 was sure photographs from a ghost hunt were 'pictures of dust', so attempted to replicate the effect. After unsuccessfully photographing his vacuum cleaner in the dark, he moved to the bedroom: '[A]fter flapping about with the quilt and quickly taking a snap I got a couple of the little blighters!' Ramsland unconvincingly distinguishes natural from supernatural orbs.[26] Even believers doubt orbs.[27] The presenters of *Most Haunted* have often been accused of faking phenomena.[28] They are deeply critical of orbs, 'a very high percentage' of which are 'simply misidentification of conventional "flaws".'[29] The minority of effects not explicable this way are interpreted as supernatural. During a vigil several orbs were discounted as stray reflections from chrome fittings. Others, behaving differently, were then read as authentic. PE73 asserted 'light going up means it can't be dust falling.' The same technical problems had been identified in nineteenth-century theatrical effects.[30]

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[23] Sara L. Sumpter, 'From Scrolls to Prints to Moving Pictures: Iconographic Ghost Imagery from Pre-Modern Japan to the Contemporary Horror Film',*Explorations: The UC Davis Undergraduate Research Journal*, 9 (2006), 12; *Ringu/Ring*. Dir. Hideo Nakata. Omega Project. 1998, re-made as *The Ring*. Dir. Gore Verbinski. DreamWorks. 2002.

[24] Steve Parsons, 'Orbs! … At Last Some Definitive Evidence that They Are not Paranormal', *Parascience* (2010), <http://www.parascience.org.uk/articles/orbkill.htm> [accessed 2 February 2011].

[25] 'Want to Submit a Photograph?', *Science of Ghosts*, <http://scienceofghosts.wordpress.com/want-to-submit-a-photograph/> [accessed 27 January 2010].

[26] Katherine Ramsland, *Ghost: Investigating the Other Side* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2001).

[27] Alan Murdie, 'Ghostwatch', *Fortean Times*, 272 (March 2011), 21.

[28] Mikel J. Koven, '*Most Haunted* and the Convergence of Traditional Belief and Popular Television', *Folklore*, 118.2 (2007), 188-196.

[29] Yvette Fielding, and Ciarán O'Keeffe, *Ghost Hunters: A Guide to Investigating the Paranormal* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006), p. 154.

[30] Fielding and O'Keeffe, *Ghost Hunters*, p. 151.

Unexplained lights were not new with camera technologies, but domestically-available technologies have altered their description. PE75 discussed her great-grandmother, who grew up in Brazil. One uncle remained when the family returned to Britain. PE75's great-grandmother was at home when she saw 'a kind of glowing orb'. She was not scared, thinking it beautiful, but it disappeared when she approached it. It later proved to coincide with the death of her uncle in Brazil. Describing it as an 'orb' may owe much to recent discussions of photographic phenomena, although the story was already in PE75's family tradition. Only that differentiates it from PE22's sighting of a large, pale, almost transparent slow-moving orb, which was a defining moment in the development of her belief. Other informants described similar phenomena without using 'orb' or relating any crisis narrative. EM8 described puzzlement at 'usually wak[ing] … to see a ball of soft glowing red light'.

Older 'ghost-light' traditions are incorporated here. Larger-scale light phenomena are now more closely associated with UFOs.[31] PE90, who worked in a commercial space programme acknowledged similar phenomena in ghost and UFO reports. Known internationally,[32] 'ghost-light' phenomena are often connected with escaping gases in wetland areas, although this does not prevent supernatural narratives alongside the natural. PE76 indicated where green ghost-lights presage rain. Similar accounts are recorded from the Netherlands.[33] Improved drainage has undermined such local traditions, which were not always attached to ghosts.[34] Such portentous phenomena were recorded here. PE44, in her mid-sixties, recalled a neighbour dying during her childhood in South Wales. An elderly friend of her grandmother said she knew this would happen as she had seen corpse candles heading towards the deceased's door.[35]

There are continuities in the light effects around apparitions. Cinema has always experimented with editing techniques to present ghostly figures in inappropriate settings, while also relying on pallor to supplement the argument. Some images, like the white-sheeted figure, acquired a life of their own. Silent cinema persisted with it, often as slapstick, feeding recent televisual imagery. Davies suggests early cinema slapstick contributed to its downfall as a realistic reflection of today's believed ghosts.[36] More remarkable is the 1970s television programme recalled from his Stockholm childhood by the Swede PE58. A ghost kept sneezing. When he reached for the hem of his sheet to blow his nose he revealed his testicles. This, said PE58 drily, was too strong for Swedish children's television at the time. Davies' point indicates another layer added to available imagery. The developing sophistication of cinema's ability to represent ghosts as light effects, and transparent or insubstantial but clearly outlined forms, has enabled it to complicate understanding of the images

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[31] David Clarke, and Andy Roberts, *Phantoms of the Sky: UFOs – A Modern Myth?* (London: Robert Hale, 1990), p. 159.

[32] Mark Moravec, 'Strange Illuminations: "Min Min Lights": Australian "Ghost Light" Stories', *Fabula*, 44.1/2 (2003), 2-24.

[33] Henk Kooyman, 'Sagen uit de Waarden', *Neerlands Volksleven*, 16.1 (1966), 44.

[34] Jacqueline Simpson, and Steve Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 391.

[35] *Cannwyl corff* (corpse candle), Jonathan Caredig Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales* (Felinfach: Llanerch, 1992; first pub. 1911), pp. 202ff; Lynn Davies, 'Aspects of Mining Folklore in Wales', *Folk Life*, 9 (1971), 95-6.

[36] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 214.

seen during experiences. EM76's 'white floaty form' is connected to an older white-sheeted figure somehow, although not envisioned that crudely.

Pallor, transparency, and other indications of ghostliness in representations

In representational techniques there is a very long history of such technological strivings balanced by traditional conceptions. Some theatrical mechanisms, like Pepper's Ghost, were comparable to cinematic tricks in ingenuity and effect.[37] This influential device, which survived into the twentieth century in the populist milieu of the fairgrounds,[38] enabled exactly the technical effect still being considered contemporaneously by Fielding and O'Keeffe, 'the superimposition of a transparent object over solid objects'.[39] More important than colour is transparency, emphasising strange effects, not just paleness.

Historically we find recurring appeals to technical wizardry, although we should beware underestimating 'the powerful effect of magic-lantern illusionism on eyes untrained by photography and cinematography'. Proposing a 'catadioptrical phantasmagoria' in 1833, Brewster suggested it would enable lifelike representation to replace the existing 'chalky ill-drawn figures', again suggesting pallor.[40] Pallor worked as representational shorthand partly because it echoed apparitional trends. Thirty years earlier Thomas Milward was shot as the Hammersmith Ghost whilst wearing pale work clothes. In 1836 a solicitor in white got into a fight in Hampstead with two policemen investigating ghost reports.[41] Not all ghosts wore contemporary clothes, and not all ghosts were pale, but some did, and some were. This remains so.

These discussions and negotiations are found throughout theatrical and artistic representations of ghosts. Earlier discussions became important and representative portrayals themselves. The influence of *Hamlet* is unavoidable.[42] The ghost, in full armour, his face visible, is a recognisable person who is dead.[43] Jacobean ghost costuming was not apparently universal.[44] *Hamlet* contains no single visual indication of ghostliness.[45] The resemblance to the dead man is disputed, but other aspects of appearance support the arguments: his face is 'very pale'.[46] Borrowing from earlier

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[37] Davies, *The Haunted*, pp. 206-209 and 236-239; Terry Castle, 'Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie', *Critical Inquiry*, 15.1 (1988), 39-40; 'Phantasmechanics Presents Help with Pepper on It', <http://www.phantasmechanics.com/pepper.html> [accessed 26 January 2010].

[38] Mervyn Heard, 'Giving up the Ghost', *The Fairground Heritage Trust*, <http://www.fairground-heritage.org.uk/newsite/learn/learn-ghost.html> (first pub. on <http://www.thegalloper.com>, 2002) [accessed 26 January 2010].

[39] 'Phantasmechanics'; Fielding and O'Keeffe, *Ghost Hunters*, p. 151.

[40] Castle, 'Phantasmagoria', 39.

[41] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 21.

[42] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[43] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), I.2.200; I.2.229.

[44] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 183, 171; Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 219.

[45] *Hamlet*, I.1.43-46; I.2.228-240; I.1.63.

[46] *Hamlet*, I.1.233.

symbolisms,[47] this conveniently represents something otherworldly. Such experiences continue. At a rave PE60 met a dead friend who was recognisable by distinctive scars. PE60's girlfriend said 'Get away from him, he's dead.'

Further blurring of traditional images and general uncanniness can be seen in the global spread of mass media representations. In *Ringu* (1998) the haunting figure's strange walk derived from Kabuki theatre's footless ghosts.[48] The spirit presence in recent Japanese *shinrei shashin* (ghost photographs) is often identified because the living subject apparently lacks a limb, which is interpreted as a ghost standing in front of that part of their body.[49] This motif may be less widely known than the box-office success *Ringu* but both are available for comparison and merger with local traditions of footlessness. PE97 said an Asian cab-driver had told him Pakistani ghosts lack feet.

Partial apparitions, often of the upper body, are frequent.[50] With the historical background of apparitions comes the idea of changing floor heights.[51] PE76, recounting experiences from her nursing days, mentioned Civil War ghosts in an underground passage. They had no legs because 'obviously the ground was a lot lower then to what it was now.'[52] Odd movements are also noted. PE23 said his father, when younger, saw a woman moving her legs, but 'gliding' as she passed. He followed, but she had vanished. Footlessness was more common here than the once prevalent headlessness (E422.1.1 Headless revenant), which was not encountered.[53] It hints at complicated belief systems and rationalisations around forms of death, whilst appealing more simply to general uncanniness.

On shrouds and what the dead wear

There are historical and historical-sounding arguments for why earlier ghosts appeared in white sheets. These still inform belief, while earlier images usefully illuminate current questions of the interaction between representations and belief. Citing a woodcut frequently used on seventeenth-century ballad sheets, Davies argues the sheeted figure is a stereotype 'exploited by hoaxers and used in … pictorial representations', since 'only a minority' of ghosts appear thus.[54] This carries some weight, but we should be cautious about downplaying it too far.[55]

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[47] Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, p. 182. See also Tracey R. Sands, '"*Det kommo tvänne dufvor …*": Doves, Ravens, and the Dead in Scandinavian Folk Traditions', *Scandinavian Studies*, 73.3 (2001), 349.

[48] Sumpter, 'Scrolls to Prints', 13-14.

[49] Richard Chalfen, '*Shinrei Shashin*: Photographs of Ghosts in Japanese Snapshots', *Photography & Culture*, 1.1 (2008), 59-60.

[50] Green and McCreery, *Apparitions*, p. 161.

[51] Wilson, *In Search of Ghosts*, pp. 214-5.

[52] F721.1, Underground passages, and E334.5, Ghost of soldier haunts battlefield.

[53] Davies, *The Haunted*, pp. 23-25.

[54] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 20.

[55] Davies, *The Haunted*, Plate 1; *The Pack of Autolycus: Or, Strange and Terrible News of Ghosts, Apparitions, Monstrous Births, Showers of Wheat, Judgments of God, and Other Prodigious and Fearful Happenings as Told in Broadside Ballads of the Years 1624-1693*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1969; first pub. 1927), pp. 87-92.

Technical limitations make some forms easier than others to convey. With photographs the unexpectedness or inappropriateness of a figure's presence may be more important than ghostly clothing. Unusual and anachronous clothing is not discounted, but the medium lends new opportunities for interpreting ghostly appearances. In many photographs, including recent *shinrei shashin*, an extraneous figure is not apparently distinguished by colour.[56] The greater detail available increases possible interpretative discoveries. Vigil participants were enthusiastic about extraneous dogs in a photograph, and disappointed I could not see them.

Less significant visual elements may have been added to make earlier representations more typical without undermining their appearance. Many ghostly figures carry tapers, although Grose wrote that he could not find evidence of this. This did not undermine the image for him, as 'the room in which [ghosts] appear, if without fire or candle, is frequently said to be as light as day.'[57] That effect is difficult to achieve in a monotone block-print woodcut without additional clues. Informants here discussed similar effects. Grose noted that 'Ghosts commonly appear in the same dress they usually wore whilst living, though they are sometimes clothed all in white.'[58] There is a tendency now to attribute pallor to earlier burial practices, but Grose's comment suggests this was never an all-encompassing form of appearance. The connection with burial practice is interpretative, not causal. Reading an account of the figure wrapped in 'the sheet from their death-bed', PE83 said 'I'd never thought of that before. That makes sense,' suggesting a new incorporation into her eclectic belief structures.[59] Ghosts today may be expected to appear in their own clothes because this is how they were last seen. Bierce asked why clothes do not sometimes haunt 'without a ghost'. He also identified other ghostly clothing.[60]

Until the nineteenth century, the poor were often buried in a winding sheet or a shroud (which were not everywhere white).[61] It might be tempting to claim this as homogenising apparitions, but there are objections. Even where proscriptive legislation existed, variation in funerary wear was permitted.[62] Grose thought most ghosts appeared in their own clothes, and sheeted figures were 'chiefly the church-yard Ghosts'.[63] He did not dismiss these because ghosts more 'commonly' appeared in day clothes. His amusing account of churchyard ghosts who 'seem to appear *pro bono publico*, or to scare drunken rustics from tumbling over their graves' still acknowledges a form of manifestation. Pictorial stereotypes only succeed insofar as they interact somehow with understood and recognised beliefs. The white-sheeted representation seems latterly to have become more the province of would-be hoaxers, and moved some way from being an accepted form of manifestation, but this does not

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[56] *Science of Ghosts*; Chalfen, '*Shinrei Shashin*', 53-57.
[57] Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary: With a Collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions*, new edn (London: Edward Jeffery, 1811; first pub. 1787), pp. 248-9.
[58] Grose, *Provincial Glossary*, p. 248.
[59] 'Lang wit laken', (my translation).
[60] Ambrose Bierce, *The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary*, ed. Ernest Jerome Hopkins (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967; repr. London: Penguin, 1971), p. 143; Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 90-100.
[61] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 20; Montell, *Ghosts along the Cumberland*, p. 70.
[62] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1989), p. 20; Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 20.
[63] Grose, *Provincial Glossary*, p. 248.

mean it is rejected outright. A latent belief is still present. The white-sheeted figure, with different justifications in each age, may turn up repeatedly to exemplify ghosts from an earlier period.

We can see revealing analogous arguments across a long historical span.[64] Some ancient Greek revenants were black and skeletal.[65] This is sometimes attributed to cremation, which may lead to an absence of 'revenants … in corporeal form',[66] although insubstantiality need not be quintessentially ghostly: PE91 spoke of seeing just the shadow of a woman passing in the road. He associated this with ghosts, but doubted it was so associated elsewhere. Like other arguments from mortuary disposal this does not cover all forms of appearance, nor all forms of funerary practice.[67] The connection with funerary form is overstated. The Derby hospital ghost was not identified as Roman because of suggested Roman funerary practices. It did not look like any Roman ghost, then or now.

Manifestations that have not changed their appearance

i: Nightmare

Unlike apparitions, which can be measured against expected appearances, accounts of phenomena like Sleep Paralysis largely deal with effects rather than perpetrating entities, even where these are part-visible.[68] The narrative traditions often describe malevolent or sexual assault.[69] Most informants reporting such experiences here described physical attack. PE85 recalled a man coming through a wall and climbing onto him.

Work on Sleep Paralysis reveals a cross-cultural consensus of experiences, if not of interpretations.[70] More informants mentioned Sleep Paralysis than the activity usually associated with poltergeists. PE46 had read about it because his girlfriend suffered regularly. His reaction to an experience was 'I'm having Sleep Paralysis.' The reports here accord with Hufford's conclusion that the experience exists outside cultural expectations. The most interesting account came from PE74. Highly political, from a family proud of having broken from Scottish Catholicism, he has never been

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[64] Claude Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead: Ghosts, Ancestors, and the Transparent Veil of the Pagan Mind*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2009; first pub. Paris: Editions Imago, 1996, as *Fantômes et Revenants au Moyen Age*), p. 158.

[65] *Philopseudes/The Lover of Lies*, in Lucian, *III*, ed. A.M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library, 130 (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1921), §32, p. 371.

[66] Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 62.

[67] W.M.S. Russell, 'Greek and Roman Ghosts', in *The Folklore of Ghosts*, ed. Hilda R. Ellis Davidson and W.M.S. Russell, Mistletoe Series, 15 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer for the Folklore Society, 1981), pp. 195-6.

[68] Willem de Blécourt, 'Bedding the Nightmare: Somatic Experience and Narrative Meaning in Dutch and Flemish Legend Texts', *Folklore*, 114.2 (2003), 228.

[69] Davd J. Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*, Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series, 7 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 1-11.

[70] With Hufford, *Terror*, there is a wide literature, indicated in the Bibliography.

religiously involved. He had a Sleep Paralysis experience in his teens, but unaware it was a recognised phenomenon he had not discussed it. He described thinking that, or thinking he was dreaming that, a priest was sitting on his chest trying to kill him. (The caveat was his). PE63, an atheist who read Hufford after his experience, said that at no point had he believed it was supernatural. The existence of the experience outside culture did not prevent its assimilation into a belief system.

EM10 was not alone in arguing from his experience that 'I wouldn't say that I believed in ghosts in the conventional sense but I do believe that there are scientifically explainable phenomena behind sightings like my own.' PE62 discussed two friends' simultaneous experience of a malign presence. One woke to see 'an unusually tall' male figure, largely shadowed but with visible highlights in his eyes. His partner slept through this, but spoke of a 'vivid dream about the same thing … with the figure being unusually tall and disapproving.' Sleep Paralysis, outside PE62's initial interpretation, was mentioned by most later contributors to the discussion.

Such an incident changed EM54's life. This, and a subsequent feeling of presence in a strange house, 'made' her believe in ghosts 'because I know what I felt and what I saw.' It was corroborative evidence to support an existing conceptual interest, or willingness to believe, in ghosts. This was common. EM37 also described, less clearly, a life-changing experience. His first experience suggests Sleep Paralysis: 'I realized that I was not dreaming. I then jerked back and made a sound of surprise like a loud "Huh". She then began breaking apart as smoke or mist.' He later saw her in a dream and spoke to her, before having a Succubus experience.

ii: Poltergeists

These testimonies conform to the consistent physiological descriptions historically. They also illustrate a broad use of material to reach a great range of interpretations. Poltergeist experiences, although less common here, show similar tendencies.[71] We might expect references to proliferate given their spread in popular culture. It was recently suggested that American students will be more familiar with the poltergeist than other ghosts 'because of its ubiquity in both the oral tradition and popular culture'.[72] Researchers hear experiences compared to *Poltergeist*.[73] This informed PE101's comment about a small earthquake in Leeds, 'I automatically jumped to the conclusion that it was a poltergeist and went back to sleep.' Her comment, although facetious, indicates the influence of popular representation. There was evidence here that 'poltergeist' can stand for disruptive physical effects much as 'ghost' does for visual apparitions, as with PE100's 'You see ghosts if they want you to see them. Poltergeists just muck you around.' This was informal, but the distinction has some doctrinal authority. PE7, an Anglican Canon, said he thought 'the vast majority' of

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[71] Harry Price, *Poltergeist over England: Three Centuries of Mischievous Ghosts* (London: Country Life, 1945), pp. 7-10.
[72] Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider, and Jeannie Banks Thomas, *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007), p. 103.
[73] David J. Hess, 'Ghosts and Domestic Politics in Brazil: Some Parallels Between Spirit Possession and Spirit Infestation', *Ethos*, 18.4 (1990), 422; *Poltergeist*. Dir. Tobe Hooper. MGM. 1982.

claimed ghost experiences were 'what … one would call poltergeist phenomena'. He did not think these 'ghosts proper at all', although those appealing for his ministry would. EM60 linked them with alternative spiritual practices. He had 'witnessed poltergeist type activity' which stopped when his neighbour, who 'claimed to be some sort of practicing witch', moved away.

PE7, who was sensitive to the mental health of those seeking his assistance, saw in poltergeist activity the human 'epicentre' of most historical appraisals. An adolescent is often seen as the emotional focus for activity like children's pranks. PE64 related a case in which an arrested teenager claimed windows had been smashed by poltergeists. Pedler attributed poltergeist activity to the possibility for people 'to be childlike and … develop their own psychokinetic abilities without heavy adult overlay.'[74] PE7 also identified traditional poltergeist phenomena: 'things have moved, electrical gadgets have gone on and off, things have fallen down with no obvious physical causation.' These descriptions are standard.[75] Even proselytisers mention a 'dreary similarity' to the records.[76] Others are more enthusiastic about this 'astonishing uniformity'.[77] Arguing from universality of experience, poltergeists have been called the 'only' kind of ghost presenting 'useful historical source material'.[78] Consistency of reports satisfies some that poltergeists are 'a fact in Nature' that 'have always occurred'.[79]

Here, however, we saw blurring of expressive forms with these phenomena. PE76 regularly experienced the unexplained movement of pans and plates in an empty kitchen. She identified an emotional trigger in the presence of her nephew and his partner, as the events happened more often when they were in the house. The two men had cohabited, but are now Civil Partners. PE76 did not blame a poltergeist. She identified the ghosts of two former residents, neither of whom is comfortable with her lodgers' homosexuality. She blamed one ghost for the disruption, but insisted he was just teasing the men. She did not see the spirits as hostile, unlike poltergeists.[80] PE76 did not appeal to poltergeists as an explanation, but described the disruptions (caused by spirits with which she had other experiences) as 'poltergeist' activity. She later moved, for unrelated health reasons, and reported that the new owners had experienced more poltergeist activity since moving in. They had also seen the ghost.

Some defend uniformity of experience against accusations of familiarity with its representations. Uniformity of experience 'cannot be attributed to deliberate imitation' because many of those affected, even if they have heard of poltergeists, 'have been unaware that the particular phenomena observed in their own case have

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[74] Kit Pedler, *Mind over Matter: A Scientist's View of the Paranormal* (London: Thames Methuen, 1981), p. 130.

[75] Davies*, The Haunted*, p. 31; Price, *Poltergeist*, p. 19; Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature: Or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (Ware: Wordsworth in association with the Folklore Society, 2000), p. 292.

[76] Colin Wilson, *Poltergeist! A Study in Destructive Haunting* (London: New English Library, 1982), p. 88.

[77] An *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article quoted in Brian Inglis, *The Paranormal: An Encyclopedia of Psychic Phenomena* (London: Paladin, 1986), p. 209.

[78] Brian Inglis, *Natural and Supernatural: A History of the Paranormal from Earliest Times to 1914* (London: Abacus, 1979), p. 124.

[79] Price, *Poltergeist*, p. 7.

[80] Price, *Poltergeist*, p. 6.

been encountered before.'[81] Inglis's books, with other bestsellers, may themselves have contributed to a broader awareness of poltergeist phenomena since the 1970s. His conclusions were not supported by comments here, where informants distinguished types of haunting on the basis of the definitions and descriptions available to them. PE7 thought poltergeists, unlike ghosts, are proliferating. This was theologically informed, as he thought many of those who needed the church's help were not doctrinally armed against spiritual attack. As a considered emic position, this is worth setting against a parapsychologist's claim for ghosts and poltergeists to be considered together, which proceeds from epiphenomenal considerations.[82]

PE76's interpretations owed much to her historical researches. This is paralleled by EM66's account. She had been experiencing several strange sensations (peculiar strong smells, and unexplained light effects). She took a crucifix to the affected area and prayed. Thereafter strange phenomena, including physical vibrations and the movement of objects, increased. A priest and a medium both blessed the house. When the priest blessed the informant, a shudder of energy passed through her and 'into his hand'. The medium visited twice. After the first visit the vibrations escalated, and orbs of white light appeared. At the second, he said he had located 'a female presence who needed to pass on who had been there since medieval times', and left crystals under the bed. The phenomena continued. EM66 later approached Edinburgh University and 'a professor in the paranormal department [the Koestler Parapsychology Unit] wrote … to say he thought I had a poltergeist experience' and offered advice on controlling it. This follows individual prayer, a priest's intercession and blessing, blessing by a medium, the identification of a trapped spirit by the medium, and the placing of crystals. These may be taken to accord with an emic understanding of the phenomena, and the informant's own native categorisation. Her emic understanding incorporates the place of the university expert, whose suggestion of poltergeist activity here constitutes an etic view.

Non-visual experiences

Poltergeist phenomena are consistently reported as brute interventions. PE76's poltergeists are unusual in being associated with ghosts, but their behaviour was typical. EM66's account, not emically recognised as a poltergeist experience, also accommodates technological developments. PE3 reported a light switch flicking on and off. Technology provides metaphors for phenomena, but these metaphors have an ostensive relationship with reality. The growing trend for burying a mobile telephone with the deceased is framed as increasing closeness with the dead, but the metaphor touches on literal behaviour. The expectation of sending a message to the dead prompts the idea that the dead, too, can communicate the same way.[83] Spiritualism seized on emerging technologies both as metaphor and, 'on a deeper and much more

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[81] Inglis, *Paranormal*, p. 209.
[82] Michaeleen C. Maher, 'Quantitative Investigation of the General Wayne Inn', *Journal of Parapsychology*, 64 (2000), 20; repr. at Parapsychological Association, 'Parapsychological Articles and Full Papers', <http://www.parapsych.org/PDF/General_Wayne_Inn.pdf> [accessed 10 June 2010], pagination follows the online version.
[83] 'Texting the Dead', *FoaFTale News: Newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research*, 71 (January 2009), 3-4.

practical level', as a potential vehicle for communication.[84] Interested scientists sought to assist with such communications.[85] These ideas are widespread.[86] They also offer technical explanations of communication. PE60 thought spirits operate much like radio frequencies: poor tuning will result in muffled messages.

These ideas are raised here to highlight a range of contact beyond the visual. Visual apparitions are rarely reported speaking.[87] Disembodied voices, and a general sense of something which is neither visible nor audible, are more widely recognised. Previous records cover intercession, whether the intercedent is known or not.[88] Intercessionary voices were common here. EM78 reported an unknown voice whispering 'you fat cow' in her ear in a pub. There was no one within speaking distance, and she looked to a local haunting tradition to account for it. Voices interceding domestically are sometimes described as internal, like QU1's comment that 'Grandma says she can hear Grandad in her head when she burns toast, makes lumpy gravy etc!' This may not be entirely metaphorical, as similar visual apparitions were also considered as internal. PE8 saw her late grandfather after major surgery and said 'I know I was under anaesthetic but I prefer to think it was him.'

External domestic intercessionary voices are also often accompanied by other, usually physical, sensations. QU29's ex-partner drank heavily after his father died. Alone in the house she heard the father telling her to watch his son, as he would listen to her: 'The weirdest thing was that I could feel his breath on my face and in my ear when he said it.' QU31 forwarded a narrative about her mother, who, contemplating a medical procedure, heard her late grandmother saying 'your work is not finished yet' and felt her tapping on her shoulder. Such intercessions led Bennett to distinguish 'visitations' from 'hauntings', as her informants were more prepared to say they believed in the former than in ghosts.[89] She thus distinguished 'ghosts' (evil entities) from 'witnesses' (the friendly family dead).[90] By contrast, EM56 wrote of four hostile experiences from her childhood. In two cases a voice called her name. She wrote 'I don't believe in ghosts per say [sic], but possibly spirits? Most people don't see the difference, but I didn't see random dead people walking around my house … Ya know?' The distinction here is between 'random dead people' and evil entities, but the former are 'ghosts'. EM56 described no domestic intercession.

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[84] R. Laurence Moore, 'Spiritualism and Science: Reflections on the First Decade of the Spirit Rappings', *American Quarterly*, 24.4 (1972), 474-500; Richard J. Noakes, 'Telegraphy Is an Occult Art: Cromwell Fleetwood Varley and the Diffusion of Electricity to the Other World', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 32.4 (1999), 422.

[85] Pamela Thurschwell, 'The Erotics of Telepathy: The British SPR's Experiments in Intimacy', in *The Sixth Sense Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009), p. 190.

[86] Barry Albin-Dyer, with Greg Watts, *Don't Drop the Coffin! Lifting the Lid on Britain's Most Remarkable Undertaker* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), p. 177; P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts: A History of Phantoms, Ghouls, and Other Spirits of the Dead* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), p. 223; I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 56.

[87] Shane Leslie, *Shane Leslie's Ghost Book* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1955), p. 118; Helen Creighton, *Bluenose Ghosts* (Halifax, NS: Nimbus, 1994; first pub. 1957), p. 141.

[88] Martin Caidin, *Ghosts of the Air* (London: Bounty, 2005; first pub. 1998), pp. 74-84.

[89] Gillian Bennett, *Alas, Poor Ghost! Traditions of Belief in Story and Discourse* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1999), p. 24.

[90] Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 26.

Informants managed nuanced interpretations of 'ghost'. Despite suggestions that visual experiences are declining, this research heard several, with considerations of what constitutes an apparition.[91] There was a willingness to accommodate 'visitations' within the broader category of 'ghosts'. PE82 said she undertook paranormal investigations looking for documentary (visual) proof to support her beliefs, but she also described an earlier physical experience. Sitting at her father's deathbed, she felt he was behind her. A fortnight later

> I felt my dad's hand go into my hand, and I was literally squeezing and rubbing his hand, and I could feel it there, and it stayed there for about 30 seconds, and then I felt it go. I knew it was my dad, he had a lump [on his hand] of arthritis, and I was feeling the lump on his hand.

PE95 recounted a similar sensation. Her mother and brother both saw an apparition she could not see, although she felt it stroke her head.

PE82's account embodies a problem with 'ghosts'. Any survey must accommodate such 'domestic' experiences, although they do not necessarily satisfy the criteria of classical apparition phenomena sought by parapsychological and paranormal investigators. PE82 operates here with two sets of validating criteria that do not quite sit comfortably together, although she believes both. This was noticeable amongst respondents expressing a belief system largely hostile to ideas of post mortem spirit survival whilst retaining the possibility of ghostly forms. QU3, an atheist who was brought up a Christian, did not answer directly what he understood by 'ghost'. Though he does not believe in them 'as such', he said he had 'heard convincing reports … so [was] not entirely sceptical'. QU2 wrote that she does not think she believes in ghosts, 'But I would never say they definitely don't exist – how would I know?' PE33 described her first ghost experience. She heard footsteps coming downstairs and along the corridor, then saw a big door-handle turn. The door opened and closed, and she heard steps cross the room and disappear. She appealed to a family history of perception, but insisted she had never seen an apparition.

'Apparition' here means specifically a visual materialisation, although there is a complicated relationship between various traditions. For some it was straightforward: PE49 heard the Banshee for three hours the night her mother died. She did not see it, but made no distinction from visual apparitions. Her father had seen it, and there was a family history of ghost-sighting. Hearing the Banshee fitted this.[92] Most informants had no such strong family or group traditions, but recounted inexplicable experiences. Several described unusual smells. PE36 said a strong fishy smell appeared shortly after her mother's death, and thereafter on several significant dates. QU8 wrote of a gas engineer friend 'who can smell ghosts'. QU8 does not believe this explains the phenomena. When PE71's brother has seen the smoking man, his parents have smelled the smoke but seen nothing. PE11 mentioned a sleep paralysis experience, but the thing holding him was hairy and smelt 'beast-like'.

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[91] David Wood, 'Where Have All the Apparitions Gone? Conclusions of a Census of Hauntings', *Paranormal Review*, 46 (2008), 10-13.

[92] Patricia Lysaght, *The Banshee: The Irish Supernatural Death-Messenger* (Dublin: Glendale, 1986).

'Ghost' also covers other phenomena: EM58 wrote that 'I have never either "seen" or "heard" a ghost, but I seem to be able, on occasions, to "sense" when they are around.' There is a sophisticated understanding of the interrelation. This involves negotiating the phenomena, which develop older themes and images along new lines. It may be fruitless to seek one defining form of apparition or non-visual phenomenon to express the believed entity, as informants described experiences brought together into a complex whole. Across the questionnaires there was general agreement that 'ghost' could refer to 'an essence/presence of someone who has died' (in QU9's words), but this did not dictate the nuances of the respondent's actual belief or disbelief.[93] Accordingly, three apparitions of the living were volunteered because they fitted into a general discussion of 'ghosts'. PE14 said 'the only ghost experience I have wasn't mine.' Arriving home he had called out 'I'm back'. His father said 'I know, I saw you when you came in before.' He had not been back before. He had no 'ghost' stories involving the dead, but connected this one. PE95 related her family fetch stories to her ghost beliefs. She had several times heard her partner's key in the lock shortly before he arrived. PE20 described seeing an old acquaintance at a meeting. When asked later about his quietness he replied 'But I wasn't there', and proved it. PE20 said he had looked off-colour, to which he replied 'the other one's always like that.' She remarked on the 'always'. Magical bilocation was consistent for PE20 with other non-corporeal manifestations of the person, hence its inclusion in her discussion of ghosts. These bilocations also relate directly to the appearance of ghosts in contemporary clothing.

The findings point to how informants themselves understand these concepts. EM29 wrote of unpleasant experiences in a motel. She described feeling 'as if I was being held down on the bed,' but was also aware of voices, lights being turned on, and the sense of a shadowy presence outside her window. Considering how this had affected her beliefs, she wrote only of the conviction she had already had that 'under the right conditions and circumstances ghosts could exist. Such as at the scene of a murder or traumatic events. Certain individuals may be more in tune to other realms and may be liable to have such encounters.' Like EM56, who had written 'I don't believe in ghosts … but possibly spirits?' PE66 preferred 'spirit' for the post mortem presences that surround us at all times, saying she regarded any residual survival of life as 'essentially the spirit of the person'. She saw this as a Newtonian process: 'Once the body's gone, you've still got the energy of the person and you can't destroy energy – it can take a different form perhaps, but it can't be eliminated in a sense – so, if something chooses to keep its form because of shock, or dissatisfaction, or anger, or whatever, then it'll keep that until it's resolved whatever issue it has.'

This may be a descriptive form for the physical character of the survival of death. EM68, a practising Christian who believes in post mortem survival, has 'no idea' how survival works, but has 'always leaned toward the opinion that "ghosts" are energy traces that are somehow embedded in certain areas, rather than some kind of conscious entity.' Although PE66 suggests such 'energy' might retain its existing form in the case of a negative effect and violent or untimely death, she is generally more sympathetic to the persistence of spirit in a recognisable form. Even with uneasy

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[93] QU6 said a ghost is 'A paranormal spirit that is trapped between the world of the living and the dead for reasons withheld to them. It is described by many a novel as an entity of a once living person. Perhaps a more accurate description is a figment of our imagination.'

deaths PE66 saw the possibility of domestic intercession. Some correspondents wrote of a disjuncture between rational thinking and anomalous experiences, but linked the latter to intercession. 'Ghosts', wrote EM38, 'may just be a coping mechanism.' QU1's ghosts invading the present 'can become externalised if they are very powerful. They are as real as we make them.' These are subtle ways of considering such matters. Trying to pin down definitive phenomenal definitions may miss their significance.[94]

Conclusion: 'I think this boy be a spirit!'[95]

This last point is the key to this discussion. When examining what ghosts look like, we found a willingness to accommodate a wide range of manifestations within that consideration. At an individual level 'ghost' is maintained as an all-encompassing term, covering things which should not be where they are, regardless of the specifics of their manifestation or its possible reasons. We will see in the next chapter the reasons offered for ghostly return that form the background to these anomalous manifestations. We see here in practice that the term 'ghost' contains within itself a problematising of its own concepts. It allows for consideration of questions around itself, while taking such positions as its assumed starting place. It is unsurprising, then, that an apparently outdated form of apparition like the white-sheeted figure should be available as a starting point for discussion without directly reflecting the majority of experiences documented here.

This also explains why such an apparently outdated figure should still retain some potential for being believable. We have seen here how 'ghost' is also used to problematise its own history. This takes a particular typological form, but – with adaptations – any previous manifesting form and tradition is available for reuse and reincorporation into contemporary believed manifestations. This common negotiation means that people discussing ghosts have available to them a wide range of sources, historical and representational. Media representations may codify specific aspects of ghostly appearance, some of which are dictated or facilitated by the medium's technological capabilities, and this codification then feeds into ensuing discussions. It would be an overstatement to see this as either limiting manifestations to one standardised form, or of discrediting that form. There is a tendency to see such questions reductively, when the historical record suggests that such flexibility on the available manifesting forms, the reasons for them, and their believability, has in fact characterised discussion across a long period.

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[94] Maher, 'General Wayne Inn', 2.

[95] George Peele, *The Old Wives' Tale*, 698, in *Three Sixteenth-Century Comedies*, ed. Charles W. Whitworth Jr (London: Ernest Benn, 1984), pp. 215-272.

<center>Chapter Two</center>

<center>The conceptual and physical recognition of ghosts (ii): Why do
ghosts appear, and to whom?</center>

<center>*'tell Why thy canoniz'd bones … Have burst their cerements'*[1]</center>

Manifestations are not separable from informants' estimation of them. The last
chapter examined this in terms of what manifests. This chapter examines some
underlying conceptions for ghostly return. Informants weigh their experiences against
a range of manifestations, and employ other analytical criteria. Anomalous
appearance may only make sense when considered against other beliefs and
conceptions, against a different contextual plausibility.

The last chapter viewed the individual character of manifestations. This chapter looks
at their social character, dealing with relations with the dead at a community level,
and maintaining them in their appropriate place. We begin here to see their socio-
economic import: looking at the place of the dead in the world of the living, this
chapter considers how ghosts express a relation to property, and continue daily life.
The attitude and concerns of informants here gives a clearer idea of how people view
their dead today, and what this might mean for the historical development of such
views. By highlighting some afterlife conceptions it also lays the groundwork for
viewing these beliefs and practices in relation to more institutional and orthodox
religious beliefs.

The chapter explores two broad groups of interaction with the dead. Actively seeking
the dead takes several forms, from ghost walks to paranormal investigation. These,
and related legend trips, introduce notions that the dead have a place of their own. We
have already encountered this around apparitions in historic dress, but here we
consider it more broadly, encompassing historic sites and places of the dead at rest.
Graveyards and cemeteries offer a residency for the individual deceased and a
generalised community of the dead. We examine here the idea of a permeable border
between these communities of living and dead. Such conceptions rely on a more or
less formulated idea of how the dead are, which will resonate into scientific and
doctrinal considerations. We will see here how the social consideration of ghosts
presumes post mortem continuities of their living existence, whether as a soul or some
energy force. Associating the dead with specific places also points to a connection
with property. The socio-economic impact of this is illustrated by accounts from the
former Soviet bloc. These are illustrative because of the historical course of these
territories, but they are not a remote example. They directly reflect and impact upon
ghost belief in Britain today, as evidence from informants here will show.

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[1] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Methuen, 1971),
1.iv.46-9.

The social significance of such connections with property and location also has implications for apparitions without a burial location, or not yet known to be dead. Such cases have shaped much of the discussion of apparitions over the last century. These are touched on here as an expression of separation from property, but they introduce another social question. Informants negotiated questions of scale of loss in their reflections. Narrative genre scholarship allows a probing of developing attitudes towards different registers of death, from catastrophic wartime slaughter to individual loss. These questions raise vernacular metaphors of haunting and introduce our second broad group of interactions, the dead seeking the living. Here we examine narratives of the type that have shaped recent discussions of post mortem contact, like crisis and consolatory apparitions. As in the last chapter, this discussion also reflects older arguments. Between the living seeking the dead and vice versa we find evidence of a surprisingly persistent tradition of pacts for the first-deceased to return with news from beyond. This introduces a brief reflection on the fear of the dead, and other supernatural entities. These considerations of further aspects of the mechanics of ghost belief open up questions of philosophical practice and doctrinal belief we will examine later.

External indications do not independently compel the interpretations offered for a ghost experience. Cultural explanations are included in judgements about ghostly experiences. The monastic traditions discussed earlier involved interpreting visual appearance and suggesting explanations for their presence. These might be historical, pseudo-historical, or justified by legend traditions in local folklore.[2] Such considerations introduce an informant's thinking more generally. PE7, an Anglican involved in healing ministries, listens carefully to percipients, but 'the way one proceeds doesn't really depend upon … any explanation of why it's happened.' He applied an interpretation based on his own philosophy, which was better elaborated than that of many of those he assists.

Looking for the dead

This suggests two areas of examination, the dead seeking out the living and vice versa. Informants combined subtly distinctive positions. Many mentioned ghost tours, walks, and investigations, but distinguished between these and their beliefs. PE75 worked in a museum. Professionally she led ghost legend tours, but distinguished these from her own beliefs and experiences. She became 'very upset for the ghosts' when her cousin participated in filmed tours of haunted houses. Telling legends was a professional duty, but she did not advertise a ghost in her workplace. This would be disrespectful, as it was 'very private' and only discussed selectively. Her relationships with ghosts were much like with the living. The tours were different, but touched on her deeper beliefs. She was similarly cautious about other people's ghost narratives unless she knew something about the narrator personally. PE22 also runs ghost walks in her museum work. She tells stories on them, and is an active amateur storyteller. She was unwilling to recount other people's experiences, feeling this lacked experiential analysis and was too similar to storytelling. PE15 organises ghost walks. He previously participated in others from a love of legends and old buildings. This

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[2] Doris Jones-Baker, *The Folklore of Hertfordshire* (London: Batsford, 1977), pp. 42-45; Raymond Brown, 'The Secrets of Underground Hertford', *Hertfordshire Mercury*, 8 October 2004, 16-17.

intersected with, but was not identical to, his interest in probing his own beliefs, which chimes with PE75's position. PE15 did not expect manifestations at his events. When he did see an apparition he initially disbelieved his own perception. PE43 was atypical here in participating in ghost walks looking for evidence.

This points to a blurring of registers. Asked about ghosts (a word she does not use) an SNU church Secretary said Spiritualists 'can't raise the dead'. In a world filled with spirit (her preferred term), however, trips to medium services solicit spirit contact. The institutional form connects with other visits in search of ghosts, even with different approaches. PE82's paranormal investigation team conduct vigils without prior local research. They feel this satisfies claims to objectivity. Their investigations are thus tacitly predicated on being surrounded by spirits, as was articulated by PE12 and PE66. Rationalisations are flexible: PE16 described hearing a child's spirit knocking from under floorboards in a loft, but offered no explanation why it might have been there. Their vigil procedures, modelled on pioneering Spiritualist techniques, included invitations for spirits to copy them.[3] Like PE75's attitude to the museum ghost, this indicates co-existence with spirits functioning like the living.

