UAB
Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA ANGLESA I DE GERMANÍSTICA

The Ghost of the Subconscious: A Study of the Uncertainty of Faith in Victorian Ghost stories: *The Phantom coach*, *The Captain of the "Pole-Star"* and *The Old Nurse's Story*

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Author: Martina Busquets Costa

Supervisor: David Owen

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística

Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres

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Statement of Intellectual Honesty

Your name: Martina Busquets Costa

Title of Assignment: The Ghost of the Subconscious: A Study of the Uncertainty of Faith in Victorian Ghost stories: *The Phantom coach, The Captain of the "Pole-Star" and The Old Nurse's Story.*

I declare that this is a totally original piece of work, written by me; all secondary sources have been correctly cited. I also understand that plagiarism is an unacceptable practice that will lead to the automatic failing of this assignment.

Signature and date:

June 12, 2024

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Abstract

During the Victorian period, ghosts were particularly prevalent in fiction but, prior to Queen Victoria's reign there were concerns about the declining popularity of the genre. In her book *Visions of An Unseen World*, Handley argues that with the rise of The Enlightenment in the 18th century, traditional gospel truths, miracles and superrational intervention were aspects to be suspicious of. (Handley, 2007: 140). A century after, during the Victorian period, social, technological, and scientific improvements led to question many rooted beliefs in society, and faith became the main target, with certain branches of science proposing a limited (or non-existent) role for God in the universe (Landow, 2012). The publication of Darwin's scientific theory *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and the already existing Enlightenment beliefs, only aggravated the situation. However, stories of apparitions were still very popular during the time, but they seemed to materialise society's manifestations of fears, anxieties, and desires, emerged from the growing threat that science posed to faith.

This project aims to examine four stories (*The Phantom coach*, *The Captain of the Pole-Star*, *Was it an Illusion?* and *The Old Nurse's Story*) in a context in which religious faith was being strongly questioned. It will, therefore, study how science and faith intersect in the different stories, making the characters question their own beliefs. Furthermore, it will also explore how the portrayal of the living dead can be interpreted psychologically as derived from the anxieties and fears that the questioning of faith carried. It will be approached with a comparative literary analysis of the four stories selected, emphasising how they relate to each other and how they reflect or diverge from my thesis. The paper will follow a psychoanalytic theory framework, and it will also take thoughtful consideration of the historical and cultural context involving religion and the reception of the new scientific advances.

The beginning of the collapse of religious beliefs during the Victorian era created a tumultuous and alarming atmosphere in the United Kingdom. The Afterlife remains, still today, a mystery, prompting people to seek solace in faith. When all this crumbled, individuals were faced directly with the dubious nature of death and its aftermath. Ghost stories became, therefore, a way of dealing with this confusion. As Peter Ackroyd portrays it, a "bridge of light between the living and the dead", a "continuity … albeit of spectral kind" (cited from: Landow, 2012). For that reason, I believe that one of the most interesting ways to understand what the fall of religion meant is by analysing ghost stories. As previously stated, Victorian Ghost stories mostly explore the psychological complexities of human nature, and deal with raw emotions such as anxiety and fear. The stories, therefore, could be used as a lens through which to examine contemporary issues, such as the still prevailing power that religion has over a considerable part of society. I hope this project will be fruitful in presenting the insecurities and fears a turbulent period such as this held, especially when it directly affected religion, a rooted belief that, sometimes, represented the only source of hope and comfort for ordinary people.

Key Words: Victorian, Ghost stories, Faith, Science, Psychological

0. Introduction

I would like to start my introduction by mentioning the Italian novelist Italo Calvino. In his essay *Why Read the Classics*? (1991) he explains how, when we read a classic for the first time, we find it more surprising and magical the more we thought we knew it from hearing it discussed. Naturally, this experience only happens if the book creates a spark in us, questions us, and changes the person we were before reading it. Once we come across this book, we, somehow, become that book, and the choices we make in our life are, to a certain extent, related to it. In a literature class, I once stumbled upon *Great Expectations*, a Charles Dicken's classic, and left a mark on me; since the second page, as Calvino says, I did not read it "out of duty or respect, but only out of love" (Calvino, 1989: 3). From that day onwards, I have been fascinated by everything related to psychology, the mystery and the supernatural, but also to the time of the book, the Victorian period. I like to think that my dissertation topic has been a consequence of that day.

In this project, I aim to examine the impact the so-called Crisis of faith had on a part of society during the Victorian era. The Reign of Queen Victoria has often been described as the era of scepticism or the age of uncertainty due to a combination of several social events. Among other factors, the still-present Enlightenment principles, the increase in Biblical criticism and, especially, the rise of scientific dogmas, led to strong questioning of the established religious beliefs. For some, this crisis of faith meant hopelessness and desolation, raising new fears, and prompting many questions, as God was no longer the only answer.

The key topic I will discuss is, as mentioned before, the Crisis of Faith. While my focus will be on the emergence of scientific principles to explain this crisis, I believe it is equally important to consider other potential causes. I will briefly discuss, first, the impact that the ideas of the Rationalism movement had on society. I have chosen the essay by Joshua Bennet

A History of "Rationalism" in Victorian Britain, in which he tries to answer why the concept "Rationalism" sparked significant debate in nineteenth-century Britain, examining how the term was employed and its implications within contemporary discourse. Second, I will discuss how "Higher criticism", a type of biblical study that aimed to examine and interpret the Bible akin to any other piece of literature, had a remarkable impact on this questioning of faith. The study *Victorian Literature and Culture*, especially the chapter on "Philosophy and Religion", was very helpful in obtaining a general overview of this panorama. Finally, to consider the impact that science had during the period, I first will first examine the essay *The Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion: A Professional Dimension* by Frank Turner. In this essay, Turner assesses the conflict between these two realms and attempts to explain how this rivalry was less separated than it might have initially seemed. Second, I focused on the article *Spiritualism, science, and the supernatural in mid-Victorian Britain* by Richard Noakes, where he discusses how spiritualism challenged the prevailing beliefs in empirical scientific inquiry and scepticism towards the supernatural. As a result of this, a portion of Victorian society turned to spiritualism. In *Spirit Matters Occult Beliefs, Alternative Religions, and the Crisis of Faith in Victorian Britain,* Jeffrey Franklin portrays this change and explains the unconventional belief systems and spiritual practices that emerged in Victorian Britain due to the decline of Christian faith. To examine the impact that doubting faith could have on individuals, I considered two articles: Neal Krause's *Religious Doubt and phycological well-being: A Longitudinal Investigation,* and *Religious Doubts and The Problem with Religious Pressures for Christian Students* by Andrea C. Walker et al. Both research papers focus on the psychological impact that religious doubt can have on the individual, but their objectives differ. On the one hand, Krause's motivation is to investigate whether there is a correlation between religious uncertainty and shifts in three aspects of mental well-being over a period: Satisfaction with life, self-worth, and positivity. On the other hand, Walker, Lang, and Muñoz's purpose is

to examine the significance of higher education in nurturing students' religious growth, and how that can help in dealing with potential doubts. Finally, to have a much wider understanding of the psychological state of some of the characters of the stories, I have used two main pieces of research: Firstly, *Sensory and Quasi-Sensory Experiences of the Deceased in Bereavement: An Interdisciplinary and Integrative Review* by Karina Stengaard Kamp et al. provided me with information about the hallucinatory experiences some people have after losing a loved one. Secondly, in *Trauma Reactivity, Avoidant Coping, and PTSD Symptoms: A Moderating Relationship?* By Suzanne L. Pineles et al., I could gather information about the relationship between an Avoidant Coping strategy and PTSD Symptoms.

After carefully examining these critical resources, I have formulated the following thesis statement: The spiritual realm during the Victorian era became a way to cope with the threat that science posed to faith. The world of the deceased offered a connection between the living and the afterlife, a potential source of salvation, or, at the very least, an alternative not far removed from religion. In order to answer my thesis, I will focus on four short ghost stories: *The Phantom coach*, *The Captain of the Pole-Star*, *Was it an Illusion?* and *The Old Nurse's Story*. Therefore, the analysis will examine the intersection of science and faith within the different narratives, prompting characters to challenge their own beliefs. Furthermore, it will explore the psychological interpretation of the portrayal of the undead, tracing it back to the anxieties and fears arising from the questioning of faith. My project will be structured in two main blocks: an approximation to the context of the time (which will include the religious panorama and some of the possible causes that led to the questioning of faith), and an analysis of the four selected stories, taking into consideration my main source of interest: the increasing influence of science. I will finish the analysis with my conclusions and some brief suggestions for further research.

