Reading Knowledge in the Victorian Ghost Story – An Epistemological Reading of "Maud-Evelyn" and "The Signal-man"

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Tutkielmani tavoite on selvittää, millä tavoin tietoa hankitaan ja muodostetaan viktoriaanisessa kummitustarinassa. Epistemologian peruskäsitteistöön nojaava analyysini kahdesta viktoriaanisesta kummitustarinasta erittelee tiedon syntyä, käsittelyä ja vaikutuksia sekä lukijan että henkilöhahmojen näkökulmista.

Ennen tutkielmani varsinaista teoriaosaa määrittelen viktoriaanisen kummitustarinan genreä sekä aikalaiskriitikon että modernin kirjallisuudentutkijan käsitysten valossa. Tällä määrittelyllä haluan tuoda näkyviin genren sisäisiä konventioita ja lainalaisuuksia, joiden erittelyä hyödynnän myöhemmin aineistoni analyysissa.

Tutkielmani teoreettisen kehyksen rakennan epistemologian eli tietoteorian peruskäsitteistöstä. Käytän tarinoiden analyysissä mm. tiedon, uskon, hyväksymisen ja oikeutuksen käsitteitä, sekä kahta oikeutusteoriaa, fundamentalismia ja koherentismia. Täydennän tätä filosofista viitekehystä viktoriaanisen ajan epistemologialla, joka tukeutuu vahvasti aikansa empiristiseen ajatteluun ja visuaaliseen tiedonkulttuuriin.

Ensisijainen tutkimusaineistoni käsittää kaksi viktoriaanista kummitustarinaa, jotka ovat Henry Jamesin "Maud-Evelyn" (1900) ja Charles Dickensin "The Signal-man" (1866). Tarinat ovat melko lyhyitä, novellinkaltaisia kertomuksia henkilöhahmoista, jotka kohtaavat asioita, jotka saattavat olla yliluonnollisia. Tarinoiden teemoja ovat elämä, kuolema, kuolemanjälkeinen elämä, usko, tieto ja yliluonnollinen. Tarinoita yhdistävät perimmäisten kysymysten asettaminen kauhun ja yliluonnollisen kontekstiin.

Tutkimukseni tuloksina voidaan pitää tekemiäni havaintoja tiedon ja sen saavuttamisen tavoista tutkimissani teksteissä. Kumpikin teksti asettaa vastakkain elämän ja kuoleman osoittaen hienoista vieroksuntaa jälkimmäistä kohtaan. Henkilöhahmot, jotka elävät kuolleiden maailmassa tai liian tiiviissä yhteydessä kuolleisiin, eivät onnistu elämässään tässä maailmassa. Kumpikin teksti aloittaa empiristiseltä pohjalta tyytymättä kuitenkaan yksinkertaistamiseen; esiin nousevat kysymykset ihmistiedon ja -mielen rajoituksista. Dickens kiinnittää erityisesti huomiota ihmisen kykyyn hallita ja käsitellä tietoa, kun taas James kommentoi uskon voimakasta vaikutusta ihmisen tietämiseen. Kummankin tekstin kohdalla on ilmeistä, että taidokas tekijä osaa luoda tekstiinsä kauhun ja jännityksen elementtejä tiedon viivyttämisen ja huolellisen ajoittamisen keinoin.

Avainsanat: epistemologia, kummitustarina, viktoriaaninen kirjallisuus, kirjallisuudentutkimus

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1. Introduction

The Victorian ghost story is a fascinating genre that reflects the spirit of its time in a way that deserves to be explored thoroughly. There is more than plain horror under the surface of these stories, as they often express the philosophical, social, and even sexual concerns of their time. The Victorian era was a time period characterised by scientific and social progress, religious crisis and changes in social structure that all merged into an epistemological crisis. Burning questions of knowledge and truth suddenly became more relevant than ever, when new discoveries and applications of science shook the basis of what was previously considered factual knowledge.

Stories of the supernatural are an appropriate medium of discussing these ultimate questions of truth and knowledge. The limitations of human knowledge and existence are closely linked to death, and the other side, from which the power of the ghost story originates from. Therefore an epistemological reading of some of the finest stories known is in order. Through this analysis I wish to learn how knowledge is discussed and handled in these stories, and what the ways of creating knowledge are for the characters of the stories.

This will be achieved by closely analysing a pair of Victorian ghost stories that date back to different phases of the life cycle of the genre: a Dickensian classic, "The Signal-man" (1866), and the near-modernist, psychological story of "Maud-Evelyn" by Henry James (1900). The choice of these two texts was supported by their discussion of uncertainty and belief, the two central themes of both, epistemology and the genre. In addition to these two stories, several different ghost stories by various authors will be used as examples and points of comparison throughout the thesis in order to form a well-rounded understanding of this ample and heterogeneous genre.

I will begin my presentation of the topic by defining and describing the Victorian ghost story as a genre. This will prove essential in the later chapters of the thesis, as the functions and features of certain regularities are discussed from the perspective of my analysis. Before entering upon the analysis of the primary texts, theoretical matters of knowledge will be discussed and merged

into an especially Victorian form of visual epistemology. This will be done by combining theoretical philosophy and several sources concerning the Victorian culture of knowledge. The two primary texts, "The Signal-man" and "Maud-Evelyn", will be analysed in two separate chapters that put the aforementioned theories into practice.

The academic contribution of my work will be twofold. Firstly, I hope to reveal something new about the genre that has been under critical attention for decades. An underlying theme, that would perhaps help to connect the dots scattered in the field of readings of the genre. Secondly, my endeavour is to provide a solid reading of "Maud-Evelyn", as it is often shadowed by other texts by James when discussing his contribution to the genre. This specimen of the genre does not necessarily open itself for analysis easily, but what lies beyond its surface is truly incomparable.

2. The Victorian Ghost Story

Victorian ghost stories often had a highly established set of conventions and characteristics. One of the reasons for this was the great popularity of these stories, especially when they were serialised in periodicals such as *All the Year Round* or *Household Words*. The limited number of themes and settings sometimes resulted in repetition and even plagiarism. Once a popular formula for a terrifying story was discovered, it was shamelessly copied by authors whose livelihood often relied on having their texts published. Although it can be said that a large portion of these stories is more concerned with entertaining their audience than making a serious contribution to literature, it should be emphasised that some of the most talented writers of the Victorian era contributed to the genre, and it should by no means be dismissed as mere entertainment (Briggs 1977, 13).

Authors and critics have often attempted to define the features and criteria for the quintessential ghost story, sometimes with dissenting opinions. M. R. James, often referred to as the "the Master of the English Ghost Story", discussed these criteria and features in several texts published in various periodicals, newspapers and collections of ghost stories. He refuses to list rules

for the genre, but agrees to note several "qualities which have been observed to accompany success" (1929, 8). According to James, success, and also the true aim of the ghost story, is inspiring a pleasing amount of fear in the reader (1929, 8). This is perhaps a valid choice of criteria, because the most effective stories are the ones that have remained interesting even to the audience of today. I chose to apply the criteria compiled by James in my discussion of the genre because his numerous works embody the spirit of the Victorian ghost story. Although some of his stories were published after the end of the Victorian era, many of them were originally composed before 1901 (James 1904, 1). Ghost stories by James rarely show a strong psychological aspect common to the *fin de siècle* ghost story, but rather have a nostalgic, quaint atmosphere. His extensive career within the genre lasted for over thirty years, and resulted in some of the finest collections of ghost stories, such as *The Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904) and *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911). In addition, he succeeds to discuss the genre in an academic tone, not only from the point of view of a contributor, but also in the role of a critic.

A modern look on the ghost story is provided by *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story,* a developmental history of the genre by Julia Briggs (1977). Her conception of the genre is fairly broad, as ghostless stories of intoxication, metamorphosis, vampires and psychological terror are included in the study. Briggs claims that a more exact definition for the genre than "ghost stories" would be "supernatural stories", but then justifies her choice of the former by stating that despite being exact, the latter appears to lack appeal (1977, 12). Briggs's discussion of the genre and its cultural context are, at all events, distinguished, and therefore worthy of attention.

The nostalgic image of a group of people gathering in front of a fireplace to share their most terrifying stories has its roots deep in the ground of the Victorian ghost story. A frame narrative, often describing such parties and situations, is one of the typical features of the genre. Such a party of people gathering together could easily be used by editors as a larger frame for a series of stories published in periodicals. Sometimes the storyteller only has a very small audience, and is perhaps

repeating the words of a friend or a relative. According to Briggs, elaborate frame narratives around several short ghost stories became popular in the late nineteenth century, partially due to Charles Dickens. He not only wrote but also edited ghost stories for the Christmas editions of his magazines, and had experimented with frame narratives in his earlier novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) (1977, 38–39).