The conceptions are further complicated by their choice of locations. Doing no advance historical research, they still choose locations likely to be haunted and do not rule out reportedly haunted buildings. Contrasting themselves to *Most Haunted* they were open to null findings, which they saw as validating any results they did obtain. In this sense they called themselves 'sceptical', which did not contradict leader PE82's ambitions of finding 'someone to come through to give us *proof* that there is life after life' [emphasis added].

Legend tripping

This model has similarities with legend trips. These are often tests of adolescent courage at a site associated with a supernatural legend.[4] A focus on adolescent performance portrays the legend trip as a party with scary stories and re-enactment. This has restricted attention paid to the circulation and transmission of older legends among adults.[5] For adults, and, specifically, believers, the legend trip may be associated less with ghosts than other paranormal phenomena, although this requires further study. Much paranormal investigation, particularly in places already reputedly haunted, could constitute a form of legend trip.[6]

The legend trip can be used as a heterodox religious experience, its ostension potentially a belief-reaffirming practice.[7] PE71 expressed interest in two legend-

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[3] Kenneth D. Pimple, 'Ghosts, Spirits, and Scholars: The Origins of Modern Spiritualism', in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker (Logan: Utah State University Pres, 1995), p. 77.

[4] S. Elizabeth Bird, 'Playing with Fear: Interpreting the Adolescent Legend Trip', *Western Folklore*, 53.3 (1994), 191-209; essays in *Indiana Folklore: A Reader*, ed. Linda Dégh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), with bibliographies.

[5] James P. Leary, '*Storviken* in the Old World and the New', *JAF*, 118.468 (2005), 141.

[6] Derek Acorah, *Derek Acorah's Ghost Towns* (London: HarperElement, 2006), p. 5.

[7] Carl Lindahl, 'Ostensive Healing: Pilgrimage to the San Antonio Ghost Tracks', *JAF*, 118.468 (2005), 174; 165.

tripping possibilities. One was similar to the 'Ghost Tracks': in a place near Huntingdon, said PE71, the spirits of dead children would push a parked car across a railway line. These suggest a continuum of behaviour. Lindahl's San Antonio informant went from pious belief, but she was present alongside partying adolescents. This may link some experiences to certain groups. PE37 spoke of a house whose ghost is only seen by 18-24 year olds, suggesting age-specific legend tripping. PE23 described a pre-adolescent dare to invoke 'the ghost of Tutankhamen' at the British Museum by staring at the casket until you saw it out of the corner of your eye. 'I think it was probably a reflection,' he laughed.

This is connected with visiting the dead in more orthodox settings. Some graveyard legend trips involve disturbance.[8] This hints at institutional observations for maintaining contact without disturbing the dead.[9] Research into high-profile locations suggests media coverage has 'a major influence over … belief in the paranormal.'[10] This seems reasonable, with reservations, but it remains complicated in practice. Visiting a 'Haunted Gallery' may reinforce and encourage belief in the paranormal, but the name may also have influenced the decision to visit. Studying at the College of Psychic Studies, EM14 was taken 'on a ghost hunt to a pub … We were asked not to do any research prior to our visit, and I didn't do any.' The lack of possibly prejudicial research is outweighed by other context here, as with reports from hospitals and theatres. PE72 thought the ghost in her workplace was invented by a previous employee intent on rectifying its lack of a theatre ghost. This was an interpretative act by a non-believer. PE72 showed me a late 1980s in-house magazine she thought marked the date of the invention. Popular anthologies refer to the ghost considerably earlier.[11] The invention of consistent ghost traditions is recorded elsewhere, while some theatre ghosts are discussed in a combination of personal experience and legend tradition.[12]

Visiting the dead at home: the cemetery

Much questing is predicated on the dead being around us at all times, although few stated this as explicitly as PE66. It thus takes place outside lodgements of the dead, like cemeteries. Ghosts, because misplaced, are sought where they should not be, even if it is somewhere they were associated with in life or death. PE107, who had worked for 49 years as an undertaker, described an absence of belief across the funeral industry where '*everybody* is a sceptic.' Little ghostly activity is reported at cemeteries, with more where people live and work.[13] EM30 shared this association with death-sites not burial grounds. Experiences had convinced him 'there are restless

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[8] Jacqueline Simpson, *The Folklore of Sussex* (London: Batsford, 1973), p. 45.
[9] Milina Ivanovic-Barisic, 'Memorial Service: A Means of Communication with the Dead', [English abstract], *Bulletin of Ethnographic Institute of the SASA*, 53, (2005), 305.
[10] Richard Wiseman et al, 'An Investigation into Alleged "Hauntings"', *British Journal of Psychology*, 94 (2003), 196.
[11] Andrew Green, *Our Haunted Kingdom: More than 350 Authentic Hauntings or Case Histories Recorded in the United Kingdom over the Last 25 Years* (London: Wolfe, 1973).
[12] Ian Wilson, *In Search of Ghosts* (London: Headline, 1996), p. 24; Gillian Bennett, 'Narrative as Expository Discourse', *JAF*, 99.394 (1986), 420.
[13] Alan Murdie, 'London Ghosts', South East London Folklore Society, 11 March 2010.

spirits confined for some reason or another to the places where as living people they died.'

There is a danger of presupposing this as universally accepted. Not all undertakers share PE107's scepticism. Murdie has recorded apparent exceptions, suggesting a problem with documentation, not experience.[14] Predominantly Anglican cemeteries and graveyards employ a model of control of the dead only loosely reliant on institutional ritual.[15] Other denominations have a more ritualised system of maintaining the dead at peace, but communication is also reported from largely Anglican cemeteries. Lay doctrinal differences are less pronounced, and cemeteries are numinous. Views of the existence of the spirit have recently been documented, covering a permanent domestic 'presence' to a spirit at the gravesite itself.[16] Cemeteries show continued community. At an Anglican funeral a mourner visited a family grave, saying to PE63 'I'm just going to pop in and see mum.' Sanctity is popularly given by the burial itself.[17] The folklore record documents uneasy areas of cemeteries, legends that may now be changing.[18] PE82 described a cemetery vigil during which everyone felt ill in one spot, later found to be a 'plague burial ground'.[19]

The cemetery is an appropriate place for the dead. EM28 described a consoling and reassuring sensation of presence during her father's funeral. She has experienced nothing similar since. This is a function of funeral ceremonies, ritually ensuring the dead pass easily to their correct home. PE81, who works with soul rescue groups to release 'trapped' souls, thought most earthbound spirits are those whose philosophy prevents them from realising they are dead. This argument against atheism points to some informed communication with the dead. Not encountered here, perhaps because of a lack of focus on funerary rites, was the broad cross-cultural consideration of lodging the dead appropriately. Funeral rites introduce the deceased to their new environment.[20] Ghostly return may therefore indicate problems with this, at however prosaic and domestic a level. PE76's grandmother complained through a medium at not being laid out in the nightgown bought for that purpose. There was little sense here of excessive mourning disturbing the dead at rest, although it was heard in folk songs, suggesting a possible source for reinvigoration or awareness of the tradition.[21]

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[14] Barry Albin-Dyer with Greg Watts, *Don't Drop the Coffin! Lifting the Lid on Britain's Most Remarkable Undertaker* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), p. 156; Alan Murdie, 'Ghostwatch', *Fortean Times*, 274 (April 2011), 26-7.

[15] Nigel Barley, *Native Land* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 90.

[16] Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, and Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p. 123.

[17] Alan Jabbour and Karen Singer Jabbour, *Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 55.

[18] Kingsley Palmer, *Oral Folk-Tales of Wessex* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), p. 60.

[19] The plague pit explaining land disuse and supernatural disturbance is 'a real growth area', Steve Roud, *London Lore: The Legends and Traditions of the World's Most Vibrant City* (London: Random House, 2008), pp. 117-119.

[20] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 146.

[21] James Reeves, *The Everlasting Circle: English Traditional Verse* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p. 273; Ruth Harvey, 'The Unquiet Grave', *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 4.2 (1941), 51; S.O. Addy, *Folk Tales and Superstitions*, ed. J.D.A. Widdowson (Wakefield: EP, 1973, first pub. 1895 as *Household Tales with Other Traditional Remains*), p. 138; Helen Creighton, *Bluenose Ghosts* (Halifax, NS: Nimbus, 1994; first pub. 1957), p. 192. I

Again, cross-cultural comparisons were made. PE63 described a British Tamil funeral that ended with mourners touching the corpse. Such practices may revitalise traditions widespread previously but not encountered directly here. Touching the corpse still takes place.[22] It is widely documented from the period of home laying-out.[23] PE96 bemoaned a lack of familiarity with death since people no longer see corpses. His grandmother and great-grandmother were both laid out at home for a week.[24]

The cemetery also functions as a border. PE100 linked his ghost experiences in a workshop to the adjacent Jewish cemetery. His conclusion that 'You see ghosts if they want you to see them' calls into question any inevitable connection with the cemetery locations he described. Nothing connected his two apparitions there with a Jewish cemetery. His brother's experience with the mounted knight took place in Kensal Green cemetery, which opened in 1832. This permeable border is well illustrated in recent cemetery research. Greek Cypriot mourners take nothing pertaining to the grave into the home. Cemetery visits indicate concern with maintaining the appropriate boundaries and distance between the worlds.[25]

A community of the dead, and where it is

We see here the extension of the world of the living into that of the dead. This was clearest for the Spiritualist PE12. Spirit is like the world of the living. Relatives who are quiet in spirit, she said, were probably quiet in life. They had been elbowed aside, 'like every queue'. At an east London medium service the medium tried to identify spirits by recognisable local practices. Parapsychological objections to the idea that the next world mirrors this one ignore its place in popular belief.[26] Anthropological work on the place of the dead in social groups is useful here.[27] The continued presence of the dead here was not formal, but there are clues from other research. Some respondents to a survey on American kinship asked if they should include the dead. Schneider concluded that they did not think they should, so excluded the dead. Their question seems to suggest the opposite.[28] Narrative research supports this.

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am grateful to Jim Morrison for a recording of Pal Carter singing 'The Unquiet Grave' at Sharp's Folk Club on 25 September 2007.

[22] Ian Rankin, 'My Family Values', *The Guardian*, Family section, 21 November 2009, 8.

[23] Steve Roud, *The Penguin Guide to the Superstitions of Britain and Ireland* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006), p. 115; Edwin Grey, *Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village* (Harpenden: Harpenden and District Local History Society, 1977; first pub. 1934), p. 167; Dorothy A. Grimes, *Like Dew before the Sun: Life and Language in Northamptonshire* (Wellingborough: Wharton, 1996; first pub. 1991), p. 34; Margaret Bennett, *Scottish Customs: From the Cradle to the Grave*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004), pp. 231, 241, and 269.

[24] Elaine McFarland, 'Working with Death: An Oral History of Funeral Directing in Late Twentieth-Century Scotland', *Oral History*, 36.1 (2008), 74. Only 12 percent of corpses were embalmed in Scotland as late as 1967, 80 fn 49. By 2003 less than a quarter of deaths (23.1%) took place at home, 73.

[25] Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery*, p. 102.

[26] Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson, *At the Hour of Death* (New York: Avon, 1977), pp. 200-1.

[27] Mary Noble, 'Yoruba Death', *Shadow*, 3.2 (1986), 62.

[28] David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 71-2.

Supernatural legends suggest that 'the dead, along with the living, are a part of society and can be active in social life.'[29]

This has geographical implications. Living and dead may share a space, maintaining internal boundaries.[30] The dead also have their geographical space, be it graveyard or somewhere more remote.[31] In English legend this was the west. That tradition was not encountered here, but thanks to its place in earlier legend collections it may occur in future. Analogues were heard: the rabbi PE27 told a tale of Solomon ridding a city of ghosts who were driven out 'to the east'. (They were previously set separating grains, E454, Ghost is laid by giving it a never-ending or impossible task).[32]

This also reveals how far ghosts are bound to specific places. Metaphorical uses of the supernatural for property relations are tempting, as locating ghosts points to social concerns that may be played out over property questions. English legends accommodate questions of disruptive behaviour and property. Clibbon's Post, in Tewin, Hertfordshire, was erected at the burial site of a murdered footpad. The legend that it was to prevent his ghost seems to have arisen later, marking the accretion of traditional belief and narrative.[33] Clibbon's Post is now a site of paranormal legend tripping, indicating the use of earlier legend collections in forming and validating heterodox bodies of belief.[34]

Ghosts and property

Identifiying ghosts with social concerns through property took several forms here. There was some concern over the local status of haunted buildings either in their own right or as a landmark. PE37 mentioned a ghost in a Grade II listed building. A Belgian man told press his town was only known for its ghost-house.[35] PE76 saw the haunting of her house in terms of continued claims to ownership. The first occupant

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[29] Ilana Harlow, 'Unravelling Stories: Exploring the Juncture of Ghost Story and Local Tragedy', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 30.2/3 (1993), 194.

[30] Ljupcho S. Risteski, 'Space and Boundaries between the Worlds', *EthnoAnthropoZoom: Journal of Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology*, 2000, <http://www.iea.pmf.ukim.edu.mk/EAZ/EAZ_00/Contents_EAZ_00.htm> [accessed 8 September 2009].

[31] Theo Brown, *The Fate of the Dead: A Study in Folk Eschatology in the West Country after the Reformation* (Ipswich and Totowa, NJ: D.S. Brewer and Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 63.

[32] Brown, *Fate of the Dead*, pp. 42ff; Joan Rockwell, 'The Ghosts of Evald Tang Kristensen', in *The Folklore of Ghosts*, ed. Hilda R. Ellis Davidson and W.M.S. Russell, Mistletoe Series, 15 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer for the Folklore Society, 1981), pp. 68-9.

[33] Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 38-9, pp. 84-5, pp. 340-1; Robert Halliday, 'The Roadside Burial of Suicides: An East Anglian Study', *Folklore*, 121.1 (2010), 81-93; Jeremy Harte, 'An Echo Arose from a Suicide's Grave: The Crossroads Ghost in Fiction, Folklore and Fact', paper at the Folklore Society Conference 'The Supernatural', 28 March 2010.

[34] Luton Paranormal Society, <http://www.lutonparanormal.com/hertfordshire/popups/bulls_green.html> [accessed 2 April 2011].

[35] 'Sloop Bedreigt Spookhuis' ['Demolition Threatens Ghost-House'], *De Standaard*, 24 February 2011, <http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20110224_059&word=spookhuis> [accessed 2 March 2011].

of this nineteenth-century cottage from outside one local family, she identified two ghosts, both former occupants. She saw their activity as monitoring behaviour in 'their' property. The subsequent owners did structural work there, and complained about increased poltergeist activity. She thought this a ghostly expression of disapproval.

Such understandings of occupation and ownership are supported by haunted house traditions uninformed by reported experiences: PE53 enthusiastically announced he had grown up in a haunted house, but admitted he had had no ghostly experiences there. John, one of PE76's ghosts, was mainly an invisible mischievous presence in the house, but she also identified him with an apparition in the churchyard he used to tend. This marks a shift from the boundary-related revenants of agrarian society to a generalised property anxiety. Some distinction between revenants and ghosts is connected with concerns over land boundaries.[36] In this urban-centred research, several informants who discussed the haunting of subdivided older properties said ghosts followed the original boundaries rather than the subdivisions. Reference to ghosts walking through solid walls was justified by appeals to previously existing doorways.

This is more loaded when discussing ghost reports from societies where there has been a shift in, or an intensification of pressure on, property relations. Displaced figures from different time periods engage with different layers of property interaction, since 'On both the individual and the collective level, when people encounter ghosts they are confronted by someone's memories.'[37] The resurgence of ghost narratives in post-Soviet societies is illuminating, both for general comparison, and as direct contextualisation for contemporary British ghost belief. Migration from former Soviet societies has influenced contemporary British society, as can be seen in responses here. It has also shaped the intellectual and socio-political landscape of the post-war period. Property is key there because of general anxiety about it in the post-Soviet economic environment. A recent Estonian narrative 'starts with a short discussion about the changing ownership.'[38] A Polish woman, PE9, emphasised this anxiety over property and its displacement, describing a friend's sleep paralysis experience after a Caribbean holiday. PE9 believed this was caused by something they had brought back, and insisted on removing any holiday artefacts. This has a specific local character.[39] Examples of the over-determined 'rise of occult economies' in post-colonial societies include accusations of the zombification of a young South African labour-force for super-exploitation. Supernatural traditions intersect with political metaphors.[40]

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[36] *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, ed. Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf, Nordic Series, 15 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 118, 122; Henk Kooyman, 'Sagen uit de Waarden', *Neerlands Volksleven*, 16.1 (1966), 43-4.

[37] Ulo Valk, 'Ghostly Possession and Real Estate: The Dead in Contemporary Estonian Folklore', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 43.1 (2006), 32.

[38] Valk, 'Ghostly Possession', 41.

[39] *Scandinavian Folktales*, ed. Jacqueline Simpson (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 90; Rebecca M. Klenk, 'Seeing Ghosts', *Ethnography*, 5.2 (2004), 238.

[40] Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony', *American Ethnologist*, 26.2 (1999), 294; Arthur Goldstuck, *The Rabbit in the Thorn Tree: Modern Myths and Urban Legends of South Africa* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 28-30.

Post-Soviet ghosts

Work on this relationship between resurgent ghost narratives and changing property relations in China connects economic developments and destabilised relations between the living and the dead. Ghosts are 'dead persons who in some sense are still alive', and their proliferation 'indicates that social control of the world of the dead is failing, that the boundary between this world and the supernatural world is unstable.'[41] Terminological disputes are directly politicised.[42] Ghosts of the violently dead disrupt traditional life, representing an older cyclical view of time against Maoist positivism. They mark a vindictive return of older traditions.[43] Work that does not consider such socio-political factors will miss aspects of supernatural intervention.[44]

This is not exclusively post-Soviet. Recent American research links growing interest in the paranormal to declining confidence in corporate institutions, identified as a political concern.[45] The political character of these interventions is specific to particular historical circumstances.[46] The consistent patterns of returning ghost-beliefs across the former Soviet Bloc are thus striking.[47] No examples here dealt directly with property at a political level, but a combination of circumstances means that Britain sees a broad macro-economic impact from intense property changes elsewhere, and traces were visible among local populations. Three questionnaires were received from people from Chinese and post-Soviet areas. They offer clues about the current state and direction of belief among some restricted sections of the population.

Two were believers. All were involved in higher education. QU33, a lecturer in her mid-forties, had lived in the Ukraine, Israel and the USA. She said she had 'unfortunately' not had any experiences, but believed in 'the possibility' of ghosts. Her primary self-identification was as Jewish, but she was not a member of a synagogue. Her religious affiliation may have predisposed her to believe, although 'adult members of my family do not share my beliefs.' She had lived in Britain for eight years, and felt stronger connections with the places she had lived after the Ukraine. We should be cautious of seeing religious self-identification as determining

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[41] S.A. Smith, 'Talking Toads and Chinless Ghosts: The Politics of "Superstitious" Rumors in the People's Republic of China, 1961-1965', *The American Historical Review*, 111.2 (2006), 418-9.

[42] Smith, 'Talking Toads', 408.

[43] Erik Mueggler, 'Spectral Subversions: Rival Tactics of Time and Agency in Southwest China', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41.3 (1999), 460-462.

[44] McClenon's evidence points to a post-Gang of Four background which he ignores, James McClenon, 'Chinese and American Anomalous Experiences: The Role of Religiosity', *Sociological Analysis*, 51.1 (1990), 58, 61.

[45] Heather Ridolfo, Amy Baxter, and Jeffrey W. Lucas, 'Social Influences on Paranormal Belief: Popular Versus Scientific Support', *Current Research in Social Psychology*, 15.3 (2010), 34, <http://www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/crisp/crisp.html> [accessed 26 April 2010].

[46] Alexandra Walsham, 'Reformed Folklore? Cautionary Tales and Oral Tradition in Early Modern England', in *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500-1850*, ed. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 173-195.

[47] Alexander Panchenko, 'New Religious Movements and the Study of Folklore: The Russian Case', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 28 (2004), 111-128, <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol28/movement.pdf> [accessed 13 March 2008]; Guntis Pakalns, 'Contemporary Legend and "Ghost Stories" in Post-Socialist Latvia', *FoaFTale News: Newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research*, 37 (June 1995).

her ghost beliefs. A United Reform Synagogue discussion revealed a tolerated liberality of belief positions (including disbelief), suggesting at best an indirect correlation.

Similar considerations apply with an Estonian informant studying as an undergraduate here. PE98/QU18 had been here for 2½ years, before which she lived in Tallinn. She was 22. She identified with the Lutheran church 'since I have been baptized'. It was unclear whether this relation was temporal or causal. Her parent decided to baptise her but it is unclear how far they share beliefs, nor how institutionally observant her parents are. She does not regard herself as a practising congregant. She believed in 'an afterlife, heaven and hell and somewhat also in reincarnation', but did not think her family believed in heaven (although she was 'not sure about reincarnation'). Lack of an institutional or customary framework is a fair inference, ('I don't believe we have ever talked about this'), yet she also mentioned anomalous noises heard by her mother at work, indicating shared narratives within the family. Her mother's account itself reflects socio-economic structures: she knew she was alone, PE98/QU18 noted, 'since the house belonged to one company'. Like QU33, she wrote of her will to believe, although this was not based on any experience. Her most directly political comment was a local legend about a former mayor of Tallinn who now runs ghost walks around the city.[48] This encapsulated some comment on changes in the region.

The non-believer was a 26-year old Chinese graduate student. QU5 had been resident in the UK for three years since leaving China. She thought of ghosts as 'a kind of illusion, something which does not really exist,' and the message-bearing dead in dreams were 'only dreams, not actually the contact between the dead & the living.' She was most influenced by her father, a teacher, who is 'more scientific' than her mother. Of her family only her mother is 'a bit superstitious'. This involved considering other belief systems: she wrote that she should 'probably … firmly say "NO"' to the possibility of other post mortem contact, based on her lack of personal experience and her position that 'it is a sort of personal imagination only, influenced by different individuals' belief (religious).' She had evidently thought hard about this, having inserted 'imagination' to replace 'belief'. She had a more complicated and sceptical relationship with ghost beliefs than the previous informants, which may have been informed by a different political background.

Burial: Lack of Location

The social disruption indicated by ghosts around property relations may apply equally to separation from property. Comparable to ghosts pointing out problems with their interment are those who return because not yet buried. Untimely or uneasy death has a cultural weight beyond personal belief. QU8 understood ghosts to be where 'The spirit stays behind after death – normally due to a traumatic death,' but did not 'believe in ghosts or the possibility of them.' QU19, who does believe, described them as 'spirits that have something [they] didn't solve on Earth,' as in the film *Ghost*.[49] Dislocated revenants are familiar in maritime lore, and current reactions to

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[48] This has been doubted. Jonathan Roper, personal communication, 5 September 2010.
[49] *Ghost*. Dir. Jerry Zucker. Paramount. 1990.

catastrophes at sea are linked to older traditions.[50] Records of specific cases indicate a shift from attachment to accident sites to legends of a more generalised haunting.[51] Ghost narratives have not emerged around the 1987 sinking of the 'Herald of Free Enterprise', but its metaphorical description as a 'ghost ship' suggests the same tendency.[52]

Scales of Loss

Ghosts are often attached to individual violent or untimely deaths. Narrators employ different narrative genres depending on the scale of the loss, with 'large-scale catastrophe … affiliated with the genre of myth, [and] local or personal tragedy … affiliated with the legend.'[53] Little mythic narration was encountered here, but accounts after the 2010 Haitian earthquake indicate a connection with disaster sites. In the refugee camps 'bad spirits' tormented children. These were not new ghosts caused by the earthquake, but supernatural intrusions reflecting the disastrous disruption of ways of life.[54] There are suggestions of new ghosts emerging after recent conflicts.[55] These indicate developing traditions at conflict sites, but do not directly reflect the scale of loss.

Little comparable was heard here. PE71 was surprised not to have seen a ghost while clearing motorway crash-sites for the police. Other informants were less comfortable with discussing their eschatology openly, perhaps because less accustomed to it. PE71 thought that at fatal accidents the soul could only just have left the body, so must be sitting at the roadside, disoriented by events. The soul would react the same as a living person under such circumstances, so PE71 expected this was where he was most likely to encounter a ghost. His conception accords with the continuities already discussed. His easy use of 'soul' was notable, it being for him the eternal survival of an individual's personality and character. Such conceptions were neither inevitable nor necessary. Many informants discussed instead some electrical energies. Electrical stimuli were appealed to by self-proclaimed 'agnostics' about ghosts like PE41 and convinced believers alike. PE60 saw the soul as energy, and separate from its vehicular body. He pondered how much energy would be required for a soul to manifest or send a message, but thought this was available to all. PE22 saw 'ghosts' as non-interactive memories embodied in specific places. She preferred 'energies' for interactive forces able to travel along energy lines, hence her argument that dowsing

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[50] Eivind Haga, 'The Wet Grave, Sudden Death and the Bereaved', *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 39.1 (1985), 23-28.

[51] Edward D. Ives, *Drive Dull Care Away: Folksongs from Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown, P.E.I.: Institute of Island Studies, 1999), p. 80; Creighton, *Bluenose Ghosts*, pp. 127-129; Janet McNaughton, '"I've Always Believed in Spirits, from That Time, Anyway": Aspects of Belief in the Song "The Ghostly Sailors"', *Culture and Tradition*, 6 (1982), 21-31; Gordon Bok. *Schooners*. Timberhead, CD0005, 1992.

[52] 'Disasters: Grief and a Ghost Ship', *Time*, 23 March 1987, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,963857,00.html> [accessed 14 May 2011].

[53] Harlow, 'Unravelling Stories', 178.

[54] *Crossing Continents: Haiti*, BBC Radio 4, 15 July 2010.

[55] Will Storr, *Will Storr vs The Supernatural: One Man's Search for the Truth about Ghosts* (London: Ebury Press, 2006), p. 61.

could reveal them.[56] The 'soul' here blurs into more alien scientific conceptions: QU21 thought contacting the dead required 'a lot of energy whether human or other'.

PE71 also negotiated scale. As a child he had experienced several domestic anomalous incidents. He regularly watches the contemporary legend programme *Fact or Fiction*, indicating an active consideration of popular material. He regards the Phantom Hitchhiker as supported by weight of evidence but he has no expectation of hearing it at work on the road. Other informants based their judgements on the absence of hauntings at disaster sites. PE31 thought if there were ghosts anywhere they would be at concentration camp sites. As there were not, ghosts thus did not exist. Nazi atrocities run through literature addressing haunting and 'haunting'. Recent fictional ghosts of victims at Holocaust sites are literary inventions that do not seem to reflect broader haunting traditions.[57] There may be some tension between the narrative forms. Seidler's moving article about his mother's death links them. Generally he uses 'ghost' as a social metaphor, but he also describes a dream in which his mother visits him. Attempting to control the experience by identifying it as a dream, he describes it in familiar ghost memorate terms: 'it was as if she had returned and I felt her presence very vividly … She was embodied in some way, but she had no material form.' He undermines his own coping strategy, saying it was 'very vivid and had a sense [sic] that *it was not a dream at all*' (emphasis added).[58]

The narrative distinction sits between the historical/political situation and its personal impact. The socio-political situation informing Lolop'o ghost narratives was the catastrophic famine following the Great Leap Forward, but they focused on local officials responsible for transforming ancestral spirits into 'wild ghosts'.[59] Following the fascists' destruction of large sections of their community, Jewish funerary custom was altered to accommodate communication to a younger generation.[60] The ghost has a political dimension.

This line of approach has facilitated scrutiny of vernacular metaphorical uses of 'haunting' and 'ghosts'. These occur, although infrequently.[61] In some cases, such abstractions are deliberately removed from questions of belief and experience. When PE99, a non-believer, mentioned his 'ghosts' he meant memories of adolescence unrelated to anything supernatural. This is not the same as some apparently similar academic attempts to expropriate the term from literal usage. Bell's 'I don't believe in that kind of ghost' underlines how detached from vernacular considerations such usage is.[62] A synagogue discussion group was asked about hauntings of concentration camp sites. Although happy to discuss domestic hauntings and anomalous

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[56] Jabbour and Jabbour, *Decoration Day*, p. 85.
[57] Jonathan Schorsch, 'Jewish Ghosts in Germany', *Jewish Social Studies*, 9.3 (2003), 139-169.
[58] Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, 'Fragmented Memories: The Holocaust, Ghosts, and Dead Bodies', *Mortality*, 12.2 (2007), 152, 148.
[59] Mueggler, 'Spectral Subversions', 468.
[60] Valery Dymshits, 'The Jewish Cemetery: A Place Where One Does Not Go', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 37.3 (2007), 323.
[61] For example 'What kind of ghost blows your hat off, but you can't see him? The wind.' There were difficulties with 'translating the ideas into English'. Archer Taylor, 'Polish Riddles from Michigan', *Journal of American Folklore*, 62.244 (1949), 189.
[62] Michael Mayerfeld Bell, 'The Ghosts of Place', *Theory and Society*, 26.6 (1997), 815-6, 827, 826.

experiences, they dealt only abstractly with concentration camp hauntings. They appealed to an abstracted metaphor to express social/personal tensions.

PE31's comment about reported hauntings at mass murder sites may reflect this inability to reduce the scale of the deaths to a personal interactive level, but applied to a different conclusion. Some non-Jewish informants did report experiences from Nazi sites. PE7 had felt uncomfortable driving through northern Europe, and was unsurprised to learn he was passing the site of a concentration camp. PE35 served in Germany during the Cold War. A monitoring system triggered repeatedly, although there was no indication of incursions. A Norwegian crewman said this was 'hardly surprising'. The station had previously been a Nazi Prisoner of War camp, where Soviet prisoners were left naked overnight, then shot. PE35 believes in 'some kind of presence', but had never seen anything himself. Like the non-believing PE31, these informants approached the sites as sympathetic outsiders. Any haunting would be an externalised experience: the ghosts would not be the personal voices conjured by Seidler or the authors of Holocaust literature. QU3 recalled driving across the Clifton Suspension Bridge with a friend 'who often heard the voices of dead people'. His friend became 'genuinely agitated and uncomfortable – as he claims to have heard the voices of people who have committed suicide from the bridge.' Although accumulated in great number these are not viewed collectively, as concentration camp victims are. PE75 reported a similar reaction on Hungerford Bridge, which she attributes to a murder a few days before. We could also consider the accretion of individual legends in a limited location. When PE5/QU24 saw her 'cavalier', she was unaware of the legend details being added.[63]

These responses suggest how the spectrum from socio-political to personal works. To the identification of myth as the genre expressive of large-scale catastrophe we can add a specific use of metaphor. This may reflect affinity with the victims, as the chief focus on large-scale disaster sites has come from those unlikely to be personally involved. Battle sites commonly have haunting legends attached to them. Some well-known British 'ghost army' stories relate to social upheaval, like the Civil War. There are also reflections of concern like the 1678 sighting of a 'Popish' ghost army near Lulworth.[64] Such tendencies are still found, like the 'unlikely ghost' of a Second World War tank.[65] With distance of time, these change in line with shifting motifs. The Lulworth ghosts are now interpreted as Romans. As socio-political circumstances become less directly personal, ghost narratives acquire firmer legend status. Where they remain directly personal, the narratives become myth, even if the original event had a similar socio-political impact. Mythopoesis is difficult to identify contemporaneously, but a classical example shows the trend. Centuries after the battle of Marathon, the fighting was heard nightly. Those who died were incorporated into the local pantheon.[66] This trend is still visible, but less obvious.[67]

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[63] Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Lore of the Land: A Guide to England's Legends, from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 385.

[64] Westwood and Simpson, *Lore of the Land*, pp. 44-5; p. 133; p. 216; index, q.v. 'Ghosts: Armies'.

[65] Ruth Stratton and Nicholas Connell, *Haunted Hertfordshire: A Ghostly Gazetteer*, 2nd edn (Dunstable: The Book Club, 2006), p. 134; Jones-Baker, *Hertfordshire*, p. 88.

[66] Pausanias, [*Periegesis*, 1.32.4] *Graeciae Descriptio*, ed. Johann Friedrich Facius (Leipzig: Schaefer, 1794), p. 124.

The dead visiting the living

The association with disaster areas, battlegrounds and crime-scenes continues to link the dead with particular locations, but brings us to our second group of contact experiences. These are the dead coming from inappropriate or as-yet-unknown locations to visit the living. Military ghostlore abounds with examples, and crisis apparitions were key to the SPR's work.[68] They persist. PE89 related a family tradition of her grandmother's son appearing during the First World War and declaring 'I have come to say goodbye.' They also link with other themes. PE88's great aunt awoke 'to find her husband dripping wet in the room.' She announced this at breakfast, shortly before news arrived that his ship, the *Lusitania*, had sunk. PE88 saw this as a family legend of the crisis-apparition type, but its connection with major disaster is clear. PE75 reported a similar story, without a human form. EM20, an IT project manager, wrote of anomalous computer errors when his grandmother died. A scientist, PE54, related a crisis apparition story from his boss. (Neither is a believer). His boss's wife woke him saying 'Your father was here.' The old man was later found to have died at that time.

PE62, who regularly attends a Spiritualist church, wrote:

> Yesterday morning, I was visiting a gallery exhibition, and stopped in front of a very large glazed painting. The painting was quite dark in colour and so had a very clear view of the reflection behind me. Suddenly I saw a very old and distressed looking man walking towards to me, with his right arm raised and fully outstretched. Instantly I recognised him as my godfather, (99 years of age) and was stunned seeing him there. I stared at the reflection before me for a good few seconds, and very clearly observed the reflection. Turning around to greet him there was nothing there! Feeling quite shaken, I returned home to later hear that he had died that same morning.

The similarity to PE23's Tutankhamen legend trip vision was reinforced by his subsequent comments. An artist, he had had 'many of these experiences over the years', many 'in front [of] mirrors, glazed areas etc'. He describes poetic inspiration in similar terms.

Most important here was a personal connection with the deceased.[69] Bennett called the 'two principal types of revenant' identified by her informants 'domestic' and 'personal spirits'. These 'domestic spirits' are ghosts of location, seemingly 'influenced by literary and legendary traditions'.[70] The terms are unfortunate, as the

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[67] Wilson, *In Search of Ghosts*, pp. 191-193.

[68] Ernest Bennett, *Apparitions and Haunted Houses: A Survey of Evidence* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), pp. 95-101; Henry Sidgwick, *et al*, 'Report on the Census of Hallucinations', *PSPR*, 10 (1894), 207-244; Charlotte Latham, 'Some West Sussex Superstitions Lingering in 1868', *The Folk-Lore Record*, 1 (1878), 20.

[69] Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

[70] Gillian Bennett, 'Heavenly Protection and Family Unity: The Concept of the Revenant among Elderly Urban Women', *Folklore*, 96.1 (1985), 89.

'personal spirits' also focused on domestic affairs, but her insistence that purposive ghosts are still found remains important.[71] Their purposes are mundane and domestic.

Consolation and protection

Many informants spoke of anomalous experiences at the moment of death of a loved one. PE25 said her house went cold when her grandmother died. PE82 was with her father in his last moments but knew he 'wasn't there. My dad was standing behind me.' EM20 'clearly felt a presence somewhere behind and above me.' PE29 discussed a friend whose father lay dying in hospital. Sitting with her mother, PE29's friend became aware of someone in the doorway. She knew he would vanish if she looked up, but recognised from her peripheral vision that it was her father looking at her mother. She raised her head very slowly, and saw the *absence* of a person.

PE60 provided additional context to meeting a friend's ghost six months after his death. The day after his death, a mutual friend visited the deceased's mother and saw a figure outside. 'It was him, waving goodbye', said PE60, echoing the mother's interpretation. These were consolatory apparitions. PE3 who had recently lost her sister, spoke of the family's grief. One of her half-sisters had said 'I can't believe she's gone.' At that moment, the light flicked off. The same happened to another half-sister. Echoing PE82's comments, PE3 said this convinced her to believe, but it was also a comfort more generally. QU12 linked the comforting and message-bringing aspects of apparitions. She is 'aware of [a protective spirit] at almost all times'. He appeared to her when her partner's father died.

Family members, commonly grandparents, offer continued assistance and reassurance. As a child PE71 was woken at the same time every night by a light flashing on his radio. A white figure materialised from it and patted him on the head. He was initially frightened, but his parents said it must be his grandfather. His young brother sometimes sees a friendly figure in a rocking chair, smoking a cigarette. PE71 identified this as a former occupant of the house and family friend. Two informants spoke of the impossibility of the figure actually being their grandfather, but accommodated this within their experience. PE8 experienced complications following the birth of her son (named after her grandfather). Coming round after major surgery she saw her grandfather smiling at her. She included these factors when considering the apparition. 'I know I was under the anaesthetic, but I *prefer* to think it was him' (her emphasis). PE69 described seeing his grandfather at times of stress, but insisted 'I know it's not him.' He could not explain this, but did not find it disorienting.

Grandparental interventions concerning children were common. EM7 described a visitation from her 'grampy' shortly after his death when she learned she was pregnant. EM34 'had a feeling' the figure reassuring her about her son's health was her late grandfather. A storyteller, PE26, told about a grandmother's ghost saving a child from an oncoming lorry. For all its dramatic performance qualities this was consistent with other stories here. EM50 saw his grandmother's ghost on a sofa, smiling at him. He wondered why she had visited him, as 'I wasn't that close to my gran until her later years.' These interventions are also described in line with the

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[71] Bennett, 'Heavenly Protection', 95.

narratives of children speaking to an older apparition. EM17's son woke her because of an old woman in his room. EM17 recognised her late mother. Initially terrified, she thought 'why be scared it's my mum … she smiled and then disappeared.' PE49 laughed at her cousins' fright on meeting the ghost of her grandfather. It was inconceivable that he would have meant them any harm, she said, because he had loved them in life: 'your own grandfather would never hurt you.'

Family members can be appealed to directly. After her mother's death, PE86's father was unable to find a ring mentioned in the will. In frustration he called out 'I can't find it – Mary, where is it?' at which moment PE86's daughter found it.[72] On several occasions since he had called on Mary for help. EM77 wrote of appealing to her dead sister for help. On one occasion she was ill and in financial difficulties. Shortly after talking to her sister, a forgotten insurance policy covering her sickness fell from a cupboard. Some family ghosts simply mark important occasions, like the fishy smell noticed by PE36 after her mother's death. QU40 was driving with his girlfriend when his late mother appeared by his shoulder and said 'Why don't you ask this girl to marry you?' He pulled over and proposed. They have been married for 15 years. Such intercessions can be dramatic. PE89 told of a family friend during the Blitz. During one air raid she did not reach the cellar in time. She saw her late husband open the front door, run down the hall, and open the back door to lessen the blast.

Information about the afterlife, and arrangements to meet there

Unknown figures also fit these intercessionary types. PE8 was saved as a child by an apparition of a kindly man who pointed upstairs to where his cot stood. Shortly after his mother moved the cot, a wardrobe fell where it had been. Other spirits have known family associations. PE66 saw her first apparition as a child in the company of her grandmother. It was a nursemaid who had worked for the family when her grandmother was young. She was killed in an accident, but

> refused to believe that she was dead, because obviously she was in
> charge of my grandmother and her brothers and sisters, so she …
> would come and go throughout significant periods in my
> grandmother's life, make sure she was ok.

This is a positive take on PE81's view of not knowing that you are dead.

There is a reason for return between notifications of an unknown death and continued care from beyond the grave. There is a long tradition of pacts for the first deceased to return to advise a relict about the afterlife. These are a religious form of apparitions relating to some failing or wrongdoing in life. Medieval sermons drew moral and doctrinal lessons from the appearance of ghosts. After the Reformation this developed into a direct investigation of the character of the afterlife.[73] Post-Reformation death pacts remained dangerous, but the arrangement to return proved durable because of its availability for various interpretative purposes.[74] It could be used religiously to advise

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[72] The name has been changed.
[73] John Aubrey, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1962; first pub. 1949), pp. 350-1.
[74] Eric Maple, *The Realm of Ghosts* (South Brunswick, NY: A.S. Barnes, 1966), pp. 104-5.

the survivor of the experience.[75] With the emergence of 'scientific' investigation of ghosts, it became available for testing the possibility of an afterlife.[76] Such agreements are not widely documented, but they do continue. PE29 believed in ghosts, although she laid more emphasis on her family's sensitivity to ESP phenomena. Her father's companion, a widow, had arranged with her late husband that the first to die would return with 'a sign that there is some sort of afterlife'. She had two experiences she attributed to this intervention. In one she and PE29's father both saw a tassel on a rug rotate steadily, apparently without any stimulus. While the widow was eager to read this as her late husband's actions, PE29's father was less inclined to believe it. He has had precognitive experiences, and is not hostile to belief.

Few such arrangements were described directly. The grieving bereaved may not mention them in the absence of results, which might inflate positive records by minimising the apparent frequency of such arrangements. Mention of a pact by a third party reveals an active consideration of the afterlife. It is part of a vernacular estimation of ghosts: brought up an Anglican, PE29 describes herself as an agnostic, and specifically as a 'disbeliever' in that Church. This is not to dismiss surrounding structures of belief and their negotiation, as her family clearly think about their psychic sensitivities, like her late mother's ''fluence'.

Haunting as an indicator of social malaise may also be linked to a pledge to return. This is best known as a domestic arrangement, but it has other levels. Threats to return may also point to social disruption. An Irish Traveller song in current tradition threatens the haunting of the woman who will cause the narrator's death.[77] This was previously recorded as 'a common threat'.[78]

Fear of the dead

At a domestic level, ghosts may be reassuring and helpful. At a social level they may reflect disruption and political tension. These are not clearly delineated areas, but most ghosts here were not frightening. The dead are not inherently frightening, although some supernatural interventions are to be feared. Distinctions were made. PE4 spoke of seeing a jinn-possessed woman in Pakistan. She tossed aside the men trying to restrain her 'like raggy dolls', jumping over one. PE4 then described falling downstairs as a child. He felt a force lift him from underneath, protecting him from serious harm. This, he thought, might have been 'a family spirit'. PE49 described the Banshee, which she heard the night her mother died. As a young man her father had hidden in a nearby house to escape a pursuing Banshee, defending himself with holy water and prayers. PE49 stressed the Banshee's awful character: 'She is terrifying. You'd be literally terrified … to hear her roar and scream.' Danger is related to narrative forms and doctrinal positions. PE7 thought non-churchgoers were at greater risk from supernatural intervention as they were doctrinally unarmed. A popular

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[75] Maple, *Realm of Ghosts*, p. 147.