1. Background and Context

1.1 The Victorian Religious Panorama

The Victorian era has been often characterized as an age of doubt, or an age of agnosticism, and one marked by an "intense private angst and public debate about the states of faith and doubt" (Franklin, 2018: 2). The causes that led to this are many, and scholars do not always seem to agree on what was the leading one. I believe, nevertheless, that there was not an isolated cause that explained Victorians' struggle with religious beliefs, but a complex network of various factors. Many Victorians were starting to see a shift in their faith; although they paid close attention to observing the signs and symbols of religion, their true depth of faith may not have been as profound as is typically assumed. It is important to highlight that religious institutions were still prevalent during the Victorian reign, and they represented the foundations of social life. During the 19th century, the United Kingdom was predominantly Christian, (the vast majority Protestant) with only Judaism representing a substantial non-Christian faith. Despite the Protestant majority, there were various disagreements within the institution of the Church. The Church of England (Anglicanism) faced competition from numerous other denominations such as Evangelists, Quakers, and Catholics, each with their own doctrines. Evangelicalism represented the predominant non-Anglican Protestant form that influenced religious beliefs, and it emphasized that salvation relied solely on faith and sustained the absolute authority of the Bible. Even if it was very divided, religion played a crucial role, holding a central place in the public consciousness and intellectual life of the age. The clergy fulfilled a central function in spreading the "Word of God" through sermons and by engaging their congregations in prayer and service.[1] Although many individuals may not have been primarily guided by religious principles, viewing religion as a way to gain social acceptance based on moral grounds, I argue that the concept of God and the doctrines detailed in the Bible

[1] See Maureen Moran, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, especially "Philosophy and Religion" in chapter one.

remained highly relevant in shaping people's understanding of life, particularly concerning the afterlife. This situation may have aggravated the distress suffered by those who were still deeply religious. Furthermore, during the century, several public figures openly declared their lack of religious beliefs, threatening the domain of religion in the country. The causes of this progressive change of mind, as stated before, vary significantly, but what can be assured is that it lead to a remarkable crisis of faith, occurring paradoxically during a period with intense religious passion: "Victorian faith entered crisis not in the midst of any attack on religion but rather during the period of the most fervent religious crusade that the British nation had known since the seventeenth century, indeed during the last great effort on the part of all denominations to Christianise Britain" (Turner, 1990: 11). What interests me is not so much how this crisis affected the society as a whole, but rather how the individual dealt with it. As many serious thinkers, such as William James, have stated, "the real issue lay inward, within one's own mind" (Meyer, 1975: 58). I will therefore try to describe some of the main causes that may explain this crisis, focusing, especially, on the topic of my concern, the rise of scientific theories.

1.2 Causes of the Crisis of Faith

One of the possible reasons for this crisis of faith is a current known as rationalism or Enlightenment rationalism. During the Victorian period, many thinkers relied on rationalism to explain or guide their lives. The term can be traced back to the 17th century, and it was used to describe individuals who prioritized reason over sensory experience as the basis for understanding. Similarly, rationalism began to imply a challenge to theology during the 18th century. Some British commentators like Hugh James Rose, influenced by observations of German thinkers, expressed great concern about German biblical critics who were labelled as rationalists. These critics appeared to prioritize human reasoning over divine revelation, which caused alarm among British observers. Nevertheless, according to Joshua Bennett, "It was only

in the nineteenth century, however, that rationalism became the subject both of siren warnings and of self-conscious devotion on a scale unprecedented as well as subsequently unrepeated" (Bennett, 2018: 64). By the mid-19th century, rationalism took on a different meaning within British discourse. Figures like William Lecky and Frances Power Cobbe redefined rationalism as a form of moral theism, a historical progress detached from biblical supernaturalism. This mid-Victorian construction of rationalism aimed to rescue Christian foundations while accommodating intellectual and moral advancements. However, by the end of the century, a new generation of rationalists tried to redefine the term again, but this time, emphasizing secular and scientific norms. Rationalism was no longer identified with religion and did not attempt to create a bridge between Christianity and intellectual advances. Now it fully embraced the Enlightenment ideas of the 17th century (Bennett, 2018). Religious thinking was, therefore, under serious threat. Some scholars such as George Holyoake and Joseph McCabe promoted secularism and advocated for a separation of religion from the public sphere. They visualized a society guided by reason, incompatible with traditional religious beliefs. I believe that those ideas shook the religious foundations of Victorian society, resulting in a questioning of religious faith.

Hand in hand with the ideas of rationalism emerged the so-called higher criticism. Higher criticism, or biblical criticism, refers to a type of biblical studies that first emerged in Germany at the end of the 18th century and proliferated in Britain around the 19th. The main principle of these studies was to consider and approach the Bible similarly to any other literary work, with careful consideration of linguistic and historical principles. Therefore, it was essential to examine passages within the context of the Scripture and determine the historical circumstances surrounding the book's composition. The truth or falsehood of the Bible could be recognized through rational analysis, independent of traditional beliefs or religious authority. Some scholars such as David Strauss (*The Life of Jesus* [1835-6]), Ernest Renan (*Vie de Jesus*

[1863]), and John Seeley (*Ecce Homo* [1866]) challenged the pre-established views of many Victorians, and "with their rational, evidence-based approach to Biblical history" (Moran, 2006: 30), their ideas seemed to be convincing. Another publication in 1860, *Essays and Reviews*, questioned even further the traditional views within the Church of England. This anthology consisted of seven essays focused on religious themes, addressing subjects such as the biblical analyses conducted by German scholars, the proofs supporting Christianity, theological ideas in England, and the narrative surrounding creation in the book of Genesis. This compilation created so much stir that the essayists were called "The Seven Against Christ" and faced intense criticism from the church. This criticism of the sacred Scriptures, as Edward Breuer states, "garnered […] an immediate and intense reaction" (2021: 252), not only among scholars but also among the general Victorian population.

Finally, I now focus on what I believe was one of the leading causes of the progressive decline in faith: the rise of scientific theories. The relationship between science and religion during the 19th century is not easy to define. It would be overly simplistic to anticipate discovering a single, consistent relationship between the two since it differed over time and location, as well as from person to person. Nevertheless, it is not hard to observe that the rise of a scientific method of approaching life posed a threat to religious supremacy since the church had to face challenges and allegations that were not easy to overcome.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century in Britain, there was a prevailing perception that religious beliefs and scientific pursuits harmoniously coexisted. Perhaps because science was not yet a strong institution (since it lacked government support and had limited employment opportunities), it was still very influenced by religion. The clergy controlled access to scientific patronage and employment, and many scientists "considered the moral and metaphysical imperatives of natural theology as a proper and integral part of their vocation and not as an intrusion of extraneous categories imposed by outside institution" (Turner, 1978: 360).

In 1803, William Paley, a British philosopher and theologian, published a book titled *Natural Theology*. In this, he tried to demonstrate the existence of God by focusing on what could be observed in nature. Every animal or plant, he argued, can give us evidence of a design that can be observed from the wings of a bird to the eye of a human being. This design must have a designer, and for Paley, it was God. In the first two chapters, he uses the analogy of the watchmaker to argue for the existence of a creator, comparing the complexity of living organisms to that of a watch. According to Paley, just as the design of a watch implies the existence of a watchmaker, the complexity of living organisms implies the existence of an intelligent designer, namely God

> the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker: that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer, who comprehended its construction, and designed its use. (2009: 3-4)

The rest of this publication is dedicated to exemplifying his theory by using different analogies, such as the eye and the telescope. In this comparison, Paley describes the function of a human eye, which he observes to be extremely complex and precise, enabling humans to see. Then, he introduces the telescope, a man-made device that resembles the function of a human eye:

> The lenses of the telescopes, and the humours of the eye, bear a complete resemblance to one another, in their figure, their position, and in their power over the rays of light, viz. in bringing each pencil to a point at the right distance from the lens; namely, in the eye, at the exact place where the membrane is spread to receive it. (2009: 22)

By comparing the two objects, the author is trying to demonstrate that just as the detailed design of the telescope leads us to deduce the existence of a human designer, the even more complex design of the eye should lead us to infer the existence of a divine designer, namely God.