Another type of frame narrative can be provided by a report on the finding of a secret letter, diary or manuscript containing the actual ghost story. This interest in secret manuscripts may have its origin in what is by most scholars regarded as the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole. The preface of the novel presents the story as originating from an old Italian manuscript, dating back to the eleventh century (Clery 2002, 21). Sometimes a manuscript or a diary containing the story is presented to the reader by someone who perhaps translated or edited the original text, or someone who received it from an eyewitness (Briggs 1977, 39).

The common factor, and the purpose of the frame narrative, is undoubtedly the desire for verisimilitude. It is easier for the reader to believe in the supernatural events and elements of the story, when they are told, or repeated, by an impartial voice, who has nothing to defend or lose. According to M. R. James, verisimilitude, or "the pretence of truth", is one of the quintessential criteria for ghostly fiction. In "Some Remarks on Ghost Stories", he also states that the supernatural phenomena must not be explicable in terms of rationality, misconception, or dreaming (1929, 10). A ghost story can only be truly frightening when it is presented to the reader as fact. This emphasis on verisimilitude was by no means a novelty in his times, but something that writers and critics have been concerned with ever since Horace and Aristotle.

The ghost story is, by definition, a type of short story. This was recognised by M. R. James, who considered the ghost story to be "only a particular sort of short story", and "subject to the same broad rules as the whole mass of them" (1929, 10). According to Briggs, the ghost story does involve key features similar to the whole mass of short stories; "atmosphere, economy, well-managed

climax" and a "final twist" are crucial factors in both types of stories (1977, 13). The ghost story only diverges from "the mass" by being more interested in suspense and the fear of the supernatural. The main reason, if excluding practical ones, for the brevity of the traditional ghost story is perhaps, as Sir Walter Scott puts it, the character of the supernatural, which is "extremely difficult to sustain" (quoted in Briggs 1977, 13). The thrilling atmosphere of a story and adequate cohesion can be difficult to maintain over a long narrative, a dilemma that will be discussed more thoroughly in section 4.

In some cases the structure of a short story lends itself to longer ghost stories, such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) by Oscar Wilde, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by Henry James, and *The Great God Pan* (1894) by Arthur Machen. These are generally called novellas instead of novels or even short novels, because of their brevity in comparison to the sheer extent of the full-length novel of the period (Briggs 1977, 13).

In order to make their ghost stories credible and vivid, the Victorian author often chose to use first person narration. The sensations and attitudes of an "I" relating the supernatural events were a consequence of the frame narrative. The effect of verisimilitude becomes more powerful when the ghost story is brought to us by an eyewitness. This mode of relaying information will be discussed more closely in the ulterior parts of this thesis.

Not all of these narrators are willing to accept the supernatural events as such. They doubt, mistrust and question the truthfulness of the apparitions, as well as the reliability of the eyewitnesses. The nameless narrator of "The Signal-man" tries to find a rational explanation for the supernatural phenomena experienced by the signalman, and decides that "there may have been infection in his [the signalman's] mind" (1866, 3), whereas the narrator of "The Haunted-House" accuses the women of his house staff of irrational behaviour and developing "improving powers of catalepsy" caused by "unreason" (Dickens 1859, 44). These kinds of reactions are clearly an example of a strategy, perspicaciously noted by Briggs; "The narrator's scepticism may act as a disarming anticipation of that of his audience." The narrator voicing the objections of the audience helps them

to relate to the narrator and accept his testimony without question (1977, 17). Again, this leads to the "the pretence of truth" admired by M. R. James, who claimed that the vividness of the characters greatly depends on them awakening the sympathy of the reader (1929, 11). The sceptical narrator is one of the most prominent features of the Victorian ghost story, and the general disbelief embedded in the genre sets it apart from the terrifying tales of the previous centuries (Briggs 1977, 17).

The characterisation of the Victorian ghost story complies with the conventions of the short story. Above all else, the characters, along with the settings, are few in number. This is naturally caused by the shortness of these stories, together with the fact that there is no proper need for a multitude of individuals and a multi-layered network of relationships. The interaction between the natural and the supernatural – the ghosts and the person seeing them – does not necessarily require more than a handful of characters. In the Victorian ghost story, the main objective of characterisation is to help the reader to identify with the central characters.

The central characters are those who encounter the supernatural. They are usually not as well-developed as the typical characters of a novel, but still show a strong contrast to the secondary characters who often remain flat and restricted. Some protagonists question the apparitions and supernatural events with science, as shown for example by "The Signal-man", to which I will return in the later sections of my thesis. Other protagonists often encounter social and sexual issues along with the supernatural phenomena. Typical concerns of this type are for example those of arranged marriage ("The Old Nurse's Story", 1852) and tainting of sexual purity (*The Turn of the Screw, 1898*).

The sceptic narrator is not, in fact, the only strategy of realist fiction exploited by the ghost story. According to M. R. James, the setting of the ghost story should be "those of the writer's own day", with "nothing antique about them" (1929, 11). By creating a familiar setting, perhaps portraying the life of a middle class family, the author creates a false feeling of security that will soon be shaken by supernatural events. It is perhaps easier for the reader to identify with the characters when the setting of the story appeals to their feelings of familiarity and conventionality. In some

cases, the familiarity of things and surroundings can work as a catalyst of fear. The method of transforming familiar objects into frightening objects of fear was often used in Victorian ghost stories. In "Oh, Whistle, and I'll come to you My Lad" (M. R. James, 1904) the ghost takes possession of bed linen, and begins to haunt the protagonist in a horrifying manner. In "A Terribly Strange Bed" (Wilkie Collins, 1858), the protagonist finds himself haunted by something that truly is a terrible and strange bed.

Another typical setting for a Victorian ghost story, as observed by Briggs, is a place so unfamiliar and ominous, that both, the characters and the reader, cannot feel safe. Gothic castles, mansions and inns in remote locations convey dark powers lurking within, and gloomy forests on the outskirts of unkempt gardens can only hide the most horrible secrets imaginable. The unfamiliar scene often implies the immanence of evil and supernatural powers (1977, 19). Perhaps the central character moves into an old manor house or stays at an inn, possibly feared by the locals, and begins to encounter supernatural phenomena. Such houses can be found throughout the nineteenth century in a majority of ghost stories, such as "The Haunted House" (Charles Dickens, 1859), "The Judge's House" (Bram Stoker, 1891) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Edgar Allan Poe, 1845). Despite the popularity of the theme in the nineteenth century, the haunted house was hardly a novelty at the time. *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole led the way in the eighteenth century, and others such as Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley followed with their pioneering works of Gothic fiction.

The Victorian culture often associated Gothicism with medieval barbarism and superstitions. In the late Victorian times the word *Gothic* was considered nearly synonymous with adjectives like *obsolete* and *outlandish* (Hogle 2002, 21), and therefore, was the perfect choice when creating a scenery for a ghost story. The older the house or the castle, the more spiritual energy it was able to possess.

In his remarks, M. R. James emphasises the "sole object" of the ghost story. According to him, the most important characteristic – and the main purpose – of a ghost story is "inspiring a

pleasing terror" in the reader (1929, 12). This may imply that James did not see the ghost story as a genre that could seriously reflect social and other concerns, but a form of entertainment and light reading. Be that as it may, it must be noted that he wrote the article containing these criteria in 1929, in a time when the genre no longer had the fresh life force it did 50 years earlier.

All the prior criteria mentioned in this chapter have the purpose of creating verisimilitude, and, therefore, contribute to the effect of inspiring fear. James also mentions motifs and events that should not be a part of the perfect ghost story as they make the story less frightening. According to James, the author should avoid "explanation of the machinery", that is, revealing everything (or too much) to the reader. Some things about the supernatural should always be kept in the dark in order to maintain a certain amount of uncertainty and suspense, an important matter that will be looked into within the scope of this thesis. Some of the most terrifying and memorable ghost stories, such as *The Turn of the Screw*, are very successful in this maintaining of suspense. The reader of *The Turn of the Screw* is left in the dark on several issues regarding the actuality of the apparitions and the sanity of the governess experiencing them. In this particular text, Henry James polished his technique, *adumbration* – presenting the reader blank spaces within the text, to be filled by the reader with their inmost fears – to the finest (Briggs 1977, 88). A few years prior to James, Oscar Wilde aimed for a similar effect in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), where the sins of Dorian, the protagonist, are never made entirely explicit. With this choice of vagueness and obscurity, Wilde gives the responsibility of defining evil to the reader, who supposedly shifts their own sins and flaws to the character of Dorian through suggestion. Briggs concludes that the vagueness created by Wilde may have contributed to the child characters in *The Turn of the Screw* (1977, 89), and may well be right. This careful manipulation of knowledge and delaying information are some of the crucial aspects of my analysis of James's "Maud-Evelyn" (1900) in section 3.