[76] Renée Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research, 1882-1982: A History* (London: Macdonald, 1982), pp. 60-75.

[77] 'Don't Be Beguiling', sung by Tom McCarthy on 10 March 2009. I am grateful to him for his interest and support.

[78] *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*, ed. W.B. Yeats (London: Pan, 1979), p. 117.

author suggests 'Something about this field of inquiry … make[s] people vulnerable to harm.'[79]

PE49 expected a benevolence from family ghosts at odds with her Banshee experience. She described a spectrum, and refused to rule out potentially harmful ghosts: 'I'm not saying there's not evil ghosts, of course there is.' PE43 also described the fine line between feeling scared and threatened, quoting her grandmother that 'If they could have hurt us, they would have done.' The presence of a border between worlds need not mean that crossing it is inherently dangerous or unwelcome. Bierce's clever definition of ghosts as 'The outward and visible sign of an inward fear' suggests ideas about the relationship between belief and behaviour, but there may be no corresponding outward fear.[80] Some of these points look towards the relationship between formal and informal registers of belief. How ghosts look and why poses more directly research done in various scientific and experimental fields on the validity of that appearance. How appearances have been interpreted through the expectations of belief and philosophy suggests this is hardly neutral, as we shall examine in the next chapter.

Conclusion: 'You'll make me a corpse when I'd make you a queen'[81]

Fear of the dead neatly summarises the problems in the complex considerations of haunting seen here. Whilst not ruled out altogether, fear was not the starting point for considerations of ghostliness. Ghosts here were practically coexistent with the living, sharing the available space in a more or less articulated arrangement. For some this meant their constant presence around us. For others it indicated distinction of spaces. The dead have available spaces, although these were negotiable. It is acceptable to go in search of the dead in those spaces, whether the misplaced sites of social disruption or the appropriate place for the lodgement of the dead. This latter undermined suggested denominational differences at lay levels, a factor we will consider further in later chapters. The society of the dead, into which funeral rites of incorporation systematically lodge the deceased, is not closed to the living. Its open character reinforces the underlying notion that the dead are, for the most part, like the living and, specifically with those known to us, like they were when alive. They may share a conceptual space with other, more threatening, supernatural entities, but that does not make all ghosts dangerous. We see here a tendency towards personalising the spirit world.

Again, this operates across a wide spectrum. In this personalisation we see how ghosts can interact at the same time, and without apparent contradiction, as representatives both of property benignly and of social disruptions around property. An examination of post-Soviet ghosts has shown how the tendency works under specific conditions, whilst also pointing to its impact here today. Local cultural features also show how this takes place in negotiation with other supernatural entities. A consideration of the scales of loss reflected in ghost narratives, and the different narrative genres pressed into service to encompass them, has further highlighted the likely progress of

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[79] Michael Prescott, 'Hungry Ghosts: The Dark Side of the Paranormal', *Darklore*, 1 (2007), 4.
[80] Ambrose Bierce, *The Enlarged Devil's Dictionary*, ed. Ernest Jerome Hopkins (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967; repr. London: Penguin, 1971), p. 143.
[81] 'Don't Be Beguiling'.

narratives attached to specific places and events. Such progress, particularly the development of myth, is barely chartable in the course of even one generation, much less one research project. Evidence from the longer historical record illustrates the tendencies, and how existing ideas are adapted and reused for new purposes within developing notions about ghosts and social groups. Even today we find continued discussions of the Witch of Endor. One of that story's original doctrinal points was the impermissibility of seeking out the dead, an idea explored throughout this chapter. Pacts for the first-deceased to return with some comment about the afterlife usefully indicate the way in which some ideas have proved resilient because of their adaptability for different purposes. It sits in the middle of the spectrum of relationships between living and dead charted here. It is a suggestive example, because it points again to a continuing negotiation of the meaning of ghosts that is beneath much scholarly radar.

Chapter Three

Experimental and philosophical considerations of anomalous experiences: How are physical factors interpreted and understood?

'Not all coyotes are ghosts'[1]

We have seen several registers of negotiation when ghostly experiences are being discussed and interpreted, and also encountered disciplines which treat this primarily as an epiphenomenal question. This is complicated by the broad range of cultural expectations and conceptions brought to bear by those relating ghostly experiences. The appeal of aiming to establish definitively the facts of such experiences is apparent. It also poses a philosophical problem. Empirical experimentation, establishing bodies of verifiable and testable data, operates within certain theoretical limits. The search for evidence of non-material causation and manifestation is problematic with empirical data. Some of those advancing suggestions for such research now bring other registers of thought to bear. Some of the problems in experiment and hypothesis design reflect an Empiricism which examines each anomalous claim without generalising from some evidential themes.[2] The push to determine the origins of belief may itself be driven by belief.

In this chapter we look at some of the thinking around experimental approaches, both in itself and in its likely impact at a popular level. Recent correspondence from the SPR provides a window onto these questions. Established as a scientific investigative body, the SPR balances its material research agenda with the aspiration of some of its members to prove an afterlife. This correspondence illuminates many questions of scientific understandings and parapsychological research played out over the last century. Many disputes in this field are tediously unproductive, but indicate how different models of scientific knowledge are advanced, and what criteria researchers bring to their investigations. This involves some consideration of the embrace of Jamesian Pragmatism by some investigators, and a step back from full-blown Materialism by others. The current state of philosophical complexity is captured in Susan Blackmore's withdrawal from parapsychological research. Responding to the material findings of her research, she turns towards meme-theory. Memetics, apparently the pinnacle of Materialism, is, rather, an Idealist conception that prevents any nuanced consideration of the actual content or state of belief.

The meme may, however, be gaining ground more popularly, indicating how some scientific and scientific-sounding details are incorporated in statements and examinations of belief. We will explore this by looking at several physical effects and their appraisal. This consideration, which touches on psychological and psychiatric

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[1] Morris E. Opler, 'Myth and Practice in Jicarilla Apache Eschatology', *Journal of American Folklore*, 73.288 (1960), 136.
[2] For clarity philosophical trends are capitalised here, to distinguish eg Pragmatism from pragmatism, and (particularly) Empiricism from materialist empirical research.

concerns, will point again to how natural and supernatural causation are combined in discussions of anomalous experiences. This also involves considering misperception, whether natural or induced. This is addressed here within a scientific and philosophical discussion, but it foregrounds considerations in the following chapter of such factors in narratives.

Introducing the problems

The SPR's 2010 membership renewal letter suggested that a 'sea-change in world views' is underway. Although powerful, 'the materialistic paradigm is becoming increasingly untenable, giving way to thinking more favourable to the founding ideas of our Society'.[3] This letter encapsulates many problems with understanding ghost belief, and belief more generally, over the last period. A declining Materialist paradigm might be expected to be accompanied by rises in non-materialist expressions of thought. Census figures on religious affiliation might support the claim, with three-quarters of the population identifying themselves by religion.[4] However, a recent Christian report estimates around 60% of UK adults are '"closed" to attending church in future', which would complicate the argument.[5] The SPR is not addressing fluctuations in religious thought, but responding to work on 'non-materialist causation' of consciousness.[6] Neuroscience is a major battleground for this appeal to Cartesianism, but this cannot be separated from religious philosophical questions.[7]

The SPR's words are striking given that the organisation 'holds no corporate views'.[8] Membership implies neither 'the acceptance of any particular explanation of the phenomena investigated, nor any belief as to the operation, in the Physical world, of forces other than those recognised by Physical Science.'[9] Its foundation claimed to fill a gap for science.[10] This allowed the possibility of applying science for spiritual conviction.[11] Six months after this letter, they publicised research that might offer

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[3] Correspondence, January 2010.

[4] 77.18%, 'Focus on Religion', Office for National Statistics, 2004, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=13209> [accessed 1 March 2009].

[5] Jacinta Ashworth and Ian Farthing, *Churchgoing in the UK: A Research Report from Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK* (Teddington: Tearfund, 2007), p. 7.

[6] Jeffrey Schwartz, quoted in Amanda Gefter, 'Creationists Declare War over the Brain', *New Scientist*, 2679 (25 October 2008), 46-7.

[7] Mario Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary, *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007); Gefter, 'Creationists', 46; Charles T. Tart, *The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal Is Bringing Science and Spirit Together* (Oakland: New Harbinger, 2009), pp. 33-52; and review by Feargus O'Connor, *JSPR*, 74.3.900 (2010), 179-180.

[8] 'Guidelines for Members', 1, <http://www.spr.ac.uk/main/page/guidelines-members> [accessed 30 June 2010].

[9] 'Constitution and Rules, as Revised at the General Meeting, January 19th, 1883', *PSPR*, 1 (1882-3), 331.

[10] 'The Society for Psychical Research: Objects of the Society', *PSPR*, 1 (1882-3), 3.

[11] It goes too far to claim the SPR was founded 'by spiritualists', Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 73-4.

'scientific evidence of poltergeist knocking', illustrated with material evidence in the form of sound analysis.[12]

There are tensions within experimental approaches to ghosts, where 'Parapsychology had already established as a presupposition the fact of a paranormal reality.'[13] There are differences of approach between experimenters and investigators, and unacknowledged tensions in some views of scientific experimentation. Haynes suggests mediumship might have declined due to increased use of electrical apparatus affecting the brain activities involved in paranormal transmission, before praising the electric tape recorder's role in clarifying séance contents.[14]

The range of responses

There has been much experimental research, and some lay engagement with perceptual research. Further research may also be coming under scrutiny, whether from sceptical rationalism or within a critical negotiation of beliefs. In the first category we have PE94, a physicist. During a hospital visit his doctor discussed quantum mechanics. On his second visit she asked if quantum mechanics could be used to explain ghosts, as she had seen several. PE94 was shocked that a scientist would even discuss such things. In the second category we have PE102, an active member of the Ghost Club interested in Wicca. She refers to her lack of intellectual accomplishment whilst drawing attention to technical work in psychology and parapsychology. She also assesses new research critically.[15] Between these informants we find appeals to science that are rather less solid than they first appear.[16] Other informants brought a solid scientific background to their beliefs and assessments. PE15, a computer programming researcher, was brought up to believe 'there was nothing outside of what you can touch and see.' PE22's first degree was in Biology. Both are believers. This spectrum is also found among experimenters and writers from scientific backgrounds. This may affect how they address different audiences.[17] Other scientists have changed their positions, and discuss this. After substantial investigations, Taylor's 'earlier positive views on the paranormal' needed to be 'radically revised'.[18] Some critics were not satisfied.[19]

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[12] 'Scientific Evidence of Poltergeist Knocking?', <http://www.spr.ac.uk/main/news/colvin-acoustic-properties-poltergeist-rapping> [accessed 30 June 2010]; Barrie G. Colvin, 'The Acoustic Properties of Unexplained Rapping Sounds', *JSPR*, 73.2.899 (2010), 65-93.

[13] Peter Assion, 'A Critique of Parapsychological Folklore', in *German Volkskunde: A Decade of Theoretical Confrontation, Debate, and Reorientation (1967-1977)*, ed. and trans. James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 161.

[14] Renée Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research 1882-1982: A History* (London: Macdonald, 1982), pp. 94-5.

[15] Personal correspondence, 26 April 2010, discussing Heather Ridolfo, Amy Baxter, and Jeffrey W. Lucas, 'Social Influences on Paranormal Belief: Popular Versus Scientific Support', *Current Research in Social Psychology*, 15.3 (2010), 33-41, <http://www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/crisp/crisp.html> [accessed 26 April 2010].

[16] Alan Landsburg, *In Search of Strange Phenomena* (London: Corgi, 1977), p. 69.

[17] Phoebe D. Payne and Laurence J. Bendit, *This World and That: An Analytical Study of Psychic Communication* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950; repr. Wheaton, Ill: Quest, 1969), p. 17; Laurence J. Bendit, *Paranormal Cognition: Its Place in Human Psychology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944).

[18] John Taylor, *Science and the Supernatural: An Investigation of Paranormal Phenomena Including Psychic Healing, Clairvoyance, Telepathy and Precognition by a Distinguished Physicist and Mathematician* (London: Temple Smith, 1980), p. viii.

Giving up, without giving up the ghost

Parapsychology struggles for recognition as a scientific discipline. It is rarely described as a 'heterodox science'.[20] Scientifically, Wiseman has suggested that 'parapsychology, as it stands, is a complete waste of time.'[21] Bobrow's survey of medical literature is an appeal for classical parapsychology, but exposes its limitations.[22] More generally scientists construct informal statements of trust in their evidence. Otherwise unreliable anecdotal evidence may be tolerated if its source is credible or trustworthy. Not independently compelling, such evidence led to greater willingness to conduct empirical study. It required a subjective judgement on credibility, often about the witness's science background.[23] One of Wiseman's key demands is that parapsychologists accept scientific norms, and stop making renewed claims for exemption if experimentation fails to support hypotheses. Other quantitative disciplines could profit by this.[24] Wiseman identifies several tactics for sidestepping acknowledgement of null findings, and is accused in turn of using them to avoid positive findings.[25] We could add appeals to earlier evidence not satisfying current levels of experimental authority. Claims that Daniel Dunglas Home's phenomena retain 'enough evidential value to be cited' have some weight, but there is a difference between citation and basing further hypotheses on them.[26] As-yet-unconfirmed hypotheses often generate further hypotheses. Specifically-hypothesised phenomena are treated as a generalised effect. Researchers then argue backwards from an effect that is not yet proven.[27]

Blackmore apparently did what Wiseman encouraged when she abandoned parapsychological research. She faced up to a lack of experimental results by saying

[19] John Beloff, *Parapsychology: A Concise History* (London: Athlone, 1993), p. 197.

[20] David Hess, 'Religion, Heterodox Science and Brazilian Culture', *Social Studies of Science*, 17.3 (1987), 467.

[21] '"Heads I Win, Tails You Lose": How Parapsychologists Nullify Null Results', Lecture at Anomalous Psychology Research Unit, Goldsmiths University, 16 March 2010, <http://www.gold.ac.uk/apru/lectures/wisemanvideo/#d.en.20389> [accessed 5 June 2010], expanding his article of the same title, *Skeptical Inquirer*, 34.1 (2010), <http://www.csicop.org/si/show/heads_i_win_tails_you_loser_how_parapsychologists_nullify_null_results> [accessed 21 May 2010].

[22] Robert S. Bobrow, 'Paranormal Phenomena in the Medical Literature Sufficient Smoke to Warrant a Search for Fire', *Medical Hypotheses*, 60.6 (2003), 864-868.

[23] Richard K. Coll and Neil Taylor, 'Probing Scientists' Beliefs: How Open-Minded Are Modern Scientists?', *International Journal of Science Education*, 26.6 (2004), 769.

[24] Ara Norenzayan and Ian G. Henderson, 'Belief in Supernatural Agents in the Face of Death', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32.2 (2006), 185.

[25] Chris Carter, '"Heads I Lose, Tails You Win", or, How Richard Wiseman Nullifies Positive Results: A Response to Wiseman's (2010) Critique of Parapsychology', *JSPR*, 74.3.900 (2010), 165.

[26] George Zorab, 'Have We to Reckon with a Special Phantom-Forming Predisposition?', *JSPR*, 48.763 (1975), 19; Brian Inglis, *Natural and Supernatural: A History of the Paranormal from Earliest Times to 1914* (London: Abacus, 1979), p. 254.

[27] Simon Newcomb, 'Modern Occultism', in *A Skeptic's Handbook of Parapsychology*, ed. Paul Kurtz (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1985), p. 153. For an example, David Rousseau, 'Why Is General Psychic Ability So Weak and Unreliable? Insights from a Systems Theoretical Analysis of NDEs', paper at the SPR's 34th International Conference, University of Sheffield, 11 September 2010.

'Enough is enough. None of it ever gets anywhere.'[28] She had repeatedly had to rethink hypotheses in the absence of experimental results, but this has led her to the proposition that we are 'a biological creature, designed by natural selection for the survival of our genes *and memes*' [emphasis added].[29] Memes are considered further below, but this turn points to an underlying problem. Blackmore struggles to address the persistence of belief in the face of disproof. She describes investigating an alleged alien implant, eventually discovering it was dental amalgam. The victim was relieved, but may not have 'stopped believing in the aliens or his abductions'. Blackmore is discussing shifting beliefs, but no longer believing this was an alien implant may not have fundamentally altered his other beliefs.[30] Blackmore does not seem to have asked about this directly, but accounts from other sources suggest it.[31]

Informants saw no difficulty with coexistent natural and supernatural phenomena. PE95 described ghostly experiences, bilocation, and a Sleep Paralysis experience she said was not supernatural. One investigator's first concern is 'to know *in my own mind* what all of this strange phenomena [sic] means' [emphasis added].[32] Understanding material mechanisms need not lead to a Materialist conception. Shifting experimental structure has been used to move away from laboratory investigation of experiences reported largely as spontaneous and unpredictable occurrences, and into psi-research with (notionally) more easily-replicable findings. Such psi-findings are then used to refer retrospectively to spontaneously occurring phenomena. This research did not address general paranormal beliefs, but information was recorded when offered. PE29 attached greater importance to her family's ESP abilities generally than ghosts specifically. PE49 spoke plainly about her sister's foresightedness.[33]

Some belief systems incorporated different technical elements. The doctor, whose questions about quantum mechanics and ghosts PE94 related with such outrage, could be included here. PE60 had given much thought to his beliefs. He had read extensively and randomly, sometimes with books that came into his possession accidentally. He suggested some hidden pattern to their appearance. Other informants expressed a similar attitude. PE79 said a random photographic display programme on his computer always showed pictures of a deceased friend shortly before the dead man's birthday. Such a common combination of disbelief and experience is not always acknowledged.[34] The photographs seemed a straightforward misinterpretation

[28] Susan Blackmore, 'First Person: Into the Unknown', *New Scientist*, 2263 (4 November 2000), 55.
[29] Susan Blackmore, 'Why I Have Given up', in *Skeptical Odyssey: Personal Accounts by the World's Leading Paranormal Inquirers*, ed. Paul Kurtz (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2001), pp. 85-94.
[30] Blackmore, 'Why I Have Given up', no pagination, quoted from <http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Chapters/Kurtz.htm> [accessed 4 July 2010].
[31] David J. Hufford, *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*, Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series, 7 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 115-170, p. 269.
[32] John Fraser, *Ghost Hunting: A Survivor's Guide* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010), p. 184.
[33] Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *Till Doomsday in the Afternoon: The Folklore of a Family of Scots Travellers, the Stewarts of Blairgowrie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 27.
[34] Michaeleen C. Maher, 'Quantitative Investigation of the General Wayne Inn', *Journal of Parapsychology*, 64 (2000), 365-390; repr. [with different pagination, used here] at

of randomness, in line with judgements involving 'data that are probabilistic or minimally complex'.[35] This involves a selective memory of other occasions when the deceased's photograph may also have been displayed. Other informants explored critically the idea that random events were connected. PE41 described a figurine in his breast pocket when he had had a serious accident. It had a crack across its head in the same pattern as the head injury he had just sustained. He said this was coincidence, but it would have been easy to connect the occurrences if he wanted. His wife did so.

PE60 was one of the few informants who also discussed UFO experiences. He worked these into a cosmology, where The Bible 'makes so much more sense if you replace "God" with "Extra-terrestrial"'. His fellow builder PE61 commented little on these stories, having 'heard it all before', but became animated about the technical abilities of the ancient Egyptians. Their comments focused on the construction of monuments, a subject of which they had some technical appreciation.

More things in heaven and on earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy?

The apparent distance of some experimental research from the apparitions described here is not necessarily an obstacle to understanding vernacular ghost beliefs. However one uses its evidence, experimental research may be responding to existential challenges.[36] Blackmore recognises these challenges in the foundations of psychical research, which she no longer trusts. Instead she sees a world in which natural phenomena and the properties of culture are equally self-replicating and self-transmitting. This does not depend on her research, but her interpretation of it. A contemporary critic of the founders of psychical research pointed out the philosophical problems. Where psychical researchers promoted their turn to paranormal experimentation as extending their scientific expertise into a new field, Engels explained this as a consistent part of their philosophical shortcomings. One tendency was that investigators worked 'so far in the toils' as to see only what they wanted. Another limitation was the inability of Empiricism to reach broader conclusions, since 'As long as *every* single alleged miracle has not been explained away' investigations would continue.[37] This persists.[38] James championed the argument that 'a universal proposition can be made untrue by a particular instance' in his formulation 'If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, you mustn't seek to show that no crows are; it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white.'[39] Accordingly evidence of fraud does not limit investigations, and may

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Parapsychological Association, 'Parapsychological Articles and Full Papers', <http://www.parapsych.org/PDF/General_Wayne_Inn.pdf> [accessed 10 June 2010], 6.

[35] Barry Singer and Victor Benassi, 'Occult Beliefs', *American Scientist*, 69.1 (1981), 49-55; repr. in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural*, ed. Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers (Palo Alto: Mayfield, 1985), pp. 352-361. This is on p. 354.

[36] Blackmore, 'Why I Have Given up'.

[37] Engels, 'Natural Science in the Spirit World', in *Dialectics of Nature*, trans. Clemens Dutt, rev'd edn (Moscow: Progress, 1954), p. 59.

[38] Bobrow, 'Sufficient Smoke', 865; Shane Leslie, *Shane Leslie's Ghost Book* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1955), p. 6.

[39] 'Address by the President', *PSPR*, 12 (1896-7), 5.

validate it.[40] Without a philosophical base beyond Empiricism, even scientists with a record of empirical research could support psychical findings.[41]

The focus here on the representation of phenomena in culture does not exclude scientific research. Boyer indicates directions for investigating which elements of religious ideas might be cognitively conditioned.[42] The obstacles can be seen in arguments that cultural heterodoxy is an indicator of neurobiological mechanisms.[43] Scientific experimentation also sits within this cultural elaboration. This may not mean supporting the claims of psychical research, but may result in other tactics that are equally evasive before the persistence of the cultural representation.

Engels praised some scientists' contributions to materialist thought while criticising a "shamefaced" attitude to their own Materialism.[44] Huxley refused to expose some evident frauds.[45] His Agnosticism brought him close to Pragmatists like James, who noted that scientists cheat regularly. This was disingenuous, as James was referring to the demonstration of experiments for teaching purposes. He applauded the SPR for adopting a 'once a cheat, always a cheat' policy while insisting that 'Man's character is too sophistically mixed for the alternative of "honest or dishonest" to be a sharp one'.[46]

This dispute still plays out over replicability. Empiricism calls for apparitions seen simultaneously by more than one witness, a criterion advanced by Berkeley to ascertain the real. It remains subjectively Idealist, and great emphasis is laid upon it by paranormal and psychical investigators.[47] James argued that persistence of similar reports suggested a commonsense argument for underlying truth.[48] This echoes today in some arguments for an evolutionary tendency to believe.[49] It also finds echoes in arguments that culture is what humans have developed to supplement evolutionary incompleteness.[50]

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[40] Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 60-1.

[41] Lewis Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things before Breakfast: The Evolutionary Origins of Belief* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 126-7.

[42] Pascal Boyer, 'Explaining Religious Ideas: Elements of a Cognitive Approach', *Numen*, 39.1 (1992), 29.

[43] Omar Wain and Marcello Spinella, 'Executive Functions in Morality, Religion, and Paranormal Beliefs', *International Journal of Neuroscience*, 117.1 (2007), 135-146.

[44] Frederick Engels, 'Introduction to the English Edition' [1892], *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), p. 19; Thomas H. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition*, Collected Essays, V (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 239.

[45] Richard Milner, 'Charles Darwin and Associates, Ghostbusters', *Scientific American*, 275.4 (1996), 101.

[46] William James, *Essays in Psychical Research* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 363-4.

[47] V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 14, trans. Abraham Fineberg, ed. Clemens Dutt, 4th Edn (Moscow: Progress, 1977), pp. 31-2.

[48] James, *Essays*, p. 363.

[49] Pascal Boyer, 'Functional Origins of Religious Concepts: Ontological and Strategic Selection in Evolved Minds', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6.2 (2000), 197.

[50] A frankly bizarre position, Lorne L. Dawson, 'Anti-Modernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism: Struggling with the Cultural Significance of New Religious Movements', *Sociology of Religion*, 59.2 (1998), 136.

Some of James's contemporaries denounced such attempts 'to make faith scientific'.[51] Beard insisted that '[t]he first step in all the sciences has always been the rejection of average human testimony. If we accept what people say, there can be no scientific knowledge of any kind.'[52] Appeals are still made to 'common sense realities of subjective experience'.[53]

This underlines the need for philosophical clarity, or objective phenomena could legitimately be excluded from investigation once discussed.[54] Beard's position was noteworthy given parapsychologists' insistence that phenomena should be investigated precisely because they are reported. Reading Beard, one could conclude that persistent cultural representations of a motif should exclude it from scientific examination. This is where a consistent Materialism, seeing belief as a social question, has the advantage. Lenin, discussing the social organisation of religious structures, was hostile to supernatural reports while treating them as a comprehensible social fact. He noted that 'Contemporary fideism does not at all reject science; all it rejects is the "exaggerated claims" of science, to wit, its claim to objective truth'.[55] He was answering claims that rational comprehensibility itself determines objectivity, an argument we find throughout the modern period.[56] Richard Dawkins is hardly a champion of post-modernism, but his response religion takes the form that it must be explicable through biological mechanisms, and that cultural and social forms of expression are quasi-genetic.[57]

Ways and Memes

The objective reality or otherwise of reported phenomena does not determine their incorporation into social organisation. Cultural representations are consonant with the matter they reflect, but thought itself is not matter. This points up some of the reductiveness in suggestions that belief or disbelief in ghosts is innate. Cultural development is seen as genetically inevitable and therefore to be accepted or not, according to preference.[58] There is an additional problem here: memetics is sufficiently vague to be usable for ideas and beliefs and also for the narratives in

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[51] George M. Beard, 'The Psychology of Spiritism', *The North American Review*, 129.272 (1879), 65.

[52] George Miller Beard, 'A New Theory of Trance and Its Bearing on Human Testimony', *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 4 (1877), 42; Rhodri Hayward, *Resisting History: Religious Transcendence and the Invention of the Unconscious* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 40-44.

[53] Alex Hankey, 'Beyond the Materialist Paradigm: Some Personal Thoughts', 26 November 2008, <http://www.svyasa.academia.edu/AlexHankey/Blog/108/BEYOND-THE-MATERIALIST-PARADIGM-SOME-PERSONAL-THOUGHTS> [accessed 4 April 2011].

[54] Bobrow, 'Sufficient Smoke', 867.

[55] Lenin, Vol. 14, p. 125.

[56] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained; Correspondence, 1982-1985*, ed. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 29.

[57] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 2nd edn (London: Black Swan, 2007), p. 192.

[58] See the responses in Jesse M. Bering, 'The Folk Psychology of Souls', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 29.5 (2006), 453-498; Rita Astuti and Paul L. Harris, 'Understanding Mortality and the Life of the Ancestors in Rural Madagascar', *Cognitive Science*, 32.4 (2008), 713-740; for a useful illustration of some of the problems (on language-learning) see Justin L. Barrett and Jonathan A. Lanman, 'The Science of Religious Beliefs', *Religion*, 38.2 (2008), 113.

which they are encoded. There has been a partial, and critical, adoption of the notion among scholars dealing with narratives. The meme, a scientific-sounding causal agent for belief and its transmission,[59] is also coming into more general wider popular usage to cover stories and their transmission. Attributing material status to ideas and stories is not Materialist, but a retreat from an understanding of the material factors that contribute to their production and which they reflect. Stories do not tell themselves or tailor themselves to being told, but are selected and learned for many different reasons.[60] Storytellers may vary narratives under different circumstances.[61]

Memes have been advanced as 'cultural replicators', that is, the information encoded in a cultural artefact or mentifact.[62] Relying on memes themselves for explanation, some defences of the notion are deliberately vague.[63] Identified with a formative stage in hominid evolution, memes have been seen as the mechanism by which (some) culture is subsequently transmitted, and may be identified with the cultural items themselves.[64] Scientists have noted in meme theory a failure to distinguish between memes and their phenotypes, and a failure to distinguish between knowledge, belief and ideas.[65] The notion that memes are self-adapting and self-transmitting undermines questions of human agency, and has further exacerbated some scientific confusion over narrative.[66] This needs noting, as an emergent popular use of the term, to cover transmitted motifs and ideas, seems to overcome this problem by silently abandoning these aspects of the theory.[67] Popular usage, therefore, seems to highlight the shortcomings of the theory as it relates to narratives and beliefs, and also to point back to earlier thinking about motifs and transmission.

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[59] Abstract for a talk 7 October 2008, Anomalous Psychology Research Unit, 'Invited Speaker Series 2008-2009 (NB: Revised, 23/1/09) Abstracts and Biographies', <http://www.gold.ac.uk/apru/speakers-archive/2009abstractsandbiographies/#d.en.9687> [accessed 4 November 2010]. Compare Ilkka Pyysiäinen and Marc Hauser, 'The Origins of Religion: Evolved Adaptation or By-Product?', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 14.3 (2010), 104-109.

[60] Donald Braid, 'Memory and Oral Narrative Performance', *Sound Effects: The Oral/Aural Dimensions of Literatures in English*, University of St Andrews, 6 July 2006.

[61] Carl Lindahl, 'Faces in the Fire: Images of Terror in Oral Märchen and in the Wake of September 11', *Western Folklore*, 68.2/3 (2009), 209-234; Carl Lindahl, 'The Uses of Terror: Appalachian *Märchen*-Telling, Folklore Methodology, and Narrator's Truth', *Fabula*, 47.3/4 (2006), 264-276; Edgar M. Slotkin, 'Legend Genre as a Function of Audience', in *Monsters with Iron Teeth: Perspectives on Contemporary Legend, Volume 3*, ed. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), pp. 89-112.

[62] Susan Blackmore, 'The Trouble with the Trouble with Memetics', *Skeptical Inquirer*, 32.2 (2008), 65, quoting from <http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/journalism/SI2007.htm> [accessed 12 July 2010].

[63] Dawkins, *God Delusion*, pp. 223-4.

[64] Blackmore, 'The Trouble with the Trouble'.

[65] Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things*, p. 30.

[66] Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things*, p. 30; Matthew J. Sharps, Justin Matthews, and Janet Asten, 'Cognition and Belief in Paranormal Phenomena: Gestalt/Feature-Intensive Processing Theory and Tendencies toward ADHD, Depression, and Dissociation', *Journal of Psychology*, 140.6 (2006), 579.

[67] Paul Mason, 'Twenty Reasons Why It's Kicking off Everywhere', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/paulmason/2011/02/twenty_reasons_why_its_kicking.html> [accessed 10 February 2011].

Folklorists and anthropologists have not been blind to cognitive aspects of transmission.[68] Boyer's explicit call that anthropologists must address scientific developments, however, remains largely unreciprocated. The pioneer memeticists disregard long scholarship on cultural transmission. Blackmore illustrates the theory by discussing the transmission of a song without reference to a century of scholarship on the place of printed material in oral transmission of songs:

> Suppose someone sings a song and someone else copies it – there is no split [between meme and phenotype], and errors accumulate. Compare this with the song being written down in musical notation and lots of perfect copies being printed.[69]

Blackmore's 'perfect' transmission thus takes place at a printed, not a sung, level. She tacitly identifies human activity with its representation. She presumes the printing of 'perfect copies' dictates identical performances, although pieces played from the page are still interpreted.[70] Blackmore's argument for 'errors' in oral transmission is also problematic. Errors occur in learning and recall, and such changes can be transmitted by accurate learning of a previously-altered variant.[71] However idiosyncratic and deliberate changes can also be learned and transmitted. Many recently composed songs – including 'The Ghostly Crew', touched on in the previous chapter – enter vernacular oral tradition with local variations. For Blackmore meme and phenotype have a life of their own, and transmission and adaptation sit outside the cultural life of the performer. The passivity she envisages is best captured in her formulation 'someone else copies it': others might prefer 'learns'.

The meme is a metaphor restricted by philosophical weakness and vagueness of use. Some tale scholars find the idea useful, within limits. Zipes has used memetics to explore the cultural background to story transmission, but insists that '*not every folk or fairy tale is a meme or can become a meme*' (his emphasis), as meme-status depends on human agency (in line with some new popular usage).[72] He stands accused of inconsistency here, but identifies the source of this agency in memetics itself.[73] The metaphor is also limited by an implied moral dimension which becomes more important when discussing religious and supernatural narratives and beliefs.

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[68] David C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-Out Rhymes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Boyer, 'Explaining Religious Ideas', 27; Ilkka Pyysiäinen, 'Amazing Grace: Religion and the Evolution of the Human Mind', in *Where God and Science Meet: Vol. 1: Evolution, Genes, and the Religious Brain*, ed. Robert McNamara (New York: Greenwood, 2006), pp. 209-225; Melford E. Spiro, 'Ghosts: An Anthropological Inquiry into Learning and Perception', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 48.3 (1953), 376-7.

[69] Blackmore, 'The Trouble with the Trouble'.

[70] Paul Day [Paul Cowdell], 'Towards Understanding Traditional Singing in a Social Context: A Study of Romney Marsh' (unpublished MA dissertation, National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, University of Sheffield, 2006), p. 43.

[71] Donald Braid, *Scottish Traveller Tales: Lives Shaped through Stories* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2002). Braid's first degree was in Physics.

[72] Jack Zipes, 'What Makes a Repulsive Frog so Appealing: Memetics and Fairy Tales', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 45.2 (2008), 111, following his *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[73] Gregory Schrempp, 'Taking the Dawkins Challenge, or, the Dark Side of the Meme', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 46.1 (2009), 99 fn 1.

Schrempp notes a tendency for memes to apply to negative cultural complexes and tendencies. '[G]ood memes do not correct for bad memes,' but 'the antidote to evil memes seems to reside in some meme-transcending power of critical thought.'[74] Elsewhere Schrempp has noted how new scientific advances require a notion of 'the folk' as their Other.[75] Amusingly he points out that the holes in memetics allow Dawkins to elaborate a moral code similar to religious exceptionalism.[76] This reflects the philosophical problem outlined above.

Schrempp is not hostile to memes, but his most pointed criticism is that 'Much of meme theory *has been done before* – less ideologically and more scientifically, I suggest – under the labels of trait and motif' (his emphasis).[77] Indexing tale types and motifs allows us to see where similarities are the result of transmission, thereby offering the chance of further investigation into the cognitive basis for transmission. They allow an assessment of traditionality, and, by isolating elements of cultural construction, offer some insight into the adaptation, and transmission of stories and their components. Memetics gives these catalogues an etiological character. Crucially, the discussions around formulating indices focused on identification of story elements. Propp aimed to emulate scientific taxonomies by establishing accurate distinguishing criteria. His ambition was a rather more exacting definition than that offered by the 'meme'.[78]

'Commonsense' science

Much of this relates to folktales, and stories performed *qua* stories (often for entertainment), but it also holds for the less aesthetically-satisfying unresolved legends and memorates offered during conversations about the unexplained here. It points to how some stories and motifs are circulated and adapted, and the cultural tendencies involved. Much memetic discussion is removed from consideration of experiments. That was not the case here, where the most frequently encountered position was a broad spectrum of 'commonsense' views of science, not specifically attached to experimental evidence. EM32 said his experiences were real, but unverifiable: 'I'm not sure why I am bothering to narrate experiences that I know took place but which will be regarded as "psychological phenomena".' He appealed to his education to establish his level-headedness ('as a graduate of Oxford University, I do not regard myself as someone prone to fantasies or weak imaginings'), although he had no scientific background. He offered no scientific support for his experiences, but suggested that, under experimental conditions, it might be found. His insistence on the reality of his experiences was matched by his criticism of appeals for personal narrative testimonies: 'I cannot imagine what you are hoping to achieve from such anecdotal sources.'

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[74] Schrempp, 'The Dawkins Challenge', 94.

[75] Gregory Schrempp, 'The Demon-Haunted World: Folklore and Fear of Regression at the End of the Millennium', *JAF*, 111.441 (1998), 247-256.

[76] Schrempp, 'The Dawkins Challenge', 96.

[77] Schrempp, 'The Dawkins Challenge', 98; Bill Ellis, *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: Legends We Live* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippl, 2003), pp. 75-92.

[78] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd edn rev. and ed. Louis A. Wager, American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series, 9 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), p. 11.

Some informants had a more scientific background. EM44 recalled a series of apparitions 12-15 years earlier, during her unhappy first marriage. She repeatedly experienced seeing a man standing beside the bed. She 'thought it could [be] some kind of divine being warning me to leave my husband or watching over me. Perhaps I was dreaming?' She remembered it vividly, but could not explain it. It had not changed her views on ghosts. She remained interested in the paranormal, but 'I am also a qualified scientist so understand the importance of evidence and eliminating the obvious.' Similarly EM10 recalled an unexplained incident from his childhood, 25 years earlier. He would now be inclined to treat this as Sleep Paralysis but for an apparent interaction of the figure and the curtains. This triggered a lifelong interest 'in all the paranormal, not just ghosts'. His description matched some parapsychological definitions of 'paranormal': 'I wouldn't say that I believed in ghosts in the conventional sense but I do believe there are scientifically explainable phenomena behind sightings like my own.'

They appealed to experimental investigation without pursuing it. More significant than scientific investigation in discussing their experiences and beliefs is the possibility of scientific restriction of the quantity of unexplained occurrences. EM44 described herself as an 'open minded sceptic', who 'believes something is there but not as commonly as some would like to believe.' This use of scientific rhetoric is perfectly consistent with Empiricism. Only scale distinguishes it from the 'sceptical' character of PE82's paranormal investigation team: PE82 meant they would not be swayed into seeing things that were not there, although they were all, apparently, believers. Other investigators would certainly criticise their use of equipment.[79] They happily used suggestions of evidence of latent activity that are widely enough understood to be commercially significant. A recent advert asks 'What other meter can read both EMF and cold spots at the same time?'[80] Neither phenomenon is experimentally proved as evidence of anything specifically paranormal.

We have already seen how they may be selecting venues they consider likely to be haunted. Many commentators note 'new house effect', whereby unfamiliar sounds in unfamiliar surroundings induce the reflexive attention of those present.[81] Townsend makes some sensible points about them. Unsettling phenomena are more likely to be auditory than visual, as it is 'easier to investigate and explain what you can see'. People going on vigils 'are looking for ghosts', and saying a house is haunted 'will affect how they interpret anything they hear or see'. He slightly overstates this case, as he also notes that 'Many people report cases of haunting when they first move into a house.'[82] Any implied causal connection between these arguments is made explicit in Wood and Gould's comment that a haunting *only* becomes such when it is so labelled. Otherwise it is 'a series of events with a different explanation, or ignored altogether.'[83] Where there is an expectation of a haunting, any building can become

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[79] Fraser, *Ghost Hunting*, pp. 77-97.
[80] TomsGadgets.com, *Fortean Times*, 264 (July 2010), 23.
[81] Dave Wood and Malcolm Gould, 'What's That Noise? An Exploration into the New House Effect', *Anomaly: Journal of Research into the Paranormal*, 41 (2007), 4.
[82] Maurice Townsend, 'The New House Effect', ASSAP, <http://www.assap.org/newsite/htmlfiles/New%20house.html> [accessed 14 July 2010]; Vic Tandy and Tony R. Lawrence, 'The Ghost in the Machine', *JSPR*, 62.851 (1998), 360-364.
[83] Wood and Gould, 'What's That Noise?', 4-5.

effectively 'new'. They sought to test the hypothesis that 'the number of sounds reported by participants would reduce as a proportion of the sounds objectively recorded during the sessions': there was broad support but no 'robust evidence'.[84]

It could be argued that, by not researching ahead of their vigils, the paranormal investigation team minimised some of this impact of suggestion. It is more likely that they exposed the problems of forcing a direct causal connection between Townsend's propositions. They were looking for ghosts, and attentive to a building they did not know. PE43 spoke of two formative experiences. The first experience conformed closely to patterns of unexplained noises and lights within a house, but was not belief-changing. That came later, in a churchyard she knew was reputedly haunted. Thereafter she was more inclined to treat uneasy sensations as having ghostly origins, regardless of the location's reputation. This was now defined by belief, rather than popular report. PE82's investigators were accompanied on their vigil by theatre technician PE45. He described himself as 'sceptical', by which he meant he did not believe. He saw nothing during the vigil to convince him of ghostly activity. He was in familiar surroundings, and had wide experience of the building in various light conditions. Most strikingly, given Townsend's appeal to suggestibility, he was (unlike PE16) resistant to nearly familiar names that emerged during a ouija session.

This is not quite experimental, although it can develop that way. Research into low-frequency standing airwaves experimentally tested an hypothesis, after reported sightings and strange sensations. Tandy, an engineering designer, initially attributed these to unusual mechanical noises or the presence of animals. He subsequently experienced an unpleasant physical sensation, and saw an apparition. Tandy identified these sensations as extraneous to the expected physical effects.[85] The experiment confirmed an unheard intrusive sound, with specific physical effects on its hearers. It adds an important detail not just to our understanding of physiological causes of effects, but also to the limitations of 'commonsense' science.