Almost fifty years later, in 1849, Reverend Thomas Romney Robinson stated that:

> . . . science is not necessarily wisdom. To know, is not the sole nor even the highest office of the intellect; and its loses all its glory unless it act in furtherance of the great end of man's life. That end is, as both reason and revelation unite in telling us, to acquire the feelings and habits that will lead us to love and seek what is good in all its forms, and guide us by following its traces to the first Great Cause of all, where only we find it pure and unclouded. If science be cultivated in congruity with this, it is the most precious possession we can have—the most divine endowment. But if it be perverted to minister to any wicked

> or ignoble purpose—if it even be permitted to take too absolute a hold of the mind, or overshadow that which should be paramount over all, the perception of right, the sense of Duty—if it does not increase in us the consciousness of an Almighty and All-beneficent presence,—it lowers instead of raising us in the great scale of existence. (Robinson,1850, cited in: Turner, 1978: 360)

Robinson is reminding the scientific association of the dangers of a purely scientific approach to life. Science can be useful, but without the "Almighty and All-beneficent presence", it can have a negative effect on our worth in the context of existence or society. The scientific panorama, therefore, was intrinsically related to religion, with many scholars trying to insist on the idea of a single creator, God.

Nevertheless, this harmony came under threat, with many disagreements starting to flourish. The main issue relied on the way the scientific and religious communities understood the world. As George Gaylord Simpson states:

> The conflict between science and religion has a single and simple cause. It is the designation as religiously canonical of any conception of the material world open to scientific investigation [...] The religious canon [...] demands absolute acceptance not subject to test or revision. Science necessarily rejects certainty and predicates acceptance on objective testing and the possibility of continual revision. As a matter of fact, most of the dogmatic religions have exhibited a perverse talent for taking the wrong side on the most important concepts of the material universe, from the structure of the solar system to the origin of man. The result has been constant turmoil for many centuries, and the turmoil will continue as long as religious canons prejudice scientific questions (Simpson, 1964: 214).

After the second half of the 19th century, science became, for some, a means to justify political statements. Certain branches of science, particularly those originating from France, appeared to imply a limited (or even absent) role for God in the universe, potentially challenging the authority of the Anglican political and religious establishment. The threats were not only from France, however. Significant advancements in fields such as geology, physics, or biology by British men of science threatened the interpretation of Genesis. Geological findings indicated that the Earth existed for a duration that surpassed any timeline deduced from the Old Testament. Prehistory "seemed a time of monsters and chaos, not the orderly creation of all species in six days" (Moran, 2006: 31). One of the most relevant publications of

the time was *On the Origin of Species* (1859) by Charles Darwin. As he states in his introduction, "each species had not been independently created, but had descended, like varieties, from other species" (Darwin, 2019: 3). Species, therefore, evolved gradually due to chance and mechanical natural laws, rather than through immediate Divine intervention. In 1871, Darwin examined the topic more fully and published *The Descent of Man,* where he further explores the evolutionary origins of species and discusses how the process of natural selection applies to human beings. In his book, he asserts that humans underwent the same evolutionary processes as other species, originating from simpler forms and facing the potential for extinction. Darwin's statements, as Moran explains, "kindled ferocious debate that set science and religion in opposition, hastened the advance of secularism as the dominant social framework, and influenced literary structures and themes" (Moran, 2006: 31). I believe it is relevant to point out how the panorama drastically changed from the publication of *Natural Theology*. Less than sixty years separate Paley from Darwin, yet their publications state completely different views on life: one supporting the existence of God, the other questioning it.

Religion, nevertheless, was still very present, and Darwin's book faced many criticisms, even from people belonging to his circle. Perhaps stemming from a fear of the potential validity of Darwin's assertions, George Jackson Mivart, a Roman Catholic biologist, began to have reservations regarding the adequacy of natural selection by itself in determining species. That is why, in 1871, he published a book titled *Genesis of Species*, where he argued that natural selection alone could not explain the complexity and diversity of biological forms observed in nature. His main purpose was to demonstrate that, even though species had evolved through ordinary natural processes, primarily controlled by "Natural Selection", there was no inherent conflict between this scientific understanding and the belief in divine creation. Accepting the

role of natural laws in evolution did not preclude the possibility of divine involvement or the belief in a creator who initially set these laws in motion:

> The aim has been to support the doctrine that these species have been evolved by ordinary natural laws (for the most part unknown) controlled by the subordinate action of "Natural Selection," and at the same time to remind some that there is and can be absolutely nothing in physical science which forbids them to regard those natural laws as acting with the Divine concurrence and in obedience to a creative fiat originally imposed on the primeval Cosmos, "in the beginning," by its Creator, its Upholder, and its Lord (Mivart, 2007: 289)

Other scientific scholars, such as P. G. Tait and Balfour Stewart, adhered to traditional religious beliefs in a manner that was detrimental to the scientific community. In their study *The Unseen Universe*, published in 1875, they tried to demonstrate the validity of the Christian doctrine of immortality. Tait and Stewart examined concepts such as the existence of a spiritual realm or a higher reality that lay beyond the physical universe, blending scientific speculation with theological ideas.

To my understanding, the fact that a work such as Darwin's creates so many waves of criticism can only have two explanations: on the one hand, the statements published are inconsistent, and therefore they do not fulfil the promised expectations. On the other hand, they challenge the pre-established beliefs in a way that endangers the stability of a society. I lean towards the second option when dealing with a major institution such as the church. The church was the heart of the British nation, and its values and promises served as a guide for many Victorians. Therefore, when scientific ideas began to take shape, many felt their beliefs threatened; what they had once considered undeniable was becoming a possibility.

1.3 A Solution to the Crisis

How did the common Victorian deal with this crisis? Accepting the statements of the scientific community would imply a rejection of their values, values that had shaped who they were. In June 1853, the Illustrated London News expressed disappointment that the "matter-of-fact people of the nineteenth century" were "plunged all at once into the bottomless deep of spiritualism" (Illustrated London News). Spiritualism was becoming a well-spread

phenomenon, affecting not only the uneducated and common people but also the enlightened and sophisticated, much like a contagious disease. By 1860, spiritualism had become a part of Victorian life, and those who felt lost appealed to spirits to find shelter:

> Thus, Protestant individuals, driven by a widely perceived crisis of faith in orthodox Christianity, subject to modern science's rise to dominance in truth-telling authority, and fully exposed for the first time in history to the panoply of world religions, generated an unprecedented proliferation of new and often hybrid religions and spiritualities (Jeffrey, 2018: 1)

What I will try to defend, nevertheless, is that the rise of spiritualism did not imply a change in faith. Many Victorians relied on the realm of the dead only to justify their previous beliefs, not to get rid of them.

2. Analysis of the Stories

2.1 "The Phantom Coach"

The first story I am going to focus on is "The Phantom Coach" by Amelia B. Edwards. This story, in my opinion, presents the struggle that some Victorians experienced when their beliefs were challenged. As previously stated, during this time of change, some people tried to get a hold of anything they could to convince themselves that they were not mistaken. Anything that could assure them that there was still something that escaped the realms of science was enough to keep their hopes alive. The process, nevertheless, was not by any means easy. As Fowler states, faith is "a dynamic evolving pattern of the way our souls find and make meaning for our lives" (Fowler, 1966. Cited from: Krause, 2006). Faith, then, is deeply intertwined with the essence of who we are at a spiritual level. It is not just about adherence to doctrines or rituals, but about finding purpose and significance in our existence. I believe this might be one of the reasons why some people could have found it extremely difficult even to question their beliefs. Neal Krause in his essay "Religious Doubt and Psychological Well-Being", raises the question of whether religious doubt is associated, precisely, with a decline of the psychological well-being overtime. Furthermore, he focuses on education to examine if it improves or deteriorates

the welfare of an individual. His conclusion seems to reveal that, on the one hand, older people with higher levels of education appear to have more doubts about their beliefs but, at the same time, have more skills to deal with them better: "Given the lifelong influence of schooling and occupational experiences, people with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to apply their skills in wrestling with, and resolving, religious doubt" (Krause, 2006: pg. 290). On the other hand, older people with a lower level of education do not seem to enquire that deeply into their doubts, if they have them. However, when doubts do appear, they do not possess the skills to deal with them in a healthy way, causing distress or frustration:

> If doubt cannot be resolved, then one option is to ignore, dismiss, repress, or deny it. But if doubt arises again, as it often does, then repeated episodes of unsuccessful encounters with it are likely to spark negative emotions, such as feelings of frustration, confusion, and bewilderment" (Krause, 2006: Pg. 290).