In addition to excessive information, the reader should not be exposed to harsh violence or explicit sex. M. R. James refers to these factors as "blatancy", something to be avoided when

maintaining the fear of the supernatural. Gratuitous violence not only takes the attention away from the fear, but also quickly becomes rather banal. On the contrary, the mere threat of bloodshed and conflict adds to the effect of suspense. James also judges too much sex as a "fatal mistake" for the same reasons, and states that sex is "tiresome enough in the novels" (1929, 12). The absence of sex and violence can also be explained by the nature of the Victorian ghost story as a medium. Often distributed as serials in periodicals, and perhaps enjoyed by entire families together by reading aloud, the ghost story could not discuss intimate relations in a very prosaic style.

According to Briggs the genre began to deteriorate and decline in popularity after the First World War, and was later largely replaced by science fiction as an outlet of the distress and *Weltschmertz* experienced by the modern man. She also speculates that the connection between the two genres perhaps interlocks with their shared presumption of man not being alone in the universe (Briggs 1977, 23–24).

The fundamental purpose of the Victorian ghost story was to induce fear in the reader. This goal was pursued by aiming for verisimilitude, a challenge that required great expertise from the author. A skilled choice of setting, an incredulous atmosphere, and the careful management of a terrifying climax were crucial ingredients when composing a story of supernatural horror. The horror itself represented the encounter and collision of the worlds of the dead and the living, the old and the new.

3. Epistemology as Coherence

Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature, possibilities and acquisition of knowledge. It also studies the beliefs humans have, and the justification of those beliefs (Honderich 1995, 245). According to modern theorists, knowledge can be justified in various ways, two of which I will be looking into in the following subchapters.

My main guide in the theory and terminology of epistemology is a fundamental philosophy textbook, *Theory of Knowledge* by Keith Lehrer (1990). Lehrer's work explores both traditional and contemporary theories related to knowledge, and introduces them by means of concrete examples. This theoretical framework will be accompanied by critical writings by Victorian authors and masters of suspense, that is, Henry James, Edgar Allan Poe and Ann Radcliffe. Their discussion of composition touches upon epistemological coherence, an essential component of my analysis of "Maud-Evelyn", provided in the final part of this section.

3.1 Knowledge, Acceptance, Justification and Belief

The first assumption that epistemology makes is that humans have knowledge, and that knowledge relies on the human capacity of distinguishing truth from error. In the semantic sense, there are many uses of the word *know*, such as "I know the way to London" or "I know John", but the one epistemology is interested in is the knowledge that something is true, or the information sense of *know*. Solely information, however, does not equal knowledge, because information can be possessed and transferred by machines, animals and small children, who lack the ability to evaluate the veracity of the information (Lehrer 1990, 2–9).

There are three conditions governing knowledge: the truth condition, the acceptance condition, and the justification condition. The truth condition simply states that knowledge must be true, otherwise it is not knowledge (Lehrer 1990, 9). This is the only simple statement about truth that can be made, as the nature of truth is rather paradoxical, and therefore a comprehensive theory of truth is impossible to formulate. The difficulty of defining truth rises from the formulation of statements whose truthfulness is to be evaluated. Some theorists argue that only simple, declarative sentences such as "Paris is the capital of France" can be labelled true or untrue. This principle, however, induces difficulty with paradoxical sentences such as "This lie is true". Sentences like this

can nevertheless be ruled out by declaring them ill-formed and thus unsuitable for the test of truthfulness (Lehrer 1990, 21–22).

The acceptance condition states that in order to be true, knowledge must be accepted. This means that if a person dishonestly claims to know something, but does not accept it as truth, what the person has is not knowledge. It must be noted that this equation cannot be inverted with full success; a person can accept or believe something without knowing it true. We may well believe that our home is safe and sound while we are away, and no burglars have been able to enter it, although we do not know it. In this case, the belief emerges from our need for feelings of safety and contentment (Lehrer 1990, 10–11).

The justification condition states that knowledge must be justified. Justification must be complete and based on evidence, which means that partial justification is not enough. For example, we may be justified in believing that our house is safe (it was safe yesterday, and the day before, the neighbourhood is nice, and our home has never been broken into), but we cannot fully know it unless we actually drive home to see for ourselves (Lehrer 1990, 11).

The relation of knowledge and belief is one of great complexity. It is possible for a person to say "I do not believe it, I know it!" This statement defies logic, but can be accounted for as a performative utterance, similar to the ritualistic utterance "I promise", and therefore a matter of rhetoric, not epistemology. Another problematic rises from the premise that knowing implies believing; it is safe to say, that if a person knows that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, he also believes that *Macbeth* was written by Shakespeare. It is nevertheless difficult to say, if a person truly knows who wrote *Macbeth*, if he happens to hit the mark by accident, that is, by guessing that the author of *Macbeth* was Shakespeare. Delivering the correct answer to a question – Who wrote *Macbeth*? – without believing to be capable of it does not equal possessing the said knowledge (Lehrer 1990, 28–30).

3.2 Theories of Justification

In order to reach a tenable theory of knowledge, it is essential to form theories of justification. There

are two different theories of justification that are relevant to my study: the foundation theory and the

coherence theory (Lehrer 1990, 13–14).

According to the foundation theory of justification, all knowledge and justification is

based on a foundation that consists of basic beliefs that are self-justified. This indicates that there

must be statements that we believe without argument under all circumstances. According to empiricist

theories, such statements can be constituted through observation, and therefore all basic beliefs are

based on experience (Lehrer 1990, 41–42). Empiricist theories are essential to my study of the

supernatural aspect of ghost stories, as the phenomena in question are often a matter of perception.

However, perception can be deceitful, and cause the beliefs about sensations to be fallible (Lehrer

1990, 51). This may be the case when our sensory perception is distorted due to hallucination (having

a sensation caused by something that is not real) or illusion (having a sensation that is not true to the

cause of the sensation. For instance, one can see the surface of the asphalt road glimmer like water

when the sunlight is refracted from it at a certain angle) (Audi 2003, 31–32). Another case where

fallible sensations may occur, is a situation where a person incorrectly infers a testimony related to

their own sensations made by someone else. This someone else may be an authority of religious or

scientific type, and therefore a plausible source of testimony for the person in question (Lehrer 1990,

54).

In contrast to the foundation theory, coherence theory finds basic beliefs unnecessary.

The reason for this, according to coherence theorists, is that all beliefs can be justified on the basis of

their mutual support and relations to other beliefs (Lehrer 1990, 13). In this theory, the acceptance of

belief lies on their explanations; some beliefs are justified because they explain others, and some

achieve their justification from being explained. The choice between explanations is often made on

pre-existing beliefs. We choose to trust the explanation that has the support of what we already know,

that is, coheres with our acceptance system in a rather circular manner (Lehrer 1990, 87, 91–93). Perceptional beliefs are often considered self-explanatory, meaning that the belief of the truth explains at least partially the existence of the belief itself. Lehrer provides an example: "One explanation of why I *believe* that I *see* blood on my shoe is that I *do* see blood on my shoe." (103) In addition to explanation, coherence can also be based on an acceptance system that creates justification by helping us to judge what to accept in terms of reason. With the support of their acceptance system, a person can tell which sources to trust: their senses, testimony by others, different scientific methods and so forth. The decisions are made on the basis of the information the person already possesses stored in their acceptance system. As the person receives new data, the acceptance system changes. This is how coherence generates justification (Lehrer 1990, 115).

The most significant concepts displayed here are the two theories of justification. The foundation theory of justification forms the basis of empiricism, a crucial factor when discussing perception and acquisition of scientific knowledge. The coherence theory of justification differs from this in its emphasis on the relations and the mutual support between different beliefs. Here knowledge is gained through epistemological coherence, an essential part of my analysis of "Maud-Evelyn" in the following subchapter.

3.3 "Maud-Evelyn"

"Maud-Evelyn" is a curious short story written by Henry James in 1900. The tale of wonder and mystery is delivered to the reader by a highly sceptical female narrator, whose ill-starred matchmaking fails when the young gentleman is swept away by an older couple who wants to make him their son-in-law. Slowly the narrator learns that this new bride is, in fact, dead, and has been dead for years. The young man, Marmaduke, and his new family create an entire life history for the dead girl, Maud-Evelyn, and end up living with her memory in a house furnished like a museum or a shrine for her memory. Decades later, when Marmaduke dies, all the belongings and gifts he got for her

dead bride are inherited by Lavinia, the woman who Marmaduke would perhaps have married, had he not met Maud-Evelyn's parents.