Water and gas

Experiences involving gas and plumbing operate at a less experimental level. PE32 (not the percipient) recounted a story touching on anxieties about a haunting in a village. A neighbour complained that the plumbing in her house was making strange noises, caused (she believed) by supernatural agency. A mutual friend, thinking it to be the sound of old pipes, suggested her boyfriend, a plumber, take a look. He did so, and agreed that it was noise from the pipes. His girlfriend reported this to PE32 saying her boyfriend 'would have' known if there had been any ghostly activity, as he is sensitive to that sort of thing.[86] The practical identification of a physical, non-supernatural, cause is used here to validate the broader possibility of supernatural effects. PE90 said many of the programme *Ghost Hunters*'s failed investigations involve identifying problems with the plumbing in supposedly haunted houses. The show's presenters are semi-professional ghost hunters, but they appeal to their plumbing background to give them additional authority. A reader of *Fate* magazine

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[84] Wood and Gould, 'What's That Noise?', 8.
[85] Tandy and Lawrence, 'Ghost in the Machine', 361.
[86] PE32 and her husband PE1 recounted several stories about him.

wrote of receiving advice from 'a voice inside my head' on clearing a blocked drain. This involved lengthy instructions on removing and flushing sections of pipe. The story is practical and physical, but when the bath drained 'I was so excited and pleased that I said, "Thank you, kind spirit, for your aid!"'[87]

Gas also has physical properties that are easily identified in relation to ghost narratives. These may not just be olfactory. Cranmer 'ruined a beautiful three hundred year old legend with my curiosity', after realising that leaking natural gas, warmer than the surrounding air, was providing a distorted reflection of passers-by in the form of a headless ghost. (This may have involved his own commonsense science).[88] With piped gas there is the question of smell. We have already seen cases involving strange smells. There was an olfactory element in PE31's narrative, which served to reinforce the character of his work (it was sweat, which he specified as being male). QU8, who did not believe, wrote of a friend who 'can smell ghosts'. This friend, a gas engineer, can 'detect ghosts by their scent'. He would follow this identification by discussing with the homeowners. During this 'they can often work out who the dead person is'. Here, the commonsense science approach came from the respondent rather than the gas engineer: 'My friend thinks this is real but I think there must be a rational explanation and don't believe it.' In this instance appeals to the same commonsense science are simultaneously applied for and against supernatural origin. PE43 appealed to this commonsense science to support her feeling that her first experience was outside the realms of the normal, whilst still rejecting it as decisive in changing her beliefs. Aged 10 she was awoken by a loud noise, and saw the shadows of flames and people passing projected onto the wall. A humanities student, she admitted not being 'entirely great with science, and light and refraction and stuff', but used this to support her claims further, as 'I'm pretty sure you wouldn't get that kind of movement … even opposite a window like that at that time of night.' This is worth comparing with the shadow of a figure 'with a long head' seen by the policeman PE34, described previously. He was not in his own home, but minimised the novelty of the environment as far as he could.

Questions of gas also raise a point about physical reactions to such stimuli and effects. Tandy describes well the induced physical sensations and visual stimuli. Informants here reported similar sensations, albeit with less scientific scrutiny and under different environmental conditions. EM14 likened the chest-tightening to an attack of asthma, from which she suffers. PE75 recounted what felt like a panic attack halfway across Hungerford footbridge. She said she must have looked drunk, as she had to pull herself along the handrails of the bridge, 'crying, and … in a really really bad state … thinking that I was going to die, and that people were going to kill me.' This sensation had passed by the time she reached the other side. Some days later, back at the same spot, her attention was drawn to a police notice appealing for information about a murder. She thereafter attributed her sensations to a residual feeling from the murder. This notion of residual energies was known before Nigel Kneale's 1972 television drama made it popularly known as the Stone Tape theory.[89] It provides a convenient shorthand term for subtly different interpretations of 'energy': Murdie has suggested

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[87] Rev. Ida B. Bates, 'Spirit Plumber', from the column 'True Mystical Experiences', *Fate*, 10.1 (1957), 68-9.
[88] H.M. Cranmer, 'The Headless Frenchman of the Twin Sisters', *Keystone Folklore Quarterly*, 1.2 (1956), 10.
[89] Elliott O'Donnell, *Dangerous Ghosts* (London: Rider, 1954), p. 15.

these might just be 'lonely' places, and that a Latin American cure for such 'hauntings' is a party to dispel the loneliness. The notion has also been used by religious commentators to account for the residue of emotional feeling in a location.[90] We have seen a tendency to associate hauntings with electrical energy. PE41 discussed them in relation to phantom images on radar screens. He had been in the RAF and appealed to existing bodies of technical knowledge, where these phantom images are known as 'ghosts'. Some vernacular usages of 'energy' are technically inappropriate, but given a 'spurious validity' by the word's scientific origins.[91] There have been experimental attempts to generate 'haunting' experiences with energy sources.[92] Such stimuli may not be used as a blanket explanation for all phenomena. PE59 was quite definite about the role of electrical impulses, but only applied this with certainty to 'some' phenomena.

It could be inferred from her narrative that PE75 had unconsciously passed the police notice on the night of her unpleasant sensation ('there was a yellow sign up by the bridge, and I hadn't even spotted it until Jo said something'), but her recounted sensations are more interesting.[93] PE82, describing the experiences of the cemetery vigil, said group members felt physically sick. The element of suggestibility remains high. Physiologically the sensations described are akin to those during the sudden dips in temperature reported in paranormal investigations. PE76 described the time 'John' physically passed through her. Her nephew had already seen his apparition out of the corner of his eye. (He assumed it was PE76, but described different clothing). He said the room had already gone cold. PE76 came to the top of the stairs and 'suddenly something cold went through me, and it was horrid, I didn't like the feeling at all … it was almost like being hit by water going straight through you.' Unlike most other such reports, she then also saw the apparition, sitting on her bed. PE7 compared his feeling of acute physical discomfort at the site of a concentration camp in northern Europe to an attempt to cast a spell on him in southern Africa. Returning to his church one day he had found a fetish made of animal skin and bones, and 'there was just that frisson, this is old and dead and nasty'.[94] As an Anglican exorcist he said he had felt this sensation in varying degrees during his ministry. Sometimes he said, paralleling Murdie's comments, he just felt a place was 'unhappy'.

Is it in the mind, and if so how did it get there?

These informants incorporated medical assessments into their understanding of ghost phenomena. PE7 had written a 'Summary of Diagnostics for Deliverance Ministry' outlining considerations necessary before any Ministry intervention. Some are doctrinal assessments of the spiritual factors at work, from temptation as a form of spiritual test to possession by 'unclean spirits'. These have a subtle relationship with psychological health generally. Many haunts are 'place memory haunts. Scenes of

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[90] Leslie, *Ghost Book*, p. 86.

[91] Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things*, p. 179.

[92] Christopher C. French, et al, 'The "Haunt" Project: An Attempt to Build a "Haunted" Room by Manipulating Complex Electromagnetic Fields and Infrasound', *Cortex*, 45.5 (2009), 619-629.

[93] The name is a pseudonym.

[94] PE7 demonstrated the church's power over witchcraft rather informally. He trampled the fetish saying 'In the name of Jesus I jump on this rubbish.'

violence, immorality, despair, etc.' He said he considered most reported phenomena not as ghosts, but as broadly covered by 'poltergeist'. This had three typical elements: '(1) A human epicentre (2) … a past history of trauma somehow being re-emphasised in present (3) Occult door or contact.' The third point leaves open the same natural/supernatural connection made in relation to Sleep Paralysis, but the focus here is the human agent: 'Poltergeist activity is symbolic … Ministry must focus on the "owner".' Any assessment must begin from a consideration of whether the person is spiritually besieged or physically ill, but these are not exclusive, as the fourth point, 'Vexed or ill?' makes clear:

> The most common misidentification is with schizophrenia, or some other mental illness or medical condition. Both can exist together. Referral to a Christian psychiatrist or psychotherapist is important. Most people who identify themselves as possessed however, are not.[95]

In interview, PE7 emphasised this. The first question is 'is this person mentally disturbed … is there some other obvious explanation for what is occurring.' In 'difficult cases' they would also encourage doctors and psychologists to make an assessment, although that 'doesn't mean to say … that there may not be some truth in it despite the fact that they might be otherwise troubled.' A High Anglican, he seemed likely to agree with the Catholic Leslie's suggestion that Christian and scientist are similar as both 'ask for proof'.[96] Supernatural explanations may be a second resort if confused or unsatisfactory medical explanations cannot be worked into a commonsense science.[97]

PE76 had spent most of her working life as a nurse. She had a family background in ghost belief and perception (her grandmother was a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, she said) but attributed her familiarity with ghosts to nursing. QU14, similarly, wrote that being a nurse had made her 'more open minded' in this regard. As with PE32's 'grey lady', PE76's hospital ghost stories were closely related to the care and welfare of patients. She said she often tended patients who would die. Ghost nurses could portend unexpected death, as in PE32's narrative. PE76, bereaved of a son when he was very young, adopted a nuanced understanding of the relationship between emotional and supernatural impact. She said often saw her late son, but was unsure whether that was because she wanted to see him. She was not suggesting all apparitions are produced by the traumatic grief of the recently bereaved, but she did not exclude it as a contributory and complicating factor. QU34 wrote that he found it difficult to answer questions on contact with the dead, as he had lost his partner only two years earlier and was still working through the grief. Identifying himself as a Humanist, he felt unable to answer on belief in ghosts or their possibility, but this was filtered through his comprehension of emotional and psychological states: 'The departure of one's partner raises all sorts of questions – many will probably not be answered. Personally it would be a great comfort if there were [ghosts].' A 'second

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[95] Quoted from 'Summary of Diagnostics for Deliverance Ministry', written by PE7. I am grateful to him for a copy of this document, and other discussion material on Christian teachings on life after death.

[96] Leslie, *Ghost Book*, p. 6.

[97] Robert W. Wyllie, 'Do the Effutu Really Believe that the Spirits Cause Illness? A Ghanaian Case Study', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 24.3 (1994), 228-240.

best' approach, he suggested, would be to maintain the interests of the deceased, which points again at vernacular ghost metaphors.

Such an approach seems consistent with recent developments in social work. Martin Smith largely sees ghosts as manifestations of childhood fears and 'archetypal symbols and images' invoked 'at times of mental disturbance', but his work is an appeal for sympathetic listening to the stories told by clients.[98] There has been some recognition of a cultural framework within which spirit beliefs should be understood, even if not accepted by clinical staff.[99] This has taken place through discussions with relatives, who are making similar assessments themselves. A colleague told PE48 about her grandmother's last months. She would sometimes soil the bed, and said she could not get to the commode quickly enough because of the ghosts sat in her way. PE48's colleague, who believes in ghosts, was disinclined to believe this particular explanation. She was, thus, involved in a lay medical assessment. QU43 wrote that her mother suffers from Alzheimer's disease and believes she is sharing her house, which she now thinks to be her childhood home, 'with her (long dead) mother and also with her aunt (who is not dead but … is in a home)'. QU43 is a non-believer. She sees this as effects of the illness, from which she extrapolates a likely reason for ghost belief. Grandparental examples occur frequently, perhaps because they provide children's first experience of the physical problems of senescence. We have already seen the intergenerational transmission of folk beliefs and ideas, and intergenerational closeness. PE76's grandmother was pivotal in transmitting spiritual ideas. PE76 is nearly 60, but PE43, in her early 20s, recounted a similar family transmission from her grandmother.

This negotiation of medical and supernatural causation is familiar from medical anthropology. Research into ghost affliction among Gujarati families in Britain sought to show how health professionals could work with cultural belief systems in illness causation. *Bhut* (ghost) activity follows folkloric patterns. Activity is triggered by unresolved grievances and untimely deaths, and reported after disasters. Families 'do use biomedical services, but at the same time will take precautions to avoid *najar* and *bhut*.'[100] Also raised by physiological considerations of the impact of disease are possible alterations of perception (whether pathological or induced). Perception altered by stimulants will be tackled further in the next chapter, but we should note how far it has been assumed that narcotic stimulation can directly create apparitions, as in Calmet's crude assertion that 'a drunken man will see double,'[101] or act on other conditions.[102] Jung suggested Miss E's vision of skeletons was triggered by a trip to the cemetery, in a somnambulist state intensified by unwonted alcohol consumption.

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[98] Martin Smith, 'The Divine or the Physician? Fears of Ghosts and the Supernatural in Approved Social Work', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 22.3 (2008), 290. These (Jungian?) 'archetypal symbols' seem to have the same problems as memes.

[99] Kathryn S. Elliott, and Mariann Di Minno, 'Unruly Grandmothers, Ghosts and Ancestors: Chinese Elders and the Importance of Culture in Dementia Evaluations', *Journal of Cross Cultural Gerontology*, 21 (2006), 157-177.

[100] Alison M. Spiro, '*Najar* or *Bhut*: Evil Eye or Ghost Affliction: Gujarati Views about Illness Causation', *Anthropology & Medicine*, 12.1 (2005), 68; 71. *Najar* is the evil eye.

[101] Augustin Calmet, *The Phantom World: Concerning Apparitions and Vampires ('Traité sur les apparitions et sur les vampires')* (Ware: Wordsworth and the Folklore Society, 2001), p. 187.

[102] Matthew Warner Osborn, 'Diseased Imaginations: Constructing Delirium Tremens in Philadelphia, 1813-1832', *Social History of Medicine*, 19.2 (2006), 200-1.

He warned against underestimating alcohol's role, as it 'not only acts adversely on these conditions, but, like every other narcotic, increases suggestibility.'[103] Recent experiments have examined anomalous experiences induced with a psychomanteum. This has also been used in bereavement therapy.[104] We have already seen apparitions encountered, or sought, in reflections, and the suggestion that the expected features of a typical haunted place might 'induce mild psychosomatic and hallucinatory experiences'.[105] Non-believers often suggest that ghost sightings are chiefly hypnagogic or hypnopompic hallucinations.[106] Misperception in the dark is considered elsewhere, but little in the testamentary record supports any statistical prevalence, while abnormal perceptions may not themselves explain abnormal beliefs.[107]

Misperceptions are additionally compounded by emergent technologies.[108] This echoes in the next chapter's consideration of moral regulation in some supernatural narratives.[109] Considerations of saccadic eye movement sums up some of the themes that have arisen here.[110] A postmodern relativism has been justified on the basis of this phenomenon of vision.[111] The conclusion is hardly supportable, but the interpretation involved in saccadic eye movements does point to the Empiricism considered above. For all that she believes she is scoring points against 'a modernist illusion or … a world tidily organized by the universal, teleological, and objective', Marsching highlights the complicated interaction of material fact and cultural interpretation noted here.

Conclusion

Marsching's comments point to another layer of factors incorporated into negotiations of the anomalous generally, and ghosts specifically. Ostensibly about the objective mechanics of perception, her comments reveal the philosophical preconceptions that inform her interpretative decisions. In this respect she differs little from many of those we have encountered in this chapter, who bring their understanding of material

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[103] C.G. Jung, 'On the Psychology of So-Called Occult Phenomena' [1902], in *Psychology and the Occult* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008; first pub. 1982), p. 17.

[104] Devin Blair Terhune and Matthew D. Smith, 'The Induction of Anomalous Experiences in a Mirror-Gazing Facility: Suggestion, Cognitive Perceptual Personality Traits and Phenomenological State Effects', *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 194.6 (2006), 415.

[105] Richard Wiseman *et al*, 'An Investigation into Alleged "Hauntings"', *British Journal of Psychology*, 94 (2003), 208-209.

[106] Terence Hines, *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal: A Critical Examination of the Evidence* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1988), p. 61; Michael A. Persinger, 'The Neuropsychiatry of Paranormal Experiences', *Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 13.4 (2001), 515.

[107] Wolpert, *Six Impossible Things*, p. 104.

[108] Barbara Allen, 'The "Image on Glass": Technology, Tradition, and the Emergence of Folklore', *Western Folklore*, 41.2 (1982), 85-103.

[109] Hermann Bausinger, *Folk Culture in a World of Technology*, trans. Elke Dettmer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 15.

[110] Fabrizio Smeraldi, 'The Saccadic Search Home Page' (1999), <http://diwww.epfl.ch/lami/team/smeraldi/saccadic/saccadic.html> [accessed 22 January 2011].

[111] Jane D. Marsching, 'Orbs, Blobs, and Glows: Astronauts, UFOs, and Photography', *Art Journal*, 62.3 (2003), 62.

realities into play with cultural and philosophical precepts. In extensive lay negotiations we see a willingness to contemplate scientific explanations alongside the supernatural, and their use to lend the supernatural further layers of sophistication. In a different, more technical, sphere, we see processes we have met before. The incorporation of scientific and scientific-sounding elements into the negotiation of ghost beliefs is complicated to some extent by the existence of bodies like the SPR bringing science to bear in the pursuit of the afterlife. Their Pragmatic experimental model has been one of the dominant historical paradigms of ghost research in the last century. This has had some empirical scientific benefits, particularly in experimentally disproving specific experiences and phenomena. As we saw in earlier chapters, such definite disproofs (which have the added benefit here of adding to our scientific knowledge more generally) can be used to validate belief more generally.

This creates an embarrassed tension: an audience at Goldsmiths Anomalous Psychology Research Unit was generally sympathetic to Richard Wiseman, but defensive about the methodological advances that have come out of parapsychology.[112] There is no real contradiction here when the underlying ideas of researchers are examined more closely. That is why this chapter has hinged on such questions. The dominance of the SPR model indicates that this is not a rarefied abstract question, but one that has fed into popular consideration of technical matters in ghost experiences. At the same time, and much as we saw with popular representations, the scientific field continues its developments which are themselves touched by popular interactions with earlier scientific thought. The dominance of the Pragmatic model means that setbacks may make little experimental difference to believers, who can continue the search for the one white crow, but it has had a rather different impact on some non-believers, whose adaptation to these ways of thinking has generated a clumsy attempt to identify persistent cultural elements at a quasi-genetic level. Beyond its apparent integration as a popular concept, the meme seems a negatively judgemental way of viewing such persistent elements. In the next chapter we will return to a rather more positive view of these narrative elements.

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[112] Sadly this discussion, which followed the lecture '"Heads I Win, Tails You Lose": How Parapsychologists Nullify Null Results', 16 March 2010, was not included on the video footage <http://www.gold.ac.uk/apru/lectures/wisemanvideo/#d.en.20389> [accessed 5 June 2010].

Chapter Four

Changing ghost narratives in modern Britain: How do people tell their ghost stories now?

'Real ghosts ... seldom have a story attached to them'[1]

We have looked from several angles at the relationship between experiences and the expressive form given them when they are discussed, and how this intersects with belief. This research prompted oral and written stories, allowing an assessment of how these interact, and how oral narrative negotiations of supernatural experiences and belief work today. A straightforward connection between report and belief, or experience and belief, is commonly posited. The evidence points instead to their complicated negotiation. Some mechanistic views of belief, like PE94's position that the brain is 'hardwired' to see ghosts, have tended to downplay the subtleties.[2] When Margaret Fox recanted her earlier rappings it was no surprise that opponents welcomed this 'death-blow' to Spiritualism. Opinions from Spiritualism's advocates were more surprising. Some denounced Fox, but others said it proved the unreliability of séances, thus raising a need for more authoritative forms of spiritualist practice.[3]

Narratives are contested as they are recounted. We should expect consistency between narratives less than a consistency of interrogation within them. Narratives of ghost experiences are not simple, fixed, accounts of fact. They are adjusted for audiences, in line with existing traditional motifs, other beliefs, expectations, experiences and, indeed, scientific thinking. Narratives may not seek explanations. The anomalous experience may defy available explanations, with the narrator accommodating it as supranormal, telling the story as unresolved, or leaving it untold pending some explanation. Mundane explanations may not prevent a story being told, nor prevent supramundane conclusions being drawn from it. It can still be accommodated to a different belief system. Considerations of these questions are built into the decision to tell a story as well as the way it is told.

There is, today, an assumption of mass-media sophistication in personal experience narration, often to the disadvantage of believers and narrators. (PE50 attributed rising belief to the spread of media representations of ghosts). This relationship is more complicated than simple borrowing. Earlier writings feed back into contemporary elaboration of belief structures. Here we look at several authors whose books have been influential in shaping current discourse and thinking. We should be wary of

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[1] Theo Brown, *Devon Ghosts* (Norwich: Jarrold, 1982), p. 4.
[2] V.S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), pp. 174-198; Dean H. Hamer, *The God Gene: How Faith is Hardwired into Our Genes* (New York: Anchor, 2005).
[3] Ernest Isaacs, 'The Fox Sisters and American Spiritualism', in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 104-5.

assuming a direct connection or disconnection between representation, authority and belief. As with *Most Haunted* the relationship can be difficult, with audiences dubious of a presentation they still use to negotiate genuine beliefs. The controversial high profile work of Harry Price is comparable.[4]

We can examine, there, questions of authorial reliability. This may not be based on criteria of objectivity and truth. Thanks to his self-promotion Price is probably the best-known author considered here. His influence reverberates among prolific post-war writers like Peter Underwood and Guy Lyon Playfair. Other authors are also still consulted without being trusted. Elliott O'Donnell's influence is confirmed by the extent to which current paranormal commentators criticise it. Some of his titles are still in print.[5] The historical importance of some authors, like Catherine Crowe, may today be secondary to the mass availability of their work. The cheap reprint of Crowe's major work carried other marks of authority; it bore the imprimatur of the Folklore Society and contained an introduction by a contemporary expert who is also mass-published.[6] The author sits within the chain of transmission of narratives. This applies even with more deliberately entertaining authors.

This raises questions of narrative artistry, and tensions between storytelling and personal experience. This tension may not be a contradiction. Some legend material is told with similar attention to artistry as tales of entertainment. We explore here informants' registers of stories, which include inconclusive items alongside bigger, finished, narratives. There is a continual question of the interaction between performance and belief, explored here through theatrical productions. Better known from folktale material, this question illuminates the narration and performance of beliefs documented here. Using folktale type ATU1676 as an illustrative example, we shall explore how ghost narratives are used for moral and social regulation. In many variants of ATU1676, this relates to drinking. Pubs today form the locus for much consideration of ghosts, both as an emergent haunting site, and as a location for discussing hauntings. They are also treated with mistrust when not understood in these terms. Some scientific writing on altered perception treats stimulants solely as causative. We examine here how far narrators build scrutiny of such factors into their discussions. As with jokes, a critical negotiation may not undermine the belief structure more generally.

Who is a reliable narrator?

Some critical negotiations come – sometimes surprisingly – to straightforward conclusions. Brown acknowledged the contemporary investigations but thought the Drummer of Tedworth 'perfectly genuine'.[7] Price excluded 'all known fraudulent'

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[4] Paul Tabori, *Harry Price: The Biography of a Ghost-Hunter* (London: Sphere, 1974; first pub. 1950); Trevor H. Hall, *Search for Harry Price* (London: Duckworth, 1978); Richard Morris, *Harry Price: The Psychic Detective* (Stroud: Sutton, 2006).
[5] Elliott O'Donnell, *Scottish Ghost Stories* (Norwich: Jarrold, 1981; first pub. 1911).
[6] Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature: Or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (Ware: Wordsworth in association with the Folklore Society, 2000).
[7] Theo Brown, *The Fate of the Dead: A Study in Folk Eschatology in the West Country after the Reformation* (Ipswich and Totowa, NJ: D.S. Brewer and Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 20.

cases from his poltergeist collection, but still included the 'doubtful' Cock Lane.[8] Focus on evidential proofs has led to an artificial distinction between 'reliable' and 'unreliable' narratives, without clearly establishing its purpose. This is further complicated by the shaping of stories over time, which often involves dropping 'details that strengthen the evidential value of the story' to reinforce their more general truth.[9] There is much mistrust of journalistic anthologies like those produced by Elliott O'Donnell. He re-worked narratives extensively, hence the continuing hostility from commentators who are seeking definitive factual accounts of paranormal phenomena. He also claimed to have been called on to investigate hauntings.[10] These investigations were criticised for not meeting the standards required of 'official' psychical research.[11]

Harry Price, by contrast, aimed to legitimise British psychical research, with himself at its head.[12] He was a difficult character.[13] Price failed in his ambitions, but created a recognisable public profile for investigations, much as the *Most Haunted* team did later. Catherine Crowe's sober collection of ghost narratives was intended as 'a sustained and passionate plea for psychic experiences to be treated as worthy of serious, even scientific consideration and for ghosts not to be dismissed as "obvious" delusions.'[14] Her purpose was addressing a 'vague and ineffective' afterlife belief. She hoped to deepen this by amassing narratives.[15] Her book has not quite been used this way.[16]

Crowe appealed to the pragmatic argument examined above, so her project cannot entirely be accounted a failure.[17] Without validating the psychic investigation she desired, her book is still used to circulate the stories she saw as evidence of a lightly-held belief, thereby reinforcing the philosophical point about the win/win situation offered by Pragmatism. It continues to be used, cheaply and with the support of academic authority, much as Lang noted earlier demonology books ended up being used, as a literary source feeding into oral legend.[18] Price's profile made him a focus of narratives, regardless of the attitude of the experts he hoped to impress. He made Borley Rectory a celebrated ground for contesting evidence and beliefs, about which '[a]rguments will rage … for many years'.[19] Two SPR investigations demonstrated

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[8] Harry Price, *Poltergeist over England: Three Centuries of Mischievous Ghosts* (London: Country Life, 1945), p. x.

[9] Hornell Hart, quoted in Larry Danielson, 'Paranormal Memorates in the American Vernacular', in *Occult in America*, ed. Kerr and Crow, pp. 202-3.

[10] 'About the Author', in Elliott O'Donnell, *Dangerous Ghosts* (London: Rider, 1954).

[11] Martin Marty, 'The Occult Establishment', *Social Research*, 37.2 (1970), 212-230.

[12] Price, *Poltergeist*, p. 12. Compare Heather Wolffram, 'In the Laboratory of the *Ghost-Baron*: Parapsychology in Germany in the Early 20th Century', *Endeavour*, 33.4 (2009), 152.

[13] See especially Hall, *Search for Harry Price*, and Morris, *Harry Price*.

[14] Gillian Bennett, 'Introduction', in Crowe, *Night Side of Nature*, p. 11.

[15] Crowe, *Night Side of Nature*, p. 19.

[16] Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters* (London: Arrow, 2007), p. 15; Bennett, 'Introduction', in Crowe, *Night Side of Nature*, pp. 13, 9.

[17] Crowe, *Night Side of Nature*, p. 19.

[18] Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1894), p. 64.

[19] Antony D. Hippisley Coxe, *Haunted Britain: A Guide to Supernatural Sites Frequented by Ghosts, Witches, Poltergeists and Other Mysterious Beings* (London: Pan, 1975; first pub. 1973), p. 104.

Price's manipulation of the inquiry, although the second suggested Borley could still be a focus for hauntings.[20]

The persistent attachment of narratives to Borley had been noted even during Price's lifetime.[21] This attachment co-exists alongside the repeated rehashing of Price's publications.[22] Borley continues to attract comment and visitors.[23] In 1980-1 Stephen Jenkins told a meeting of school students about his 1977 visit to Borley, when he saw a ghostly funeral. Jenkins took a photograph which was subsequently found to contain an anomalous figure.[24] Price's investigation was already long discredited, but disputes around it had reinforced the location's reputation, and channelled discussions of ghost beliefs.

'It makes interesting and entertaining reading'[25]

O'Donnell similarly dramatised his own investigations. He was fascinated by dangerous ghosts. Not the most commonly reported experience, these make for exciting copy. The disjuncture can be seen in popular paranormal magazines: a magazine containing articles on reassuring domestic intercessions and premonitory dreams advertises only the sexy and violent stories.[26] PE79 insisted that real-life experiences are not scary. This former television producer explicitly distinguished them from the terrifying stories of ghost literature. Ghosts are not simply benevolent either: PE79 distinguished between the complicated moral and social world of the described experience, and well-constructed literary tales told to chill.[27] Informants, and those involved in artistic representations, can tell the difference, even when creating their own admixture. PE31's story of a strange presence in an empty building was intended to leave an unpleasant after-effect, the more disturbing as he included the detail that he does not believe in ghosts. Alan Murdie criticises the presentation of ghosts as predominantly dangerous, which he partly attributes to O'Donnell's writing.[28] The point is not whether O'Donnell was 'a wonderful liar'.[29] Instead,

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[20] Peter Underwood, *The A-Z of British Ghosts* (London: Chancellor, 1992; first pub. 1971), p. 30: Morris, *Harry Price*, p. 213.

[21] Christina Hole, *Haunted England*, 2nd edn (London: Fitzhouse, 1990: first pub. 1949), p. 179.

[22] Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, *The Ghost Book: Strange Hauntings in Britain* (London: Robert Hale, 1955), p. xiv.

[23] Andrew Green, *Our Haunted Kingdom: More than 350 Authentic Hauntings or Case Histories Recorded in the United Kingdom over the Last 25 Years* (London: Wolfe, 1973), p. 87.

[24] Colin Wilson, *Poltergeist! A Study in Destructive Haunting* (London: New English Library, 1982), pp. 294-296.

[25] Charles Sampson, 'Author's Introduction', in *Ghosts of the Broads* (Norwich: Jarrold, 1976; first pub. 1931), unpaginated.

[26] Cover stories of *Chat: It's Fate!*, 10 (October 2009) included 'Pushed by a Dead Woman into a Canal's Icy Waters', and 'Taken! A Demon Made Me His Sexual Plaything'.

[27] Jacqueline Simpson, '"The Rules of Folklore" in the Ghost Stories of M.R. James', *Folklore*, 108 (1997), 9-18; Timothy H. Evans, 'A Last Defense against the Dark: Folklore, Horror, and the Uses of Tradition in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 42.1 (2005), 99-135.

[28] Fortean Times UnConvention, 2 November 2008.

attention should be drawn to O'Donnell's popular speaking engagements. However embellished (and however unlike some traditional narratives), his stories found an audience who then offered him their own experiences. O'Donnell 'couldn't have a drink in his club, sit on a park bench or stay in a boarding house without someone telling him their encounter with a ghost'.[30]

This illustrates the enthusiastic discussion of experiences, and also the appeal to some expert authority to validate, contest, or comment upon, a story.[31] This authority is bestowed by knowledge of the subjects at hand. The plumber in PE32's story is an expert in the field of plumbing, and an informed sensitive. PE82's paranormal group deferred to its more experienced investigators. Such knowledge may be doctrinally imparted, even where denominationally surprising.[32] There may also be links with media portrayals of such authority figures.[33] Similar appeals are also made to discredit experiences.[34] Scholars find appeals to their works, like PE7's use of Bennett's writings, and to them personally.[35]

Finished stories?

This need not mean audiences believed O'Donnell's every word. He may have provided a forum for discussion. To reduce this to the plausibility or reliability of his narratives is to miss the interaction within narrative events. This is more interesting than their reliability, which reflects the false dichotomy between experimental and narrative studies. O'Donnell leaves stories unresolved, or allows a lack of further information stand for a conclusion.[36] Even with journalistic idiosyncrasies this reflects how stories are shared. PE29 participated in a joint discussion with PE76. PE29 had not heard some of the stories before, although the two had been close for many years and had discussed ghosts previously. PE48 taught anthropology and contemporary legends, so was unsurprised at the exchange, testing, and disbelieving of stories. She was still surprised how far her colleagues used mention of this research to recount their beliefs or experiences. This individual response was replicated at social events. PE69, a writer and admirer of literary ghost stories, participated at an

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[29] Michael Goss, 'Jumpers and the Killer Monk of Beachy Head', *Magonia*, 55 (1996), no pagination as cited from the online text at <http://magonia.haaan.com/2009/jumpers/> [accessed 26 July 2010].

[30] Scott Wood, abstract for paper 'Elliott O'Donnell Number 1 Ghost Hunter', at *GHost: Hostings 3: GHost-hunters 1*, 12 October 2010.

[31] Erika Brady, 'Bad Scares and Joyful Hauntings: "Priesting" the Supernatural Predicament', in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), pp. 145-158.

[32] Linda-May Ballard, 'Before Death & Beyond: A Preliminary Survey of Death & Ghost Traditions with Particular Reference to Ulster', in *The Folklore of Ghosts*, ed. Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, and W.M.S. Russell, Mistletoe Series, 15 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer for the Folklore Society, 1981), pp. 13-42.

[33] *The Exorcist*. Dir. William Friedkin. Hoya. 1973; Brady, 'Bad Scares', p. 149.

[34] Peter Lamont, 'Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence', *The Historical Journal*, 47.4 (2004), 903.

[35] Willem de Blécourt, 'The Witch, Her Victim, the Unwitcher and the Researcher: The Continued Existence of Traditional Witchcraft', in *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Volume 6: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo, and Stuart Clark (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), p. 156.

[36] O'Donnell, *Dangerous Ghosts*, p. 40.

evening of ghost stories.[37] Readings occupied most of the programme, but it provided an appropriate context for PE69 to discuss seeing his late grandfather.

A similarly prolific writer demonstrates this blurring of registers.[38] Alasdair Alpin MacGregor's ghost writings are often discursive travelogues. An active member of the Folklore Society, he records that not all its members were convinced by claims that ghost belief was dying out. Murray's claim elicited '[a]n audible sigh of respectful disagreement'. Some members looked for his reaction, which he attributes to his serious interest. Expertise need not imply definite solutions so much as an informed willingness to consider. MacGregor reports wider reactions to Murray's comments in the press. Mary Balfour's disagreement was informed, she wrote, by being (like PE76) 'the seventh child of a seventh child'.[39] Less articulate than Balfour, but resting no less securely on a body of belief and experience, was the anonymous correspondent who forwarded a Midlands newspaper's coverage, defaced with the comment '"UTTER ROT!!"'[40] A serious attitude, even if critical, may be sufficient to elicit a response. The resulting stories may not be polished literary pieces, but filter into print through the mediation of professional writers. Once in print they themselves become available reference points. The printed accounts do not dictate the form of subsequent narratives, but assist in evoking them. This is true of Wood's lecture criticising O'Donnell, and of O'Donnell's contemporaries attending his talks.

MacGregor protested that printed narratives were told as a chain of reported stories.[41] This research revealed just how far stories are shared. Informants heard narratives, which they shared alongside, or in the absence of, their own. Hearers include stories in material they consider when assessing the state of beliefs generally. PE32 had different beliefs to the villagers mentioned in her story, but afforded theirs due consideration. She presented the resident who thought noises were supernatural as over-anxious and easily misled. The plumber's girlfriend was an intermediary storyteller. Her interpretation was presented with respect, although PE32 was not convinced by it. PE48 maintained a critical detachment from the contemporary legends she had heard, but she also actively assessed her colleagues' stories. She and PE44, discussing family traditions of ghost stories from older relatives, both expressed concern that such narrative transmission might be declining. PE48 thought she might only have heard her great aunt's stories because she could find no other audience. Given the intergenerational transmission of stories found here we might see this as indicating a healthy pattern of sharing. MacGregor acknowledges the amalgamation of older and newer material. His intention was 'to *relate*, rather than to

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[37] 'Spectres at the Feast', part of London Ghost Week, 29th October 2009.

[38] The National Library of Scotland lists 32 titles written or edited by him, <http://main-cat.nls.uk/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=MacGregor%2C%20Alasdair%20Alpin&Search_Code=NAME_&CNT=50&PID=jfGT7gllednL2_rYGwodteMNdXgaT&BROWSE=1&HC=45&SID=1> [accessed 28 July 2010]; and literary archive material, National Library of Scotland, Inventory Acc. 6215, Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, April 2009.

[39] See also Gordon Smith, *Spirit Messenger: The Remarkable Story of a Seventh Son of a Seventh Son* (London: Hay House, 2003).

[40] MacGregor, *Ghost Book*, pp. xi-xii.

[41] MacGregor, *Ghost Book*, p. xiii.

explain'.[42] This is the writer as an active part of the transmission and negotiation process. Scholars, too, are involved in this process.[43]

Ghosts in different media

Stories are not necessarily invalidated because appearing in one form or another. Most informants criticised *Most Haunted*, whilst still engaging with it at some level. Other programmes were used as evidential sources. Danielson's linguistic survey indicated that, for certain purposes, first-person narrative pieces from *Fate* magazine can be read as accounts comparable to oral testimonies recorded in fieldwork. With editorial tidying, they are comparable to the written accounts received here, some of which had been submitted elsewhere. Danielson rejected 'obvious fictional forms'.[44] Although contextually clear, this formulation still begs some questions. His stated interest was in 'traditional narrative presented as a paranormal experience story'. He is interested not in 'literary invention based on oral folklore' but in 'close replicas of oral texts'.[45] That is not clear-cut. O'Donnell's first person narratives may be more obviously worked over than his third person accounts. Charles Sampson's largely invented Norfolk tales are published by a popular press that also publishes O'Donnell and more serious local research.[46] Some of Sampson's tales are based on traditional tales, but 'more appear to be his own invention'. His book remains popular, with some stories developing into local legends.[47] Sampson invoked a pseudo-scientific version of the pragmatic argument to all but acknowledge his creative role: 'How much of it is actually true must be left to the gentle reader's own discretion, but it makes interesting and entertaining reading.'[48]

A move to the personal

We find here the adopted fictional forms conforming to traditional forms of storytelling. Research interests have shifted over the last 40 years. In 1979 Danielson noted a historical tendency to concentrate on third-person legends.[49] That has changed, thanks to an acknowledgement of what is being documented,[50] and to an

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[42] MacGregor, *Ghost Book*, p. xiv, his emphasis.

[43] Linda Dégh and Andrew Vaszonyi, 'The Memorate and the Proto-Memorate', *JAF*, 87.345 (1974), 227-8; Paul Cowdell, '"You Saw the Ghost, Didn't You? There's Someone Wants to Ask You about It": Occupational Ghostlore, Narrative, and Belief', *Contemporary Legend*, 9 (2006 [published 2010]), 70.

[44] Larry Danielson, 'Towards the Analysis of Vernacular Texts: The Supernatural Narrative in Oral and Popular Print Sources', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 16.3 (1979), 132.

[45] Danielson, 'Vernacular Texts', 133.

[46] O'Donnell, *Scottish Ghost Stories*; David Clarke, *Ghosts and Legends of the Peak District* (Norwich: Jarrold, 1991); Sampson, *Ghosts of the Broads*.

[47] Citing Jennifer Westwood's unpublished notes. I am grateful to Brian Chandler, Sophia Kingshill, and Jacqueline Simpson for generously allowing me access to Westwood's notes, and to Jeremy Harte for his assistance.

[48] Sampson, 'Author's Introduction', *Ghosts of the Broads*, unpaginated.

[49] Danielson, 'Vernacular Texts', 136.

[50] Jacqueline Simpson, 'The Local Legend: A Product of Popular Culture', *Rural History*, 2.1 (1991), 25.

increasing interest in personal experience narratives.[51] The recent study of contemporary legend has led to closer scrutiny of shifts between first- and third-person narratives.[52] In this context shifts in narrative voice were documented that problematised the memorate. The etic activity of genre categorisation has sometimes disregarded emic categories.[53] Closer attention to narrative and audience has allowed a more nuanced appreciation of the fluctuations within, and adaptations of, stories, and its significance for beliefs encoded within narratives.

Folktales are not told as literally true. Some interpret this as a judgement against other levels of truth they might contain, including their relationship with accounts of personal experiences. This creates a problem when assessing similar accounts, by encouraging a simplified view of the relationship between experience and narrative as a straightforward exchange of representations.[54] Informants here included people involved in tale telling professionally (QU30), or in an amateur social setting (PE22). PE31 shaped his story in line with his other narrative skills. PE22 was wary of narrating other people's experiences because it brought narration too close to a storytelling event. She shared a scholarly mistrust of narrative artistry in experiential accounts, seeing different intentions behind tales and memorates. This might be supported by the fact that QU30, the professional storyteller, was not a believer. A professional performer's consideration of storytelling ethics in ghost narratives suggests this is not the most important element of the narration in terms of belief, but that creating an opportunity to tell stories allows participants to reveal underlying beliefs and concerns.[55] Other narrative elements accrue around single episode memorates to create artistically satisfying performance pieces, but attention should be paid to the storytelling whole. It was unsurprising that theatre workers could construct a satisfying narrative. PE42 described her lengthy personal narrative, shaped and informed as a performance, as her 'party piece'. Finishing it, she assumed she had exhausted her repertoire, but subsequent conversation triggered recollections of other less-rounded incidents. Her narrative remained skilful, but these were not finished and assured performances. One concerned the widely circulated photograph of a mysterious child seen through the legs of a group of women.[56] Another theatre-worker, PE72, had no personal stories, being an atheist without any supernatural beliefs. Slightly apologetic about this, she related instead a cluster of stories heard from friends. PE76, who runs a youth theatre project, worked known legend motifs into her relation of personal experiences, filling out her narrative as a performance.

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[51] Sandra K.D. Stahl, 'The Personal Narrative as Folklore', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 14.1/2 (1977), 9-30.

[52] *Contemporary Legend the First Five Years: Abstracts and Bibliographies from the Sheffield Conferences on Contemporary Legend*, ed. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 17-8; Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings* (London: Pan, 1983, first pub. 1981).

[53] Edgar M. Slotkin, 'Legend Genre as a Function of Audience', in *Monsters with Iron Teeth: Perspectives on Contemporary Legend, Volume 3*, ed. Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), pp. 102-3.

[54] Alan Gauld and A.D. Cornell, *Poltergeists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 19. Part of the confusion appears to be their unscholarly use of 'myth'.

[55] Pete Castle, 'Storytelling Opens Doors: Good Ones – And Bad Ones, Possibly', *Facts & Fiction*, 67 (November 2008). I am grateful to Pete Castle for forwarding this article.

[56] 'Want to Submit a Photograph?', <http://scienceofghosts.wordpress.com/want-to-submit-a-photograph/> [accessed 27 January 2010].