In their article, Andrea C. Walker et al. assess the question of religious doubt and its impact on the individual. They concluded that autonomy, measured in higher education environments, can lead to an improvement or a reinforcement of the religious beliefs when doubt emerges. An individual can experience four different stages of religious identity development: "(a) diffusion (low exploration, high commitment), (b) foreclosure (low exploration, low commitment), (c) moratorium (high exploration, low commitment), and (d) achievement". During diffusion, an individual is fully involved in the values of his family or community. Doubt does has not appeared, therefore, there is no need for exploration. Foreclosure is understood as the part of the process where the individual still holds the same values, but he is no longer committed to them. During moratorium, the stage I am going to focus on, individuals examine the validity of the beliefs and values inherent in their current faith systems. In this phase doubt emerges and can cause discomfort if not dealt with properly. Results showed that progressing through this exploration period creates advantageous circumstances for individuals to fully embrace a religious identity. During the moratorium phase, individuals use their own judgment to consider different beliefs beyond their original religion and may commit to a new

belief system at a slow pace or keep their original one. After this phase they integrate their personal exploration into their religious beliefs, making their faith more unique and stronger, reaching the last stage, achievement. (Walker et al., 2023). As a result, "individuals become fully freed to move into the mystical-communal stage, during which they begin to acknowledge the limits of logic and embrace the mystery and paradox experienced in life" (Walker et al., 2023: 3).

One of the main characters in "The Phantom Coach", the Master, is an erudite and a hermit, who has devoted his own life to his studies that go from "practical science to mental philosophy" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). After 23 years of ardent research, he has concluded that there are some things that science cannot explain; and still, scientific men condemn the person who believes ("He who believes, is a dreamer or a fool" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). He argues that the belief in apparitions has been radically condemned but, paradoxically, this phenomenon is more extended and shared among the population than science principles: "Against what superstition have they waged so long and obstinate a war, as against the belief in apparitions? And yet what superstition has maintained its hold upon the minds of men so long and so firmly? (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). To me, the Master is the perfect example of a man who is (or was) experiencing a crisis of his preestablished beliefs. Suddenly, in a time where scientific theories tried to demonstrate a new approach to the way the world was understood, his religious faith seemed to not have space. As previously stated, this sudden questioning of one's faith can directly affect the well-being of an individual: The Master is an old and imposing man ("A huge, white-haired old man rose from a table covered with books and papers and confronted me sternly". (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). He also seems to be a cultivated person with an education, not only by the way he acts but also by the information we gather in the description of his room; when the narrator comes inside, he encounters the master studying: "With this he waved me to a seat, resumed

his own, and became at once absorbed in the studies from which I had disturbed him" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). Further on, the description of the room also gives clues about the nature of the Master:

> I saw a long array of geological specimens, surgical preparations, crucibles, retorts, and jars of chemicals; while on the mantelshelf beside me, amid a number of small objects, stood a model of the solar system, a small galvanic battery, and a microscope. (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach").

He is, therefore, an educated elderly man. As Krause shows in his article, and as I have stated before, older people with an education seem to have more doubts about their religion because "the more a person... thinks the more he will doubt; for the more he knows the more he will see that he does not know" (James Snowden, 1916. Cited from: Krause, 2006). Nevertheless, they have more strategies to deal with their doubts. The master's constant study and investigation seem to be his strategy to deal with them, he finds possible holes in the science theory to prove his point and stick to his beliefs:

> Show me any fact in physics, in history, in archaeology, which is supported by testimony so wide and so various. Attested by all races of men, in all ages, and in all climates, by the soberest sages of antiquity, by the rudest savage of to-day, by the Christian, the Pagan, the Pantheist, the Materialist, this phenomenon is treated as a nursery tale by the philosophers of our century. Circumstantial evidence weighs with them as a feather in the balance. The comparison of causes with effects, however valuable in physical science, is put aside as worthless and unreliable. The evidence of competent witnesses, however conclusive in a court of justice, counts for nothing (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach").

His way of proceeding, meaning, investigating, and finding his own path, is precisely what Andrea C. Walker et al. prove to be a common practice when religious doubt appears. Therefore, the Master seems to have spent the past twenty-three years in a "moratorium" phase, so intensely focused on his studies that he has forgotten about the outside world "Sir, I have lived here in strict retirement for three-and-twenty years. During that time, I have not seen as many strange faces, and I have not read a single newspaper" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). Now he has achieved a type of faith more unique and stronger. But what is the Master focused on? He is interested in one thing that science seems to not have been able to deny yet, spirits. Alfred Russel Wallace, a renowned naturalist and one of the co-developers of the theory of

evolution through natural selection, admitted that miracles had “no place” in “modern science” which had engendered “a firm conviction in the minds of most men of education, that the universe is governed by wide and immutable laws” (Wallace,1866, cited in: Noakes, 2004: 9). He nevertheless warrened that, “the apparent miracle may be due to some undiscovered law of nature” (Wallace,1866, cited in: Noakes, 2004: 9). Therefore, the Master is holding unto the one thing that science could not prove and, therefore, could not deny.

The next character I will focus on is the narrator of the story, James Murray. Murray is a Barrister-at-law, and he comes from the “outer world” (Sims, 2014: “The Phantom Coach”) where science and its rationalist way of proceeding are starting to take shape. He, therefore, belongs to that society and shares the same traits: For instance, when he gets lost while hunting geese, he is lucky enough to stumble upon Jacob, the Master’s servant, who guides him to the house. Once they get there, the Master asks Murray by what right he has forced an entrance to his house, to which Murray responds: “the same by which I should have clung to your boat if I were drowning. The right of self-preservation” (Sims, 2014: “The Phantom Coach”). He, therefore, stands as the polar opposite of the Master. To me he is the representation of the scientific community as opposed to the spiritualist one (the Master), and he will have to admit that what he saw could not have been explained by natural science.

The third and last character of the story is Jacob, the servant, who also plays a significant role in the narration. He is, since the beginning, associated with the light: The narrator explains how, after wandering through the snow for a long time, he finds himself “face to face with an old man and a lantern” (Sims, 2014: “The Phantom Coach”). Further on, Murray refers to the servant as a “reluctant guide” (Sims, 2014: “The Phantom Coach”). Light often represents safety, clarity, and the possibility of escaping from darkness and uncertainty. Murray, an educated man, guided, as mentioned before, by pure rationality, is completely lost. His only salvation seems to be Jacob, the light that will accompany him to the knowledge of the Master.

It is because of him that Murray meets the Master, who will introduce him to spiritualism. To me, Jacob is the embodiment of wisdom and experience; he oversees the passing down of knowledge from one generation to the next, and serves as a guide or mentor figure, offering insight into the mysteries of the supernatural world. Murray, as a lawyer, needs empirical evidence to proceed; that is why, although astonished by the eloquence of the Master, he still refuses to believe him: "I did my best, in short, to forget the startling speculations to which I had just been listening, and, to some extent, I succeeded" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). However, when Jacob mentions the accident, everything seems to get more real. We will never know, nevertheless, if what the protagonist saw that night is true or just a fantasy influenced by Jacob's story. As Murray states, he only had "the testimony" of his "own senses" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach") to rely upon, and the surgeon that attended him after the accident found him "in a state of raving delirium" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). What can be assured, however, is that the Master and Jacob have certainly succeed in making a rational man change his views: "Others may form what conclusions they please—I know that twenty years ago I was the fourth inside passenger in that Phantom Coach" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach").