This story, despite its finesse, has received fairly little critical attention on its own. "Maud-Evelyn" is often lumped together with other, more famed stories of the supernatural by James, such as *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), "The Jolly Corner" (1908) and "The Real Right Thing" (1899). These cannot be bluntly classified as ghost stories, as often the existence of a ghost in the story is not exactly straightforward, but if classification be necessary, I do find the term "metaphysical romances" quite appropriate (Miner 1954, I). The criticism on these texts has quite often had a slight emphasis on description instead of analysis, but readings from the points of view of psychoanalysis, moral and biography have been offered (Miner 1954, 11–16).

Despite the exiguity of the theoretical material on "Maud-Evelyn", it is possible to carry out a well-informed reading and analysis, as the text unquestionably reflects one of the prominent literal issues discussed by contemporary authors: maintaining suspense. This aspect of the text will be explored with the help of critical writings by three masters of the Gothic tale: James himself, Ann Radcliffe and Edgar Allan Poe. James's preface to a collection of his stories (1908) mainly discusses *The Turn of the Screw*, but due to the similarities between the two stories can be applied to "Maud-Evelyn" as well. "Maud-Evelyn", being published two years later than *The Turn of the Screw,* takes advantage of the familiar technique of adumbration. Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) visualises the process of creating suspense, and Radcliffe's "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826) comments on the importance of certain obscurity in a terrifying tale.

My interest in "Maud-Evelyn" lies in its discussion of knowledge, and the ways knowledge can be controlled, limited and rationed. This text, considering its theme, effortlessly links up to the ultimate questions so typical of Victorian epistemology.

3.3.1 Truth, distorted and shrouded

The superficial structure of "Maud-Evelyn" has the air of a traditional ghost story. The actual story, delivered by a sceptical narrator, Lady Emma, is surrounded by a frame narrative with one of the most familiar topoi of the genre: a group of family or friends in a social gathering around a flickering fire (1). This setting was nearly a rule of the Victorian ghost story, and was previously used by James in his masterpiece published two years prior to "Maud-Evelyn", *The Turn of the Screw,* where he went even a step further by setting his frame story in Christmastime. This classical choice of setting, along with the effort for verisimilitude expressed by the frame narrator of "Maud-Evelyn" – "But what she had known I must give as nearly as possible as she herself gave it" – can be read as an assurance of genre; what follows, is a ghost story (1). The irony is that "Maud-Evelyn" is not a straightforward ghost story, but a fiction that should be read in the manner of reading a ghost story. The expectations and reactions of the reader play an important part in the course of the story, as will be later noted and more carefully examined.

Lady Emma may at first seem like the typical narrator of the ghost story genre, the kind that reveals very little of herself, and thus attracts very little attention from the reader. As the story unfolds, she comes to reveal more about herself than of the actual characters of her story. Those characters, Marmaduke, Lavinia and the Dedricks, are visible for the reader only through Lady Emma's eyes, and her judgement on them is not necessarily kind. For some reason Lady Emma believes that Marmaduke relies on her because of her kindness, as she was once pursued by Marmaduke's father, a widower:

> I was conscious of a pleasant link with the boy whose stepmother it had been open to me to become and to whom it was perhaps a little a matter of vanity with me to show that I should have been for him one of the kindest. This was what the woman his father eventually did marry was not, and that threw him upon me the more. (2)

Here Lady Emma concludes that the unkindness of his stepmother drew Marmaduke to her, but perhaps forgets the fact that Marmaduke is even more drawn to Maud-Evelyn's parents, the Dedricks, and remains in their company insomuch that he ceases to pay his once so regular visits to Lady Emma.

Another character estranged from her family is Lavinia, the young woman Lady Emma is desperately trying to match with Marmaduke. Lady Emma describes Lavinia as extremely timid and slightly self-complacent, in any case "one of those persons as to whom you don't know whether they might have been attractive if they had been happy, or might have been happy if they had been attractive" (2). Apparently Lavinia had already turned down a marriage proposal by Marmaduke, and is now suffering a fate of loneliness, almost as a punishment for this mistake. This, according to a brief, yet insightful essay by Banta, is a recurrent theme in the short, supernatural fiction of James; "those who trifle with love and do not fulfil its obligations are punished" (1964, 179). In addition to this punishment, Lady Emma's treatment of Lavinia is not exactly benign. She repeatedly points out how difficult it is for Lavinia to speak her mind and reach logical conclusions in a case where very few, if any, can be reached. According to Lady Emma, Lavinia seems "helpless and blank" and struck by difficulty, or "at a loss" repeatedly, when asked about Marmaduke's affairs with the Dedricks (10–12). In fact, Lavinia irritates Lady Emma greatly, when she keeps defending Marmaduke and expressing her surprise by using the word "struck". This is quickly echoed by Lady Emma in another meaning; "There was something about her [Lavinia] that began to escape me, and I must have looked at her hard. 'It's very good of you to be struck!'" (12) Here she not only comments on the innocence and good intentions of Lavinia, but also suggests that a good slap might bring her to her senses.

Throughout the text Lady Emma shows a strong interest in financial and other benefit. She knows that Marmaduke "was always short of funds" and immediately concludes that the Dedricks are "taking him about" (4–5). Her question in inner monologue, "Was he altogether silly or was he only altogether mercenary?" suggests that Marmaduke may be taking financial advantage of the Dedricks, and lives in "all the luxuries and conveniences" while being "paid for it" (13–15). Lady

Emma even sees benefit in the pleasant, sociable character of Marmaduke if his marriage with Lavinia were to take place, as Marmaduke would have "an immense circle" of friends ready for her (4). Social charades are a pleasing pastime for Lady Emma, as her condescending attitude to "study of the human scene" suggests that she falsely believes that the other characters of the story are merely puppets on a scene she is able to direct through matchmaking (6).

Lady Emma's unpleasant qualities, greed, opportunism, half-heartedly veiled maliciousness and condescension do not make her a very likable character. As suggested before, she believes that her kindness is drawing Marmaduke towards her, but her negative qualities are, in fact, driving Marmaduke away from her, closer to the Dedricks. Lady Emma and the Dedricks, whose name does not create a homophone pair with the word *dead* by accident, represent the juxtaposition of life and death on a thematic level of the text. Marmaduke, and perhaps some of his real-world contemporaries, were more fascinated with death than the mundane ways of the world of the living, represented by Lady Emma and her superficiality.

Why is Marmaduke so drawn to the Dedricks and their daughter? The couple is twice Marmaduke's age, and they do not belong to the same social circle with the other characters (7). The most prevalent qualities of the Dedricks, repeated by both, Marmaduke and Lavinia throughout the text, are goodness and kindness (5, 6, 10, 11, 14). Marmaduke finds the Dedricks "endlessly amusing" and "delightfully queer and quaint and kind – they're like people in some old story or of some old time" (14). Here it seems that Marmaduke finds great comfort in the company of the Dedricks, perhaps a sense of belonging he could never find with his biological family after the death of his mother. The affection appears to be mutual, as the Dedricks have, in Marmaduke's words, "simply adopted" him as a part of their family (13). Death may also appear as a safer option for Marmaduke than life, as it is more easily controlled; he can create life events for Maud-Evelyn, without having to tolerate the uncertainties of human existence. In addition to good, kind and quaint, the Dedricks are

described by Marmaduke as "original and unusual" (7), which strongly contradicts the description given by Lady Emma when she accidentally meets them at a railway station in Germany:

> They were colourless, commonplace, elderly Britons, of the kind you identify by the livery of their footman or the labels of their luggage, and the mere sight of them justified me to my conscience in having avoided, from the first, the stiff problem of conversation with them. (15)

This contradiction leaves the reader at a loss, as the reader is never offered an opportunity to decide for herself. Whatever knowledge the reader has about the Dedricks is always delivered through other characters. This is also the case with the ultimate enigma of the story, Maud-Evelyn. The reader never meets her, nor sees the "temple of grief and worship" that the Dedricks have turned their home into since the death of their daughter (14).

The devotion that the Dedricks show for worshipping their deceased daughter resembles closely a late eighteenth-century phenomenon Castle aptly calls "the romantic cult of the dead." The most prevalent manifestations of this phenomenon were the idealisation of the deceased, consolatory literature, elaborate grave inscriptions, monuments and mementoes, and the theme of a sentimental reunion that would take place in the afterlife. Behind all this was the latent desire for the dead not being dead, and the changes in social and family structure. Family units had become smaller because of urbanisation, and this would cause affection to be distributed to fewer people than before (1995, 131). Maud-Evelyn had been an only child, and had passed away at the age of approximately fifteen (12). Her parents had since then began to "live for her" in a manner that Lavinia describes as "their extraordinary fidelity and the way that […] they have made of her memory a religion" (9, 13). The couple communicates with Maud-Evelyn through a psychic medium, Mrs. Jex, whose business of rappings and séances Marmaduke finds "ugly and vulgar and tiresome", an attitude apparently shared by James himself (14; Banta 1964, 173).