Theatres continue to offer a focus for ghost stories. The performance possibility is important, but this should not suggest they are unrepresentative of belief. They may provide a well-constructed centrepiece to a group of narratives distinguished only by location. Theatrical superstition merges well with potential hauntings.[57] Ghosts presage successful runs.[58] Such a story, around the ghost of the former actor-manager John Buckstone at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, demonstrates the flexibility of such traditions. Buckstone's ghost has also been associated with a theatre across the road.[59] Probably a mistake, this indicates sympathy towards ghosts in any theatre. It may also indicate extending haunting to the area around a theatre, blurring local legends.[60]

These elements provide a platform for entertaining ghost stories. Popular shows become a touchstone for ways of telling such stories, reinforcing the point about Pepper's Ghost in dedicated popular shows. The successful adaptation of Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* has generated its own ghost legend, with an unexplained figure appearing on stage. This followed a break-in, and 'it is believed that the ghost has come to protect the theatre.'[61] Hill's homage to Edwardian horror fictions may not bear direct comparison with personal experiences, but provides a context for them. Other writers are explicit on this. Jeremy Dyson and Andy Nyman's *Ghost Stories* was intended both to be scary and to reflect how such questions are researched in reality.[62] The leading character was lecturing on his research and experience, and they reflected academic studies there.[63] PE85, a children's author, shared his personal experiences partly so he could discuss ideas for a current project. PE6 laughingly blamed 'Hammer horror films' for the persistence of religion, but such representations still allow the possibility of discussing such topics.[64] This chimes with appealing to an expert.[65]

A journalist claimed that 'this side of human nature has not been well catered for' in theatre.[66] That is hardly true. Events and performances are numerous. Alongside London Ghost Week events there were theatre pieces like *Between the Dark and the Daylight: Ghost Stories in the Vaults* at Southwark Playhouse during December 2007. (The venue also stages regular Halloween events). Like the ongoing television ghost stories following the M.R. James adaptations of the early 1970s, the show had an antiquarian air, advertised with a quotation from Jerome K. Jerome. PE102 sent a

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[57] Dan Gross, 'Folklore of the Theater', *Western Folklore*, 20.4 (1961), 257-263. Many are common to British theatre.

[58] Andrew Green, *Ghosts of Today* (London: Kaye & Ward, 1980), pp. 120-1.

[59] Alan Murdie, 'Ghostwatch', *Fortean Times*, 264 (July 2010), 14; Green, *Ghosts of Today*, p. 113.

[60] William Terriss, killed outside a theatre, haunts a local station, Green, *Our Haunted Kingdom*, pp. 194-5.

[61] 'Spooky Happenings at the Fortune Theatre', Woman In Black website, 15 March 2010 <http://www.thewomaninblack.com/news_womaninblack/news_womaninblack_story.php?id=2> [accessed 9 August 2010].

[62] Jeremy Dyson and Andy Nyman, personal communication, 3 September 2009.

[63] Jeremy Dyson, personal communication, 1 February 2011.

[64] Dominic Cavendish, 'Ghost Stories: Jeremy Dyson and Andy Nyman Interview', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 June 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/7847404/Ghost-Stories-Jeremy-Dyson-and-Andy-Nyman-interview.html> [accessed 10 August 2010].

[65] Brady, 'Bad Scares', p. 149.

[66] Cavendish, 'Ghost Stories'.

Christmas card illustrating a James story.[67] Dyson and Nyman are part of a trend towards closer connections between artistic representation and reported experience. These include publications,[68] and events. *Seeing Is Believing* combined material from the Harry Price Archive with the work of contemporary artists 'who share a fascination for the unexplained'. Some of the contemporary photographers employed nineteenth-century spirit photography techniques. This ongoing artistic engagement with existing bodies of research has an impact on the transmission of those bodies of research. The flier for *Seeing Is Believing* noted of Price's archives that 'Helen Duncan's ectoplasmic emissions were recorded for posterity' and 'Photographic *proof* was gathered of the Borley Rectory haunting' [emphasis added].[69] With different purposes and techniques, artistic constructs and personal narratives interact.

A test of fear

The performance and narrative of beliefs thus takes a complex form, as can be seen from the ways motifs are combined. This can be illustrated by examining a motif recorded widely across Britain and elsewhere, and then examining related (but not identical) accounts noted here. Motif H1435 (collecting skulls from a charnel-house as a test of fear) is commonly found as part of two Tale types, ATU 326, The Boy Who Wanted to Know What Fear Is, and ATU1676, Joker Posing as Ghost Punished by Victim.[70] H1435 also thrives on its own as a legend with specific local features. In an Oxfordshire version a man 'thought to be daft' is challenged in the pub that he dare not go to the charnel house at midnight and bring back a skull. When he picks up a skull a voice says 'Put that down! That's mine!' He picks up another and hears the voice say the same thing. '"What?" he replied, "did you have *two* heads? Then I'll have one",' thereby winning his wager.[71] The story has specific local details, as the church bone-house has been the location for exhumed bones 'from time out of mind'.[72] Different specific local details are found in other versions.[73] A Cornish version continues to be a thwarted practical joke, but the protagonist also has 'uncanny powers'.[74]

This motif is widespread.[75] It indicates taxonomical problems, being sometimes listed as AT326D*: given certain story complexes where this tale type merges with others,

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[67] See <http://www.hauntingimpressions.co.uk> [accessed 23 December 2010].

[68] Andrew Martin, *Ghoul Britannia: Notes from a Haunted Isle* (London: Short, 2009).

[69] *Seeing Is Believing*, 23 November 2007 – 27 January 2008, The Photographers' Gallery.

[70] John B. Smith, 'The Devil of Croyden Hill: Kinship, Fiction, Fact, Tradition', *Folklore*, 116.1 (2005), 66-74.

[71] Katharine M. Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language, Incorporating the F.J. Norton Collection: Part A, Folk Narratives*, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 343.

[72] Percy Manning, 'Stray Notes on Oxfordshire Folklore (Continued)', *Folklore*, 14.3 (1903), 412.

[73] S.O. Addy, *Folk Tales and Superstitions*, ed. J.D.A. Widdowson (Wakefield: EP, 1973; first pub. 1895 as *Household Tales with Other Traditional Remains*), p. 6; Enid Porter, *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), p. 197.

[74] Smith, 'Croyden Hill', 71.

[75] Jacques R.W. Sinninghe, *Spokerijen in de Zaanstraak en Waterland*, 2nd edn (Zaltbommel: Europese Bibliotheek, 2000), p. 27.

it is more fruitful to view tale complexes at a motifemic level.[76] This also removes the possible implication that a motif identified as part of a specific tale is somehow therefore deficient in some way when it stands alone. This would be to misunderstand the nature of oral tradition. The motif may be the level at which beliefs are related, and there may be limits to the adaptability of this legend material for folktales.[77] This would resolve a conundrum noted earlier about belief legends, that beliefs might be 'best expressed by a genre given the least credence', and that narrators 'might not totally accept the beliefs expressed in legends'.[78] The motifemic focus is reinforced by ATU1676. Dressing as a ghost, a feature of these tales, turns up in other incidents in ATU326, while Person in White Thought to Be Ghost also has a motifemic classification (J.1782.6).

We have seen the convenience of the white-sheeted figure, and the complicated relationship between belief and this representation. In the ATU1676 stories, jokers appeal to a specific tradition of ghostly appearance. They are variously undone, but not by being disbelieved. In ATU1676B, Clothing Caught in Graveyard, the protagonist accidentally catches their clothing on a tomb and dies of fright, believing ghosts have seized him. This is noted in recent American legends, and provided a story for the influential television series *The Twilight Zone*.[79] A real ghost, or the underlying belief in ghosts, is the key. In some stories the intended victim resists the 'supernatural' assault with determined and unexpected vigour.[80]

These stories never address the possibility that the victim sees through the prank, but express attitudes to social and moral questions. A 20th century account was told as 'a cautionary tale … not to play foolish pranks'.[81] Others rely on the belief of the victims, with positive effect. A wife dresses in a surplice to frighten her husband, the parish clerk, out of his drinking. A parish priest told this story, reasserting orthodox religious morals by unorthodox means. Another victim appeals to his years as a bellringer when confronted by an apparition. This trick is expected to work because he is known to be superstitious. These stories end with a return to moral rectitude and sobriety. They are somewhat conservative, consolidating the underlying social structure. The parish priest fitted local heterodox belief narratives into a doctrinally acceptable orthodoxy. PE7 used his interventions to reassert a doctrinal authority before eclectic belief systems. This extends into the moral realm a tendency for ghostliness to represent some breach of the expected or accepted order.[82]

Moral regulation with a punchline

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[76] Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1946), pp. 129-130.

[77] Anna Angelopoulos, 'Greek Legends about Fairies and Related Tales of Magic', *Fabula*, 51.3/4 (2010), 221.

[78] Dégh and Vaszonyi, 'Memorate and Proto-Memorate', 231-2.

[79] Jan Harold Brunvand, *Curses! Broiled Again! The Hottest Urban Legends Going* (New York: Norton, 1989), pp. 79-81

[80] W.H. Barrett, *Tales from the Fens*, ed. Enid Porter (London: Country Book Club/Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 38-41; Smith, 'Croyden Hill', 68-9.

[81] Smith, 'Croyden Hill', 69.

[82] Kaarina Koski, 'Conceptual Analysis and Variation in Belief Tradition: A Case of Death-Related Beings', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 38 (2008), <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol38/koski.pdf> [accessed 6 February 2010], 47.

Directly comparable stories of practical jokes aimed at asserting or regulating a social code were told here. Successful social regulation depends not on the representation of the ghost, but on the beliefs behind the disguises. The ATU1676 disguises work because the victims believe ghosts can take those forms. This applies to other moral regulation, as with PE76's interpretation of some of the poltergeist-type activity in her house. Many pranks related here were unsuccessful, but that did not undermine the belief systems on which they rested. Encountering the white-sheeted figure in hoaxes does not mean it is exclusively risible. PE77 articulated the complicated relationship with this kind of ghostly figure, continually deflating supernatural experiences while leaving open their possibility. He worked as a security guard, often on night shifts. Many of his stories involved scaring new guards not yet familiar with the large empty building at night. In one hotel a permanent light set behind a remote-operated fan on the ceiling was the dining room's only light source by night. Showing newcomers round, he explained that a former resident had died there. Calling out 'Mabel! If you're there, give us a sign!' he switched the fan on remotely, causing the light to flicker. PE77 had never had a direct ghost experience, but admitted there were nights when that hotel had a 'bad atmosphere'. Another hotel had large gas-operated clothes driers. It was against regulations to use these at night because they were dangerous, but one officer continued to do so. This was a sackable offence, so PE77 tried to frighten him out of the practice. He got a third guard to drape himself in a white sheet and hide, then jump out on the offender. The plan failed, as the only response was 'You look bloody silly in that, Gary.' The trick's attempt to regulate social behaviour is clear. Notwithstanding its failure, it also rests on certain expectations. PE77's story of the resident with Alzheimers disease rests on her conformity to pallid ghostly stereotypes. He also spoke seriously of finding dead bodies, in that and other jobs. Like PE71 he had 'always thought' that if he were to experience anything ghostly it would be in those places. That he had not did not change his belief negotiations, any more than did his ability to play practical jokes in a building he knew well in the dark. These negotiations covered several registers of manifestation. At a holiday camp where a child had died in the 1950s he and a team were sent to investigate the appearance of a face at a window. A corridor smelled bad so he opened a window. This prompted a terrified reaction from the team behind him, who suddenly and inexplicably felt the building go cold.

PE22 discounted two apparently anomalous telephone calls during an all-night session at a museum because these could have been tricks by security guards. This did not fundamentally alter her beliefs but served to strengthen her belief in the night's other experiences. Another security guard, EM30, had worked in a building he dreaded entering at night. Although he 'never actually saw any ghosts', he frequently heard doors opening when he 'knew for a fact that nobody was in the building'. He remains convinced it is haunted. On the basis of sensations there he is 'convinced … there are restless spirits confined for some reason or another to the places where as living people they died.' We see here the link between the organising and regulatory character of the hauntings and the occupational identity of the percipients. Again, this is a spectrum rather than a fixed and absolute relation, and it points towards a connection with other themes already encountered. In the geographical space of hauntings we sometimes find a link with towers and staircases, often to emphasise occupational distinctiveness. (This is obvious with PE30's experience up a flytower,

but also applies to many nursing ghosts).[83] Occupational distinctness may also have a directly political character, echoing themes discussed earlier.[84]

Kvideland acknowledges the ostensive practice of dressing up might preserve belief in ghosts, whilst arguing that impersonating a ghost suggests the belief on which any legend rests is dying out.[85] In part this rests on the idea that daring to imitate phenomena would not happen if they were seriously believed. The flippant white-sheeted apparition does not necessarily indicate a recent trend towards discrediting this image. There is a very long tradition of this kind of disguised prank, often pointing to discussions about belief.[86] Fraud might be the imitation of something that either already exists or is already believed.[87] By rendering the ghost a convenient image not believed in the specific instance of its application, the white-sheeted prank cements belief by demonstrating the courage of the person resisting it, in line with ATU326.[88]

Its informality is essential to understanding this moral regulation and practical joking. This might suggest it is less serious than an institutional expression of a moral code, but this would be to miss the interactions. Many of these stories, including PE77's, were told in pubs. They were intentionally entertaining, but were also a serious engagement with this research. This need not conflict with institutional positions. PE7 suggested the Church of England was dependent on the informal interpretations brought to it: 'From the Church's point of view you're in an area of Ministry where you don't seek stuff but people ask for help. Now obviously that means it's self-selecting in a way.' This attention to the response of individuals meant he was happy not to address broader traditional networks of ghosts: 'one isn't … on the whole, trying to do anything with the great ghosts of England … resident of the local pub and a great attraction, you know.' Laughing, he said that a different approach would 'destroy the tourist industry'.

The 'haunted pub' is a recent development. Of the 60,000 or so pubs in England in 1969, only around 200 had a reputation for being haunted.[89] Of the roughly 53,000 pubs today, ghost experiences are reported from nearly 600.[90] Ghostly phenomena are reported in inns before the 20th century, when hauntings may have been publicised for

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[83] Sylvia Grider, 'The Haunted House in Literature, Popular Culture, and Tradition: A Consistent Image', *Contemporary Legend,* New Series, 2 (1999), 191; Jack Santino, 'Occupational Ghostlore: Social Context and the Expression of Belief', *JAF*, 101.400 (1988), 207-218.

[84] Although they reported no sightings of Woburn's 'black boy', staff there thought it originated with the murder of a servant, which seems an indirect comment on their own employment, George Owen and Victor Sims, *Science and the Spook: Eight Strange Cases of Haunting* (London: Dobson, 1971), pp. 135-6.

[85] Reimund Kvideland, 'Legends Translated into Behaviour', *Fabula*, 47.3/4 (2006), 260.

[86] For a 3rd century attempt to scare a non-believer, *Philopseudes/The Lover of Lies*, in Lucian, *III*, ed. A. M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library, 130 (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1921), 32, p. 371.

[87] Steven F. Walker, 'Vivekananda and American Occultism', in *The Occult in America*, ed. Kerr and Crow, p. 167.

[88] Alessandro Falassi, *Folklore by the Fireside: Text and Context of the Tuscan Veglia* (London: Scolar, 1980), pp. 169-170.

[89] Marc Alexander, *Haunted Inns* (London: Frederick Muller, 1973), p. 13.

[90] Paranormal Database, <http://www.paranormaldatabase.com/reports/pubs.php> [accessed 23 May 2011].

local trade. Today publicity aims at a tourist market willing to travel further.[91] In the 1950s Borley's licensees were apparently willing to trade from ghost-hunting visits.[92] Pubs are likely places for hauntings, but also for discussions of hauntings. The discussion that led to PE77 sharing his stories was possible because we were in a pub that has traded on being haunted for 40 years, since renovation uncovered 18th century artefacts.

A drink and a ghost

The pub keeps material about these artefacts, but the barmaid also appealed to the knowledge of the regular customers. PE11 described his ghost experience there, then discussed experiences elsewhere. His narrative of the pub ghost was complete and rounded, with acute details. It took place early one evening, when he and a barmaid were the only people in the pub. He had not yet had a drink, he said, a point we will see again. A 'gentlemanly' figure came downstairs into the bar, and tipped his cap. PE11 turned away, then turned back. The figure had vanished. PE11 included possible interpretations into his narrative, but understood this as a ghost. The other customers were more tolerant of this narrative about their immediate and familiar environment than they were about a subsequent story from PE11's childhood, when his family had moved into a pub in Coltishall, Norfolk. He was asleep and something grabbed his ankles. He attributed this to sleep paralysis. He saw a hairy thing, comparing its smell to horses. His fellow drinkers dismissed this as rubbish. There is a Black Shuck tradition in Coltishall.[93] Such stories may have shaped PE11's subsequent telling of the experience, but it did not result in a complete legend, nor was it compelling for his audience.

This points to a seriousness in discussion, however informal the setting. The pub need not be reputedly haunted to make it an appropriate locus for such discussions. The barmaid referred to the customers for information about that building, but most of the stories that followed were unrelated to it. Other informants discussed in pubs with no ghostly reputation. The station bar where PE60 and PE61 discussed has none of the relaxing charm of the 18th century coaching inn where PE11 and his friends talked. PE60 and PE61 had constantly to watch for train times. In the coaching inn the discussion gradually unfolded, slowly incorporating more of the customers. The social setting also affects how narratives are shaped. Spontaneously offered narratives often have some entertainment purpose. That was the case with PE30's theatre narrative, although his chief motivation was talking about theatre.[94] This suggests a story construction not restricted to pub narratives, as with PE42's 'party piece'. The pub's environmental influence on shaping and performing stories does not prevent serious consideration of questions of belief. Lack of seriousness in the form of the event need not imply a lack of seriousness in its content. In the coaching inn

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[91] Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 62-64.

[92] Green, *Our Haunted Kingdom*, p. 87.

[93] Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Lore of the Land: A Guide to England's Legends, from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 500; J. Wentworth Day, *Ghosts and Witches* (New York: Dorset, 1969; first pub. 1954), pp. 26-7. I was unaware of this tradition at the time of our discussion.

[94] Cowdell, "'You Saw the Ghost'", 77-79.

discussion, with the recounting of practical jokes and unexplained experiences, PE80 asked about the impact of meta-narratives on how people see UFOs.

The social setting may channel several elements in the discussion. PE43, who regularly participates in ghost walks seeking experiences corroborating her beliefs, discussed an experience in an old pub. After the experience, PE43 was invited to have a drink to calm her nerves. When she explained her experience to her friends and other bar-staff, this became an opportunity for them to share their experiences, stories, and beliefs. Her account pointed to the exchange of different registers of story. PE80 spoke of the benign old man who apparently saved his life, but also described an occasion when some kind of force had prevented him and his mother from leaving a house. The pub may also just be a locus for social discussion.

Not dead drunk

Drunkenness is an area for moral regulation through legends. As with the disguise stories seen above, the non-supernatural details of the story (aimed at the drunkenness) leave open, or are predicated upon, supernatural beliefs. The network of ideas surrounding pub pranks was well illustrated when visitors flocked to a reported White Lady apparition in Coalisland, County Tyrone.[95] This attracted broad attention.[96] The town's pubs were the main network for circulating the stories. It was the main topic of 'stories and jokes' in the *Four Corners*, 400 yards from the site.[97] Local teenagers constructed white-sheeted figures with mannequins, in line with pranks recorded elsewhere.[98] Sean O'Neill said 'everyone's been trying it … We've been dressing up in sheets and stuff, but it's not working at all.'[99] Some paranormal investigators saw circulation of the story in pubs as reason to discount it or not examine further: 'When I heard there was a bar not doing well in the neighbourhood, I didn't even bother to go and look.'[100] Murdie indicates the differing approaches: '[I]f no firmer evidence is forthcoming, the Coalisland spectre is likely to fall to folklorists for analysis and interpretation.'[101] Murdie's coverage demonstrates how even a light-hearted informal account of a haunting can reinforce traditional beliefs. The White Lady was reported from a site with a previous history of phantom hitchhiker (*E332.3.3.1) accounts. One person incorporated other traditional motifs, saying a nearby fairy tree had been cut down recently. Traditionally, this would incur

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[95] Johnny Caldwell, 'Traffic Jam after "Ghost Sighting"', BBC News, Northern Ireland (5 January 2009), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7811761.stm> [accessed 5 August 2010].
[96] Paul Lewis, 'Coalisland's Ghostly Attraction', *The Guardian* (10 January 2009), Main Section, 17.
[97] 'Haunting Tale of a Ghost from Tyrone', *The Belfast Telegraph* (10 January 2009), <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/haunting-tale-of-a-ghost-from-tyrone-14135884.html> [accessed 15 May 2010].
[98] Jess Harris and Julia Neely, 'Southern Illinois Phantoms and Bogies', *Midwest Folklore*, 1.3 (1951), 174.
[99] Lewis, 'Ghostly Attraction'.
[100] Alan Murdie, 'Ghostwatch', *Fortean Times*, 259 (February 2010), 17.
[101] Alan Murdie, 'Ghost Stories', *Fortean Times*, 247 (April 2009), 10. Murdie is hardly hostile to folklore.

the fairy's vengeance.[102] Irish fairy beliefs are constantly re-adapted in relation to ghostlore. Traditionally Irish fairies are bad angels, but they have more recently been connected with the dead.[103] Indications of similar shifts were mentioned here. An Irish student told PE48 that wearing clothes back-to-front wards off fairies: this is a familiar motif for confusing ghosts.[104] The blurring of older traditions can be seen in comments about the fairy tree. Not just a fairy tree, it was also said to have been planted above a spirit bottle, which was described as 'a common thing' locally.[105] Laying ghosts by having priests pray them into bottles is a common theme, but its merger with the fairy tree is novel, indicating a motifemic syncretism.[106]

There is plenty of historical evidence of ghostly apparitions being seen, discussed or falsified under the influence of alcohol. Attention is mostly paid to the stimulant's role in altering perception.[107] Less attention has been paid to how the ghostly experiences re-created under the stimulus of alcohol still rely on existing ways of understanding ghosts. It also misses the extent to which negotiations of distorted perception are included within narratives. EM39 had been 'a little bit stoned earlier that day' before a sleep paralysis experience, 'And I tend to ascribe these things to hypnogogic phenomena myself. But it scared the shit out of me, and it's the closest thing I've had to a paranormal experience.' PE60 considered his drug intake as a potential factor in the apparition of his dead friend, but disagreed with his girlfriend that this had actually caused the perception. Considering the possibility of misperception can be enough to exclude it. Interviewing Roy Fulton about a phantom hitchhiker experience, Goss stressed Fulton's caution about his driving licence, on which he depended for work. Fulton had drunk two pints before the experience, and Goss thought him 'capable of taking that amount (and more) without losing touch with reality'.[108] Such personal judgement recurs throughout historical records. When Robert Hunt told a story about two Cornish miners coming upon a demonic wrestling match one night, he said they had been 'half-pinting'. They were not drunk.[109] E.A. Reeves saw a ghost at Knightsbridge tube. Reeves had just had lunch, but had 'only had a coffee'.[110] As with PE60, such restraint was not essential for this kind of

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[102] Dáithi Ó hÓgáin, *The Lore of Ireland: An Encyclopaedia of Myth, Legend and Romance* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), p. 211.

[103] Patricia Lysaght, 'Traditional Beliefs and Narratives of a Contemporary Irish Tradition Bearer', in *Folk Beliefs Today*, ed. Mare Koiva (first pub. Tartu, 1995), Haldjas e-publications, <http://www.folklore.ee/rl/pubte/ee/usund/ingl/> [accessed 11 February 2008].

[104] A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 143; Judith Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1983), pp. 217-8.

[105] 'Haunting Tale'.

[106] Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 210.

[107] Augustin Calmet, *The Phantom World: Concerning Apparitions and Vampires ('Traité sur les apparitions et sur les vampires')* (Ware: Wordsworth and the Folklore Society, 2001), p. 187.

[108] Michael Goss, *The Evidence for Phantom Hitch-Hikers: An Objective Survey of the Phantom Hitch-Hiker Phenomenon in All Its Manifestations* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1984), p. 92.

[109] Robert Hunt, *The Drolls, Traditions, and Superstitions of Old Cornwall (Popular Romances of the West of England): First Series*, 3rd edn (Felinfach: Llanerch Press, 1993; first pub. 1881), p. 217.

[110] Reeves's 1916 account is discussed in David Matless, 'A Geography of Ghosts: The Spectral Landscape of Mary Butts', *Cultural Geographies*, 15.3 (2008), 336-7.

consideration to work. PE34 had gone to bed drunk, and awoke later with the realisation that there was someone behind him. His first reaction was that this was a burglar, so he lay still, not wanting to be a victim. The drinking had exposed him to criminal action, and he appealed to his professional qualities to overcome this. (He spoke of embarrassment if he, a policeman, were to be robbed like this).

Alcoholic stimulation is included as a frequent and usual part of social interaction in folk narrative in a way it is not always considered in experimental research. In folk narrative it is not purely causative[111] Jung pointed to the intensification of a somnambulist state by the effects of alcohol, which 'increases suggestibility'.[112] This opens another way of looking at the question of stimulation heard here. The negotiation of alcoholic misperception makes no fundamental difference to the underlying belief in ghosts: like the 'scepticism' of the paranormal investigators seen earlier, ruling out individual instances in fact provides support for the larger belief system. Accordingly, beginning from the belief in ghosts itself, the influence of alcohol can be seen as affecting the individual's ability to regulate a pre-existing and permanent perception. This was the position of PE66, who said there are ghosts everywhere. Because of its age the centre of London is full of them. Drinking alcohol broke down the barriers she maintains to keep them at arm's length.

This may also nourish certain metaphorical discussions. PE18 had had an experience when on drugs of finding herself surrounded by the 13th century inhabitants of her town. She interpreted this poetically, but in similar terms to PE66, saying it posed the task of finding the boundaries.[113] PE66 no longer drinks in central London because of this inability to handle the crowds of ghosts who are there all the time. This fits with other discussions of the continual presence of ghosts that were not related to stimulants at all. The Spiritualist PE12 insisted that people who are open to spirit communication 'have to be masters of our own body or else they [spirits] would work us 24/7 and that wouldn't be right, because then we'd burn ourselves out'.

More on laughing and believing

This is a non-scientific form of the physical determinant as validating factor. Discrediting specific stories can be used to validate beliefs. Wooffitt suggests this is integral to all narration of supernatural experiences.[114] More important is how far these narratives rest on previous beliefs, even if these are unstated. This can be seen in verbal jokes about ghosts. In 'The Walking Coffin' three boys are threatened by a coffin walking towards them. Eventually one boy takes a cough drop, which 'stopped that "coffin"'. Clements sees this as a 'discredited legend'. He hypothesises that

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[111] Robert C. Belyk, *Ghosts; True Tales of Eerie Encounters*, 2nd edn (Victoria, BC: Horstal & Schubert, 2002), pp. 153-156.
[112] C.G. Jung, *Psychology and the Occult* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008; first pub. 1982), p. 17.
[113] PE18 is a poet.
[114] Robin Wooffitt, *Telling Tales of the Unexpected: The Organization of Factual Discourse* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); Robin Wooffitt and Hannah Gilbert, 'Discourse, Rhetoric, and the Accomplishment of Mediumship in Stage Demonstrations', *Mortality*, 13.3 (2008), 222-240. I am grateful to Robin Wooffitt for his discussion of this.

telling these is 'to deny with a good laugh the belief conceptions of the legend'.[115] The story undoubtedly shares motifs with other haunted house narratives, but the punchline does not undermine the belief systems. Rather than debunking the walking coffin, the joke leaves that possibility intact. In a recent Newfoundland story, a terrified hitchhiker believes he in an empty car steered by a ghostly hand coming through the window. He is explaining this in a bar later when the men who were pushing the vehicle in the rain enter and recognise their unwelcome passenger.[116] This is a different type of funny story. Any supernatural content is discounted. However, the Newfoundland story also works by deflating events that are otherwise believable. It still relies on that believability.

This kind of joke was for the most part not directly encountered here, although traces could be seen in PE77's narratives. More informants here used similar narrative techniques to shape their stories towards dramatically satisfying conclusions. EM4 sent a four-page document about a ghost hunt in a theatre. The first two pages detailed the investigation and buffet, and his reactions. The third page offered his later, more critical, assessment, and his attempts to generate orb photographs. The last page offered a punchline: 'One last thing: [a whole blank page, then, in a larger font] The Buffet was appalling.' This is not quite like the jokes above, because this does not round off the story. It creates an informal and light-hearted atmosphere, within which the negotiation of events can be taken seriously. EM4 enjoyed his evening, which he found 'entertaining … and … very professional', although he avoided the more over-enthusiastic ghost-hunters. He was unconvinced by the results, but concluded 'I would love to go again but do some real tests that were beyond human intervention.' A civil servant heard 'a young voice whisper "you fat cow" very clearly in my ear' in a pub. Entertaining, it did not undermine EM78's serious negotiation of belief: 'I keep an open mind as to whether it was a ghostly experience but if it wasn't a ghost I can't explain who it was.'

Conclusion

We have seen a tension between the sometimes open-ended experiences recounted here and a tendency to shape them into something more structured and satisfying. There is an appeal for narrative authority, which is not quite the notion of a 'reliable' author demanded by some investigative disciplines. The material incorporated in this process can include publications by supposedly unreliable authorities, because their authorial contribution both fits into a chain of transmission and functions as a contribution to the contesting and disputing of an anomalous experience. This conforms to the legend dialectic, the engagement with doubt about the beliefs under discussion which has been advanced as a defining component of that genre.[117] This generic distinction is important, but the evidence here indicates the caution required in this area. An examination of the whole narrative context shows where generically

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[115] William H. Clements, 'The Walking Coffin', in *Indiana Folklore: A Reader*, ed. Linda Dégh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 279-286.
[116] Paul Smith, 'A Newfoundland Ghost Story', *FoaFTale News: Newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research*, 63 (December 2005).
[117] 'The legend is a legend once it entertains debate about belief', Linda Dégh, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 97.

distinct material is combined, and where comparisons may be drawn between apparently separate registers.

Accordingly much of this chapter has considered various representations of belief and experience narratives that we might very loosely call performative. Contemporaries discussing ghost beliefs were aware of differences between these and the classical memorate, but still found ways of combining them. Attention has been drawn here to a reductive equation of experience and narrative. Aside from playing down the narrative skills of informants, it also overlooks the connection of literary and artistic representations with actual beliefs. A general problem with many disciplines concerned only with the epiphenomenal character of ghosts is that they largely ignore social context. The place of the pub in a narrative chain has been enough to convince some researchers to abandon further study of some accounts. What we saw, rather, was a social use of ghost narratives to assert informally some form of regulation. If some of this took the form of entertaining pub stories, it did so in conformity with older traditional narrative motifs and relied still on some accepted and often unstated assumptions about ghost belief. A joke rests on something serious. Again, epiphenomenal research treats stimulants solely as causative, whilst employing the same narrative devices about them as are built into vernacular experience accounts. Although perhaps embarrassing to some researchers, that is unsurprising, as their own research can also be re-adapted for the scrutiny of beliefs being discussed.

Chapter Five

The interaction of doctrinal and informal beliefs: Which believers believe

in ghosts

'As good Christians we should not believe in ghosts'[1]

In articulating ghost beliefs there is an intersection between contextualising elements
and the anomalous character of the experiences. These do not always sit comfortably,
but are amalgamated into a dynamic whole by percipients and believers. This
incoherence might cause problems in beliefs, but negotiating the incoherence is itself
part of the belief. It is no obstacle to encounter scientific evidence contradicting a
component of a narrative or experience. This can also be used for validation by
providing a securer understanding of what is anomalous. Much discussion of ghosts
points to a sophisticated contextualisation explaining their inexplicability.

This leads easily towards the development of syncretic belief structures, but it raises
additional questions about religious institutional beliefs. Some religious observers
balance doctrinal faith and investigation of supranormal phenomena. This takes an
acute form for institutional observers, who might be less likely to formulate an
idiosyncratic heterodoxy. Religious observers are also negotiating the place of
anomalous experiences in a doctrinal codification of the extraordinary. Investigation
may simultaneously corroborate phenomena and confirm creed, holding together
'what philosophers and theologians would keep apart'.[2]

Any such investigation has an historically conjunctural character. In Britain over the
last four centuries discussions of ghosts have been filtered through, and predicated on,
understandings of post-Reformation thought.[3] We sometimes find an expectation that
doctrinal adherents will conform to the elaborated doctrines of their institution as
these are understood by the commentator.[4] There is also a tendency to assume this
elaboration, once established, will have a stable and somewhat suprahistorical
character. Here ghosts problematise both sides of that equation. Investigating ghost
beliefs in the context of other doctrinal beliefs provides a better view of the realities
of daily belief than researchers' interpretations of predicted doctrinal responses.
Problematising the conceptual realities of doctrinal belief also illuminates the
development of institutional religious formations. Here we focus on the interaction of
personal beliefs within such frameworks. The historical character of these questions,
particularly given Protestantism's post-Reformation dominance of the religious

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[1] Christian Clerk, '"That Isn't Really a Pig": Spirit Traditions in the Southern Cook Islands',
Oral Tradition, 5.2-3 (1990), 319.
[2] Tony Walter, 'Mediums and Mourning', *Theology*, 110.854 (2007), 98.
[3] 'General Introduction', *Ghosts: A Social History*, ed. Owen Davies, Vol. 1 (London: Pickering
& Chatto, 2010), pp. ix-xxii.
[4] David Price Rogers, 'Some Religious Beliefs of Scientists and the Effect of the Scientific
Method', *Review of Religious Research*, 7.2 (1966), 71, 76.

landscape institutionally and conceptually, is well illustrated by the theological positions of the Anglican Canon PE7. Sophisticated and complex, they highlight the contemporary disputes within his denomination.

Questions of creedal authority and negotiation are found in other religions, and point to consideration of the relation between extra-institutional beliefs and expectations based on doctrinal teachings. This chapter uses questionnaire material enabling scrutiny of these relationships based on respondents' own considerations. It also considers the relationship between beliefs and autobiography. These questions can be examined by starting from a well-established framework outside the dominant British institutional religious paradigm. Catholicism provides a useful area for exploration, as post-Reformation historical and folkloric models have been built on official opposition to, and lay survival of, its positions. This exploration reveals similarities of lay practice, but this is not straightforwardly the survival through Protestantism of inevitable or natural Catholic practices, as sometimes posited. The Catholic priest's expertise sits in a continuum with protestant esoteric expertise: here is the syncretic flexibility that marks much ghost belief. In Protestantism this takes the form of a disinstitutionalisation, rather than secularisation. We conclude here with an examination of some more eclectic and recent denominations and practices, and the relationship expressed by informants between these and more orthodox institutions.

Expectations of history

PE7, an Anglican Canon, occupied a certain position of authority within his church, but his doctrinal assessment remained distinctive. Anglicanism is currently riven with disputes over observation. PE7's positions rest in that context, but may not typify mainstream orthodox Anglicanism or non-institutional lay Anglicanism, and may not conform to easy expectations about Protestantism. Inclined towards a High Anglicanism sympathetic to Catholicism, he thought monotheistic religions find spirit beings problematic. He noted the connection of the community of saints and Marian apparitions to ghost discussions.[5]

PE7's learned discourse negotiated apparently irreconcilable elements historically. The availability of this negotiating position to figures within an institution suggests a greater discursive flexibility for its congregants. PE2 had initially advanced complexity of beliefs as an obstacle to Anglican involvement. Rabbinical discussion traditions codify this process and indicate possible responses. The synagogue discussion group conducted a broad-ranging appraisal of doctrinal and heterodox elements under rabbinical regulation, accommodating doubt about orthodox religious tenets. PE27's introduction gave this creedal authority. He outlined an official position on ghosts. Judaism was not opposed to the search for ghosts. The Torah, although not encouraging it, offers instructions in how to conduct such a search, but ultimately removes ghostly apparition from institutional control, saying 'if you want to see a ghost you will.'

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[5] *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2005), paragraph 211, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html> [accessed 24 August 2010].

PE7's pre-history of Christianity was more formal. He incorporated criticisms of the Reformation, which had gone 'too far' in some respects, undermining older relations with the dead. PE7's position is as part of an ongoing discussion of doctrine. This balances an evangelical movement[6] and a sometimes explicitly anti-Reformation turn to Catholicism.[7] This accords with the historical rationalisations used in forming syncretic and eclectic heterodox belief structures, and the use of previously published material to inform that. It directly involves the historical course of the religious institution, and the texts include its founding canon. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find continued discussions of the Witch of Endor.[8]

PE7 was involved in parapsychological investigations as an undergraduate, but found them less spiritually satisfying than his doctrinal religion. Deciding between them did not exclude psychical investigations. Similarly, unless enhancing and supporting doctrine, psychical research could encourage deviations from it. Psychical research exposes the risk that 'Religious belief and moral character may be damaged.'[9] Noting an Anglican comment that it was 'undesirable that there should be experimental proof of man's survival after death', Leslie responded 'Faith presumably is preferable.'[10]

Beliefs were expressed here conforming to expectations of orthodox doctrine. QU19 understood ghosts to be 'spirits that are "locked" on Earth'. She had not experienced them, but believed because 'they are spirits that have something [they] didn't solve on Earth.' The Muslim PE51, who had had no ghost experiences, predicated his belief on Qur'anic comments about ghosts and jinn. This is disputed, suggesting folk heterodoxies within an institutional framework.[11] Feilding insisted on the religious efficacy of psychical research, which 'should be encouraged by the Church as a useful branch of ecclesiastical activity'.[12] Catholicism has been able to use parapsychology consistent with its doctrine.[13] Early nineteenth-century catechism missions insisted 'disembodied spirits … have their own physical reality, although it is not yet known to scientists.'[14]

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[6] John Hayward, 'A Dynamic Model of Church Growth and Its Application to Contemporary Revivals', *Review of Religious Research*, 43.3 (2002), 233; <http://uk.alpha.org/facts-and-figures> [accessed 6 April 2011].

[7] 'Church of England Bishop Says "Anglican Experiment is over"', *Catholic News Agency*, 26 October 2009,
<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/church_of_england_bishop_says_anglican_experiment_is_over/> [accessed 6 April 2011].

[8] Michael Scheifler, 'The Witch of Endor, a Familiar Spirit, and the State of the Dead', <http://biblelight.net/witch_of_endor.htm> [accessed 6 April 2011].

[9] Shane Leslie, *Shane Leslie's Ghost Book* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1955), p. 64.

[10] Leslie, *Ghost Book*, p. 26.

[11] Amira El-Zein, 'Doctrinal Islam and Folk Islam', *Cultural Analysis*, 8 (2009), 67-69; Ahmed Al-Rawi, 'The Mythical Ghoul in Arabic Culture', *Cultural Analysis*, 8 (2009), 45-67.

[12] Leslie, *Ghost Book*, p. 75.

[13] David Hess, 'Religion, Heterodox Science and Brazilian Culture', *Social Studies of Science*, 17.3 (1987), 470-1.

[14] Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 457.

The Data

The questionnaires offered the clearest information here on congregational beliefs and practices. Respondents were invited to comment freely on their beliefs and personal history. Seven described themselves as atheists or humanists of some sort. These ranged from people consciously rejecting Christianity to a 'Spiritual Atheist'. QU8 wrote that she had always been an atheist, and was interested in Buddhism as 'a method to deal with life rather than a desire to seek spiritual comfort/guidance'. The atheist PE48 had similarly used Buddhist meditation techniques to manage stress. QU29, the 'Spiritual Atheist', appealed to a vague scientific framework: her beliefs are growing stronger over time, 'especially with regards to animal rights and the Gaia hypothesis'. She described ghosts as 'some non-physical part of a person or animal, which can somehow manifest itself without the physical body'. She and her brother both believe in ghosts. Her mother, a Catholic, 'believes ghosts/souls only reside in heaven', while her father is 'too much of an empiricist to believe'.

Fourteen respondents said they were not members of any religious body. For some, rejecting an institution had no impact on heterodox beliefs. QU14 'believe[s] in something – certainly an afterlife.' QU28 rejected institutional religion on historical grounds, while expressing belief in the 'possibility that "life" may not end with "death" of body'. Other informants seemed atheists, without describing themselves as such. QU5 described ghosts as 'a kind of illusion, something which don't [sic] really exist'. This complicated relationship between ghost beliefs and more orthodox institutional beliefs was borne out in the interviews. Data on institutional affiliation and attendance are unavailable for over half of those informants.[15] Decontextualised stories were shared. Some anomalous stories introduced discussion of a breakdown of earlier trust in religious bodies. The sometimes partial information about religious self-identification and affiliation was not always supplemented by information about attendance. There is almost no equivalent information in the e-mail correspondence, although some interpretation is possible. Since an experience in 1981 at the age of 10, EM16 has had 'a vested interest in the paranormal' and 'a faith in God too'.

Responses conforming strictly to doctrinal teaching were in a minority. We might expect this. Self-identification and institutional practice is complex, especially with an official state religious body. This is compounded by the individualist nature of that institution in Britain, which accommodates identification alongside irregular attendance patterns and practices. Anglican attendance solely at rite of passage and major festivals is recognised within the Church, if not always outside it. PE7, discussing the distance from the Church of most of those seeking his help, described them as having 'a residual faith' of the '"We might go to Church at Christmas"' type. This applied generally. Discussing the 'fairly low but noticeable' number of people who stay in contact with the Church after his Ministry, he said Deliverance brings into

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[15] See Appendix Table C. Of the 110 informants, congregational affiliations (if any) are not available for 49. Of the remainder, 7 expressed general scepticism without specific affiliation or stated position, and 10 expressed a general religious conviction without stating any affiliation. The remaining 61 broke down into: 12 Christian; 3 Muslim; 2 Spiritualist; 3 Pagan/Wiccan; 1 Hindu; 5 Jewish; and 10 Atheists. Some of the 49 may have believed in a divinity not expressible in congregational terms. For 8 participants, psychical/paranormal investigations supplanted many previous congregational affiliations. Similar problems apply to the questionnaire 'No' respondents.

organised Church attendance 'probably the same percentage as … baptism'. Questions have been raised about future attendance patterns even under this model[16] but it cannot simply be discounted.[17] Institutional observers also operate with degrees of negotiation. The heterodox beliefs discussed might have attracted here those with a more complicated or peripheral relationship to institutions.

Both trends can be seen in QU7, a 66-year old observing Baptist, who wrote carefully that 'people who are sensitive and open to suggestion might think they have seen ghosts.' She believed doctrinally in divine visions and communications, and not in post mortem contact between humans. Nevertheless, while her religious beliefs remained unshakeable 55 years after conversion, they had also subtly changed, being now 'less dogmatic and more related to experience and maturity'. QU12's spiritual odyssey was more complicated. A 40-year old unaffiliated 'practising Christian', she worshipped as an Anglican before becoming 'disenchanted with the rules being put in place'. After a period outside any congregation she was accepted into Catholicism, but 'found that my idea of God didn't match theirs in some important areas' so left. Her congregational journey was matched by the development of a highly idiosyncratic theology, informed by Christian and other institutional doctrines, which flowed logically into post mortem communication: 'I believe in the Holy Trinity; in the life, death and resurrrection of Jesus Christ and in the day of the Final Judgement. However, I also believe in the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed and in the words of the prophets in the Old Testament. I also think that souls are reborn as many times as necessary for them to fulfil God's purpose for them.' She was sure 'the dead can contact those who are sensitive to them'. She remained adamant those beliefs had not changed: 'I have always believed in ghosts and the supernatural.'