This story shows, therefore, the significant impact that a crisis of one's faith can have on an individual. The Master, overwhelmed by the recent principles of scientific theories, has spent a significant part of his life trying to reconcile himself with his own faith, since the ideas of the scientific community were too groundbreaking to be accepted.

2.2 "The Captain of the 'Pole-Star'"

The second story I would like to consider is "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'" by Arthur Conan Doyle. In this story, we embark on the Pole Star, a whaling ship stranded in the middle of the Arctic. We follow the diary of John McAlister Ray, a student of medicine, who serves as the ship's doctor. He is, therefore, recounting the events of the story from his own perspective, as

in “The Phantom Coach”. Nevertheless, although the narrator is reflecting on past events and providing insight into what happened from his point of view, the veracity of his statements seems more accurate since little time has passed between his experience and the narration. We can deduct from his writing (and from his profession) that McAlister is a fact-based person. The first words we read from him showcase this:

> September 11th. Lat. 81 degrees 40’ N; long. 2 degrees E. Still lying-to amid enormous ice fields. The one which stretches away to the north of us, and to which our ice-anchor is attached, cannot be smaller than an English county. To the right and left unbroken sheets extend to the horizon. This morning the mate reported that there were signs of pack ice to the southward. Should this form of sufficient thickness to bar our return, we shall be in a position of danger, as the food, I hear, is already running somewhat short. It is late in the season, and the nights are beginning to reappear. (Sims, 2014: “The Captain of the ‘Pole Star’”)

The similarities with the narrator of “The Phantom Coach” appear to be evident; they both have a logical approach to life, and they both have jobs that leave no room for speculation. However, even though Murray was reluctant to believe anything related to the supernatural, he showed more respect towards the Master’s opinions. McAlister, on the contrary, completely disregards his shipmates. On September 12th, the narrator relates how, in the past, some crew members complained that “they heard plaintive cries and screams in the wake of the ship, as if something were following it and were unable to overtake it” (Sims, 2014: “The Captain of the ‘Pole Star’”). In his diary, he refers to it as “fiction” and a “pandemic,” and he tries to give a rational explanation for it: “No doubt what they heard was either the creaking of the rudder-chains, or the cry of some passing sea-bird. I have been fetched out of bed several times to listen to it, but I need hardly say that I was never able to distinguish anything unnatural” (Sims, 2014: “The Captain of the ‘Pole Star’”). He then explains how he mentioned it to the Captain, but he also seemed disturbed by hearing it, which leads McAlister to state: “I should have thought that he at least would have been above such vulgar delusions” (Sims, 2014: “The Captain of the ‘Pole Star’”). Further on, he again witnesses an outburst of superstition among the crew, and his reaction denotes even more of a sense of superiority: “The Bogie again. Thank Heaven that I have strong nerves! The superstition of these poor fellows, and the circumstantial accounts

which they give, with the utmost earnestness and self-conviction, would horrify any man not accustomed to their ways" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). His attitude seems somewhat pedantic, fitting perfectly into the Master's description in "The Phantom Coach" of a "man of science": "They condemn as fable all that resists experiment. They reject as false all that cannot be brought to the test of the laboratory or the dissecting-room […] He who pauses before he pronounces, is condemned as a trifler. He who believes, is a dreamer or a fool" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach").

The Captain is the second most important character in the novel. To me, he could be likened to the Master from "The Phantom Coach", but he possesses much deeper psychological complexity. The Captain is narrated in contraposition to McAlister; he is superstitious, full of energy, and mentally unstable. By his description, we get the impression that Captain Nicholas Craigie is an anxious man with a mysterious countenance:

> The Captain is tall and well-formed, with dark, handsome face, and a curious way of twitching his limbs, which may arise from nervousness, or be simply an outcome of his excessive energy. […] the eyes are the distinctive feature of his face. They are of the very darkest hazel, bright and eager, with a singular mixture of recklessness in their expression, and of something else which I have sometimes thought was more allied with horror than any other emotion (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'")

He is, nevertheless, much like the Master from "The Phantom Coach", "well-read and entertaining" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'") and he is cultivated enough to talk "about the nature of the soul" and to sketch out "the views of Aristotle and Plato upon the subject in a masterly manner." (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). He seems to have the same interests as him, whose range of studies go from "Reichenbach to Swedenborg, Spinoza, Condillac, Descartes, Berkeley, Aristotle, Plato" (Sims, 2014: "The Phantom Coach"). As stated before, they both differ in their psychological complexity: Doctor McAlister provides us with a detailed analysis of the Captain's behaviour in almost every annotation he makes in his diary. The more the story advances, the more he believes the whole crew is in the hands of

a madman. He is a very sensitive man with a fierce temper; he is a risk-taker, and his behaviour seems to be getting more and more erratic as the story progresses:

> My deliberate opinion is that we are commanded by a madman. Nothing else can account for the extraordinary vagaries of Captain Craigie. It is fortunate that I have kept this journal of our voyage, as it will serve to justify us in case we have to put him under any sort of restraint, a step which I should only consent to as a last resource (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'").

As the end of the story approaches, he starts to hear voices and cries, and even recounts having seen a woman stood amid the Artic ice: "Look! There, man, there! Between the hummocks! Now coming out from behind the far one! You see her—you must see her!" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). The mysterious cries and loud noises seem to get more and more noticeable, to the point that even McAlister himself admits that he might have been in the wrong: On September 17th at 12 p.m., McAlister writes in his diary that he has undergone a startling experience and he is beginning to doubt whether he "was justified in branding everyone on board as madmen because they professed to have seen things which did not seem reasonable to my understanding" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). According to the Doctor, he was frightened "when there arose from the ice almost directly underneath me a cry, sharp and shrill, upon the silent air of the night"; a cry that rising steadily, reminded him of the final lament of a "lost soul" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). As in *The Phantom Coach*, it seems that either McAlister or Murray need proof to proceed; the old *Credo ut intelligam* view of life no longer works for them. That is why, after experiencing it first-hand, they must admit it, at least, to be possible.

Still, the most astonishing part of the story does not arrive until the end: During the early hours of September 19th, the Captain disappears. As McAlister explains, they were both together on the poop of the vessel when, suddenly, the Captain "gave one spring to the top of the bulwarks, and another which took him on to the ice, almost to the feet of the pale misty figure" (Sims, 2014: The Captain of the "Pole Star"). After a long search, they finally found him: He was dead, facing downwards upon a frozen bank. According to the doctor, the corpse

was covered in ice crystals that had landed on him, shining on his dark sailor's jacket. As the crew got closer, a gust of wind picked up the crystals, "and they whirled up into the air, partially descended again, and then, caught once more in the current, sped rapidly away in the direction of the sea" (Sims, 2014: The Captain of the "Pole Star"). For the rational mind of the doctor, those crystals were nothing but a "snowdrift," but for some members of the crew, they resembled a woman leaning over the body, giving it a kiss, and then quickly departing across the ice.