Combined together, this cult of worshipping the dead, using psychic mediums to contact those on the other side and describing the Dedricks to be like people from a time gone by do create a feeling of not being able to let go, or a sense of clinging on to things, ideas and people that are no longer here and now. Marmaduke, along with the Dedricks, begins to live in the past by creating an actual life story for Maud-Evelyn, as explained here by Lavinia:

> "It's self-deception, no doubt, but it comes from something that – well, […]
> is beautiful when one does hear of it. They make her [Maud-Evelyn] out older,
> so as to imagine they had her longer; and they make out that certain things
> really happened to her, so that she shall have had more life. They've invented
> a whole experience for her, and Marmaduke has become a part of it." (17)

Here Lavinia expresses her acceptance of what Marmaduke and the Dedricks are doing in shaping the past and bending "the facts", that is Maud-Evelyn's age, mentioned by Lady Emma (16). Lavinia also points out, that the creating of imaginary life events for Maud-Evelyn is a collective, reciprocal process for those suffering from the same shared psychosis:

> "It's the gradual effect of brooding over the past; the past, that way, grows
> and grows. They make it and make it. They've persuaded each other – the
> parents – of so many things that they've at last also persuaded him
> [Marmaduke]. It has been contagious." (17)

Here Marmaduke and the Dedricks take part in a process of creating knowledge through coherence, as the truths about Maud-Evelyn are little by little formed in relation to other truths about her. The collective acceptance system possessed and operated by Marmaduke and the Dedricks generates justification for their beliefs in a manner described in section 3.2.

The reason for this distortion of factual knowledge is the pain experienced by the Dedricks and caused by the loss of Maud-Evelyn. They mean no harm in rejoicing in the contact they have established with their deceased daughter and sharing this comforting experience with Marmaduke, who is drawn in to this delusion by his urge of belonging somewhere and having a loving family of his own. This connectedness of individuals in a congregation-like group, dedicating their

lives to the remembrance of someone long gone by letting that someone live on in their daily experience merge into a metaphor of religious experience. Marmaduke and the Dedricks certainly behave like the members of a religious cult. They keep to themselves, reduce the contact to outsiders to a bare minimum and find their strength within their group. This view of alluding to religion is supported by textual evidence on a semantic level, such as making Maud-Evelyn's "memory a real religion" and describing her things, cherished by the Dedricks, as "relics" (13–14). The house dedicated to the memory of Maud-Evelyn is referred to as "a temple", and the act of worshipping her memory "a ritual", expressions clearly located in the semantic field of religion (14). In addition to other tokens of faith, the photograph of Maud-Evelyn has become so important for Marmaduke, that he carries it with him like a cross or a crucifix (12). Marmaduke and the Dedricks even show two different practices of worshipping, as the Dedricks hold on to using psychic mediums, perhaps a metaphor for organised religion with its sermons and services, whereas Marmaduke, according to his own words, does not "require it" and can "do beautifully without it" (14). He never uses mediums to contact Maud-Evelyn, but believes that she is with him without any mediation.

The reactions of Lady Emma and Lavinia support the idea of Maud-Evelyn being the centrepiece of a religious cult. Neither of them believes in the cult, but they both do their best not to insult those who do. Lady Emma, although a confirmed cynic, does her best to maintain peace when Marmaduke gives her the news on his and Maud-Evelyn's engagement:

> "Your blessed engagement?" I couldn't help the tone in which I took him up; but the way he disposed of that was something of which I feel to this hour the influence. It was only a look, but it put an end to my tone for ever. It made me, on my side, after an instant, look at the fire – look hard and even turn a little red. During this moment I saw my alternatives and I chose; so that when I met his eyes again I was fairly ready. "You still feel," I asked with sympathy, "how much it did for you?" I had no sooner spoken than I saw that that would be from that moment the right way. It instantly made all the difference. The main question would be whether I could keep it up. (19–20)

Here Lady Emma faces two options; she can either pretend that she believes too, or take the risk of causing a conflict, or "a little outbreak", as she calls it (20). While she listens to Marmaduke praising his fiancé she does form a question in her mind: "I say, just settle it for me once for all. Are you the boldest and basest of fortune-hunters, or have you only, more innocently and perhaps more pleasantly, suffered your brain slightly to soften?" (20) However, this question remains unuttered.

Lavinia shares Lady Emma's disbelief, but does her best to defend Marmaduke and support his view of the situation. She describes the believers' devotion as beautiful more than once (16–17) and takes Marmaduke's side in the situation when they accidentally meet at Kensington Gardens (22–23).

As mentioned before, Marmaduke is caught in the past, represented by the "rigid, antique pattern" of worship, and is unwilling to step forward into the future (14). He believes that truth can be found in the past: "[T]he more we live in the past, the more things we find in it. That's a literal fact. You would see the truth of it if your life had taken such a turn", he preaches to Lady Emma (23). However, for James the truth is not in the past, or in ancient rituals. This is painfully learned by Marmaduke, who eventually grows old and ill, and loses the Dedricks as the pass away. He ends up having "ailment in his eyes" and is led around the park by the merciful Lavinia like the Victorian version of King Oedipus (26); in his search for truth he has lost his parents, both biological and adopted, and only learned that in the end he is alone, and at the mercy of his fate. Lavinia, who perhaps finds herself a new family in Marmaduke, is described here to be "like a sister of charity – at all events like a sister" (26). This underlines the fact that although Marmaduke ends up spending his last months (or years) in the company of Lavinia, and even finds himself a second house where Lavinia can visit him without tarnishing the memory of his late wife, the two never find romantic love in each other (26). Their relationship remains on a platonic level, as Marmaduke is unable and unwilling to let go of his fictitious past.

3.3.2 Knowledge, limited and rationed

The body of text in "Maud-Evelyn" consist of eight relatively short, unnamed chapters, that each have a specific topic. According to my reading, and for the ease of discussion, I have named the topics as follows:

1. Marmaduke and Lavinia

2. The Dedricks

3. Maud-Evelyn

4. The death of Maud-Evelyn

5. Lady Emma comments on the situation

6. Creating a past for Maud-Evelyn

7. The engagement and apartment of Marmaduke and Maud-Evelyn

8. The death and estate of Marmaduke

When considering the distribution of information to the reader, an index such as this proves highly useful. In the first chapter the frame story introduces Lady Emma, who then proceeds to present Marmaduke and Lavinia to the reader. The second chapter discusses the Dedricks and their interest in Marmaduke, and in the third chapter it is brought to light that the Dedricks have a daughter, Maud-Evelyn. A great revelation takes place in chapter four, as the reader finally finds out that Maud-Evelyn is dead, and this revelation, along with the situation altogether, is further commented on by Lady Emma in chapter five. Chapter six discusses the way Marmaduke and the Dedricks build a life with memories for Maud-Evelyn, followed by the engagement and Marmaduke moving in with the Dedricks in chapter seven. Chapter eight, being the longest, describes the gradual ageing and later on passing away of Marmaduke, who leaves his estate, including all the precious things that used to belong to Maud-Evelyn, to Lavinia. At the end of chapter eight Lavinia and Lady Emma agree to explore the apartment and see the treasures "next week" and tell the reader all about them, but for the reader, the day never comes (27).

The order and timing of distributing knowledge to the reader are the key to the suspense and wonder of this text. As mentioned earlier, the text effortlessly reads as a ghost story from the onset, mostly because of the frame story and other conventions discussed in the previous sections. The revelation of the status of Maud-Evelyn in chapter four takes the reader by surprise; there was no indication or allusion of her being dead in any of the previous chapters. Here the reader receives an essential piece of information that shapes the reading of the rest of the text, and also affects retroactively the information the reader already has about Maud-Evelyn and the possibility of her relationship with Marmaduke. The delay of knowledge, carefully implemented by James, creates the suspense of the story and lets the knowledge, once exposed, radiate throughout the text in a process of coherence.

When the reader, still having the erroneous impression of a ghost story, finds out about Maud-Evelyn being dead, she begins to anticipate some kind of interaction with the supernatural, perhaps a visual observation of the ghost of Maud-Evelyn, or visiting Mrs. Jex, the psychic medium, with the Dedricks. Despite these expectations, Maud-Evelyn and the different modes of communicating with her (through or without a medium) remain a secret to the reader. Yet some details about Maud-Evelyn and Marmaduke's "life" together are revealed, especially in chapters six and seven, where it comes clear that Marmaduke not only believes that he knew Maud-Evelyn, but has also created a fictitious past for her, a past that he himself is a part of in "memories of his own" (16). Marmaduke loves Maud-Evelyn, and as they get engaged, the couple makes a home in Westbourne Terrace. The suite is filled with presents that Marmaduke and the Dedricks got for the bride, and according to Marmaduke, he remembers what Maud-Evelyn said about each present (21). The young husband-to-be talks of her bride with such warmth and dedication, that the love between the young couple remains unquestioned.