Catholicism

The belief system may override biographical patterning. EM68 said '"ghostly experiences" haven't really affected my spiritual beliefs one way or the other. I am a practising Christian, and believe that in some way we survive death.' Her preferred belief, that 'ghosts' are 'energy traces … embedded in certain areas, rather than some kind of conscious entity,' was largely irrelevant. 'As to how we survive, or what exactly happens, I have no idea.'[18]

Practising Catholics formed a small part of the respondent base: four questionnaire respondents identified as Catholics, including QU38 whose questionnaire was incomplete. The denomination seems to offer a useful counter-example to Anglicanism. Pragmatically it has a different probable attendance and practice among self-identified congregants. QU19 described herself as 'Not really [a] practising member' while reporting an attendance level of 'Once/twice each month', higher than among equivalent non-practising Anglicans. More important are the expected

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[16] 'Long Term Decline: Results of the General Limited Enthusiasm Model (Births, Deaths, Reversion', *Church Growth Modelling*, <http://www.churchmodel.org.uk/LongDecline.html> [accessed 7 April 2011].
[17] Jacinta Ashworth and Ian Farthing, *Churchgoing in the UK: A Research Report from Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK* (Teddington: Tearfund, 2007).
[18] Helen Waterhouse and Tony Walter, 'Reincarnation Belief and the Christian Churches', *Theology*, 106.829 (2003), 20-28.

doctrinal differences. These, and the political course that led to their separation, have played a profound, possibly over-determining, role in shaping historiographical and folkloristic writings in the last period. Since the split in the English church popular, political, propagandist, and historical writings have informed and rested upon each other, and have fuelled a lay articulation of beliefs.[19] Focusing on separate institutional existences also reflects a tendency to attribute 'superstition' exoterically.

Today there are closer institutional discussions, and a blurring at lay level. High Church Anglicans here were sympathetic towards Catholic creedal positions, albeit with an institutional rejection. QU35 was brought up Catholic but 'found its dogmatic certitude increasingly implausible and unacceptable' so joined 'the more open-minded C of E'. She remained happy to describe herself as 'C of E, of the "Anglo-Catholic" or "High Church" type'. PE22's High Anglican Anglo-Indian parents both died as Catholics. Away from institutional considerations, informants pointed to vague Catholic influences. PE75 had some Irish Catholic ancestry, and referred to her family as 'pick-and-mix religious people'. Pointing also to Cornish family she invoked a Celtic spirituality.[20] This blends directly with contemporary Irish Catholicism.[21] There is no clear dividing line between this and orthodox Catholic education. At a Catholic school EM27 asked about ghosts and was told 'all who die go to heaven or hell and there [aren't] any.' This may suggest the tailoring of theology for children, but she draws a lay connection with the Holy Ghost. Other respondents had been inculcated with a more orthodox understanding of Catholicism, regardless of subsequent developments. QU44 described himself as

> Catholic due to parents – I completely lapsed from ages 17 to about 30 – but have returned following birth of my children – I have always believed but not always deemed it essential to attend mass.

This supports research into non-attendance by believers.[22] QU44 points to the accommodation of heterodox traditional beliefs and motifs within an orthodox structure. He reported a premonitory tradition in his father's family, but personally had a more orthodox relationship with his doctrinal upbringing.

Difficulties with 'superstition' are heavily informed by post-Reformation disputes. Catholic doctrines on the dead and their relationship with the living were expected to dwindle before Protestantism's rise. That they did not created problems. Protestant

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[19] See, amongst others: Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Penguin, 1978); Leslie, *Ghost Book*; Jacqueline Simpson, 'Confrontational Ghost-Laying in England and Denmark', in *Northern Lights: Following Folklore in North-Western Europe: Essays in Honour of Bo Almqvist*, ed. Séamas Ó Catháin (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2001), pp. 305-315; R.C. Finucane, *Ghosts: Appearances of the Dead and Cultural Transformation* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1996; first pub. 1984, as *Appearances of the Dead*), pp. 90-116, etc.
[20] Philip Payton, 'Bridget Cleary and Cornish Studies: Folklore, Story-Tellng and Modernity', *Cornish Studies*, Second Series, 13 (2005), 200.
[21] Tom Inglis, 'Catholic Identity in Contemporary Ireland: Belief and Belonging to Tradition', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 22.2 (2007), 212.
[22] Michael Hout and Andrew M. Greeley, 'The Center Doesn't Hold: Church Attendance in the United States, 1940-1984', *American Sociological Review*, 52.3 (1987), 325-345.

theologians criticising 'Popish superstitions' and their non-Anglican conciliators still encountered them in their own congregations. Protestant and Catholic theologians alike had to confront the relationship between orthodox and unorthodox beliefs, and the possibility that ending the supernatural might undermine religion.[23] Theological defences against scepticism tangled the theological arguments against Catholicism.[24] Appeals to Catholic authorities are neither new nor exclusive to Catholicism.[25] Catholic 'superstition' remained available to justify unorthodox Anglican positions.

Purgatory

Although few informants described a creedally orthodox eschatology, doctrinal tensions lurk behind many considerations of the possibility of apparitions. Catholic afterlife structures incorporate their possibility through Purgatory, which was specifically rejected by the Church of England.[26] Writing a century ago to denounce psychical research, a Spanish cleric summarised the doctrinal position in terms the Vatican still espouses today:

> the good go to heaven, the bad to hell, those in between (that is to say, the great majority) to purgatory. If these latter can show themselves, it can only be by the permission of God. Otherwise, they are fallen angels.[27]

Although nominally this position is excluded from Protestantism, it has still been documented in lay form.[28] Spirits in purgatory have died 'in God's friendship … but … still have need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven'.[29] This implies no voluntarism about communication.[30] Folk Catholic beliefs and practices have blurred this at a lay level, and less orthodox positions also continued. Limbo was officially discredited in 2006 as never having been a 'definitive truth of the faith'.[31] Dismissing Limbo could be seen to strengthen Purgatory, but its persistence points to more ad hoc considerations of the afterlife.

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[23] *Ghosts*, ed. Davies, Vol. 1, pp. 1-4, 33-39; Judith Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind: French Peasants and the Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 5.

[24] Moody E. Prior, 'Joseph Glanvill, Witchcraft, and Seventeenth-Century Science', *Modern Philology*, 30.2 (1932), 167.

[25] Robert W. Scribner, 'The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the "Disenchantment of the World"', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 23.3 (1993), 484.

[26] Article 22, *Of Purgatory*, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Church of England …* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, [n.d.]), p. 379.

[27] Quoted in Camille Flammarion, *La Mort et Son Mystère: Tome III: Après la Mort* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1922), p. 123 (my translation).

[28] John Symonds Udal, *Dorsetshire Folk-Lore*, 2nd edn (Hertford: Stephen Austin, 1922; repr. St Peter Port: Toucan, 1970), p. 279.

[29] *Compendium of the Catechism*, paragraph 210.

[30] Yvonne Castellan, *Le Spiritisme*, Que Sais-Je, 641 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. 108.

[31] 'How Can Limbo Just Be Abolished?', BBC News, 6 October 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/5406552.stm> [accessed 24 August 2010].

Purgatory informed Reformation disputes at doctrinal and socio-political levels. Masses for the dead sustained a socially coherent mutual relationship. Protestant individualism, by contrast, might suggest that 'each generation could be indifferent to the spiritual fate of its predecessor'.[32] Reformation arguments also involved the elaboration of institutional responses to ghost accounts.[33]

Earlier ghostly apparitions indicated problems in the communion of saints, including a failure to observe masses. The rejection of Purgatory encouraged expectations that such purposive ghosts would disappear. This may have contributed to the unexplained apparitions of nineteenth century legend collections but purposive ghosts persist. Comparative evidence of ghost-laying suggests the underlying beliefs of Catholics and Protestants are not so distinct, and might not support the post-Reformation differences read into them.[34] Ghosts still appeal for doctrinally appropriate intercessions, although purposive ghosts are more generally reported domestically. The removal of Purgatory implies less indifference to the spiritual fate of previous generations than a new mediation of that relationship at a personal rather than congregational level. Even where no institutionally managed intercession is necessary to translate the spirit from purgatory, the dead can still involve themselves in the affairs of the living. When Bennett suggested purposive ghosts had been overlooked she was trying to redress disregard for domestic intercession. Her argument also hints at an under-reporting of ghosts seeking institutional intercessions.

Close research among Catholics will likely reveal greater levels of intercession than suggested. Some recent accounts conform closely to mediaeval appeals. In a post-war story from New York a man's father appeared requesting masses to ease his passage through the afterlife.[35] Such doctrinally appropriate responses seem likely to be widespread. QU35 wrote that her Belgian Catholic mother was 'brought up to think the souls in Purgatory might come to haunt you if you did not pray for them often enough'.

This research revealed unformed associations of ghostly return and religious practice. PE75 had holidayed in Prague, where a family friend had previously died after an accident. PE75 attended mass at a church she was visiting as a tourist, and lit a candle for her. Leaving, she felt 'really really weird and … sick'. That night she saw an apparition, which her mother later identified as the dead girl. PE75 learned that after the accident the girl's family had arrived in time to see her before she died. After visiting her they had prayed at the very church where PE75 heard mass. (The Anglican PE32 also felt a strange sensation in a local church, which she thought might be related to her family connections in the area). For PE75 attending mass was appropriate. She does not regard herself as a regular congregant, but 'recognisable, the priest would know what I look like, however, not a Sunday churchgoer'. This seems based on expected attendance patterns. QU45, who has no such background, is drawn to Catholic churches where she performs appropriate-looking gestures, apparently utilising form without structure or content. Not a member of a religious

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[32] Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, p. 721.
[33] Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 179-180; Philip Morgan, 'Of Worms and War: 1380-1558', in *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp. 132-141.
[34] Simpson, 'Confrontational', p. 314.
[35] *Fate*, 38.7 (July 1985), 55.

body, QU45 sometimes attends churches 'to soak up the atmosphere. For reasons I don't understand, I prefer Catholic Churches and I always light a candle and say "thank you" but I have absolutely no idea who I am saying it to.' Elsewhere she described herself as sceptical about the supernatural, indicating a journey away from institutional observation. She claims she has 'become increasingly more atheist as I have grown older'. PE75 showed divergences from Catholic orthodoxy. She rejects the notion that her friend was 'an unhappy spirit or anything like that … it didn't mean that she hadn't crossed over to the right place or anything.' Blending Catholicism with Celtic spirituality is relevant, but so is a more mundane detachment from weekly observance by otherwise loyal Catholics.[36]

Catholicism within the hierarchy of resort

There is only a fine distinction between apparitions requesting intercessionary services and protesting at funerary problems. Doctrinal details are lost or blurred outside Catholicism, but its general notions remain available. Anglican responses echo intercessionary mass requests, and it has its own denominational requiem masses.[37] The recent record suggests close negotiation between apparently contending denominations, suggesting either underlying similarities or a shared use of motifs.

PE66 embodied this. An Australian whose family had lived in the Dutch East Indies, she lives with her Dutch boyfriend in London. He inclined to an austere protestant belief system that allowed no place for ghosts. She stressed his Calvinist background. He was 'bible through and through … it's a reflection of his upbringing'. She had spent one year at a Catholic school, where she was 'ostracised because I wasn't a believer', and attributed their disagreements on ghost-seeing to religious dogmatism. Dutch Catholicism developed and established an identity within its own social 'pillar'.[38] This allowed the possibility of a 'hierarchy of resort' across available institutions.[39]

The Netherlands offers an interesting analogy because this hierarchy occurs even where pillarisation might have isolated denominations, underscoring the point that 'religious life is not the same as participation in the institutions of the church.'[40] Religions differ historically: practically, one finds no exclusive doctrinal purity but some admixture, reflected in appeals to hierarchies. A Dutch girl followed by a spirit seeks help across the Protestant establishment until Catholic monks assist her.[41] This is widespread.[42] Dutch examples also point to non-institutional responses, including

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[36] Hout and Greeley, 'Center Doesn't Hold', 332-335.

[37] Ian Wilson, *In Search of Ghosts* (London: Headline, 1996), pp. 298-9.

[38] Walter Goddijn, 'Church and Ideology in the Netherlands', trans. Yvette Mead, *The Low Countries: Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands*, 1 (1993-4), 83-89; Frank J. Lechner, 'Catholicism and Social Change in the Netherlands: A Case of Radical Secularization?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 28.2 (1989), 136-147. I am grateful to John Newton for his discussion of this question.

[39] Finucane, *Ghosts*, p. 154.

[40] P.J. Meertens, 'Geloof en Volksleven (I)', *Neerlands Volksleven*, 16.1 (1966), 9, (my translation).

[41] Meertens, 'Geloof en Volksleven', 5, 12.

[42] Anthony S. Hale and Narsimha R. Pinninti, 'Exorcism-Resistant Ghost Possession Treated with Clopenxithol', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 165.3 (1994), 387.

merely appealing to a Catholic neighbour. Visiting a Catholic priest, even for non-Catholics, is recognised in some places as 'a kind of traditional customary practice'.[43] Even during a period of pronounced sectarian tension in Ulster it was 'by no means the case that there are two distinct groups of practice, beliefs and observations'.[44] Similar journeys are recorded in Brazil.[45]

This requires some flexibility in thinking about intercessionary ghosts. While they may appear in Catholic sources and from Catholic informants – and sometimes to serve the purposes of Catholic proselytising – they may also have a wider applicability. A child, whose uncle appeared to say he had killed himself after being spurned by a lover, was at a convent school. The spirit said 'it would help him a great deal to have me to pray for him.'[46] Minnie Wilson, the schoolgirl, told an SPR meeting that the request was not odd, as 'in Catholic schools girls are taught to pray regularly for the dead.'[47] QU35's mother, as we have seen, was brought up fearing the return of souls from Purgatory unless they were prayed for regularly. This clarifies the denominational question of whether intercessionary requests are made to those who believe in the appropriateness of responses, or whether ghosts also appeal to people who do not think they can help. This latter offers an easy explanation for ghostly decline, but printed examples point towards interdenominational agreement on behaviour. Leslie disputed suggestions that Catholic countries have fewer ghosts than the British Isles, because that carried no doctrinal weight. He argued instead that ghosts might be 'less persistent where Masses can be easily procured for their allayance'.[48] This neatly reconciles the defence of Catholic interest in the subject with its broader spread.

Syncretism and the supernatural

Anglicans are reluctant to call their beliefs 'supernatural'. Catholicism may be more amenable to it, because it is essential in Christian terms.[49] This does not mean that Catholics are enthusiastic about sensational attention.[50] Unwillingness to be drawn into an area that might undermine the church's seriousness may have informed the refusal of a Hertfordshire Catholic priest, PE105, to circulate this questionnaire

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[43] Erika Brady, 'Bad Scares and Joyful Hauntings: "Priesting" the Supernatural Predicament', in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), p. 147.

[44] Linda-May Ballard, 'Before Death & Beyond: A Preliminary Survey of Death & Ghost Traditions with Particular Reference to Ulster', in *The Folklore of Ghosts*, ed. Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, and W.M.S. Russell, Mistletoe Series, 15 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer for the Folklore Society, 1981), p. 41, p. 13.

[45] David J. Hess, 'Ghosts and Domestic Politics in Brazil: Some Parallels between Spirit Possession and Spirit Infestation', *Ethos*, 18.4 (1990), 414-5.

[46] Celia Green, and Charles McCreery, *Apparitions*, Proceedings of the Institute of Psychophysical Research, 5 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), p. 31.

[47] 'Cases: G.283: Apparition Seen soon after Death', *JSPR*, 13.249 (1908), 233-4.

[48] Leslie, *Ghost Book*, p. 130.

[49] Thomas Raverty, 'Starting with the Supernatural: Implications for Method, Comparison, and Communication in Religious Anthropology and Inter-Religious Dialogue', *Anthropological Forum*, 13.2 (2003), 187-8. Raverty is also a monk.

[50] Brady, 'Bad Scares', p. 149.

among his congregation. Some of the responding Catholics, however, were his parishioners.

The United Synagogue Rabbi PE27 played an active and enthusiastic part in inviting me to a regular discussion circle, in a way that sat uncomfortably with some participants. PE68/QU26 expressed scepticism about much of what the Rabbi said, not excluding orthodox tenets. In his questionnaire he wrote 'I think most of my immediate family are sceptical as I am', although he had 'an elderly aunt who is more spiritual'. He goes to synagogue weekly, and participates in the discussion circle regularly. His responses pose the need for further investigation into congregational activity as a means of maintaining cultural association with an ethnic and/or religious group. Within Christian denominations there was tension over these questions. PE106, an Anglican working in an ecumenical Higher Education chaplaincy, warned that African evangelical groups would never respond to questions about 'ghosts'. The key may be register and import rather than just terminology. PE64 reported a Christian evangelist who preferred to believe a teenager was engaged in criminal damage rather than identify a poltergeist, as the latter would involve demonic activity. An African evangelical congregation in London launched an anti-demonic mission entitled 'Keys for Supernatural Manifestations!'[51]

Theological doubts over Christian 'supernaturalism' may be less significant for congregants, but the disputes have had some impact on historical discourse.[52] The arguments envisaged a rural, ignorant, oral religion, reaffirming the suggestion of exoteric accusations of superstition.[53] There were comparable Protestant oral cultures.[54] Ideas of Catholic and pre-Reformation survivals continue to inform historiographical writings based on earlier folklore collections as much as they do local folklorists relying on out-of-copyright anthologies, with particular impact in relation to 'superstition'.[55] Brown takes a 'most unexpectedly consistent body of belief' to 'imply a common cause'.[56] Her historical reading of Article 22 is subtle, suggesting no intended rejection of Purgatory, only the denial of 'a certain interpretation once erroneously held by the Roman Church'.[57] This may have been intended to provide *ex post facto* doctrinal support for the persistence of post mortem

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[51] Kingdom Life Chapel International, East Ham, 27 August 2009. For a similar blend of registers of Christianity, Claude F. Jacobs, 'Spirit Guides and Possession in New Orleans Black Spiritual Churches', *JAF*, 102.403 (1989), 48.

[52] Alexandra Walsham, 'Reformed Folklore? Cautionary Tales and Oral Tradition in Early Modern England', in *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500-1850*, ed. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 174; Alexandra Walsham, 'Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain: The Origins of Folklore', in *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present*, ed. S.A. Smith and Alan Knight (= *Past and Present*, 199 Supplement 3 (2008)), 200.

[53] Udal, *Dorsetshire Folk-Lore*, p. 201.

[54] Walsham, 'Reformed Folklore?'.

[55] Theo Brown, *The Fate of the Dead: A Study in Folk Eschatology in the West Country after the Reformation* (Ipswich and Totowa, NJ: D.S. Brewer and Rowman and Littlefield, 1979); Ronald Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore', *Past and Present*, 148 (1995), 93.

[56] Brown, *Fate of the Dead*, p. 1; Jo Bath and John Newton, '"Sensible Proof of Spirits": Ghost Belief during the Later Seventeenth Century', *Folklore*, 117.1 (2006), 1-14.

[57] Brown, *Fate of the Dead*, p. 15.

apparitions, but she remains silent about the doctrinal explicitness of this argument from Cardinal Newman.[58]

Priests and Other Experts

Doctrine colours the interpretation of phenomena. For priests this may involve asserting doctrine to regulate those not closely under the church's authority, as with PE7. Appeals to the church need not imply a desire to assert its doctrines. Doctrine may provide a continued framework of understanding for people brought up in a denomination, even if no longer practising. PE74's interpretation of his sleep paralysis was shaped by his long abandoned religious background. As a lapsed Catholic, Storr queries his determination to verify anomalous phenomena.[59] There may also be a respect for doctrinal authority as a reliable narrative voice. Priests 'frequently disappoint those consulting them by paradoxically acknowledging the existence of the supernatural in general terms, while vigorously urging a non-supernatural explanation of the episode at hand.'[60] Creedal standing is not a requirement. When PE24 was 15 his geography teacher told him she lived in a haunted house, which had changed her beliefs on ghosts. Hearing 'someone like that' speak this way made him think there might be something in it after all.

Nor is doctrinal dominance exclusively Catholic. Such authority has some history in Protestantism. Scandinavian 'Black Book Ministers' acquired authority through specific arcane learning at Wittenberg.[61] The traditional authority figure has a long cross-denominational history. The Reformation tensions of *Hamlet* are played out between a ghost apparently from Purgatory, and the authority of Wittenberg-educated Protestant intellectuals who can speak to it.[62]

Protestantism as melting pot

These figures also have secular counterparts. Elevated-sounding qualifications from independent institutions proliferate to legitimise parapsychological researches.[63] All expert figures can be assessing authorities.[64] This involves examining their credentials. PE4 and PE60, who started conversations in public places, followed questions about the research with questions about my employment prospects before

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[58] John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua Being A History of His Religious Opinions*, new [1865] edn (London: Longmans, Green, 1908), pp. 78-9.
[59] Will Storr, *Will Storr Vs The Supernatural: One Man's Search for the Truth about Ghosts* (London: Ebury Press, 2006), p. 31.
[60] Brady, 'Bad Scares', p. 151, p. 149.
[61] Kathleen Stokker, 'Between Sin and Salvation: The Human Condition in Legends of the Black Book Minister', *Scandinavian Studies*, 67.1 (1995), 91-108.
[62] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), I.1.54, 58; Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[63] Gérard Chevalier, 'Parasciences et procédés de légitimation', *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 27.2 (1986), 213.
[64] Brady, 'Bad Scares', p. 155.

sharing narratives. The rabbi dignified me as 'professor', balancing my research authority against his doctrinal authority.[65]

Creedal differences dictate different forms, but this is a general tendency. Catholicism could maintain close links to congregants' ghost beliefs in part because of the historical trajectory of its doctrine. This does not rule out continuing developments in lay Catholic beliefs and practices, including the adaptation of practices like Spiritualist photography. While rather different, particularly in its community character, Catholic photography at Marian apparition sites – disavowed by the Church – is not unique in such adaptation, sharing much with photography by ghost-hunters.[66]

Non-Catholic Christians have a different historical relationship with ghost experiences. QU19 is a Catholic. Her mother, a Jehovah's Witness, does not believe in ghosts 'following her religion'. Some Protestants assert that their experience matches their creedal expectation. PE66 said her boyfriend refused to 'broaden his beliefs or take on anything that could *possibly* contradict his faith' [her emphasis]. She was convinced he shared her experiences, but 'it doesn't fit in with his beliefs' so he would not 'talk about it, and see if it works and how [to] fit it into the bible'. Different attitudes emerged amongst Anglicans, even those active in their churches. PE1, a churchwarden, was serious about his faith and its practice. After initial reluctance about 'superstition', he discussed seriously his father's experience. PE1 part-rationalised this, but discussed it in the same way as other informants. Similar evidence emerges from recent collections.[67]

The Anglican evidence here covered institutional observance less intense than PE1's. PE23 highlights the range. On questionnaires he ticks 'Church of England', but he has been to all sorts of churches as 'you all worship the same god'. This may reflect the church-going experiences of post-Windrush Caribbean migrants. A Jamaican in his 40s, PE23 was brought up in London. Fluidity of beliefs are available within Protestantism itself, consistent with its recent broad doctrinal disputes. American figures suggest a recent rise in Protestant belief in an afterlife, which has been attributed to the growth of evangelical ministries. By 1980, higher Protestant than Catholic belief in hell was recorded in the US.[68] In areas of relatively recent Christian conversion we find the church itself accommodating older traditional beliefs outside its doctrines.[69] QU35 said

> my own version of Christian teaching leads me to think it is
> theoretically possible, but highly unlikely, that souls revisit the earth or
> remain more-or-less permanently fixed there. But I know that many
> Christians, past and present, would disagree with me, and think
> 'ghosts' are quite common.

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[65] PE27 was educated in the United States, so 'professor' may have had a different institutional meaning for him.

[66] Daniel Wojcik, 'Spirits, Apparitions, and Traditions of Supernatural Photography', *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation*, 25.1/2 (2009), 120-123, 130.

[67] Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *True Ghost Stories of Our Own Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 79-80.

[68] George Gallup Jr, with William Proctor, *Adventures in Immortality* (London: Souvenir, 1983), pp. 59, 74.

[69] Clerk, 'Isn't Really A Pig', 318-9.

She was a regular Anglican churchgoer, with festival and occasional weekday services supplementing her weekly Sunday attendance.

Thanks to a complicated admixture of traditions, spiritual authority is no longer necessarily the preserve of the creedal authority, but this need not entail institutional rejection. Where characters in contemporary legends shift from religious to 'secular', piety remains the core of the story.[70] Intercessionary phantom hitchhiker stories show various denominational characteristics.[71] Phantom strangers in vehicles were heard here, like PE42's mysterious boy, but no phantom hitchhikers, although PE71 accepted the story as probably true. He raised this in a consideration of philosophical and eschatological concerns. When disturbances were experienced in one room of his house, his wife made it a safe space by hanging a crucifix. She is not a Christian.

Respondents who identified as 'Christian' without a strong institutional identification offer clues about the negotiation of doctrinal position from both sides. When PE7 said most people requiring his help are not regular churchgoers, it was a doctrinal reproach: they were susceptible to spirit and demonic activity because inadequately protected theologically. They were not excluded from the Church, as one might expect of some more austere Protestant denominations. PE88 wrote of an Ulster Free Presbyterian who believed her dead uncle 'had gone instantly to judgement and heaven or hell, but … the doorbell rang the evening after his funeral, his profile was seen through the glass but no one was there.' PE7 proffered no position on the personal identification of non-congregants who appealed for his help. Although clear on the impact of spirituality at a personal level, the questions were not inevitably linked. Some of those to whom he would minister might become regular congregants, but more would not. It was a question of institutional authority, which individuals found less significant than the elaboration of a personal framework of beliefs.

A melting pot out of Protestantism

PE88's interpretation of her student's motives for discussion points to further complications in the network of formal beliefs around protestant denominations. She thought the student was 'processing the conflict between her own theology and her experience; and perhaps … processing … contact with people holding differing beliefs.' Many informants placed their personal heterodoxy in the context of a generalised Christianity. PE43, in her early 20s, said she is still working out what her religious beliefs are. She had grown up in an environment 'sceptical' towards ghosts, but not secular. Her mother is a committed Anglican, with apparently a doctrinal

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[70] Fred van Lieburg, 'Ghosts, Animals, or Angels: Christian Story-Telling in a Modern World', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 20 (2002), <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol20/ghosts.pdf> [accessed 16 May 2008], 33-4.
[71] Richard K. Beardsley and Rosalie Hankey, 'The Vanishing Hitchhiker', *California Folklore Quarterly*, 1.4 (1942), 303-335; and 'A History of the Vanishing Hitchhiker', *California Folklore Quarterly*, 2.1 (1943), 13-25; Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings* (London: Pan, 1983), pp. 30-41; *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937 by over Two Hundred Observers*, ed. Humphrey Jennings, Charles Madge et al, new edn (London: Faber, 1987), p. 46; Michael Goss, *The Evidence for Phantom Hitch-Hikers: An Objective Survey of the Phantom Hitch-Hiker Phenomenon in All Its Manifestations* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1984), pp. 140-142.

hostility to ghosts. Her father has a more 'scientific' scepticism, although it was unclear how scientific. The biggest spiritual influence was her maternal grandmother, who was an organist in her local Anglican church. This grandmother regards herself as a Christian, but has a distinctive set of beliefs that do not accord with her church. She fell out with one vicar after mentioning a church ghost that hid her music. Her eschatology is distinctive, and part codified in a grimoire transmitted through the female line. PE43's grandmother believes in Heaven, which surrounds us all the time. The ghosts we see are thus enjoying activities they enjoyed while alive, like walking in the park. This is similar to the surrounding spirits described by PE12 and PE66. Hell is full of those barred from participation in these activities, increasing their anger. PE43 was not sure about her own attitude to this yet, but described a decline in her scepticism. She respects her grandmother as an authority on ghosts, based on the older woman's experiences. PE43 said she had fallen out with organised religion but still believes in god and, she thinks, in an afterlife. She was aware that this might conflict with her childhood religion.

Like PE24 she was candid about the continuing elaboration of her beliefs. Other similarly aged respondents showed evidence of these processes less consciously. QU17 described himself as 'no longer practising', but believed in an 'Anglican-style Christianity, including an afterlife/heaven etc'. One result is the complicated bricolage of text-based doctrines in QU12's personal theology. More common was an eclectic and idiosyncratic theology less strongly based on textual authorities. Sometimes this was divorced from institutional practice, whilst still echoing an appeal to authority. EM45 is 'not considered psychic in my family but other people are'. This took a particular form with Spiritualism, which accommodates an institutional framework and a nominal rejection of such frameworks. PE70, whose wife is a Christian Spiritualist, expressed surprise at 'how much of a religion' it was. He did not regard it primarily as a church. Spiritualism's openness and eclecticism are based on standing outside any doctrine. PE12 insisted she is 'not religious' in any way: Spiritualism is based solely on what can be seen and heard. Spiritualism is purely to give 'proof of life after death' and some comfort, she said. She was open to the use of any terminologies to explain this: asked whether what passed over into spirit was the soul, she said 'call it the soul, call it the spirit, call it whatever you want.' The movement has a universal cultural spread. Even as she insisted on the preferred 'spirit', she sought to make this comprehensible: 'you term [them] "ghosts", we call them "spirits".'

Although her church is under the SNU, PE12 stressed its independence: 'the church may belong to the SNU, but I'm the president.' This meant tolerating doctrinally-specific portraits banned by the SNU. She used these to support eclecticism, while the SNU bans them for the same reason.[72] Services begin with a denominationally non-specific prayer. One medium used the following:

> Thank you for this day and thank you for every day. And everyone that
> is in the sanctuary of life sends their love and healing to those that are
> sick and ill. And to those that are in war-torn countries may they
> receive peace and upliftment. May the animal kingdom too receive the

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[72] 'Philosophy – The Seven Principles', <http://www.snu.org.uk/Spiritualism/philosophy.htm> [accessed 14 September 2010].

healing rays and the healing light, and may, where there is anyone that is lonely, may they have someone to talk to. Amen.[73]

PE12 had come to Spiritualism during an emotionally difficult period. Her mother had died, and PE12 was seriously ill. It would be tempting to see this as a crisis stimulus to conversion, but the evidence may not support such an over-determined reading. Some informants did change institutional affiliations, in some cases with afterlife beliefs, in response to personal crises. PE12 was the closest of these to a crisis conversion, but it did not happen immediately, and her subsequent account includes suggestions that she was already aware of spirit. Her future partner was present when she received the first spirit message identified as being for her, so long-term personal consolation was also involved.

PE82 was an observing Anglican until the death of her husband 15 years ago. Her response was a rejection of institutional forms, but this was a change in faith, not its loss. This took its current paranormal investigative form ten years later, following her father's death. Prior to that she said she had no particular (articulated) afterlife beliefs: 'I just thought … when you died that was it.' The development of her views took particular shape with the sensation that her father's spirit was standing behind her while she sat at his deathbed. She said that until this point she 'didn't think there was anything whatsoever, paranormal'. This should be weighed against her apparent continued faith, which was expressed in Christian terms, although she was questioning institutional forms. There was a decongregational rejection of the notion that the church is 'god's house'. Prayer, she argued, would be effective wherever it happened. This led to a rejection of the authority of the institution and its representatives:

> if the vicar said, Right, we're not having any more sermons in the
> church but we'll go up on a hillside somewhere, in ordinary clothes, so
> everybody could go if they wanted to and listen to stories and things
> like that, like Jesus did, then I might go and listen to a sermon or such,
> but I don't have to go into a church and have all the highness and all
> these robes … because in my mind Jesus was poor. And these vicars
> aren't.

She later turned this towards her quest for proof of 'life after life'. There was some adaptive development of her views away from institutions, but this was hardly an abandonment of religion. She recognised the difference, saying 'my beliefs have changed', and acknowledging that her current practice is 'wrong' for the Salvation Army of her religious upbringing. The discussion at this vigil acknowledged this distance, underscoring shifts in numinousness rather than its rejection. PE16, present during this discussion, described herself as 'not religious at all', with the clear identification of 'religion' and its institutions. PE16 found humour in the adaptation of her beliefs, claiming her 'very very religious' grandmother 'says I'm a devil-worshipper'. The discussion drew attention to anxieties caused to family members

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[73] Medium service 18 September 2009. The medium is not identified to safeguard PE12's anonymity.

who do not accept this shift in beliefs. PE82 said her brother thinks she is 'absolutely mental. He's all against it.'[74]

When PE82 spoke of prayer being effective wherever it happened, she specifically discussed gardens, 'because I feel there's more something out in the garden.' This still related to an existing model of divine contact. The 21-year old PE87 had a religious philosophy that inclined towards some form of nature worship. She had spent much of her childhood in communes organised around music festivals, where her thinking was formed. Her spiritual upbringing was almost a mirror-image of the church-institutional background just seen. As a child she several times said 'I've seen a ghost', but her mother did not believe her. Her mother's stated belief was that all natural things have spirits, a tenet now held by PE87, specifically citing trees and water as phenomena with their own spirits. QU31, who described herself as '"spiritual" rather than "religious"', also spoke of her belief in 'the nature based religions'. PE87's mother's rejection of claimed ghost sightings was based on the logic of her belief system. What made PE87 unique was that she had acquired this idiosyncratic belief system wholesale and retained it intact, although it seems to have been eclectic at an earlier stage of its formation.

PE87's transmission of this belief system offers a useful comparison with a group over-represented here as against their statistical weight nationally, pagans and wiccans. Four questionnaire respondents and three interview informants may be included in this group. Figures from the 2001 Census indicate a small population so identified. Of a total population (52,041,916) the Census recorded 30,569 under the broad heading Pagan, and 7,227 as Wiccan. Other written-in options, including 'Heathen', 'Druidism' and 'Occult' alongside these categories, suggest further the complications. The figures are comparable to self-reported Spiritualists, with similar caveats about the numbers.[75]

Every Witch Way

Taking these together may be problematic, but it reflects the articulation of spiritual development found here. This syncretic aspect of their development may parallel the development of their belief systems, although not all wiccans and pagans would agree with this. The construction of their religions is recent enough to highlight the eclectic ways such belief systems can develop.[76] A claimed transhistorical character is closely

[74] Laurie Hull, *Brandywine Valley Ghosts; Haunts of Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2008), p. 49.
[75] Focus on Religion report prepared by the Office of National Statistics from the 2001 Census, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=13209> [accessed 1st March 2009].
[76] Ronald Hutton, 'Modern Pagan Witchcraft', in *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Volume 6: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), pp. 1-79; Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); T.M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic and Witchcraft in Present-Day England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Margot Adler, *Drawing down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*, 2nd edn (Boston: Beacon, 1986).

tied to the elaboration of an antiquarian-oriented popular folklore.[77] QU31, a practising member of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids, further connected this with literary antiquarianism: the Order 'matched my interests in Arthurian literature and legend'.[78] This comment is also revealing about practitioners. In the use and transmission of published and manuscript magic texts there is a 'total lack of a dividing line between popular and learned magic'.[79] PE43, who discussed the matrilineal transmission of a family grimoire, had sought a university department where this might also be studied academically. Scholarly work on magical lore finds a responsive audience among practitioners who see themselves outside academic research.[80]

QU31 became interested in druidry when her mother died, although a longer-term development needs to be considered in assessing the shift. She was brought up a Methodist, practising actively until she was 18. Her brother preaches in Methodist chapels, and 'believes … the Bible is all true'. This, echoing other comments about relatives, suggests that doctrinal absolutism may also be a construct of those slightly outside a congregation and its creed. This would chime with a post-Murrayite view of the conspiracy of established churches against pagans and witches, and suggests the shift in creedal beliefs itself fuels the argument. It is reciprocated. EM60 wrote of 'poltergeist type activity' at a time when his neighbour 'claimed to be some sort of practising witch'. After she moved 'there was no further activity'.[81] Most unorthodox religious practices can be connected to hauntings.[82]

QU31 remained 'happy for many years to attend occasional services in a wide variety of Christian churches'. Elsewhere she noted her church attendance had ceased some years before her mother's death. She described her husband, an active supporter and observer of her practices, as being 'of no fixed religion'. This gives a clue how religious beliefs are seen as negotiable. The beliefs of the other questionnaire respondents included in this category follow a similar development. QU15, a 25-year old pagan, grew up believing in the Christian god 'because that is all my school taught me and I didn't know any better'. She describes her mother as a spiritualist who 'believes in ghosts, angels etc', suggesting a Christian-inflected spiritualism. QU15 describes growing discomfort with belief in the Christian god, saying she came to consider herself an atheist until she was about 20. Her brother is an atheist who 'thinks all this sort of thing is absolute rubbish', while her rejection of Christianity took the form of rejection of aspects of her mother's belief system, like her belief in angels. At 20 she met some pagans whose beliefs 'made more sense to me'. If caveats should be placed over self-reported denominational identity being partial, her

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[77] Caroline Oates and Juliette Wood, *A Coven of Scholars: Margaret Murray and Her Working Methods*, Archive Series, 1 (London: FLS Books, 1998); Jacqueline Simpson, 'Margaret Murray: Who Believed Her, and Why?', *Folklore*, 105 (1994), 89-96; Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Arrow, 1966; first pub. 1954), pp. 33-43, 63-69, with Murray's 'Introduction', pp 15-16.

[78] See <http://www.druidry.org> [accessed 16 September 2010].

[79] Hutton, 'Modern Pagan Witchcraft', p. 13.

[80] Mogg Morgan, '[Review] *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* by Owen Davies', Mogg Morgan, 3 May 2009, <http://mogg-morgan.blogspot.com/2009/05/grimoires-history-of-magic-books-by.html> [accessed 16 September 2010].

[81] Spelling suggests this correspondent is American.

[82] Including Spiritualism, Robert C. Belyk, *Ghosts: True Tales of Eerie Encounters*, 2nd edn (Victoria, BC: Horstal & Schubart, 2002), pp. 43-4.

response places similar caveats over self-reported atheism. Aside from her family background, she writes 'I think I have always believed in ghosts.'

QU15 did not belong to a coven, but sometimes gathers with 'like minded friends'. This differs from QU31's druidic ceremonial. QU16, who identified herself as 'pagan/wiccan', also did not seem to belong to a coven. She referred to an informal network of belief practices connected with the afterlife, but there was less suggestion of collective worship. More important is the direction of the development of QU16's beliefs. Christened in the Church of England, she was never a practising Anglican. In 2000, at the age of 30, she was confirmed as a Roman Catholic, but 'became disillusioned due to their stance on homosexuality'. Five years later she 'decided to follow my heart and embrace the pagan/wiccan religion'. She describes her mother as a believer, who has 'always believed in spirits, ghosts and sprites'. (This last was unique here). Her partner is QU12, the 'practising Christian' whose beliefs idiosyncratically mix Christianity and Islam. QU12 worships privately and has 'no interest in organised religions'. She also has 'a protective spirit …. He rarely manifests physically, but I am aware of him at almost all times.' This spirit (Timmy) can sometimes indulge in mischief, but 'mostly he appears at times of personal loss or distress'. QU16 described this as 'regular contact with a little Victorian boy' who has been 'almost a "spirit guide" to her since she was a child'. Both respondents wrote of boarding a coach at the same time as QU16's father died. QU16 wrote that as she stepped onto the coach she 'saw my father's funeral in a flash but in intricate detail'. She believed 'it was my father warning me of what was to come'. QU12 wrote that 'at the exact moment that her father died, Timmy appeared at the front of the coach and removed his cap, while looking straight at me.' These appear to have been simultaneous occurrences of different apparitions, and therefore irreconcilable from a psychical research perspective. More significant is the way contact with the dead is channelled through the spirit guide in the distinctively personal theology. In the absence of such an elaborated framework, post mortem contact continues more generally. After various accounts of seeing figures at historical sites, QU16 wrote 'I believe that some people do have the capacity to communicate with the dead.'

This last point brings us back again to the traditional motifs informing ghost narratives and beliefs. These operate in a complicated exchange with institutional beliefs, with some of which they may apparently conflict. There are hints of evidence for such apparent clashes of belief register. A belief that darker rabbits may be witches was recorded from a 'pillar of the Church, who … was accustomed to attend the early morning service every day.' This 'incongruity' in institutional context made it memorable.[83]

Conclusion

This incongruity on the part of his great-aunt was memorable once Watkins knew of it, but this balance of registers was evidently not new. It would be interesting to know what her parish priest made of it. PE7 might have responded better to it than the vicar who argued with PE43's grandmother. In the spectrum of authority figures to whom one can appeal, priests occupy a particular, doctrinally charged, position. They are by

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[83] M.P. Watkins, 'Witch-Rabbits in Devonshire', *Folklore*, 68.1 (1957), 296.

no means removed from the rest of that spectrum, particularly in light of internal political disputes within their denominations, which have a particular impact in Britain today. Many institutional authorities presented a flexibility on questions of the supernatural that was informed by their creeds but still accessible more broadly. There were reports of ghost belief based exclusively on doctrinal teaching, but, under these circumstances, it was also not surprising to find lay conceptions of a hierarchy of resort that encompassed religious authority more widely.

Throughout, this chapter has problematised the content of self-reported religious affiliation. Apparent doctrinal orthodoxy may still encompass certain heterodox positions. These trends need not inevitably lead to syncretic developments, but they should be seen across a broad spectrum. Predictable enough within the individualist framework of Protestantism, they are also to be found within Catholicism, and as elements drawn from it. The exchange between them problematises over-determined readings of post-Reformation doctrinal separation at a lay level. Elements of Catholicism have also fed directly into the formation of other eclectic theologies. Some of these take institutional form, which we will consider further in the next chapter in relation to likely further developing bodies. Here we have seen how these developments are integrally connected to the long-standing tensions and interactions between lay and informal beliefs and institutional frameworks.