Nowadays, with a much wider understanding of the mind, it seems that what the Captain was seeing was not the actual presence of a deceased person, but he was under the influence of a condition called "bereavement hallucination." According to Matthew Ratcliffe, the term refers to a "perceptual or perception-like experience of someone who has died, usually a partner, family member, or close friend" (2020: 1). These experiences can range from lucid events to subtle impressions, which form a spectrum of vividness (Kamp et al., 2020). For example, "the quasi-sensory feeling of presence is sometimes described as a diffuse 'feeling' that the deceased is there and at other times as a clearly locatable sense of presence […] In addition, auditory SED [2] may include both sounds (e.g., footsteps) and auditory-verbal experiences (e.g., hearing the deceased calling one's name)" (Kamp et al., 2020: 1369). In the story, not only do we have an accurate description of Captain Nicholas Craigie's actions and personality, but also of his cabin and the vessel in general. Thus, it allows us to draw parallels with the symptomatology of the phenomena. I have already suggested that the Captain was having visions of a woman, as can be observed by the use of the pronoun "her" to refer to the ghost and also because her screams were "at a note such as prima donna never reached" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). It is not until the end of the story that the reader knows a crucial fact about the Captain's life; According to John McAllister Ray Senior, the father of

[2] sensory experiences of the deceased

the narrator, Captain Craigie used to be engaged to a beautiful lady on the Cornish coast, who died "under circumstances of peculiar horror" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). If we take a close look to the narration, there are some passages that seem to indicate that the apparition who had been hunting the vessel for days was no other than the ghost of the Captain's fiancée: The first time McAlister hears the cry, he describes it as one that "culminated in a long wail of agony, which might have been the last cry of a lost soul" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the "Pole Star"). This phrase conveys an image of intense suffering and despair, emphasizing a sense of anguish that seemed to have been prolonged for years; it sounds as if the ghost did not die in idyllic circumstances, just as the Captain's partner. Also, the narrator notices something that Captain Craigie mutters to himself: "but a little time, love – but a little time" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the "Pole Star"), as if he was waiting for something to happen, or someone, a loved one, to come. Finally, after the Captain had escaped, McAlister decides to go into his cabin once again, only to find that "the picture which I have described as having hung at the end of his bed had been cut out of its frame, as with a knife, and was gone" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). The picture in question refers to the sketch "of a young lady" and "underneath it in one of the corners was written, 'M. B., æt. 19'" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). The narrator confesses that he doesn't know the part that she would have played in the Captain's life, but her portrait was hung "at the end of his berth, so that his eyes continually rest upon it," so she must have been someone important to the Captain. It is quite possible, therefore, that he was having hallucinations of his loved one, because, as Matthew Ratcliffe states, partners are usually the focal point of such experiences.

Another thing to consider is the Captain's personality. According to Kamp et al., bereavement hallucinations can occur "across cultures, in all age groups, and in all types of relationship loss, regardless of religious affiliation, and whether the cause of death is natural (e.g., disease) or violent (e.g., suicide, homicide, and natural disaster)" (2020: 1369).

Nevertheless, they emphasise that there are some characteristics that might have a direct relation to experiencing them: There are some personality constructs that might make a person more susceptible to experiencing bereavement hallucinations, such as neuroticism and the tendency to adopt an avoidant coping strategy (Kamp et al., 2020: 1369). Neuroticism is a personality trait marked by emotional instability, sensitivity, unease, lack of confidence, depression, and various other adverse emotions. In the narrator's words, the Captain is "a man of fierce temper, and very sensitive about anything approaching to an infringement of his rights" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). He also has "a curious way of twitching his limbs, which may arise from nervousness" and his eyes, being brown and eager, possess a mixture of "recklessness, something else […] more allied with horror than any other emotion" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). Clearly, the Captain is a person who does not seem to be emotionally stable; he twitches, has constant mood swings, and seems not to care much for his life, since "he courts death in every possible manner" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). Another trait of a person more prone to experiencing bereavement hallucinations is the tendency to adopt an avoidant coping strategy. This strategy is a psychological approach where an individual tries to evade dealing with stressful situations rather than confronting and resolving them. Some of the techniques can be procrastination, denial, substance use, or distraction. It is not surprising that the Captain also tends to avoid facing stressful situations at every chance he gets. The most evident example is the avoidance of responsibility for the dangerous situation his crew is in; the whole vessel seems to have been stuck in the ice for days when the story begins: "September 11th. Lat. 81 degrees 40' N; long. 2 degrees E. Still lying-to amid enormous ice fields" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). Despite the evident risks and deteriorating conditions ("we shall be in a position of danger, as the food, I hear, is already running somewhat short" [Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"]), the Captain is obsessively focused on the potential success of finding fish

(or, at least, that is what he uses as an excuse). His insistence on pursuing fish even when it could endanger the crew suggests an avoidance of the reality of their dire situation. We find another example some passages after: During a conversation with the Doctor, the Captain experiences a sudden outburst of fury at him and rapidly departs to the deck:

> "Curse you!" he yelled, springing out of his seat, with his very beard bristling with passion. "What is your happiness to me? What have I to do with her that you must dangle her photograph before my eyes?" […] with another imprecation he dashed open the door of the cabin and rushed out upon deck […] I can hear him pacing excitedly up and down overhead as I write these lines. (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'").

The captain is using intense emotions as a shield to avoid dealing with underlying issues or making rational decisions. Finally, the captain tends to isolation and detachment: He often locks himself away during his "dark hours" and avoids the company of the crew, including the Doctor:

> On occasions, and more particularly when he was thoughtfully inclined, the look of fear would spread and deepen until it imparted a new character to his whole countenance. It is at these times that he is most subject to tempestuous fits of anger, and he seems to be aware of it, for I have known him lock himself up so that no one might approach him until his dark hour was passed (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'").

In their article, Kamp et al. also discuss how these hallucinations can be positive for some individuals, bringing them pleasure or even help. Nevertheless, for others, "Stigma can be a cause of feelings of ambivalence and distress" (2020: 1371). As such, "the experiences may be initially welcome, but worry over one's mental health (due to the perceived association in general society between hallucination and psychosis) as well as other people's reactions, or the anticipation of it (e.g., family and doctors), may cause distress to the individual" (2020: 1371). That is exactly what the Captain experiences: During one of his hallucinations, he asks the doctor if he saw the woman too, to which he replies that he did not. He then proceeds, as many people do, to question his own sanity, and says: "I say, Doc, don't let the steward in! He'll think I'm mad. Just bolt the door, will you! […] You don't think I am, do you, Doc? […] "Tell me now, as man to man, do you think that I am mad?" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). While the Doctor thinks that he is suggesting lunacy as the secret of his conduct ("it

was he himself who suggested lunacy and not mere eccentricity as the secret of his strange conduct" [Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"]), I see a man who is asking for help and validation from a professional; the fact that he is questioning his own sanity just shows how sane he is.

Ultimately, I would like to comment one last thing about the Captain: his tragic ending. During the whole story, as we have seen, Captain Craigie exhibits a behaviour marked by signs of anxiety, sadness, and stress. It could be argued that he was, somehow, feeling a sense of guilt. That possibility is discussed among the members of the crew, even if the Doctor does not seem to agree:

> I do not think that a guilty conscience has anything to do with his behaviour. The idea is a popular one among the officers, and, I believe, the crew; but I have seen nothing to support it. He has not the air of a guilty man, but of one who has had terrible usage at the hands of fortune, and who should be regarded as a martyr rather than a criminal (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'").

On the one hand, some crewmembers believe the Captain to be a criminal, and now he is holding a guilty conscience about it. The Doctor, on the other hand, believes him a martyr, an unlucky person facing the consequences of an unfortunate life. I believe, nevertheless, that one opinion does not exclude the other, and that the Captain can both feel guilty and be a martyr. We do not know what happened to his fiancée; the only information that we possess is that she died in terrible circumstances. However, we can glean some information from the Captain's thoughts that may reflect how he feels: During a conversation between McAlister and him, the Captain Craigie warned the Doctor "most impressively against confusing the innocent with the guilty and argued that it would be as logical to brand Christianity as an error because Judas, who professed that religion, was a villain (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). It is not uncommon, as Saba Mughal et al. explain, to experience feelings of guilt during what is called a "prolonged grief disorder" a common complication for experiencers of SED (Kamp et al., 2020). To me, his tragic ending is simply a means to try and reunite with his lover after months or years of guilt and despair. As stated before, the Captain "courts death in every

possible manner" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"); yet he has been unlucky enough to emerge unharmed from every situation. Perhaps it was finally time for him to take matters into his own hands.