Lady Emma's reaction to her young friend having some kind of affair with a dead girl perhaps echoes the reaction of the reader, as she speaks her mind in inner monologue: "Let me say at

once, however, that grotesqueness, and even indeed something worse, did at first appear to me strongly to season it." (13) There is never any innuendo of anything "grotesque" taking place, and there is no mention of the location of Maud-Evelyn's body in the text. The text does not mention her grave, let alone visiting it, nor does it let the reader see inside the apartment. The ultimate anti-climax takes place at the end of the story, where Lady Emma urges Lavinia to go and see the apartment she inherited from Marmaduke. Lavinia goes, and returns to Lady Emma:

> She went, and three days ago she came to me. They're really marvels, it appears, treasures extraordinary, and she has them all. Next week I go with her – I shall see them at last. Tell you about them, you say? My dear man, everything. (27)

This is the end of the story. An open end, where the narrator promises to reveal everything to the reader, but paradoxically ceases to transmit any information by finishing her narration.

All this secrecy and hiding knowledge about Maud-Evelyn is a part of a technique James himself called *adumbration*, previously discussed in section 2 in the context of the genre and *The Turn of the Screw*. The trick of this technique is presenting the reader with gaps of information within the text, and letting her fill them with her personal fears (Briggs 1977, 88). Adumbration, obscurity, prolonging the climax; regardless of the terminology, the skill of creating suspense through epistemological coherence appears to have been a significant topic of academic discussion in the eighteenth century. Radcliffe discusses the topic in her posthumously published article "On the Supernatural in Poetry", that supposedly concerns poetics in a sense broader than just poetry, and swears by "a more gloomy tint" when it comes to shedding light on the components of a story (1846, 147). She also wishes to make a clear distinction between *terror* and *horror,* a contrast similar to the one cherished by M.R. James:

> Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive

horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil? (Radcliffe 149–150)

Here Radcliffe elevates horror, the result of skilful composition, to a source of "the sublime", whereas terror, the output of gratuitous violence and other elements despised by M.R. James as well are considered a force "annihilating" the reader's mental faculties. According to Radcliffe, horror is best achieved through a carefully dispensed amount of obscurity and uncertainty that leave the reader's imagination at large (150). Poe continues along the same lines in his "The Philosophy of Poetic Composition", and shifts the discussion towards a more concrete level, as his reasoning is more closely linked to the text itself. According to Poe, the ideal poetic effect can be reached through skilful management of climax and prolonging the reader's curiosity in a text of appropriate length (1846, 21, 32). He also emphasises the importance of timing when it comes to dispensing information, and provides an example regarding the final stanza of his most famous poem, *The Raven* (1845):

It will be observed that the words, "from out my heart," involve the first metaphorical expression in the poem. They, with the answer, "Nevermore," dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical- but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza that the intention of making him emblematical of Mournful and never ending Remembrance is permitted distinctly to be seen. (1846, 32)

The effect here is similar to that of the revelation of Maud-Evelyn's deadness; the reader begins to re-evaluate all that has been said before, and the knowledge, carefully rationed, adds to the effect also pursued by Henry James. This effect was described by James as something new, as according to him "[t]he good, the really effective and heart-shaking ghost stories […] appeared all to have been told, and neither new crop nor new type in any quarter awaited" (1908, np). This is how James describes the starting point of composition of *The Turn of the Screw* in his preface to a collection of stories not

including "Maud-Evelyn". He also reprimands previous authorship within the genre for not being able to create evilness sinister enough, and utters his ambition in the matter:

> One had seen, in fiction, some grand form of wrong-doing, or better still of wrong-being, imputed, seen it promised and announced as by the hot breath of the Pit – and then, all lamentably, shrink to the compass of some particular brutality, some particular immorality, some particular infamy portrayed: with the result, alas, of the demonstration's falling sadly short. If *my* bad thigs, for *The Turn of the Screw*, I felt, should succumb to this danger, if they shouldn't seem sufficiently bad, there would be nothing for me but to hang my artistic head lower than I had ever known occasion to do. (1908, np)

In this excerpt of James's preface, the word *particular* quickly draws attention. His view appears to be, inversely, that in order to build the pinnacle of evil, the manifestations of that evil must be made ambiguous and indefinite, anything but particular. This is what he certainly succeeded in in *The Turn of the Screw*, and this is undoubtedly a crucial element of "Maud-Evelyn" as well.

In the case of "Maud-Evelyn", these ambiguous, indefinite fears might include those of the supernatural, ghosts, dead bodies, or something worse than grotesque, as Lady Emma puts it. After all, the love affair of a fifteen-year-old dead girl and a grown man do raise questions of certain taboos, and the questions become even more urgent when the reader's thoughts are guided even closer to grotesqueness by mentioning "the suite prepared for her marriage" (21). This image very likely leads the reader's thoughts to the idea of consummating a marriage. Another idea that might haunt the mind of the reader is a disturbing discovery of some kind, perhaps made in the apartment. Preserving Maud-Evelyn's personal belongings might bring to mind the possibility of preserving her body as well.

What are the effects of this careful distribution of knowledge and the use of adumbration, in addition to causing fear or discomfort in the reader? All in all, it emerges that the writer is holding the knowledge in his hands, and is only giving the reader the minute crumbs of information he sees fit. These little pieces of information are enough to nurse the belief that raises in

the reader, and is such an essential factor in this text. Marmaduke's love, just like the devotion of the Dedricks, is carried by their belief in Maud-Evelyn, and in this belief they feed each other's beliefs, again through coherence. According to Lewis' essay "Reality of the Unseen: Shared Fictions and Religious Experience in the Ghost Stories of Henry James" (2005), belief was a central theme for James, and always present in what Lewis calls "shared fictions". By this he means the bonds that the characters have created with each other by believing in the same fiction, whether it be real or not (2005, 35). This is also the case for "Maud-Evelyn", as those who believe in her form a closely knit unit, where as those who do not, are left out. Lewis also discusses the religious experience in the supernatural fiction of James, without ever focusing on the true nature and ending of "Maud-Evelyn". According to my reading, in the final chapter of the story, treasures are promised to those who believe. This, being the ultimate dogma of most religions, supports my reading of the allegorising of religious experience in this text in a version of the kingdom of heaven. Marmaduke and the Dedricks shared their fiction of Maud-Evelyn, and as Lavinia and Lady Emma, who have never been to the apartment before, now agree to visit it, they become members of this belief as well. They too get to see what lies beyond, and the same promise is made to the reader.

An overly simplified and distorted reading of "Maud-Evelyn" might claim that for James, believing is bliss. After all, those who believe and refuse to question, like Lavinia, reach the knowledge promised at the end. However, in the world of this metaphysical romance answers do not come so easily. By the distribution of knowledge described earlier, and by certain characteristics of the dialogues in the text, James makes an epistemological point in which belief always depends on the knowledge it is based on. These special dialogues, taking place in every chapter except chapter five, follow a certain pattern that is best brought to light through example. Here Marmaduke and Lady Emma discuss the unattainable marriage between Marmaduke and Lavinia in chapter one:

"I swore to her that I would never marry. Oughtn't that to be enough?"

"To make her come after you?"

"No – I suppose scarcely that; but to make her feel sure of me – to make her wait."

"Wait for what?"

"Well, till I come back."

"Back from where?"

"From Switzerland – haven't I told you? I go there next month with my aunt and my cousin." (3)

Here the information of Marmaduke's voyage to Switzerland is not offered to Lady Emma, or the reader, until at the very end of the dialogue, and only after three clarifying questions made by Lady Emma. This pattern of delaying the crucial information till the very end of the dialogue appears in nine different dialogues taking place between Lady Emma and Marmaduke or Lady Emma and Lavinia. Each dialogue proceeds in a similar way, in alternation of questions and answers. Other crucial pieces of information offered to the reader in this fashion are the identity of the Dedricks in chapter two, them having a daughter in chapter three, the daughter being dead in chapter four, the making of Maud-Evelyn's past in chapter six, the marriage suite in chapter seven and last but not least, the possibility of viewing Maud-Evelyn's treasures in chapter eight. The subtext behind these dialogues appears to be that effort has to be made in order to reach knowledge, and still, the knowledge available is always governed and rationed by someone. In the case of these dialogues, the knowledge may even be misunderstood or misrepresented by some of the parties involved in it, as can be seen in a dialogue in chapter two. In this fragment of it, Lady Emma is trying to gain information from Lavinia on the Dedricks, who have just met Marmaduke in Switzerland. The fragment begins with a question made by Lady Emma:

I thought a moment. "Are they ladies?"