Chapter Six

The persistence and development of ghost beliefs: How they might develop in future, and their institutional impact

'a belief is a never-completed activity'[1]

Dealing with contemporary and historical material, this chapter revisits some ideas already discussed, and also looks ahead to possible future belief and its expressive forms. Such prognoses and statistical estimates rely on existing poll data. This research has problematised easy assumptions about such data. It is necessary to consider again how they interact with data on institutional belief frameworks. We have seen the interaction of ghost beliefs with more formal institutional beliefs, although we can hardly describe some of the highly elaborated eschatologies here as 'informal'. The continuous interplay between different levels of belief articulation points to the possible elaboration of future syncretic institutional models, as well as informal transmission outside institutional frameworks. Both are considered here, and some of the functional characteristics of these registers, which will affect any future direction, are drawn out. This can be illustrated by the growth of some newer institutions. Adapting earlier ghost beliefs, Spiritualism responded to historical circumstances with new institutional forms. Its relative smallness today sometimes encourages an underestimation of its longer-term significance. Its refocusing of afterlife beliefs and practices has fed into contemporary informal thinking more pervasively than the numbers suggest.

We are generally concerned with demographics here, formally in terms of changing social structures, and informally in terms of circulation of stories and discussion. This raises a theoretical point. We have considered throughout some problematic issues of the notion of 'folk', some of which now have popular circulation. Here we consider again the question of 'folk belief'. Ghost beliefs are discussed here in relation to institutional religious beliefs, but the trends are more broadly applicable. Some of what follows can be extrapolated to heterodox beliefs more widely.

Beliefs and more beliefs

'Belief' has sometimes been treated as static or one-dimensional. Creed is taken as an agreed constant, with non-creedal beliefs treated as its similarly constant opposites. Even scholars of less institutionally codified beliefs have struggled with the dynamic relationship between these beliefs and institutions, for example suggesting that 'Western folk religion … is the informal doppelgänger of mainstream Christian

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[1] Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 7.

philosophy and its testimonial interpretations.'[2] While a corpus of common motifs and themes runs through the sharing of ghost beliefs, their range suggests 'Western folk religion' and 'mainstream Christian philosophy' both cover too wide a field to be useful.

Difficulties remain with 'folklore', in relation to the character of the 'folk' and the transmission of the lore. One recent definition suggests folklore takes place in small groups.[3] Whilst successfully breaking from earlier preconceptions, this still leaves a problem. Since '[t]he "folk" can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor'[4] it might be possible to identify folklore by the group in which it circulates, and then to identify that group by its folklore. This is unfortunate, but the circulation of ghost narratives suggests both tendencies, complicating older notions of transmission. Under earlier models, the lore was what had passed orally from the primitive to the modern world. This golden age of orality was no such thing.[5] Ghostlore reveals a question of registers. This is a communicative register with an organisational informality compared to wider social structures.

Because of the negotiations involved in expressing heterodox beliefs it is not possible to describe narratives here simply as performances, although some clearly were. This needs stating, as some important folklorists redefined the discipline through performance theory. Aspects of this, and similar anthropological work, have been useful.[6] Janelli's contribution, addressing points of contact between apparently dissimilar approaches to ritual and supernatural belief, was vital here.[7] He addressed the limitations outlined above, examining the relationship between archival material and current theoretical concerns. Ghost beliefs and experiences have not always been easily circulated in artefactual form. Janelli examined the disjuncture between performance-centred theory and theories that viewed socio-cultural phenomena from the perspective that 'individual choices are the products of and not the originators of social forces.'[8]

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[2] Linda Dégh, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 262.

[3] Dan Ben-Amos, 'Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context', in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, ed. Américo Paredes and Richard Bauman, Publications of the American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series, 23 (Austin: University of Texas Press for the American Folklore Society, 1972), pp. 12-13.

[4] Alan Dundes, 'What Is Folklore?', in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 2; Elliott Oring, 'On the Concepts of Folklore', in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliott Oring (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1986), pp. 1-4.

[5] Lawrence Stone, 'The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640', *Past and Present*, 28 (1964), 41-80; Lawrence Stone, 'Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900', *Past and Present*, 42 (1969), 69-139; J.W. Adamson, 'The Extent of Literacy in England in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: Notes and Conjectures', *The Library*, S4-X (1929), 163-193; *Oral Tradition*, 25.1 (2010), and 24.2 (2009); *The European Fairy-Tale Tradition between Orality and Literacy*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos (= *JAF*, 123.490 (2010)).

[6] Lisa Gabbert, 'The "Text/Context" Controversy and the Emergence of Behavioral Approaches in Folklore', *Folklore Forum*, 30.1/2 (1999), 119-128; Michael Lambek, 'Spirits and Spouses: Possession as a System of Communication among the Malagasy Speakers of Mayotte', *American Ethnologist*, 7.2 (1980), 318-331.

[7] Roger L. Janelli, 'Toward a Reconciliation of Micro- and Macro-Level Analyses of Folklore', *Folklore Forum*, 9.2 (1976), 59-66; Gabbert, 'The "Text/Context" Controversy', 125.

[8] Marvin Harris, quoted in Janelli, 'Toward a Reconciliation', 60.

He identified two levels of causality. Micro-level causality, operating at an individual level, 'deals with the effects of the immediate situation upon each folklore performance'. Macro-level causality 'deals with statistical correlations between categories of regularities in human behavior, or with the effects of social forces upon folk traditions', thus affecting 'the situations in which folklore is performed rather than the final text or behavioral act itself'.[9] This addresses a reductiveness in some valuable material: Harris's insistence that individual responses are shaped and stimulated by social formations is persuasive, but its presentation diminishes the dynamic interrelationship between different social levels.[10] This relationship may become more complex under conditions of greater global interaction and the proliferation of available social formations. Janelli's micro-level analysis corrected any underestimation of interaction.[11] He identified macro-level causality as 'probabilistic in nature and as indirectly affecting folklore texts and specific acts of behavior'. It is therefore 'possible to see regularities in collective behavior, such as social organization or tradition, as both a cause and a product of individual folklore performances.'[12] This helpfully illuminates how some unperformed beliefs fit both social and individual frameworks, and allows an understanding of the interrelation between levels of interaction.

What is 'Folk Belief'?

Janelli suggested the probabilism of the macro-analysis indicated the possibility of change, but did not determine it. He insisted that this macro-analysis depended on examining comparative material.[13] His approach unlocks the point that commentators are often not comparing like with like when assessing these data. It may also help towards some idea of what 'folk belief' might be, and its relation with other belief structures. Mediaeval historians have valuably debated how far these complexities have actually been pushed, where the relationship between localised, individual belief structures and broader institutional religious practices is further complicated by the limited availability of evidence.[14]

We have seen informal and heterodox uses of institutional religious forms. PE12's Spiritualist church used Christian images, as did PE71's partner. Similar use is described from an American spirit-rescue exorcist, BarBara, conducting work like that undertaken by PE81 and much like many informants here in her thinking and practice. She is described wearing a silver cross during an exorcising intervention.[15] A scholarly study, however, does not pursue the hinted relationships with other institutional observation. This includes an awkward treatment of Spiritualism, within which BarBara apparently practises.[16] BarBara described heaven as 'a summerland'

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9 Janelli, 'Toward a Reconciliation', 59-62.
10 This oversimplifies Harris's position.
11 Janelli, 'Toward a Reconciliation', 64.
12 Janelli, 'Toward a Reconciliation', 64.
13 Janelli, 'Toward a Reconciliation', 61.
14 Carl Watkins, '"Folklore" and "Popular Religion" in Britain during the Middle Ages', *Folklore*, 115.2 (2004), 141.
15 Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, p. 277.
16 Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, pp. 275-6.

before offering a naturalistic description like that given by PE43's grandmother.[17] Summerland was an important part of early American Spiritualist discussions. The reference need not imply a direct involvement in that discussion, but it should be seen as an interpretative act within an unfolding doctrinal elaboration.[18] BarBara, like PE12, seems to have engaged with a researcher's understanding of her beliefs, but this was unexplored.[19] PE12 was insistently undogmatic about terminology, yet the all-embracing character of the religion she outlined still had institutional form. She could happily have embraced the comment about legends that 'The bottom line is being a believer,'[20] although even this might have seemed dogmatic. For PE12 the spirit world is a reality outside any structured belief. It finds reflection in all such structured beliefs.

This has implications for understanding ghost beliefs at a social level. Recurring claims that ghost beliefs are declining run alongside evidence they are not. The trope that an author's contemporaries are less superstitious than their forebears is familiar. Many archives of belief were assembled as arguments for more modern thinking. Such usage has been adopted emically, informed by contemporary political and philosophical concerns. PE6's 'I thought the Enlightenment was supposed to have done away with all that religion, but it didn't' echoes Victorian comments, and sits amidst contemporary philosophical debates.[21] Much current discussion of cognition and belief centres on questions of mind-body dualism.[22] The amassing of evidence of support for the belief as a means of attacking the belief is not new.[23]

Demographic changes

The predication can be seen in assumptions about demographic changes. Migratory demographic shifts are often related to technological developments.[24] Studies of

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[17] Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, p. 280.

[18] Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 246-251.

[19] Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, p. 276.

[20] Linda Dégh, 'What Kind of People Tell Legends?', in *Folklore Processed: In Honour of Lauri Honko on His 60th Birthday 6th March 1992*, ed. Reimund Kvideland et al, Studia Fennica Folkloristica 1, NIF Publications 24 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1992), p. 112.

[21] Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 807; Bruce Kapferer, 'Anthropology: The Paradox of the Secular', *Social Anthropology*, 9.3 (2001), 342.

[22] David Rousseau, 'Beyond Dualism: Insights and Predictions from a New Mind-Body Model', paper, SPR Study Day 60, 'Ordered Minds with Disordered Brains: From Evidence to Insight' (27 November 2010).

[23] Hugh Bowden, 'Before Superstition and After: Theophrastus and Plutarch on *Deisidaimonia*', in *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present*, ed. S.A. Smith and Alan Knight (= *Past and Present*, 199 Supplement 3 (2008)), 56-71; W.R. Halliday, '"The Superstitious Man" of Theophrastus', *Folklore*, 41.2 (1930), 121-153; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, pp. 17-20.

[24] Shelley R. Adler, 'Terror in Transition: Hmong Folk Belief in America', in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), p. 188; Thor Helgeson, 'Ghost Stories (As Told by Old Settlers)', in *Wisconsin Folklore*, ed. James P. Leary (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 149-158.

shifting ghost belief under Finnish conditions of social change conveniently summarise the problems, covering the very rapid development from an agricultural economy.[25] Separating earlier legend collections from later expressions of other beliefs creates a circular argument. The 'disappearance of the old legend tradition' affects general worldview, but narration itself 'came to an end because belief in ghosts declined'.[26] However, 'inexplicable and supernatural experiences' remain. Virtanen summarises: 'in the olden days everyone was afraid of ghosts, but there are no longer any ghosts, and people are not afraid of them.'[27] She conflates belief in ghosts and fear of them, as informants here did not, but this does not reflect what she documents. One example expressed his negotiation of beliefs and demographic change as adaptation, not rejection.[28] Virtanen sees a disappearance of ghost beliefs in technological change, but her evidence points towards the alteration of beliefs.[29] Similar points can be seen in an Estonian ghost narrative.[30]

These arguments still indicate real changes in response to broader socio-economic developments. They are clearer because covering such a concentrated time period, unlike here.[31] Some informants here transmitted rural traditions, without representing any recent shift from a peasantry.[32] PE43 described supernatural beliefs, from a farming village, that are believed and circulated primarily amongst local tenant farmers and agricultural labourers. PE43, in her early 20s, was respectful towards this restricted tradition. She separated this rural legend (specifically agricultural in its older variants) from more urban beliefs only in its specifics of transmission. In its older form an apparition had become associated with bad harvests. A farm labourer who died on 'one of the seven farms' in the immediate neighbourhood, the apparition once preceded a dreadful harvest and was treated as premonitory. PE43 attributed continued transmission to the relative stability of the population in this community over 150 years. Farms had stayed in the same families for much of this period, and there was little outward migration. PE43 is generally sympathetic to this transmission. There was little urban disdain for rural superstition, although her presentation of the legend was not uncritical.

The legend details are changing. PE43 recounted variants in which the apparition was the farm labourer of older accounts, a 22-25 year old of unspecified occupation, or a child. One older farmer believes the legend as an active premonitory tradition. He discusses it in the village pub, and admits to caution about going out when the apparition might appear. Some younger people in the pub tease him about this. This might suggest a demographic shift driving anti-ruralism, but among them are several

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[25] Virtanen, 'Have Ghosts Vanished?' in *Folklore Processed*, pp. 225-231; *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, ed. Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf, Nordic Series, 15 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 2-3.

[26] Virtanen, 'Have Ghosts Vanished?', pp. 228-9.

[27] Virtanen, 'Have Ghosts Vanished?', p. 226.

[28] Virtanen, 'Have Ghosts Vanished?', pp. 229-230.

[29] Virtanen, 'Have Ghosts Vanished?', p. 231; Dégh, *Legend and Belief*, p. 447 fn15.

[30] Ulo Valk, 'Ghostly Possession and Real Estate: The Dead in Contemporary Estonian Folklore', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 43.1 (2006), 41-2.

[31] But note informants here from these areas, including 5 Swedes, one Icelander, and one Estonian.

[32] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), Chapters 27, 29, and 30 (pp. 877-895, 905-913).

who have described their own ghost experiences to PE43. This is a shift in legend narrative and the nuanced content of the beliefs, not an end to ghost beliefs.

Ethnographic research reveals a willingness to discuss ghost beliefs, and points to changes within the structure of narratives and beliefs. There is often surprise at findings about beliefs that may sit awkwardly with expectations. These may dictate readings of available data. If every poll since the Second World War has shown substantial ghost belief (regardless of disputes over trends), it should not be surprising when another poll claims this.[33] Potential informants negotiate the researcher, too, perhaps thereby influencing the resultant findings.[34]

Demographics of discussion

This enables us to examine the argument that the adaptation of beliefs works at different rates institutionally and individually. It highlights problems of reporting and interpreting reports. Restrictions were apparent. From a family willing to discuss their beliefs, PE66 nevertheless expressed caution about doing so. Some people 'just think we're making things up', so she based her decision on an assessment of the interest and likely response of the interlocutor. She would not 'have just randomly mentioned it', but taking this seriously involved assumptions about me. Researching must mean 'either you had experience in it or you were receptive to it', she said, before admitting 'I don't know what your motives are behind your research.' PE20 asked bluntly whether researchers had 'got away from treating psychics as fraudulent or deluded'. PE71 was surprised at my non-belief. PE13 refused to discuss until he heard I did not believe. PE78 had said 'Doesn't everybody have a ghost experience?' and PE55 replied flatly 'No'. PE13 also dismissed this, pressing me for my position before he would speak openly.

This suggests a tendency to under-report belief, similar to the tendency to over-report institutional practice.[35] Admitting to apparently heterodox beliefs may be felt to be socially isolating and diminishing. Discussing them may be felt to undermine social authority. QU43, an atheist who did not believe in ghosts and actively sought rational medical explanations for ghost experiences, expressed anxiety about what impression even completing the questionnaire might give. This should not be overstated. Survey evidence suggests such beliefs are less heterodox than their limited ambit of regular transmission may initially indicate. Informants recognised this. The other element against apparent social isolation is that informants, though cautious, did not hide their beliefs. This illuminates aspects of the adaptation of beliefs and their expression, at individual and institutional levels. The levels of negotiation involved point corroboratively to these as separate, but interlocked, registers.

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[33] 'Believe in God? Oh, No. But I Swear by Little Green Men, Ghosts and Mediums', *Daily Mail*, 24 November 2008, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1088824/Believe-God-Oh-But-I-swear-little-green-men-ghosts-mediums.html> [accessed 7 October 2010].
[34] Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 26; Gillian Bennett and Kate Mary Bennett, 'The Presence of the Dead: An Empirical Study', *Mortality*, 5.2 (2000), 155.
[35] C. Kirk Hadaway, Penny Long Marler, and Mark Chaves, 'What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at US Church Attendance', *American Sociological Review*, 58.6 (1993), 748-9.

There are varied expectations that belief changes with age. Some informants speculated that older people would become more willing to admit or adopt ghost beliefs. PE64 suggested the growing proximity of death would focus attention on an afterlife. PE63 thought people might instead feel less need to conform to popularly held beliefs. Data here are limited. Questionnaire results indicated age with some accuracy. A general assessment of age was roughly possible in person. Assessing the age of correspondents was not always possible.[36] Correspondents were not always asked directly about changes in their beliefs over time. Within the available data, no clear pattern was discernible of ghost belief emerging or decaying correlative to age. It remains questionable whether other evidence supports higher belief among older people: most recent data suggest the opposite. American figures for 2003 indicated 51% belief across the population as a whole, with belief concentrated among younger respondents. Among those aged 25-29, 65% believed, dropping to 27% for those over 65.[37] A 2005 British survey showed similar trends, with belief declining from 48% for the 18-24 age group to 19% among the over 65.[38] Surveying 20 years of French polls, Boy identifies a greater belief in the paranormal among those under 49.[39]

The oldest questionnaire respondent, 82-year old QU39, discussed changes to his religious beliefs in relation to his engineering training, but claimed his beliefs in ghosts and contact with the dead had not changed at all. The 78-year old QU35 was attentive to the relationship between 'superstitious' beliefs and religious doctrine, seeking a holistic view of them. Although such holism does not always successfully assimilate folkloric beliefs to institutional ones, efforts occurred more frequently among churchgoers than non-believers. This may be connected to the relationship between belief and practical responses to supernatural accounts.[40] Even so, QU35 said her beliefs had not changed over time.

Given her serious thought throughout, this is likely to reflect her thinking accurately. There is a problem of the awareness of changes to beliefs over time as represented in repeated (or unstated) narratives. Circumstantial evidence from correspondence suggests such factors are more important than expected broad trend changes predicated on age. EM74 sent accounts of three experiences. From their date range he was no younger than his early 60s. The reports were 'written a long time ago', and copied from previous files. He had also submitted them elsewhere. Two earlier experiences (1963-65 and mid-1970s) seem to have been written up in the 1990s, possibly as late as when he wrote up the 1995 experience, suggesting slower sustained development rather than an age-specific shift in beliefs.

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[36] Reasonable accuracy is possible for 16 of the 78 correspondents. In four cases a youngest possible age can be inferred.
[37] Humphrey Taylor, 'The Religious and Other Beliefs of Americans 2003', *The Harris Poll*, 11 (26 February 2003), <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=359> [accessed 20 February 2008].
[38] Populus, 'Moral, Ethics and Religion Survey for *The Sun*', <http://populuslimited.com/uploads/download_pdf-090405-The-Sun-Moral-Attitudes.pdf> [accessed 20 February 2008], p. 31.
[39] Daniel Boy, 'Les Français et les para-science: vingt ans de mesures', *Revue Française de sociologie*, 43.1 (2002), 39.
[40] Jacqueline Simpson, 'Belief and Disbelief: Is Neutralism Possible?', *Talking Folklore*, 1.4 (1988), 12-16. I have benefited greatly from discussion with her.

These transmission patterns suggest accounts circulate within fairly limited ambits. No intuitively obvious transmission group appeared as a 'natural' location. Beliefs and disbeliefs were transmitted and discussed through families, without easy patterns emerging. PE16's grandmother thought her paranormal investigation made her a 'devil worshipper'. PE43, PE66, and PE76 spoke of more positive engagement with their grandmothers. PE43's grandmother had herself received grandmaternal transmission. The family was a context for discussion, but this did not imply inevitable transmission of beliefs. Respondents were asked whether their beliefs were different to those of family members, and to give details. The responses are evenly spread across four main categories indicating definite or probable sharing or difference of belief. Of the 45 questionnaires, 10 expressed a definite similarity of belief, while 12 thought they shared belief with other family members. Eleven indicated definite differences, with six indicating probable differences. Two contained no response, two said 'Don't Know', and one respondent had no family. The remaining respondent, QU14, replied 'VERY MIXED'.

This latter may be the key. Respondents could complicate and qualify their answers. Of the 11 respondents asserting definite differences between their beliefs and those of family members, five indicated that there were, nonetheless, individuals with whom they shared, or might share, beliefs. QU33 wrote that 'adult members of my family do not share my beliefs. I think my sister holds similar views, though.' Two of the 10 who asserted a definite sharing of beliefs also noted the presence of individuals with different views within the group. A third individual in this group, QU39/PE109, answered 'No' to the question of differences, but described an interpretative analysis of an apparition experienced by his wife. In person he criticised his daughter's tolerance for ghost beliefs, so the definiteness of his written answer should be tempered. Similarly some responses within the largest group (those who thought they shared beliefs with their family) were far from assertive. QU17 began 'As far as I am aware …' The non-believer QU2 wrote 'I'm pretty sure my brothers don't believe in ghosts, but to be honest I have never asked them!' QU5 said most of her family shared her non-belief, apart from her mother. QU28 predicated similarity of belief on his conceptual understanding of the possibility of determining the truth of such questions, but there was no evidence they had discussed this together.[41]

There was evidence of some agreement, but it was not inevitable. The family was one location among many for discussing ghost beliefs. It offered small group discussion opportunities, but did not dictate them. Nor was agreement inevitable within chosen relationships. The non-believer QU39 said his wife had several times seen her late mother, asking 'Was she dreaming or was it an hallucination?' Other respondents pointed to partnerships, often of more recent standing, where uniformity of ghost beliefs was not the case. EM9 said she 'believe[s] there may be such a thing as ghosts, although science and my physicist husband tells me otherwise.' She described a discussion practice where they 'try to work out logical explanations' for anomalous experiences. QU16 said her mother 'is also a believer but my step-dad thinks it is a load of rubbish'. QU16 indicates the limitations of the family as a transmission group, and how some respondents found more sympathetic environments. She became a (non-coven based) pagan/wiccan. She shared much discussion of ghosts with her

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[41] Answering 'Are your beliefs different to other members of your family …?', he wrote 'No. No-one knows for sure.'

partner (QU12), but without any identical creedal background. The creedal setting, itself another form of small group, is particularly pronounced in coven-based Wicca.[42] Given the eclectic tendencies of the religious form, trends towards creedal homogeneity are most likely to manifest at coven level. Dynamic small group status also applies for paranormal investigation groups. These often break apart over working relationships, but new formations gel quickly because of some common beliefs. Internal group dynamics were obvious. PE82 led her group, but PE33 had definite authority and experience. In fact this was only her third vigil, and the group was barely six months old. PE33's authority reflected her seriousness about ghostly phenomena. Compared with such agreement on basic principles, the family is too diffuse for comfortable discussion.

The possibility of discussion is more important than agreement. Negotiation can rest on existing traditional narratives, even if they are rejected. Not everyone need agree with the propositions advanced by other participants. This has implications for the social context in which such stories are circulated, and how this impacts on the development of beliefs. At a personal level, we are not seeing direct determination of belief by social group. Some believers may seek sympathetic groups of co-thinkers. This may not mean agreement on every detail, but an atmosphere supporting discussion. It does not preclude disagreement. This suggests the transmission of new culturally- and temporally-specific adaptations, and the lengthy historical stability of other traits. The adaptive turn towards different transmission and discussion groups also suggests how heterodox beliefs may exist and circulate alongside more formal beliefs. Rae-Ellis reports a very young child who saw a 'white-haired old lady' in the chair used by his late grandmother. His mother said she and her husband 'are practising Anglicans and do not believe in ghosts. But our son was too young to be playing tricks.'[43] She accepted some other register of discussion contiguous to, but not identical with, her congregational views.

That story cannot be taken as evidence of transmission of a tradition, but it indicates an elasticity of belief following traditional motifs. The interpretation that this was the child's grandmother came not from the percipient but from the orthodox non-believers in ghosts. Motifs and associations can remain relatively constant over long historical periods in part because they are not assimilated into an institutional orthodoxy. Their anomalous status is guaranteed, and they remain vehicles for personal statements of belief because they remain current in oral circulation.

The question of orality is complicated by the influence of Victorian psychical research on the intellectual history of ghostlore. Linking crisis apparitions to investigations of veridical hallucination played down the significance of traditional transmission of such narratives in both directions. Focusing on current attested accounts ruled out the relation of earlier accounts by subsequent generations. Little attention was paid to the possible later transmission of accounts, or to their narrative use.[44] These stories remain common, nonetheless. They were recorded here from

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[42] Nikki Bado-Fralick, 'A Turning on the Wheel of Life: Wiccan Rites of Death', *Folklore Forum*, 29.1 (1998), 6, 8-9.
[43] Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *True Ghost Stories of Our Own Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 80.
[44] Chapter 12, 'Death-Coincidences', of Henry Sidgwick *et al*, 'Report on the Census of Hallucinations', *PSPR*, 10 (1894), 207-244.

percipients and from those who had heard them from others. Limited focus on the veridical nature of crisis apparitions has also prevented making broader connections between these narratives and other omen traditions. The close links with other motifs relating to family farewells are downplayed by veridical approaches. Some traditions are creedal: the Hindu PE25 burned candles to ease the passage of the soul, in accordance with her religious doctrine, but she also spoke of the house being cold until the candle had burnt through. Domestic narratives of the farewell visit, unconnected to institutional doctrine at all, fed into continued attentive domestic presences. We might include EM13's father visiting her house for the first time, or even EM11's conviction that 'the cat that recently adopted me is a reincarnation of an old boyfriend.'

Stories tend to be circulated informally, enabling the transmission of themes and motifs over long historical periods. Notwithstanding the adaptations of motifs under immediate cultural impact, this kind of transmission operates more slowly than the adaptive development of institutional reactions to ghost motifs. Little will be said here about the place of psychophysical mechanisms in this process, but they can be understood as part of the same trend. Agreement on the existence of sensory stimuli and responses does not result in agreement on their interpretation. Although still at an early stage, cognitive studies of religious beliefs are interpretable, much like Hufford's sleep paralysis work. The relationship between objective experience and interpretation remains complicated, but informants know this. Their awareness of likely sensations and experiences, and of ways of narrating these and other ghost accounts, suggests these are worked through as much in personal deliberation as in academic discussion.[45]

The syncretic institutional model and its implications

This may further reflect cautions over narrating experiences. Repeated narration can shape an account to existing narratives. This does not mean that all anomalous experiences will automatically be told as memorates and turned into recognisable legends, nor that narrators are conscious of available motifs in advance. This combination of restraint and narrative styles contributes to the longevity of certain expressions of belief informally. The situation is different where narrative structures are shaped institutionally. Institutional narratives should not automatically be taken as dictating doctrinal attitudes. The slow undercurrent of informally-expressed beliefs informs, and is informed by, creedal positions which are themselves contributory factors in the idiosyncratic syncretism. Those creedal positions, through institutional articulation, are more liable to immediate collective change. Objective experiences may be personally renegotiated in the absence of clear-cut explanations.[46] Outsiders familiar with the phenomenon may then inform subsequent discussions: the non-believer PE74 was pleasantly surprised to learn his was a recognised condition. However, the initial attempt to comprehend or assimilate the experience is conducted individually (sometimes over a long period – 20 years in PE74's case), without any

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[45] Like PE80's curiosity about meta-narratives.
[46] Chapter 5, 'The Old Hag and Culture', David J. Hufford, *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*, Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series, 7 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 171-244.

apparent consensus. Institutional collective frameworks may serve also to shape narratives into conformity.

Spiritualism provides an opportunity to see the social effect of institutional conformity combined with the slower maintenance of beliefs individually. It occupies a specific place in the historiography and sociology of afterlife beliefs, and offers a dominant paradigm for nineteenth-century history of ghost beliefs. It loses some historiographical appeal as it declines institutionally.[47] Its historical course is sometimes seen rather schematically: after initial rapid growth, attracting radical support, numbers dropped before the First World War. Interest swelled after 1918, although membership remained small. A smaller peak followed World War Two, but it remains numerically insignificant. This downplays any deeper impact beyond affiliation. That Spiritualism survived at all suggests a more thoroughgoing effect on belief structures than is often acknowledged. This was predictable.[48] Having made an institutional leap in the first place through its radical adaptation of traditional beliefs, Spiritualism has since used those adapted belief structures to fuel the further conservative development of traditions.[49]

The disparity between deeper impact and institutional expression can be gauged from figures for the Second World War, when Spiritualism was for the first time officially recognised as a religion for service personnel. Only 521 army personnel, of a muster of 3 million, were officially registered as Spiritualists in 1942. A class bias is discernible: 504 were officers. This might under-represent not just interest but also active involvement. As cross-identification with other denominational groups contributes to reduced Census numbers, so low official numbers obscure non-affiliated practice. From 1941 the navy permitted Spiritualist services, space permitting, suggesting a reach beyond registered affiliates. In 1944 there were estimated to be around a million believers in Spiritualism in Britain, attending one thousand churches and fifty thousand home circles.[50] The figures point towards broader informal consideration of Spiritualist ideas. An editor of *Psychic News* called its legal recognition 'the kiss of death'.[51] A practitioner's concerns for institutional survival are understandable, but we should not take such a restricted view. What we see here is not a declining oppositional belief. The belief persists, outside its dwindling institutional vehicle.

Its politics

The distinction may be corroborated by historiographical connections between Spiritualism and some political radicalism.[52] In part this reflects an attempt to

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[47] G.K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Jennifer Hazelgrove, 'Spiritualism after the Great War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10.4 (1999), 404-430.

[48] Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (London: Longmans, Green, 1894), p. 64.

[49] Hazelgrove, 'Spiritualism after the Great War'.

[50] Malcolm Gaskill, *Hellish Nell: Last of Britain's Witches* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002), p. 175.

[51] Bill Neech, quoted in Simeon Edmunds, *Spiritualism: A Critical Survey* (London: Aquarian, 1966), p. 99; Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, p. 347.

[52] Barrow, *Independent Spirits*.

understand the apparent scientism espoused by early Spiritualism, which has been criticised for posing 'both as a scientific and a religious cult'.[53] In some countries its scientism enabled Spiritualism to acquire a 'spiritualistic leftism'.[54] Spiritualism was an acceptable vehicle for progressive anti-clericalism, and condemned accordingly.[55] This led some historians to link Spiritualism's growth to radical movements. The movement has had some political content, Robert Owen talking of 'the spiritual social state'.[56] The connection between Spiritualism and radical thought is not straightforward. A radical espousal, where it happened, need not imply that the afterlife beliefs were themselves radical, nor that Spiritualism represented an unbroken continuity of radical thought. There are nuances in its institutional expressions. Similar points apply with contemporary witchcraft.[57]

The experience of social crisis contributes to the institutional expression of beliefs. Popular connections are drawn between supernatural belief and economic anxiety.[58] The historical record suggests connections, but these are directly expressed less in personal beliefs than in congregational structure.[59] The most active political informant here, PE74, has been a socialist all his adult life, and has no spiritual beliefs. This did not preclude unexplained experiences, which he had not discussed widely. He had experienced the sensation of a cat sitting on his lap then jumping to the floor. Others present had also mentioned seeing something jump down. He did not believe this was supernatural, which made his willingness to share it more noteworthy. Unlike the intended entertainment described elsewhere, PE74 told this purely to assist with the research. PE72, also a non-believer, discussed her friends' experiences to assist with the negotiation of belief structures undertaken here.

Experiences and beliefs are not shaped directly and immediately by economic standing. The Fox sisters' rapping was a novel development of older beliefs and ideas, but it took place within an increasingly tense economic and political situation. The context contributes to the idiosyncratic movement's drive towards organisational structure, and explains how its individuality could be identified as broadly radical. It is unsurprising that Spiritualism became a vehicle for contesting slavery.[60] Victoria Woodhull, whose Spiritualism was abolitionist and radical, embodies the problematic networks. A sometime member of the International Workingmen's Association she

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[53] Basil Matthews, 'West Indian Beliefs and Superstitions', *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, 6.3 (1945), 140.

[54] John Warne Monroe, '*Cartes de visite* from the Other World: Spiritism and the Discourse of *Laïcisme* in the Early Third Republic', *French Historical Studies*, 26.1 (2003), 121; Lisa Abend, 'Specters of the Secular: Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century Spain', *European History Quarterly*, 34.4 (2004), 507-534.

[55] Monroe, '*Cartes de visite*', 141.

[56] Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, p. 25.

[57] Margot Adler, *Drawing down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*, 2nd edn (Boston: Beacon, 1986), p. 207; Adrian Ivakhiv, 'Nature and Ethnicity in East European Paganism: An Environmental Ethic of the Religious Right?', *The Pomegranate*, 7.2 (2005), 194-225.

[58] Simone Stewart, Mercury FM News, 14 September 2009.

[59] Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, pp. 72-3.

[60] R. Laurence Moore, 'Spiritualism and Science: Reflections on the First Decade of the Spirit Rappings', *American Quarterly*, 24.4 (1972), 474.

brought radicalism behind her Spiritualism rather than vice versa.[61] She also exemplifies Spiritualist communication's possibilities for women, which echoes through new religious formations today.[62]

Orthodox institutional models

This political involvement also reflects the scales of loss. Many informants spoke of personal and domestic intercessions, intensifying at times of stress. QU9 wrote that 'in time of bad illness/stress I often feel presence of my mum'. She had had 'no actual sighting although maybe from the corner of my eye'. PE66's grandmother was visited by her nursemaid's ghost at 'significant periods in [her] life' to 'make sure she was ok'. EM65, who lost his wife four years ago, thinks strange things that have happened since are her keeping him company. They did not look to institutional outlets for these personal stresses. Although PE66 discussed the interaction between ghost beliefs and orthodox religious positions, this periodic intensification of personal experience did not directly influence any institutional preferences of her grandmother, nor any that might have been transmitted through family practice to her. QU9 had 'no [religious] beliefs', but took seriously the implications of her ghost belief. She 'avoided [any other sort of contact between the dead and the living] as I may "awake" something.' The Anglican PE28 expressed anxiety about exploring questions of ghosts for fear of 'unleashing something dangerous'. This confirms again that the beliefs are related, but have no immediate causal connection. This is consistent with the genres used to discuss catastrophic stories.[63] Myth is the genre on which religious doctrinal agreement centres or around which negotiation of such doctrines takes place. Accordingly, the mythic drive of large-scale significant events could be expected to further institutional developments in ways the legend-generating tendency of smaller-scale local and personal tragedies would not.

This creates problems when we consider blurred categories of identification on the basis of religious practice and ethnic group, as with Jewish informants. Milton M. Gordon explored this distinction between group identification at historical and participatory levels.[64] It may be difficult to assess accurately outward conversion rates. Inward conversions are more easily documented.[65] Religious co-identification

[61] Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (London: Granta, 1998), p. 332, p. 306.

[62] Alex Owen, 'The Other Voice: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism', in *Language, Gender and Childhood*, ed. Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Urwin, and Valerie Walkerdine (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 34-73.

[63] Ilana Harlow, 'Unravelling Stories: Exploring the Juncture of Ghost Story and Local Tragedy', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 30.2/3 (1993), 178; Dell Hymes, 'Folklore's Nature and the Sun's Myth', *JAF*, 88.350 (1975), 358.

[64] Rosan A. Jordan, 'Ethnic Identity and the Lore of the Supernatural', *JAF*, 88.350 (1975), 370-382.

[65] In 2006 conversion in Israel increased from both Judaism and Christianity to Islam, with little corresponding counter-conversion. The numbers are small, even in a total population of only 7.2 million, Nuri Palter, '2006: More Jews Converting to Islam', (13 July 2006), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3274735,00.html> [accessed 31 October 2010]; Moti Bassok, '2006 Report: Israel's Population 7.2 Million, Growing Slowly', *Haaretz* (9 September 2007), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/2006-report-israel-s-population-7-2-million-growing-slowly-1.229206> [accessed 31 October 2010].

need not imply doctrinal unanimity. It may be harder to identify shifting responses at an institutional level in the same way as with conversions to younger and more eclectic organisations like Spiritualism or Wicca. Rabbinical traditions of discussion and dispute may obviate outward conversion by accommodating the eclecticism of younger organisations, but this remains an open question. More important is how religious identity operates differently to personal belief.

Orthodox models of no institution

Spiritualism undermined the authority of established institutions in two regards. In its informality, Spiritualism contended for congregants' spiritual allegiance. Its suggested radicalism also made Spiritualism a possible vehicle for opposition to the social structures on which those organised religious institutions rested.[66] This needs to be tempered. The tendency for radicals to move towards Spiritualism often followed the defeat of previously held political positions. Even so, Spiritualism could be viewed as having 'secular' tendencies. Its appeal to scientific terminology set it somewhat apart from establishment religions. That this departure from official religious institutions could be characterised as 'secular' (without deeper consideration of actual beliefs) indicates how far 'secularisation' has been considered chiefly in terms of the institutions losing members.

Such trends may only be discernible in the longer course of transmission and may not appear within one generation, but the tendency can be seen in narratives resting on technical knowledge. Broadly spiritual beliefs are increasingly informed by scientific knowledge. As this may develop and shape beliefs outside the older-established religious bodies, it could be read as evidence of secularisation. However, it is often part of a tendency towards an eclecticism of belief structures and institutions themselves. It is difficult to assess accurately how pervasive institutional belief structures were at previous historical junctures. Various doctrinal interpretations can be read in the available evidence. This may illustrate a range of nuanced beliefs but it does not identify who might have been outside the discourse completely. Into the modern era it becomes easier to assess distance from a dominant religious institution. Not everybody outside a religious institution is as far removed from its philosophical conceptions as might at first appear. Today it is culturally viable not to belong to an official religious institution, even as a dissenter.

The dispute has been whether this constitutes a secular turn away from religion. This is not to propose the relativist panoply of 'secularisms' of some cultural theorists.[67] This might undermine the notion of secular distance from religious institutions by relativising the concept so far as to include non-secular heterodox belief systems among its secularisms.[68] This type of relativism would support accusations that secularisation may be 'largely the product of its critics'.[69] 'Secular' is used here to

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[66] Barrow, *Independent Spirits*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-18; Antonio Melechi, *Servants of the Supernatural: The Night Side of the Victorian Mind* (London: Heinemann, 2008), p. 155.
[67] Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, 'World Secularisms at the Millennium: Introduction', *Social Text*, 64.18.3 (2000), 1-27.
[68] Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 'World Secularisms', 6-7.
[69] Frank J. Lechner, 'Catholicism and Social Change in the Netherlands: A Case of Radical Secularization?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 136.

indicate a more thorough rejection of belief. PE74, PE63 and PE99 thus have a thoroughly secular outlook, and are somewhat unusual in their articulation of it. Other informants demonstrated secular leanings, most evident in their complete removal from religious institutions, but with blurring and complications at an idiosyncratic level. This argument may undermine the possibility of following secularising tendencies with the (possibly misleading) statistical clarity sought by sociological commentators, but it does so by giving a more accurate assessment of what is actually believed.

By focusing on official institutions as already constituted, much sociological argument misses the different development and transmission of belief at a less formal level, and adaptations and development within institutions. Recognition of syncretism sometimes awaits its institutional fulfilment.[70] Davie identifies Bruce's position that belief is 'largely dependent on practice' as driving his conviction that secularisation is happening. She cannot decide where to follow her own, more interesting, position that Britain is '"unchurched" rather than simply secular'.[71] Bruce's position is undermined by his refusal to see 'practice' outside official institutions. Where he does acknowledge 'supernaturalist beliefs' that are 'more popular than involvement in the institutions that promoted them', he claims they are 'in decline'.[72] His assessment of beliefs fits with this, but not with what we have encountered. Beliefs, he writes, 'are strongest when they are unexamined and naïvely accepted as the way things are.'[73] This accords with a memetic view of religion, but fails to distinguish how beliefs are actually discussed. It may reflect the limitations of statistical evidence.[74]

Bruce partly bases his assessment on institutional impact on civic social structures. He discounts the Spiritualist upsurge after the First World War because it happened outside the official churches.[75] He can thus sidestep questions of heterodox influence on orthodox doctrine. He treats Spiritualism solely in its Victorian/Edwardian form, regarding it as an undemocratic practice because it requires gifted insight for communication with spirits.[76] This ignores the democratic availability of the gift (available to all, as PE12 insisted), and the continued pervasive influence of Spiritualism. Bruce argues in circles that 'The state, civic society, the polity, and the economy remain unaffected' by New Age developments, and that this 'low impact and low salience' are due to the individualism of New Age beliefs, the very individualism which makes them more successful than Spiritualism. PE23's willing espousal of any Christian congregation, whilst also embracing a whole range of family and personal traditions, should indicate the problems with such an assessment of institutional fortunes. Sociological surveys seem somewhat backward-looking in their consideration of the state of institutions: the arguments between medievalists

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[70] Lorne L. Dawson, 'Anti-Modernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism: Struggling with the Cultural Significance of New Religious Movements', *Sociology of Religion*, 59.2 (1998), 141.
[71] Grace Davie, 'Religion in Modern Britain: Changing Sociological Assumptions', *Sociology*, 34.1 (2000), 115.
[72] Steve Bruce, 'The Truth about Religion in Britain', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 34.4 (1995), 425. The statistical premise itself is arguable.
[73] Steve Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 130.
[74] Tom Inglis, 'Catholic Identity in Contemporary Ireland: Belief and Belonging to Tradition', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 22.2 (2007), 209-210.
[75] Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain*, p. 116.
[76] Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain*, p. 118.

about clear-cut distinctions between official and unofficial religious belief could usefully illuminate the limitations of these surveys.[77]

Individualism is also a problem within secularisation arguments. Post-Reformation religious liberalism, coupled with Enlightenment rationalism, has informed emic views of beliefs. Bruce argues against a view of a religious 'free market' and the 'latent demand' for a 'supply side' religion.[78] Under that argument, the breaking of a monopoly of religion would lead to the proliferation of religion through competitive production. Bruce disagrees, but cedes ground because he cannot see religious practice outside of formal congregations. Adopting the economic metaphors, he argues that dissenters have 'created their own supply' and organised 'their own formal shared expressions of that faith'.[79] Neither side sees the development of religious expression in any wider socio-historic context, which is all the more astonishing since they are looking solely at institutional expression. There is some historical connection between economic formations and forms of religious expression, but these comments offer dehistoricised views of economic structures.