If the Captain is the one grieving and thus experiencing the hallucinations, how can it be explained, then, that not only he but also the entire crew witnessed and heard the screams of the dead woman? As I attempted to explain above, scientific statements, especially those implying the mortality of the human body, created an atmosphere of uneasiness and fear. Embracing the scientific community's assertions would mean turning away from one's own values. Spiritualism, therefore, stood as a way of dealing with the fear of losing one's ideals. As Richard Noakes explains, "[spiritualism's] rapid spread had manifold causes, but it certainly owed much to widespread and long-established preoccupations about the afterlife and the immortality of the soul" (2004: 5). Spirit manifestations could mean, therefore, proof for many different claims: the autonomy of spirit and body, the continuation and everlasting nature of the spirit beyond physical death, the perpetual advancement of all in the afterlife, and the potential for spirits of the deceased to reveal themselves to the living under specific circumstances (Noakes, 2004). In the story, the only hope the captain, a man probably tortured by guilt, has is to see the woman he loves again. The crew, being "all Roman Catholics or Presbyterians", and by the way they speak, seem to be less educated: "'Mebbe aye, mebbe na, Doctor,' he said; 'I didna ca' it a ghaist'" (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'"). Therefore, they could be more prone to believe that the vessel is haunted. The most convincing element is, nevertheless, and similarly to "The Phantom Coach", that we have the testimony of scientific, rational men that corroborate the visions; in this case, two: Doctor McAlister and his father:

> That everything occurred exactly as he describes it, I have the fullest confidence, and, indeed, the most positive certainty, for I know him to be a strong-nerved and unimaginative man, with the strictest regard for veracity. Still, the story is, on the face of it, so vague and so improbable that I was long opposed to its publication. Within the last few days, however,

> I have had independent testimony upon the subject which throws a new light upon it. I had run down to Edinburgh to attend a meeting of the British Medical Association, when I chanced to come across Dr. P——, an old college chum of mine (Sims, 2014: "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'").

In light of this interpretation of the story, then, the Captain might not have taken his own life; rather, it could have been his fiancée who drew him into the realm of the dead with her.

After the reading and analysis of the "The Captain of the 'Pole Star'", it could be stated that the Victorian crisis of faith had an impact on the well-being of some individuals. This crisis meant hopelessness and desolation for some and raised new fears such as the uncertainty of death. The realm of the spirits, something that, as William Crookes stated, "cannot be explained by any present law at present known" (cited from Noakes, 2004:15), was the only means to keep the hope alive. The apparition Nicholas Craigie's fiancée meant proof of the afterlife and gave one last chance to a tormented Captain for redemption and forgiveness.

2.3 "The Old Nurse's Story"

The next story I will focus on differs from the rest in the sense that, in this instance, ghosts emerge as a reminder of a tragic past, and as a warning for future generations. The figure of the rational scientific man, therefore, is not present. Instead, we will get a variety of characters who will be more prone to believing in spirits. As Franklin explains, "there was a widespread urgency in the Victorian period […] to defend the continued existence of and belief in 'spirit' against the growing forces of what was called 'materialism'" (2018: preface). In this context, materialism refers to a shift towards understanding the natural world and human existence through physical and material explanations, instead of finding every answer in God. As Hudson Tuttle stated in his *Manual of Spiritual Science and Philosophy* in 1867:

> There is no alternative, and material science is fast driving Christianity to the wall. It has taken all the thinkers of the world. The church holds only those who do not think. Spiritualism is the last stronghold against the tide of materialism, and if it fails to establish its claims, the former will be supremely triumphant (cited from Franklin, 2018: preface)

Religion established moral rules for people to follow, guarantying control and order. During the Victorian era, as I mentioned earlier, the traditional social hierarchy may have begun to weaken. Despite this, many people still clung to old customs because they were deeply ingrained in their daily lives. In spite of the weakening influence of conventional, however, religious doctrines, there was still a need for moral guidance and ethical behaviour, and that is one of the roles I believe spirits fulfilled. Materialism might claim to explain the order of the universe and human evolution without considering the divine (Franklin, 2018). However, this perspective did not resolve the anxieties derived from the denial of a continued existence of the human soul after death, and, certainly, it did not provide moral and spiritual guidance such as religion did. The only solution Christianity had was to focus on spirits and the realm of the dead to try and reestablish itself at the centre of human actions.

"The Old Nurse's Story" is narrated by Hester, the nurse who helped raise Miss Rosamond. The story begins with her telling Miss Rosamond's children the strange events she and their mother experienced during their stay at Manor House. Miss Grace Furnivall is the lady of the house and Miss Rosamond's distant relative. Through words of Hester, we will assess the complex and uncanny mind of the Lady of the house, haunted, it seems, by guilt, derived from her sister's death. A tragic love triangle will be the cause for her mental deterioration, which will finally end with her life.

I believe Miss Grace to be the most relevant character of the story, especially due to her psychological complexity. When Hester and Miss Rosamond settled at Manor House, she was about eighty years of age. Thin and tall, her face was "as full of fine wrinkles as if they had been drawn all over it with a needle's point" (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story"). Mrs Stark, a "cold […] grey, and stony" woman (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story") was her only companion. According to the narrator, they "never went to church", but they used to do their prayers "in their quiet gloomy way" (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story"). What is most

significant about her, and that we learn thanks to little Miss Rosamond, is that she is tormented by some mysterious events: one afternoon, Miss Rosamond disappears, only to be found some hours later "under the holly trees […] in the terrible sleep which is frost-begotten" (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story").

When asked why she left, the girl explained that she "saw a little girl, not so old as she was, 'but so pretty'" (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story"). This girl invited her to go out and took her by hand. The girl's hand was icy, and she guided Miss Rosamond to a woman weeping beneath the holly trees. When the woman noticed Miss Rosamond, she ceased her crying, gazed at her with pride and then embraced her and gently rocked her to sleep. When Hester explained the story to the Miss Grace, she "threw her arms up her old and withered arms and [and] cried aloud 'oh Heaven, forgive! Have mercy'" (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story"). Only some lines after, the old lady, again, screams "Oh! Have mercy! Wilt thou forgive! It is many a long year ago!" (Sims, 2014: The Old Nurse's story). This behaviour keeps repeating until the end, when she finally exhales her last words: "Alas! Alas!, what is done in youth can never be undone in age!" (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story"). These brief sentences constitute her only contribution to the story, but they hold the key to the depths of her mind; she is consumed by guilt and now she must painfully live with it. The reader only knows the cause of her torment thanks to Dorothy, a member of the staff at Manor House: After initial hesitation, she explains to Hester how love ended the relationship of two sisters, Miss Grace Furnivall and Miss Maude Furnivall. Lord Furnivall's obsession with music led him to hire a professional musician to instruct him on how to play the organ. The two sisters rapidly fell in love with him, and he took advantage of the situation, "walking abroad in the woods with one of the young ladies; now Miss Maude, and the Miss Grace" (Sims, 2014: *The Old Nurse's story*). For some time, Miss Maude seemed to have won the prize, because she married the stranger in secret; nevertheless, she was kept hidden away in a farmhouse, where she conceived a little girl. At the same time,

her husband started to pay more attention to her sister Miss Grace only, as he said, to keep their marriage in secret. This only aggravated the situation among the two sisters, and they grew further apart every day. The foreigner visited again, but weary of the sisters' jealousy, left and never returned. Miss Maude Furnivall was now deserted by her husband, fearful of her father, resentful of her sister, and incapable of living with her daughter. However, as the old lord's health declined, Miss Maude Furnivall believed she could secretly keep her daughter with her in the west wing of the house. Nevertheless, one fearful night, while the snow was thick and rapidly falling, a loud and violent noise was heard; the old lord's angry shouting, the cries of a child, and the defiant responses of a woman created an atmosphere chaos, anticipating the old lord's verdict: He announced that he had expelled his daughter and her child from their home, cursing anyone who dared to help them. Throughout this, Miss Grace remained silent and still by his side, indicating her approval of his actions. The next day, Miss Maude and her deceased child were found outside in the cold. The narrator of the story subtly explains how Miss Grace was involved in the situation, probably being the cause of it: When the lord ended his parliament, Miss grace "heaved a great sigh, as much as to say her work was done, and her end was accomplished" (Sims, 2014: *The Old Nurse's story*):

Considering the events of Miss Grace's past, it can be assumed that the two figures Miss Rosamond saw where no others than the Ghost of Miss Maude and her little girl. It seems that Miss Grace has been haunted by the two souls for a long time, since she does not appear to be surprised at Hester's story:

> I told it all to Miss Furnivall, shouting it close to her ear; but when I came to the mention of the other little girl out in the snow, coaxing and tempting s her out, and willing her up to the grand and beautiful lady by the holly- tree she threw her arms up her old and withered arms and cried aloud, 'Oh! Heaven, forgive! Have mercy! (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story").