Her own imagination meanwhile had also strayed a little. "I think about forty."

"Forty ladies?"

She quickly came back. "Oh no; I mean Mrs Dedrick is."

"About forty? Then Miss Dedrick—"

"There isn't any Miss Dedrick."

"No daughter?"

"Not with them, at any rate. No one but the husband."

I thought again. "And how old is *he*?"

Lavinia followed my example. "Well, about forty, too."

"About forty-two?" We laughed, but "That's all right!" I said; and so, for the time, it seemed. (5)

Here the first question is given an answer that does not respond to the question, but perhaps anticipates the question that Lavinia expects Lady Emma to make next. Lady Emma echoes Lavinia's mistake, "Forty Ladies?" in disbelief, and the dialogue continues in a quick rhythm of short questions and answers. Another misunderstanding happens at the end of the excerpt, where Lady Emma mishears Lavinia's homophonous "forty, too" for "forty-two". These mistakes in communication show that for James, the person who is receiving knowledge, be it Lady Emma or the reader, is in the mercy of the person who is providing the knowledge. The knowledge that is being transmitted can easily be distorted, sometimes on purpose, and sometimes involuntarily. In this excerpt, between the communicational failures already discussed, there is a third piece of information the falsity of which is debatable; Lavinia has no knowledge of the Dedricks having a daughter. She claims that "[t]here isn't any Miss Dedrick", and later shapes this conclusion into "[n]ot with them, at any rate." It is difficult to tell whether she is giving out incorrect information or not, because the crucial question of Maud Evelyn's existence is a dubious one. The correctness of Lavinia's conclusion depends on the person considering the conclusion; for those who believe in Maud-Evelyn, Lavinia's statement is false, and for those who do not believe, it is correct. The final lines of this excerpt, "'That's all right!'"

I said; and so, for the time, it seemed" may include an interesting form of foreshadowing, or a careful innuendo of what is to come. Lady Emma's "That's all right!" has more meaning than the conventional "don't worry, everything is fine", as it also refers to the validity of the information discussed between the two ladies. All that was said about the Dedricks appears to be right and true at that point of time, "for the time, it seemed." This small comment at the end of the dialogue adds to the effect of truth being fickle, and changing through the accumulation of knowledge.

If the frame story and other conventions mentioned earlier function as a metatext-like guide for the reader, perhaps this dialogue with the uncertain information in it should also be read as a guide, or even a warning. This poor exchange of information in the early pages of the text seems to be advising the reader to use her good judgement when considering the truths delivered by the rest of the text. In the world of "Maud-Evelyn", each character's beliefs are shaped by the knowledge they possess. In terms of epistemology, this is a situation that follows the coherence theory of justification, discussed in section 3.2. A crucial element of this theory is the acceptance system that helps the individual to evaluate beliefs. In order to achieve mutual support, or coherence, beliefs must be accepted on the basis of the knowledge the individual already has in their acceptance system (Lehrer 1990, 115). What follows from poor transmission of knowledge, such as in "Maud-Evelyn", is an unstable acceptance system that may cause the individual to believe things on false premises. This kind of weakness in processing and controlling knowledge, and the consequences of such weakness are, as shown throughout this thesis, a great concern in Victorian epistemology.

To conclude my analysis of "Maud-Evelyn", I would like to emphasise the significance of belief in this text. Belief in the romantic cult of the dead, or in spirit communication, or perhaps even the power of love brings comfort to the individuals safely nested inside their personal milieu, unaware of the great truths of their own existence. Truth is a fickle thing, something that can be altered, bent and stretched into a subjective notion of the world through belief. I fully agree with James's brother, William James, when he claims in his pioneering work of psychology that "[a]s a

rule we believe as much as we can. We would believe everything if we only could" (1890, Vol II, 300). This is also the situation in "Maud-Evelyn", as some of the characters do believe as much as they can, resulting in something between self-deception and wishful thinking. The overbearing distribution of knowledge carried out by James shows the insignificance of the knowledge accessible to human beings. Our impressions are altered easily by the smallest fragments of knowledge, that we hold no control over whatsoever. The adumbrated gaps that our knowledge is unable to fill are covered with belief in the things we wish to believe.

4. Visual Epistemology

The ensemble of Victorian epistemology is a spider web of psychology, science, philosophy and theology. The Victorian era was strongly characterised by progress on various fields of technology and science. Physics, optics, communication and transportation advanced in leaps and bounds, not to mention the emergence of a completely new branch of science, psychology. Gone were the days of antiquated superstitions, at least in the urban setting of the time. In an age of scientific triumph on various frontlines of human kind, knowledge became something essential, something that widened the gap between what was civilised and what was not. For the Victorian, as it will be shown throughout this section, one of the primary methods of acquiring knowledge and justification was visual perception. This obsession with seeing, *oculacentrism*, if you will, was from time to time contested with more spiritual and psychological ideas and different modes of seeing (Smajić 2010, 73).

In this section, a specifically Victorian look on epistemology will be provided by three texts: Firstly, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (1995) by Terry Castle. This is a collection of essays on the psychology of eighteenth-century culture. The theories proposed by Castle are applicable to Victorian times as well, because the Gothic and the fascination with the macabre she discusses formed a certain kind of continuum

that reaches even the end of the nineteenth century. Secondly, I will use the dissertation of Srdjan Smajić, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (2010). Smajić's work sheds light on different modes of vision in connection with the Victorian ghost story and its not-so-distant cousin, the detective story. The third piece of my puzzle of Victorian epistemology will be "Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence", an article by Peter Lamont (2004). Lamont focuses on the phenomena experienced in the séance rooms in the time of the Spiritualist fad and their role in the scientific and cultural discourse of the nineteenth century.

In order to untangle the web of Victorian epistemology, all of its strands must be taken into consideration and laid out with great care. Once the work is done, it can be seen that from the centre of the network rises one distinctive theme that connects the multitude of ideas, notions and observations: the lack of, or the endeavour for, controlling thought and knowledge.

4.1 Seeing as reading

In the Middle Ages, knowledge gained through vision was considered an absolute replica of what was true. The human eye was thought to be a *camera obscura* that was able to transmit images as they were directly in to the mind of the perceiver, and so yield knowledge. This empiricist view was partially supported by the eighteenth-century philosopher Bishop George Berkeley, whose ground-breaking work *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1732) stated that knowledge was based on observation (Smajić 2010, 74). In modern terminology of epistemology this meant that according to the foundational theory of justification discussed in section 3, beliefs based on observation were self-justified and therefore valid for forming a foundation for other beliefs of the same belief system.

What was new about the theory proposed by Berkeley, was his linguistic model of vision. According to him, there was no pre-existing connection between tangible and visual ideas, but the pairing of the tangible and the abstract was to take place in the mind of the beholder through

habitual association and previous experience. This, again, relates to the empiricist idea of the human mind as *tabula rasa,* a storage that is little by little filled with skills and knowledge. For Berkeley, seeing was literally a form of reading, a process of decoding meanings from images and a skill that the viewer was able to better through practise. Smajić draws a strong and justifiable parallel between this and the sharp, all-perceiving eye of characters such as Sherlock Holmes and August Dupin, the protagonists of the Victorian detective story genre (2010, 71, 74–75). Characters such as Holmes and Dupin were able to use their knowledge and powers of deduction in their fight against immorality and crime. It was clear that with such great control of mind and all that knowledge stored within they had the advantage. By correctly interpreting the evidence, or the signs, the Victorian detective could "read" the situation with precision and advocate a form of scientific naturalism, which goes hand in hand with empiricism. For these detectives, induction was the true method of science and knowledge, and those not able to process their knowledge and control their mental faculties were left to be in awe of these masters of deduction.

What, then, was to be done with hallucinations, illusions and inexplicable phenomena, such as ghosts? How does one "read" those, or how does one respond to a séance testimony that seems to shatter the natural law? While the *camera obscura* theory accredited ghost-seeing and other situations of misperception to malfunctions of the eye and the optic nerve, for Victorian epistemologists and philosophers the defect was in the interpretation of the image transmitted into the mind of the viewer. If the viewer failed to have the skills to decode the images, to infer the correct meaning through association and knowledge, their testimony was not to be trusted (Smajić 2010, 67–68). Such a lack of control over cognitive matter caused an empiricist dilemma. If basic beliefs were supposed to be self-justified, often through observation, how could one validate the discarding of a testimony based on observation? According to Lamont, the validation came in the form of scientific expertise. Those who did not have scientific credentials and a trained mind were not considered competent to give statements about what happened in the séance parlours, thus making a vast majority

of testimonies on the realness of apparitions futile. At the time it was customary for scientists to observe séances, stage conjurors and the like for reasons that will be clarified in the next subchapter (2004, 910).