This model has found less success with an increasingly pluralistic spiritual landscape partly made up of the movement of longer-established congregations.[80] Eclectic new religions are as informed by older religious institutions as they are by informal traditions. The complicated network of traditions expressed by QU12 and her partner QU16 is the most extreme example here, but it illustrates how far existing institutions are blurred and amalgamated into new congregational forms. Personal informal traditions are also a factor in their resulting expression of beliefs. This currently finds little institutional outlet, but it is conceived of in terms of existing institutions. It is not a rejection or abandonment of institutional forms.

Some categories of spiritual beings, including ghosts, move when communities migrate. They indicate the kind of continuum here. Supreme monotheistic beings are unrestricted, being all-encompassing by definition. As locally specific beings of legend, lower categories of supernatural entities may be unlikely to travel, although they may prove surprisingly flexible. Belief in the universal Allah led PE51 to believe in local manifestations of supernatural conflict. QU12, who saw herself as a Christian of some kind, agreed with 'the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed', simultaneously complicating and reinforcing her beliefs. Ghosts may be locally restricted, like the mischievous but helpful Admiral Byng described by PE22, or capable of making contact across vast distances, like PE88's great uncle drowned on the *Lusitania*. A broader theoretical framework of understanding, even if relatively unexplored, may allow enough leeway for such variations. At the level of personal belief, the multicultural pluralising of local religious observation may provide further flexibility. When PE12 described performing an exorcism for a family 'from Bali' (presumably Thailand), she was amused by specific cultural differences in relation to the spirits ('there were candles everywhere' she laughed) but used this to corroborate the general thrust of her belief. There were similarities between her position and PE23's assertion 'you all worship the same god'. One reason for warning against easy identifications of

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[77] Watkins, "'Popular Religion'", 140-142.
[78] Bruce, 'Truth about Religion', 417.
[79] Bruce, 'Truth about Religion', 427.
[80] Lieven Boeve, 'Market and Religion in Postmodern Culture', *Theology*, 102.805 (1999), 32-3.

beliefs and customs on the basis of apparent similarity is that such associations are made emically. PE25 was interested in vernacular English death traditions around candles because of their place in Hindu burial practice. The subject was not broached automatically in her workplace, but it was not banned. When conversation began, cross-cultural comparisons and connections were made.

Established orthodox religious institutional groups offer apparently straightforward statistical data sources here. (The 2001 Census reported 558,342 Hindus among a total population of 57,103,927).[81] Within such a group, as within any group self-identified by shared doctrine, some consistency of thought and belief might be expected, even allowing for disputes and dissent. This should not blind us to the possibility of exchange with people outside such a group. The sharp increase in Hindu temples over the last period could thus be seen as an institutional response to social conditions.[82] The situation is different for religions with a longer history of building-based worship. Informal negotiation of beliefs also continues, consistent with the negotiations seen in the synagogue discussion, suggesting the unanswered question about institutional changes in Judaism could be addressed in this way. The two lines of development inform each other rather than standing apart.

The uncountable grains of wheat: statistical results and the ways forward

When PE106 said African Christian groups would not respond to questions about 'ghosts' he was highlighting particular nuances of doctrinal understanding. Such nuances, and the significance of the problems they pose, have gone largely unreflected in poll assessments. A 2003 poll hints at the difficulties: it is perhaps surprising that one per cent of American Christians appear not to have believed in god when this would appear to be the basic postulate of their religious doctrine. This might be explained away as an artefact of the poll, but other figures suggest there is something more complex at work. In 2007 only 97 per cent of self-identified 'Born Again Christians' polled as believing in god, while for Catholics and Protestants respectively the figures were 92 and 95 per cent.[83] Comparison of several data sources suggests a steady increase in ghost belief since the Second World War.[84] The proportion of stated disbelief has remained fairly constant throughout that period. Together these suggest a greater willingness to speak openly and a greater nuancing of terms rather than a surge of new belief. Harris argue online surveying is likely to be more accurate here than interviewing, where 'It is generally believed … the replies given to live interviewers tend to exaggerate the numbers of people who report the socially-desirable, or less embarrassing, behavior.'[85] This accords with other findings on reporting institutional belief, but discounts the substantial evidence of reticence

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[81] 'Focus on Religion', Office for National Statistics, 2004, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=13209> [accessed 1st March 2009], 0.98% of the total population, 18.25% of the total non-Christian population.
[82] From virtually none in 1963 to around 130 in 1995, Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain*, p. 83.
[83] Taylor, *Harris Poll*, 2003; 'The Religious and Other Beliefs of Americans', *The Harris Poll*, 119 (29 November 2007), <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=838> [accessed 20 February 2008].
[84] R. Gill, K. Hadaway, and P. Marler, 'Is Religious Belief Declining in Britain?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37 (1998), 512-513.
[85] *Harris Poll*, 2007.

about discussing non-institutional beliefs, and the possibility that written narratives might be doctrinally shaped.

There is a strong case for thinking that this upward trend still under-represents levels of belief in post mortem presences. An uncomplicated use of 'ghost' may deter participants who do believe in some sort of post mortem contact from answering affirmatively. PE12's amenability to using a terminology she did not share ('what you call ghosts') stemmed from wider belief structures, and was an apparent exception confirming this trend. These authors are not insensitive to shifts within institutional observation. The developments they identify confirm the distinction about rates of change at personal and institutional levels. They struggle to understand the relationship between institutional and informal religious belief even where they recognise a difference. In part this stems from their peculiar view of 'tradition' as a process embodied in an institution. Thus institutional forms of official religions as traditional, while beliefs outside an orthodox framework are non-traditional.[86] The latter point does not stand scrutiny, although the earlier idea usefully recognises dynamic institutional traditions. They recognise an institutional shift not reflected in less formal beliefs. They chart an increased belief that primarily affects institutions, but that is predicated on a higher positive response to non-institutional beliefs.

The trend here was for increased comparison of institutional belief at a personal level. Idiosyncratic personal beliefs were discussed in an exchange of recognisable ideas, so shifts within them were rather conservative. Institutional shifts are less apparent at an individual level, even in someone like PE7 who apparently embodies them.

Ways forward

It is possible to draw out possible developments on the basis of poll data obtained so far. Conflicting interpretations of likely social bases for belief have been noted. Some seem based on little more than the patrician prejudice that has dogged consideration of ghost beliefs throughout. The 2003 US polls indicates the distinction between registers of belief. It showed a clear decline in ghost belief in proportion to the level of education received. No such correlation was visible for belief in god.[87] A 2005 British survey of moral, religious and ethical opinions did not classify respondents by education, but allocated them by social class following National Readership Survey measures.[88] Using this scale (itself open to criticism, given changing education, employment patterns and technologies) Populus found little trend of belief, much less one fitting easily with expectations that higher educational levels lead to less belief. The 9-point variation across the four categories by no means indicated a clear trend.[89] Non-belief arguably showed a clearer trend. There was a discernibly higher level of non-belief among AB social class, but little clear direction elsewhere.[90] Boy,

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[86] Gill, Hadaway, and Marler, 'Declining?', 514.

[87] Ghost belief levels by education were 56% for 'High School or Less', 53% for 'Some College', 43% for 'College Grad', and only 36% for 'Post Grad'. The corresponding figures for belief in god were 92%, 88%, 90%, and 85%: Taylor, *Harris Poll*, 2003.

[88] The NRS categories are: AB, Managerial and professional: C1, Supervisory and clerical: C2, Skilled manual; and DE, Unskilled manual and unemployed.

[89] AB, 29%; C1, 36%; C2, 38%; DE, 34%: Populus, *The Sun*, Table 28, p. 31.

[90] AB, 68%; C1, 63%; C2, 59%; DE, 61%: Populus, *The Sun*, Table 28, p. 31.

attempting to discern French trends, interprets such nuances in terms of external pressures. He suggests belief is higher among those anxious about possible social marginalisation.[91] This still leaves gaps. Without considering how other groups equally anxious about their future might respond, this could simply be a justification for the limited figures already obtained.

There may be an argument for relating specific forms of supernatural belief to political formations in specific periods, but this requires a more concrete appraisal of the forms of organisation. Boy's attempt to understand how paranormal belief stands in the interstices of orthodox religion deserves credit, although it has problems, including the exoteric attribution of paranormal belief.[92] He identifies some stability of beliefs and of repertoires of beliefs, underlying orthodox belief structures. These underlying beliefs, he argues, are shown as people break from a worldview provided by orthodox philosophical bodies. Although suggestive this breaks down because he is insufficiently clear about these bodies and structures. He cites the Catholic Church and 'militant atheism' as structuring such worldviews: the latter example is pregnant, in light of the criticisms already raised of a Materialism which fails to be adequately materialist (and given the turn by sometime political radicals to afterlife beliefs at certain historical points), but there must be doubts about how far 'militant atheism' has current institutional structures within which such a worldview is shaped.[93]

Conclusion

Anxiety is currently mounting about employment and financial security, and questions arise about their likely impact on patterns of belief and religious observation. This research may not provide the broad-sweep statistical data to satisfy sociological surveys. It does direct the appraisal of statistical surveys for this future period, pointing the way to clarifying the character of the beliefs and practices under consideration. In particular this chapter has drawn out certain characteristics of informal ghost belief in its interdependence with institutional religious belief. These operate at different rates, and in direct response to slightly different stimuli. This examination, based on Janelli's scrutiny of different levels of causation, points to some of the historiographical problems in considering the political orientation of emergent eclectic institutional bodies, and allows for a more nuanced and perceptive reading of the data purportedly indicating secularisation. More generally, it allows a better sense of the respective characters of, and the dynamic interrelationship between, folk and institutional belief. Ghosts do not stand outside orthodox religious institutional practice, but in discursive and disputational interaction with it. This research has demonstrated the internal dialectical dynamic of the relationship between 'folk' and 'official' religion, and has highlighted the structural differences between these mutually interactive forms of cultural expression

Given the nature of the discussion in this chapter, its conclusions (unlike those of other chapters) can be considered in terms of possible or probable likely future developments in the present social and political climate. It is possible that the coming

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[91] Boy, 'Vingt ans', 44-5.
[92] Boy, 'Vingt ans', 42.
[93] Boy, 'Vingt ans', 43-4.

period will see apparently more discussion of heterodox ghost beliefs, although this will probably reflect greater scrutiny of these beliefs than their development and expansion. Even allowing for greater consideration of a diversity of esoteric beliefs, it could be expected that the enthusiastic public circulation of such material will follow traditional lines. Repeated discussion of anomalous personal experiences pushes narratives to conform to traditional patterns. The proliferation of popular paranormal magazines launched during the period of this research emphasises this somewhat conservative trend.[94] The discussion of personal underlying beliefs will still depend on local and specific circumstances, which are not predetermined or easily predictable. There is nothing inevitable or automatic about which small group formations will provide the most amenable setting for these discussions. At the same time, broader social and political questions will have a more immediate effect on orthodox religious institutions, both in their own development and in the emergence of new congregational forms from them.

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[94] *Ghost Voices*, launched January 2009, has contained articles on Harry Price, Naseby's battlefield ghosts, Borley Rectory and so forth: <http://www.ghostvoicesmagazine.com/> [accessed 19 November 2010]. The first issue of *Haunted* magazine (October 2009) featured an article on Derek Acorah: <http://www.hauntedmagazine.co.uk> [accessed 19 November 2010].

Conclusions

'where there are people, there are ghosts!'[1]

This research addresses the comments and reflections of 227 people who wrote about and discussed ghosts. Their diversity reflects the realities of contemporary society.

The research unfolded from a starting point in Hertfordshire and London. While the bulk of the interviews were conducted in the south east of England the research also attracted responses (in person and by correspondence) reflecting experiences elsewhere. Some of these were discrete from English daily life and were offered from afar. Others came from migrants who are now part of contemporary British society. The fieldwork data offer a snapshot of thinking about ghosts in Britain today. Statistically these data cannot hope to be all-encompassing nor, in their snowballing reach, can they claim to be representative of all English society. They do, however, point to the ways in which exchanges of ghost narratives and discussions of ghost beliefs unfold, and they do so in a way that is eclectic, far-reaching and not in the least insular. Unlike much previous research the comments documented here reflect a changed and changing society. This is not an antiquarian survey. It reflects a belief discussion as a dynamic process. That indicates the other major success of this research. Researching that dynamic contemporary belief negotiation has been possible only by interacting with the actual processes of discussion and narration. Many of the ideas mentioned here, from anthropological theories of fear of the dead to PE64's conviction that proximity to death will encourage afterlife beliefs, are predicated on certain essentialist assumptions. Death, certainly, is inevitable, and widely discussed, but what emerges is a rather complex set of considerations.

Various notions were examined here to illuminate and contextualise current belief in ghosts. Some were necessarily elementary. There is a tendency to take for granted vernacular terminologies and their relation to research usages. This is unwarranted, given the ample evidence of a diverse vocabulary at all periods, although it hints at the character of the negotiations here.[2] Expert identification of technical uses may not preclude the vernacular adoption of some terms in different senses. Locally specific terms may also be identifiable outside their original circulation area because they refer to recognisable objective phenomena. This is not merely a terminological question, although that should not be overlooked. Conceptualising post mortem entities involves questions of their appearance and manifesting characteristics. In discussing reasons for ghostly return it was necessary to assess social scales of loss. Certain historical themes in ghostly manifestation, and the reasons for it, were addressed here. The first two chapters deal with how and why ghosts are now

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[1] Laurie Hull, *Brandywine Valley Ghosts: Haunts of Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Atlgen, PA: Schiffer, 2008), p. 9.

[2] Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 2-3; Claude Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead: Ghosts, Ancestors, and the Transparent Veil of the Pagan Mind*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2009; first pub. Paris: Editions Imago, 1996, as *Fantômes et Revenants au Moyen Age*), pp. 125-132.

believed to manifest, within a framework of historical material. The interaction between oral, vernacular, written, and official representations has been stressed throughout. If many informants here were immediately unaware of historical continuities and discontinuities in their narratives, they were also part of an ongoing discussion and negotiation informed by those conceptions. Some, particularly those involved in organising religious institutions, were more conscious of this long historical interaction. They were conscious representatives of a process that is continuously taking place at a deeper level.

The articulation of vernacular concepts of post mortem entities is inevitably bound up with the doctrinal conceptions advanced by religious and faith institutions. These conceptions particularly informed discussions of the reasons for manifestation. However, the negotiation of ghosts was not confined to a religious or supernaturalist register. The historical interaction with other registers of material included a continued assessment of material, physical and scientific explanations for apparitions. Although a historical survey demonstrates that this aspect of the discussion is not confined to a recent period, it acquires a particular character today. The consideration of this 'scientistic' approach in Chapter Three flows directly from the preceding discussions of tropes and narrative forms, although it considers, too, more fundamental philosophical appraisals of the phenomena. Unrecognised as such by some of their proponents, these too are part of the narrative negotiation discussed in Chapter Four. There we saw some narrative methodologies flowing from, and informed by, such discussions. This can be seen directly in practical jokes, which also rely on traditional imagery. They also indicate levels at which narrative material negotiations lead towards authority figures and questions of moral regulation. This chapter deals with informal registers of discussion, but the themes are not confined to those registers. The extra-institutional stories in Chapter Four also interact with institutionally expressed structures of belief. At an idiosyncratic and personal level, this interaction is considered in Chapter Five. The possibility is explored there that these idiosyncratic beliefs and expressions may co-exist alongside institutional beliefs with which they apparently clash. These chapters consider the question of what narrative environment is utilised to discuss ghost beliefs.

The last chapter draws out the social implications of these ideas. Having examined the long slow course of some traditional themes and motifs, it is possible here to compare their development with institutional forms of belief. Attention is paid to putative social variation in belief. The development and interaction of themes, narrative forms, and institutional forms reveals complications to any predicted simple demographic patterns. Following the considerations of larger scale social impact it is possible to offer some conclusions about changing beliefs under conditions of demographic and socio-economic change. These changes are likely to take place more immediately at an institutional than a personal level. For several reasons, including the conservative transmission of traditional motifs, the sometimes constrained nature of these discussions, and the intimate character of the experiences being scrutinised, non-institutional beliefs show a slower rate of change and development. While it may not be possible to predict long-term patterns of change to these motifs, it should be possible to make suggestions about their short-term institutional impact. It should also be possible to assess where we currently are with the motifs and the beliefs they represent. I summarise here some of the findings in key areas of this discussion, and point to further potential research in this field.

For convenience the findings can be summarised by the questions posed initially: **who** believes; **what** do they believe and experience; **how** do they narrate their stories; and **how** do they understand all this in the context of their other beliefs?

Who believes?

There is a long history of expectations about who will believe in ghosts. Some are more or less disguised prejudices, although that is not grounds for ignoring them. Much documentary evidence for earlier ghost belief is found in the works of hostile commentators, a trend still seen in exoteric accusation of superstition. Such evidence remains valuable even if the assumptions behind it are not. Nor is there a direct correlation between such assumptions and their opposite. It is tempting to hope that middle-class disdain for proletarian superstition might reveal a self-reflexive anxiety about prevalence within the originating class group. Such displaced concerns about the prevalence of beliefs in other social groups say much about how such beliefs are discussed generally. They reveal little about the actual spread of beliefs, except that beliefs are spread more widely than the anxieties suggest. The expectation of ghost beliefs among classes outside the commentator's own suggests the beliefs are likely to be widespread, but can still be constructed as an exoteric viewpoint representative of other social groups.

Different social groups may find different expressive forms for what are essentially similar beliefs. More important here is their broad spread across social strata. Given that such beliefs are discussed openly, but within restricted social ambits, we might not expect to find any one socio-economic milieu inherently better suited to their development. The common expectation of finding ghost beliefs in someone else's social environment is revealing. It may contain an element of truth, with the ghost belief quite correctly identified in an outside group. However it may also serve to conceal the holding of the same or similar beliefs within the group happily identifying them in others. This may contribute to the failure to establish agreement on existing poll data, even though those data do not clearly indicate any trends.

Whatever social qualities are envisaged as likely to generate belief are outweighed in discussion by more broadly philosophical questions relating to anomalous experiences, including arguments based on science and forms of 'folk science'. There was a relative minority of manual workers here, although they were not unrepresented.[3] These data are far from exhaustive. The majority of e-mail correspondents gave no indication of their employment, skewing an absence of information. In some cases the e-mail address suggests possible employment, even though this was not discussed in their correspondence.[4] The largest group identified by employment milieu here (29 informants) was students. This group highlighted flexibility in employment patterns, and thus the limitations of viewing results solely within the confines of a snapshot of current occupation. Many of these students had

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[3] Four informants worked or had worked as builders and decorators, four talked of military experience (aside from those older informants who may have done national service), three had police experience, two were drivers, two were security guards, and one had worked as a gamekeeper.

[4] EM78 wrote from a civil service e-mail address.

worked (and continued to work) in other areas. There was a middle-class bias in the informant body, but this was not clear-cut. Continued employment flexibility, indicative in some respects of the socio-economic uncertainty described here, complicates the picture.[5] Statistical surveys by socio-economic grouping can and should be pursued more thoroughly, with greater attention to the questions being asked, but it would be wrong to see social status as the sole determinant of belief. Circulation of beliefs takes place to some extent because of a social grouping's convenience as a milieu for discussion. The discussion is not inevitable within any convenient, available or likely milieu, and such circulation is not constrained within the limits of a given social environment. Some occupations with a reputation for haunting may provide a forum of discussion that is as relevant beyond its own confines as within them. We can (and should) augment our statistical knowledge, but the way beliefs are discussed indicates why the picture obtained previously has been so unclear.

What do people believe and experience?

The e-mail correspondence also indicates directly how narratives are circulated. Even given the self-selection processes at work, these narratives point towards the influence of factors other than social position. Their content emphasises the kind of beliefs and experiences discussed. For these correspondents, as for other informants, 'ghost' encompassed a wide range of phenomena and sensations largely (but not exclusively) related to post mortem contact. Although only a few instances of bilocation and apparitions of the living were recorded here, they were volunteered within a broader discussion of 'ghosts'. Discussion prompted by the word 'ghost' was not restricted to apparitions, although many informants described anomalous figures, which also showed a traditional life in narratives beyond straightforward memorates. These figures, when unknown to the percipient, were often recognised as anomalous by their clothing. In some cases, clarifying why someone might be dressed in antiquarian clothing was part of the negotiation of their anomalous character. There were plausible reasons why some distinctive dress might not initially be identified as anachronistic, as with the ghostly monks and nurses. In other cases period clothing was invoked afterwards to explain the oddness of the experience. This highlighted again a trend towards the narrative structuring and transmission of experiences: PE34 shaped his narrative to the revelation that another witness had seen an apparition consistent with the shadow he saw. It was not that he was only interested in the story's dramatic effect, nor that he might have changed the story accordingly. From the elegant and unsettling conclusion to his narrative he then invited PE67's less aesthetically satisfying account of his experience in the same room. This narrative was less well constructed, and lacked visual elements, but both narrators saw it as generally corroborative. This trend can also be seen in cases where informants described a shadow without corroborative explanation, or the absence of a presence where one was felt to be, as recounted of several deathbeds.

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[5] Following demobilisation from the RAF PE41 has remained an active reservist whilst running his own shop and doing television work. PE1 trained as a chef, in which capacity he did his national service. A civil servant for most of his working life, he worked briefly in call-centres before his retirement.

A clear vision was not required to indicate ghostly activity. Smells, noises and voices were reported alongside vague visual effects. In some cases anomalous effects on objects were reported, and then fitted into a broader discussion of 'ghosts' generally. These were frequently understood as indicating consolatory contact by known loved ones. This was important in the way ghosts were understood. Although rarely rationalised in these terms, differences were seen between apparitions of historical figures intruding into percipients' environments and manifestations of known loved ones. These latter did not need to manifest in visually recognisable form, but their intercessions were seen as more directed and domestic. Animals were found in both categories, too. Physical contact was known across this spectrum, with an unseen touch being reported from strangers (PE95) and relatives (PE82). The engagement with points along this spectrum depended in part on the percipient's expectations and other beliefs. Apparitions unrecognisable in form (whether human or animal) were more likely to be interpreted as post mortem contact from an intimate than the random historical disjuncture of a fully formed figure. This did not mean that all such interpretations of phenomena were universally accepted, even where the anomalous character of the phenomenon was acknowledged, as with the discussion of the putative contact by the late husband of PE29's father's friend.

It would be overly simplistic to suggest a chart of interpretation mapping neatly and uniformly onto the spectrum of manifestations. While the less physically defined sensations tended to be associated with personal interventions, such experiences were not unique at either end of the spectrum. The orbs described as family tradition by PE75 and personal experience by PE22 differ only in reported origins and intents. The prevalence of figures unknown to percipients does not preclude recognisable forms either in memorates (PE60 meeting his friend) or later narrative traditions (PE88's *Lusitania* crisis apparition story). Further, dependent on the articulated beliefs of the informant, a greater or lesser degree of familiarity was established with non-related experiences, sensations and apparitions. The full range can be seen in PE95's account of an apparition at a restaurant table: her brother saw the apparition; her mother saw it and insisted on its right to be present with them; her father did not see it but accepted that everyone else would; and PE95 felt it stroke her head comfortingly (an action seen by her brother).

Part of this spectrum involved experiences described as a sensation, a feeling, or the apparent evidence of supernatural intervention. Following Bennett's work we might expect to find here mostly cases of domestic assistance, as with PE86's father seeking help in finding a lost ring. However, we also find less clear family interventions. When PE4 described being supported as he flew down the stairs there was no visible apparition. He had no clear conviction as to its origin but suggested it might have been a 'family spirit'. This has connections with ghosts felt touching informants physically, but it is also connected to other views of spirit activity. PE4's account should not be divorced from his other narrative, about a jinn-possession. For some more institutionally observant informants this kind of connection with the entities of their faith structures was clearer. Some, like PE7, directly connected ghostly contact with the possibility of sinister attack by evil spirits. More benignly this was also found in a belief in portentous apparitions. Several informants, usually with elaborated ghost beliefs, spoke of being able to foretell personal catastrophe. This was by no means unequivocally a boon. Both PE76 and PE95 discussed foreseeing a death. PE95 stopped reading tarot cards after foreseeing the death of a friend's mother. Again,

there is a link with other informants who had a more or less elaborated perspective for contacting the dead, but there is a connection with other portent traditions. These were less common, but the banshee story told by PE49 and QU44's family death omen clearly belong with these experiences in some way, although they may be of a different degree and may be read differently by the percipients.

How do they tell their stories?

These examples also point to the character of the group within which such stories are exchanged. QU44's fox portent belonged properly to his father's family. There was no indication he had seen it himself, but the narrative circulated within a specific localised ambit. The same is true of PE49, who placed her banshee experience in the context of other family experiences and abilities. The stories highlight some of the characteristics of ghost narrative found here. It was not unusual to find experiences maintained as memories for some time without being told as narratives. This was true, for various reasons, of both believers and non-believers. Certain small group settings were appropriate for the exchange of stories, but were not inevitable environments for such discussion, which often proceeded with a certain caution about the response of the audience. EM48 wrote 'It makes me feel good to share them with you as I have never really told too many people about them.' Stories might be told in social settings like pubs. There was quite often an intention to entertain with such stories, but this should not be overstated. Such accounts could be quite polished without closing down any further discussion of how they and their implications were understood. There was a tendency for some gifted storytellers to have one particularly finished narrative, like PE42's 'party piece', but this could also be supplemented by less elaborated pieces. These other narratives could set a tone in introducing a story (PE34's Black Dog comment) or could follow it, taking advantage of the impact of the narrative to explore other possibilities of belief or experience. PE11 followed his narrative about the pub, a narrative that was polished because its setting was so familiar to his listeners, with a more intimate story about his childhood that was not believed by the same audience.

There is no inherent contradiction between storytelling skill and a negotiation of the belief content of a story, and there were different negotiations of this by informants. Attention was drawn to repeated traditional motifs and tale types in oral narrative. Indices of these constitute, even imperfectly, an acknowledgement of story types and motifs already in circulation, and a recognition that they might also influence narrators. This is not to say that narrators consciously change stories to fit known motifs and tale types, much less to suggest a memetic supra-organic capacity for self-replication on the part of the stories themselves. Rather, over repeated recountings, narrators may smooth a story in line with such motifs. PE34's throwaway comment usefully illustrates the place of some of these motifs, facetiously tapping local traditions to frame a serious anomalous experience narrative.

This tendency to shape stories is balanced with the negotiation of their belief content. This applies for stories told second-hand (and/or directly for entertainment) and for memorates, but was most easily examined in stories involving some informal regulation of moral authority. Various registers of response triggered by discussions of ghosts were reported, from accounts of unexplained intimidating presences like

EM37's succubus experience to PE77's practical jokes. These registers co-existed comfortably within a serious discussion of potential meaning. Across the narrative registers we found the same investigative assessments of the narrator's reliability, of factors influencing perception, and of environmental conditions. This included assessments of scientific or scientific-sounding elements in and around the narrative and its interpretation. Chapter Three explored some of the philosophical assumptions to be found behind such methods of discussion, and how these inform some scientific attempts to understand narrative transmission. Appeals to memetics notwithstanding, similar constructions of narrative authority can also be seen in many scientific writings. The exchange of narrative items is conducted at various levels, and involvement in it is not confined to researchers, of whatever discipline. Although oral narratives have historically been differentiated from works of fiction and art, there is a complicated inter-relationship between them. Informants distinguished between art and experience, but saw points of contact. Writers and artists revealed an engagement with artistically unsatisfying personal stories. Fictional and artistic ghost stories are not the same as personal experience accounts, but may be informed by them, and may in turn inform the ways in which informants discuss their experiences. PE18, a poet, and PE62, a painter, both related experiences to artistic techniques. PE69, between readings of his fictional stories, discussed apparitions of his late grandfather.

How do they relate this to other, institutional, beliefs?

With the element of moral regulation, this ability to adjust between apparently different registers of discussion leads towards the question of how these beliefs fit the structures of more institutional belief systems like religious bodies. This work has proceeded with a caution against over-using 'formal' and 'informal' in relation to belief structures. The ghost beliefs examined here have mostly been maintained on a personal ad hoc basis, unlike the organising principles of religious bodies. In this sense 'institutional' may be slightly misleading, however, as some of the organising belief structures examined were also extra-institutional, with doctrinal identification not matched by any coordinated institutional body. Some pagans and wiccans here practise in a collective structure only occasionally, others not at all. However, similar flexibilities of formality can also be found historically in and around institutional observance, although the bodies of creedal material provide a more formal measure for recording movements and variations. Informants here and elsewhere acknowledged several different belief systems that do not necessarily sit easily together. This was not a problem, as these informants could work the disjuncture into a critical negotiation of anomalous experiences generally. For some informants, mostly self-identifying as adherents of newer religious formations, the incongruities were assembled into a more eclectic whole.

This points to an historical experience with emergent congregational forms. New institutions like Spiritualism have often been studied phenomenally without due regard for the traditional material they adapted to novel institutional ends. Similarly, focus on direct connections between the new institutional form and social and political conditions has inclined to create an underestimation of traditional elements being incorporated. An over-emphasis on the proposed radical character of the Spiritualist turn has tended to skew views of the growth of new institutions. It has also downplayed similar tendencies of negotiation and discussion in the development of

institutions. Spiritualism adapted traditional material and nonconformist doctrines alike.

This acquires greater significance today when we confront notions of secularisation. Earlier new institutional formations, like Spiritualism, were closely associated with science and radical politics. They have this reputation because of differences from the existing established religious institutions, but this does not mean they are secular as such. There may be an overestimation of the fixed character of institutional bodies without acknowledging their own negotiation with heterodox elements within their congregations. The Catholic Church has not exactly tolerated folk Catholicism, but it has engaged with popular heterodoxies like local saints' legends. This is a recognised problem within the secularism debate, but differences in the development and character of beliefs at a personal and institutional level are also discernible. An examination of ghost beliefs shows the long duration and transmission of motifs outside an institutional framework, in part because of their place in the active consideration of the beliefs themselves. A predicted collapse of these beliefs, on technological grounds, underestimates how they are scrutinised within the context of new developments. A slow decline in the currency of certain motifs (the white-sheeted apparition, say) does not equate to their discrediting. They may persist to a point where few (if any) of their specific invocations are believed, yet they continue to be invoked and retain weight because they still represent a negotiation with deeper-seated belief systems. This is not to discount technological and social changes, nor to suggest that traditional motifs and informal beliefs remain unaffected by them, but points to the informality of the belief network itself as a factor in their longevity and slow change. Social historians of new religious movements have perhaps underestimated the character of informal belief here.

The work social historians have done on Spiritualism points to a related shortcoming among some scholars of informal beliefs. A too narrow focus there leads to an underplaying of institutional development. The evidence suggests that immediate and visible changes in belief structure under given social conditions take place at an institutional rather than a personal level. Dramatic changes in social conditions may see a shift in the discussion of informal items of belief, as in Eastern Europe. However, because these beliefs are discussed discriminately even under optimal condition, they are unlikely to disappear or change overnight. The seeming disappearance of such beliefs as an immediate response to a political event is more likely to signal a shift in the availability, or advisability, of discussion than a sudden change in the belief itself. Shorter-term immediate changes take place at institutional level. These are informed by traditional beliefs, but do not reflect the cautious and complicated considerations, which are discussed at a personal level. Institutional changes in response to socio-economic conditions function as another conduit for informal beliefs, albeit one with new orthodoxies of its own. The emergence of Spiritualism reflected earlier political and spiritual millenarianisms at a period of setbacks for those political developments. Even with eclectic doctrines it constituted a codification of practice. Its short-term congregational successes (consistent with this model) were not sustained over a longer period, but have reinforced the long-term transmission of traditional belief items.

'Perchance 'twill walk again': What can we expect now?[6]

This research suggests ways of thinking about the problematic categories of 'folk belief' and 'folk religion'. It points to the connected character of 'folk' observation and its implied 'official' counterpart. Problems with these categories arose in part from a failure to consider the interaction in terms of impact on both sides of the equation. Studies of 'folk religion' sprang from two academic impulses. One treated institutional observances as a fixed constant against which to measure their folk-cultural aspects, the 'religious folklife', explicitly with the idea of sustaining the religious institution in its official form. The other looked at syncretism between religious institutions 'on different levels of civilization'.[7] The first thus focused on the existing institution, the second on the emergent body, but neither dealt satisfactorily with the resultant balance between them. This may have been due to a tendency to view the institutional form at any given moment as a fixed measure, somehow outside social pressure, rather than as part of the ongoing interaction and showing its influence. Negotiations continue between these registers, having different impacts upon them.

All this may suggest it is possible to offer some limited prognoses about the future direction of ghost belief. Difficult socio-economic circumstances seem likely to influence not so much these beliefs at a personal level but the structure of spiritual institutions. Such institutions may or may not reflect these beliefs exactly, as Spiritualism did, but their expansion and development may offer a conduit for their discussion. In the event of socio-political circumstances creating a more rationalist climate in which spiritual institutions do not fare so well, the fewer institutional opportunities for discussing ghost beliefs might lead one to expect a decline in such belief. However, such previous expectations proved misplaced as they failed to grasp both the stubbornness of folk beliefs, and their capacity for incorporating new prevailing modes of expression. The comment that 'History has triumphed over the supernatural, but it has not come away unscathed' seems a misreading of History's analytical role and the character of the beliefs themselves.[8]

This work has contained little about causation, about what ghosts are. Much of the discussion on that plane seems to me somewhat misleading. Experimental research valuably adds to our scientific knowledge in two regards. By confirming material causation it increases our understanding of phenomena that were previously unexplained and apparently anomalous. Perhaps more importantly it usefully indicates phenomena for which we do not yet have satisfactory explanations. Beyond this we enter a more speculative area. Confronted with phenomena for which we have as yet no explanations, a materialist who does not believe in the possibility of post mortem existence would look to the necessity of further investigation. Someone already open to the possibility of post mortem existence might suggest different hypotheses. Objectively occurring phenomena might be interpreted differently, with different narrative motifs being brought to bear on their interpretation. The extinction of a formerly conscious person will remain an objective part of human existence. Its

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[6] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), I.2.243.
[7] Don Yoder, 'Toward a Definition of Folk Religion', *Western Folklore*, 33.1 (1974), 2.
[8] Rhodri Hayward, *Resisting History: Religious Transcendence and the Invention of the Unconscious* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 131.

incomprehensibility will continue to encourage serious imaginative and scientific thought.

Given the repeated expectation of the end of 'superstitions', perhaps the question any researcher should be asked by informants is not whether they believe in ghosts or not, but whether they can envisage any point at which there might be no belief in ghosts. There remains the possibility that ghost beliefs might eventually die out, but this will not take place within one lifetime, even if it had begun already. Ghosts are ingrained in the cracks and hollows of human culture. They both are, and represent, the phenomena that we cannot explain fully. They are the traces of people who have gone before us, and they linger in our language to express residual sensations for which we have no better word than that they haunt us, that they remain with us when they are physically absent. Given the weight of this cultural legacy, and the slow rate of change of these traditional motifs and beliefs, we can anticipate that ghosts, true to character, will stubbornly and inexplicably persist.

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I have used the following abbreviations throughout:

JAF   *Journal of American Folklore*
JASPR *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*
JSPR *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*
PSPR *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*

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Reproduced here is the content of the questionnaire, which was formulated differently for circulation.

<div align="center">

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

CONTEMPORARY BELIEF IN GHOSTS

</div>

This questionnaire is being circulated as part of ongoing research into contemporary belief in ghosts. We are looking to gather information on people's beliefs and experiences, placing them into their social and historical context. It would be helpful if you could answer all of the questions fully. If you have further information you wish to share, feel free to put any additional information on another sheet of paper. Contact details are printed at the end of the questionnaire if there is anything further you wish to add to our research, or any questions you wish to ask. These questionnaires will be treated anonymously.

<div align="center">

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

</div>

Date:

Location of Questionnaire:

ABOUT YOUR BELIEFS

a: Are you a member of a religious body (church/mosque/synagogue etc)? If so, please give details.

b: If you answered 'yes' to (a) above, do you regard yourself as a practising member? How often do you attend?

c: If you answered 'no' to (a) above, do you have any religious beliefs? Please give details.

d: Have your beliefs changed over time? If so, please give details.

AFTER DEATH

e: What do you understand by the word 'ghost'?

f: Have you ever had any experience of such entities? Please give details. If you have not had direct experience, do you believe in them, or the possibility of them? Please give as much detail as possible.

g: Do you believe in any other sort of contact between the dead and the living? Please give details.

h: Have you yourself had any experience of contact between the dead and the living? Please describe it in your own words as fully as possible.

i: Have you heard of other such experiences from close acquaintances? Please give what details you can remember, including whether you believe their story.

j: Have your beliefs changed over time? Please give details.

k: Are your beliefs different to other members of your family, as far as you know? Please give whatever details you may have.

ABOUT YOU

l: What is your sex? (M/F)

m: What is your age now?

n: Are you in employment? If so, please state broadly the field of work. If not, please indicate your status (eg student)

o: Please indicate your highest educational qualification (eg GCSE, NVQ, A Level, Degree)

p: Although these results are anonymous, it would be helpful to have a rough geographical chart of them. Please give the first part of your postcode (eg AL10)

q: How long have you lived there? If you previously lived somewhere else, please give the first part of that postcode (eg BR3)

r: Please enter today's date (DD/MM/YY)

YOUR DETAILS (OPTIONAL)

As part of the ongoing research we may subsequently wish to talk to people about the questions raised here. Please complete this section if you would be willing to talk to a

researcher in person, or if you would like to be notified of the conclusion of the research. (Please note that this research is not due for completion until late in 2010).

Your Name:

Your Address:

Your Telephone Number:

Your E-Mail:

I would be willing to discuss further with a researcher in person   YES/NO

I would like to be notified of the conclusion of the research   YES/NO

You can also contact us if you require further information about the research, or wish to add anything further.

  THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ASSISTANCE WITH THIS RESEARCH

APPENDIX B

This reproduces the permission form and guidance notes used for personal interviews. The form also contained space for specific restrictions requested by the informant. The informant's copy provided contact details for requests for further information or clarification.

GUIDANCE NOTES

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH?

I am undertaking this research for a PhD at the University of Hertfordshire. I am studying belief in ghosts in England since the Second World War. To this end I am asking people about their beliefs and experiences.

THE SCOPE OF THE INTERVIEW

I am trying to understand current beliefs in their historical and social context. The interview will therefore not necessarily be confined just to your beliefs and experiences, but may take in wider aspects of your life like your job.

HOW WILL THE INTERVIEW BE USED?

The material I record or note during these interviews will be used for my PhD thesis, both in the form of direct quotation and in description based on what you tell me. For the purposes of the thesis, all participants will be anonymous.

I also hope to publish some of my findings in academic and educational not-for-profit publications. If you agree to be recorded, you may also indicate whether you would wish to remain anonymous in any further uses of the interview material.

The interpretation of material in the thesis and any subsequent publications will be the author's alone. To avoid misrepresentation, I will seek your clarification of contentious points prior to submission of the thesis or any subsequent publication.

WHAT HAPPENS TO ANY RECORDINGS?

All recordings, transcriptions thereof, and any field notes made during this research, will remain in my sole possession during the period of my PhD research. No commercial use can be made of the recordings without your further consent.

Upon completion of the PhD it may be helpful to other academic researchers to deposit research material to an appropriate library or archive (such as the National Sound Archive at the British Library). Any such deposit of research material would be bound by the terms of your agreement here.

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO HELP WITH THIS RESEARCH

<u>INTERVIEW AGREEMENT</u>

I hereby agree to be interviewed, and have that interview recorded,[*] by Paul Cowdell during the research for a PhD at the University of Hertfordshire.

I understand that any recordings, transcriptions thereof, field notes, and other research materials may be used in the PhD thesis and subsequent academic and educational publications.

I understand that the use of this material will be anonymous within the PhD and its thesis. I would also like to remain anonymous in any subsequent academic publication based on this research. [*]

If I do agree to the use of my name in subsequent publications I may still place restrictions on any part of the interview.

I understand that on completion of this research, copies of these research materials may be lodged with an appropriate academic archive for the use of other scholars. The

---

[*] Delete where appropriate

above agreements about anonymity and use of material remain in force under these circumstances.

This agreement does not cover any commercial use of recordings made during this interview. Any use of the recordings not authorised above shall require my expressed written consent.

I understand that if I have any questions as to the use of these materials I can contact Paul Cowdell, c/o Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Research Institute, De Havilland Campus R312, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, AL10 9AB.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone Number:

Participant's Signature:

Interviewer's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):

Interviewer's Signature:

Date:

<div align="center">THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO HELP WITH THIS RESEARCH</div>

APPENDIX C

Table A

Breakdown of responses by institutional affiliation, Questionnaire (*n*=45)

Affiliation	Number
Christian (see Table B for further detail)	16
No affiliation	14
Atheist/Humanist	7
Jewish	4
Pagan/Wiccan	4
Total	**45**

Table B

Denominational affiliation of Christian responses, Questionnaire

Denomination	Number
Church of England	7
Baptist	1
Lutheran	1
Roman Catholic	4
Generally Christian (no denomination)	2
Expressing belief in God in Christian terms without self-identification as Christian	1
Total	**16**

Table C

Breakdown of institutional affiliation (where known) from fieldnotes (*n*=110)

Affiliation	Number
Christian	12
Muslim	3
Spiritualist	2
Pagan/Wiccan	3
Hindu	1
Jewish	5
Atheist	10
Expressed general scepticism without specific affiliation	7
Expressed general religious conviction without stating affiliation	10
Involved in psychical/paranormal research	8
No affiliation information available	49
Total	**110**

Table D

Breakdown of Questionnaire respondents by age. Results given in 10- and 5-year ranges on left and right of table respectively (*n*=45)

10-year age range	Quantity	5-year age range	Quantity
21-30	13	21-25	8
		26-30	5
31-40	7	31-35	4
		36-40	3
41-50	7	41-45	1
		46-50	6
51-60	8	51-55	2
		56-60	6
61-70	6	61-65	3
		66-70	3
71-80	1	71-75	0
		76-80	1
81+	1	81-85	1
N/A*	2	N/A	2
Total	**45**	**Total**	**45**

* One questionnaire abandoned, one otherwise completed questionnaire omitted this question.