The fact that Miss Grace, an almost deaf elderly woman ("for her being so deaf as to be obliged to use a trumpet" [Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story"]), reacts so quickly to the story, only seems to indicate that she was aware of the apparitions; in fact, she was not only aware of them

but also deeply regretful. To me, this situation is an indication of a poor management of what seems to be a traumatic event: Miss Grace, driven by pure jealousy, told her father everything about her sister's pregnancy, being unaware of the consequences her act would have: It is because of her that Miss Maude Furnivall and her daughter are now dead.

This situation left a deep wound in Miss Grace, who has been uncapable of dealing with the feelings of resentment and guilt. She seems to not have had the tools that would have allowed her to finally forgive herself and find peace. At a time where psychological treatment, as understood today, was very poor or non-existent, the church stood as a source of comfort and relief. When the church started to lose strength and power, and, consequently, there is a decline of religious habits and customs among the population, many people might have felt helpless. This, I believe, is what Miss Grace was experiencing: As Hester states, neither Miss Grace nor her companion Mrs. Stark go to church. She does not make the effort to go to church, not even to be socially accepted. Therefore, the process of going to mass, reading the prayers, acknowledging your sins, and finally finding forgiveness is lost. She is, therefore, left alone with her regret, and guilt, with no means on how to make all her thoughts go away. The way she has to cope with it, just as Captain Craigie, is by adopting an avoidant coping strategy. As stated before, an avoidant coping strategy involves a person's attempts to evade confronting a stressor in order to protect themselves. It is very common among people who have experienced trauma to deal with it, consciously or not, with avoidant strategy, especially if they do not possess the appropriate tools to deal with it. Nevertheless, as Suzanne L. Pineles et al., states: those "Individuals who are relatively highly reliant on avoidant coping strategies and relatively highly reactive to trauma reminders may be at greatest risk of maintaining or potentially increasing their PTSD symptoms within the first few months following the trauma" (2011: 1). Miss Grace has spent almost her whole life dealing with the ghosts of her past and has tried to avoid them at any rate: One example is the East wing of Manor House. As I said before, this

part of the house is where Miss Maude Furnivall hid with her child. After the events, the east wing has always been closed: “She made expeditions all over it, with me at her heels; all, except the east wing, which was never opened, and whither we never thought of going (Sims, 2014: “The Old Nurse’s Story”). To me, the east wing symbolizes the burden of regret and the inevitability of confronting past errors. It is also from the east wing that the two ghostly figures appear at the end of the story: “In the hall the screams were louder than ever; they sounded to come from the east wing nearer and nearer close on the other side of the locked-up doorsclose behind them” (Sims, 2014: “The Old Nurse’s Story”). The door to the east wing finally bursts open, exposing Miss Grace’s fatal mistake: the ghosts recreate the night Miss Maude and the little girl died, while a supernatural vision of Miss Grace’s younger self (But just then I saw […] another phantom shape itself. […] I had seen that figure before. It was the likeness of Miss Furnivall in her youth [Sims, 2014: “The Old Nurse’s Story”]) silently watches. The east wing, therefore, symbolizes that despite Miss Grace’s attempts to hide her regret, she cannot ignore her past mistakes forever.

Although Miss Grace is the central character of the story, she is not the only one dealing with guilt and regret. Her deceased father was the main contributor to her daughter’s death; it was him who ordered Miss Maude and her child to abandon the house in a cold, winter night. Even after his death, he will not be allowed to rest in peace; his sinful actions will keep him stuck forever playing what he once loved to, the organ. One of the things that Hester notices when she first enters the hall of the house is, precisely, “an organ built into the wall”. She does not give it much consideration until one day, as winter drew close, she started to hear some noises coming from the hall; she even confessed to be almost certain that “someone was playing on the great organ” (Sims, 2014: “The Old Nurse’s Story”). Just as Miss Grace, the whole staff is reluctant to even mention the topic, so when Hester asked “who had been playing the music”, James answered that she “was a gook to take the wind soughing among the trees

for music". (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story"). Only Bessy, James and Dorothy's servant, dared to tell her that the noise she was hearing was, as "some folks said", "the old Lord playing on the great organ in the Hall, just as he used to do when he was alive" (Sims, 2014: "The Old Nurse's Story"). Before his death the organ provided him a distraction, but he was so engrossed in his activity that the foreign musician had free will to court and eventually abandon both Miss Maude and Miss Grace Furnivall without his knowledge. This preoccupation with the instrument also kept his mind occupied as his household quietly became divided, with his daughters coming to hate each other. The old lord, now a ghost, has resumed playing his organ. However, he now plays to express regret and as a means to warn others to avoid his mistakes and keep an eye on their loved ones. It is significant to notice that as the anniversary of Miss Maude and the little girl's deaths approaches, he plays louder and louder, aware that their ghosts are attempting to harm Miss Rosamond. He knows that if Hester becomes inattentive, it could lead to Miss Rosamond's death.

One detail that I believe to be very important is the instrument itself. The lord is not playing a piano, he is playing an organ, an instrument usually associated to the church. The organ is commonly used in religious services, particularly during hymns or choral performances. One of the central purposes of those religious services is to teach and guide people, just as the lord is doing; with his organ, he is reminding Hester of the consequences of not looking after the ones you love. The story does not provide us with the details of the life of the lord after his daughter passed away; we do not know if he also had to deal with the spirits of his daughter and granddaughter for the rest of his days. What we can certainly see is that he is paying for what he did: I believe that with his organ he is providing the guidance that the church was failing to give. Maybe Miss Grace is incapable of appreciating it, perhaps it is already too late for her, but it is not too late for Hester, who acted and saved Miss Rosamond's life.

After analysing the story, it can be concluded that the crisis of faith had a direct impact on some of the characters of the story, especially Miss Grace. Incapable of finding the tools to deal with her overwhelming feelings of guilt and regret, she spends her whole life witnessing the apparition of her sister and her child. Perhaps, with the guidance of the Church she could have dealt with them in a healthier way but, just as her father, she was condemned to a life of constant anguish and self-pity.

3. Conclusions and Further Research

To conclude this study, it can be asserted that there appears to be a correlation between the so-called crisis of faith and the outburst of ghost stories during the reign of Queen Victoria. Through the analysis of three different short stories ("The Phantom Coach", "The Captain of the 'Pole-Star'", and "The Old Nurse's Story") and their comparison with the religious and social panorama of the time, I have argued that the appearance of spirits was a means to deal with an era led by rational principles. Spirits appeared to embody society's expressions of fears, anxieties, and desires arising from the increasing challenge that science, among other factors, posed to faith. Scientific principles aimed to explain every aspect of life, including the role of humans on Earth. Their vision was completely opposed to the religious one, where the immortality of the human soul and the assurance of a post-mortem life stood as main precepts. Therefore, proclaiming the finite essence of human life created a controversy not easy to overcome.

From a contemporary perspective, it is not hard to perceive spirits as manifestations of a complex and unstable psychological background. Precisely, this is what I also tried to expose in my project: all the characters in the chosen stories seem to manifest some kind of psychological issue. The Master is dealing with a personal crisis of faith, Captain Craigie with the loss of a loved one, and Miss Grace with the guilt and sorrow of having contributed to her sister's death. While for The Master and Captain Craigie, spirits seem to provide solace and shelter, in Miss Grace's case, they appear to be a direct manifestation of her feelings towards the tragic end of her sister.

In order to defend my thesis, I have used a variety of secondary sources that provided me with a broader background on the topic. Nevertheless, I could not find any sources that directly addressed the issue of loss of faith in Victorian ghost stories, particularly the ones I chose, which seem to have limited research available. Therefore, to analyse the stories, I had to rely

solely on the information I had regarding the crisis of faith and the controversy with scientific principles. Furthermore, some papers in my secondary bibliography are not up to date; thus, some of their ideas might have changed over the years. Due to the limitations imposed by the page limit of this project, an extensive exploration was not possible. Consequently, the depth of my analysis is less than what I initially intended. Nevertheless, I still hope that my project will provide a wider understanding of the topic. I believe that with a broader range of stories from different years during the Victorian period, my project could have been more precise. Therefore, this is a direction that could be taken to expand my research in the future.

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