The disparagement of the uneducated mind created a new problem. There were instances where the skilful parlour tricks of the psychic medium or the mesmerist were so convincing that even scientists or other respected individuals such as royalty or leading politicians would declare themselves as believers. How could someone so prestigious have so little power over their cognitive abilities? An awkward situation could nevertheless be avoided by applying an appropriate theory chosen from the field of physiology. An apt candidate for the purpose is the theory of apparitions by physician and philosopher John Ferriar. *An Essay towards a Theory of Apparitions* was published in 1813 in order to help those suffering from the disease of ghost-seeing. "To those unfortunate persons, who feel a real dread of apparitions", Ferriar hopes "to offer considerations which will quiet their fears, and will even convert the horrors of solitude into a source of rational amusement" (1813, viii).

Ferriar presents various ways in which people can be fooled by their eyesight, and misperceive along the lines of the aforementioned *camera obscura* theory, complementing his observations and arguments with cursory yet fascinating case studies. The core of his essay, and the lifeline he throws to those suffering from ghost-seeing, is his theory of "renewal of external impressions" (1813, 17). This means that an apparition is not real, nor created in the deranged mind of the viewer, but a replica of something that was actually seen earlier and is now being retrieved from the memory through the optic nerve to be cast on to the retina. According to Ferriar, this process bears great resemblance to "childhood amusement" where one would stare in to a bright light, such as fire, and then look away, still seeing the bright outlines of the flames in one's eyes. Apparition sightings caused by "external prototypes" were considered quite safe and normal, not signs of mental illness in any way (1813, 17–22). This theory roughly covers instances where deceased people are seen, but Ferriar offers relief to also those who see "forms of objects which have no external

prototypes", such as demons. These kinds of hallucinations occur when "the brain is partially irritated", and "without any degree of delirium" (1813, 31–32).

For a modern reader, case studies of people seeing demons, spirits and giant spiders do bring delirium or insanity to mind, but the theories presented by Ferriar exempt the sufferers from the shame of such disease. The fear of losing control over one's mind is avoided by stating that sometimes the physical system that, according to empiricism, provides us with knowledge, is flawed. It should be noted that Ferriar does not ascribe any of these malfunctions to the actual *mind* of the ghost-seer, but the source of the failure is always organic: the optic nerve, the retina or the brain. With the techniques and remedies of contemporary medicine it was perhaps easier to treat and understand physical conditions than mental problems, and the diagnosis of a physical problem was less awkward to deliver to a patient. Psychology as science was yet to be discovered and taken into use.

In the final part of his essay Ferriar brings up certain mental qualities and activities that may lead to apparition-seeing and other problems of such type. He states that "[u]nquestionably, the temperament which disposes men to cultivate the higher and graver species of poetry, contributes to render them susceptible of impressions of this nature", meaning impressions of apparitions and other supernatural phenomena (1813, 63). He also mentions the civil war in 1649 and "the melancholic tendency of the rigid puritans" as causes for clouding the collective sentiment, not to mention that "[i]t is indeed, an awful truth, well known to physicians who see many lunatics, that religious melancholy is one of the most frequent causes of the *Dæmonomania*", in other words, demonic hallucinations (1813, 109–111). According to Ferriar, these types of delusions were increasing in real life, and not because of temperament only, as their birth was aided by circumstances of time and place, such as visiting the site of ancient massacre (1813, 113, 129).

Similar risk factors were noted by other physicians and philosophers to the extent that the syndrome could be named. *Reverie*, or "the obsessional solipsistic replay of mental images in the mind's eye", as Castle defines it, was considered a real threat to which anyone could fall victim (1995,

175). The concept of reverie is clarified by the process of internalisation, that is, the absorption, or assimilation of ghosts in to one's thoughts, where one obsessively creates an image of another person in one's mind. According to Castle, the work of Ferriar and his followers, being examples of the rise of scientific rationalism, caused the supposed origin of the ghost to shift from the traditional realm of the supernatural to the world of thought. It was believed that those who think of ghosts would also see them – that thoughts could transform themselves into apparitions that cannot be escaped. This was believed to take place especially when a person would recklessly indulge in activities that would induce reverie, or self-inflicted ghost-seeing:

> To prevent thoughts from turning into ghosts, the act of thinking had to be regulated. The rationalists of the last eighteenth and nineteenth century developed a host of prescriptions designed to ward off the new kind of inwardly generated phantom. Too much study, brooding over obscure intellectual problems, reading into the night, excessive mourning, and, especially overindulgence in poetic or erotic fantasies – all prompted the appearance of spectral forms. (Castle 1995, 175)

Even the healthiest of minds could sink into this somnambulistic state, where image-making, or imagining things could not be stopped:

> Too much solitude, sitting in gaudily decorated churches, walking in gardens and terraces (as opposed to along the seashore), opium chewing, corpulence, the "debility subsequent to debauch," even drumming with one's fingers on table tops, according to one writer, were all dangerous reverie-inducers. (Castle 1995, 183)

The origin of the spectral had now shifted from the external to the internal world of an individual, just as described by the internalisation theory outlined by Castle. Reverie, with all its dangers, posed a great risk to those who lacked the mental strength to resist the ghosts of the mind. It was as if thought had to be tethered just to prevent it from escaping and sweeping the thinker off their feet.

4.2 Control of Knowledge

In the Victorian war against reckless and uncontrollable modes of thinking and processing knowledge, countermeasures had to be taken. Thinking had to be guided into a direction that was both safe and worthwhile, because falling into the decadent slumber of reverie was the worst one could think of. One way of avoiding this idling of the mind was harnessing one's brain power into a process of visual learning even in the leisure time. Vision, being the most important method of acquiring knowledge in a world relying of empiricism and scientific naturalism, was considered the best possible instrument in accumulating an all-round education on the ways of the world. Lamont mentions spiritualist séances, mesmerism acts, freak shows and stage conjurors, in addition to various exhibitions, as sources of "useful knowledge" (2004, 901–904). Castle increases the list by adding phantasmagorias, or magic lantern shows, where "spirits" and other "phenomena" were reflected on the walls of a darkened room and an eerie atmosphere was created through music, steam and clever use of machinery such as trapdoors (1995, 143).

The audience was lured in to these shows by the means of wonder, amazement and curiosity, but an educational angle was offered as well. The viewers were given explanations for the enigmatic things they witnessed, in order to educate them in a modern, scientific way. Phantasmagorias, for example, always included what Castle aptly calls "a pretence of pedagogy", a lecture on "the fallacy of ghost-belief and the various cheats perpetrated by conjurers and necromancers over the centuries." What made the lectures pretentious was the fact that the true tricks of the trade were never revealed, and the magic lantern show that followed was frightful and realistic enough to leave the viewer uncertain of the reality of the apparitions included. Producers of these shows claimed to enlighten the general public and clear away ancient superstitions, while of course making a tidy sum of money on ticket revenue (1995, 143). On the same note, Lamont discusses disenchantment, or demystification of conjuring acts. According to an ancient tradition, conjurors denied having actual magical powers, a safe choice in a society where people were burnt as witches

in fairly recent times. The conjurors themselves were not the only ones to make claims on the scientific nature of their tricks, but conjuring acts, just as many other types of performances, were often observed and even reproduced by scientists as "rational amusement" and "part of the education of the young." The intentions of the conjurors were not always quite as noble, as their explanations of the illusions they created often included scientific information that was completely false and fabricated. Nevertheless, conjurors managed to maintain a positive reputation by exposing card sharps and other hustlers, including psychic mediums, who broke one of the key rules of showmanship. These professionals, who became popular by the rise of Victorian Spiritualism in the mid-nineteenth century, would claim that what they did in the séance room was no trick, but genuine spirit communication. This claim of true supernatural abilities, and earning money off it, would infuriate the conjurors, as they had tried to distance themselves from magic for centuries (Lamont 2004, 904–905). For the general public the difference between the authenticity of conjuring tricks, phantasmagorias and séances may not have been a very prominent one. As mentioned earlier, visual perception was considered the most important method of acquiring knowledge, and when the audience actually *saw* the apparitions, although indistinctly, they were most likely quite convinced.

This fight for disenchantment can be seen as another effort to reach and maintain control over knowledge and thinking. I fully agree with sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, quoted by Lamont, when he suggests that "modernity's quest for order was a war against ambivalence." By this Bauman means that resisting magic and mystery was the modern way of averting uncertainty and indeterminacy that threatened to make the world uncontrollable (2004, 904).

The need for controlling the world of thought and knowledge certainly emerges from various aspects of Victorian culture. Visual perception was considered the raw material for inference, a process that had to be carried out in a correct manner. This process, the purpose of which was to yield reliable knowledge, was in danger of becoming distorted by organic dysfunctions, such as those mentioned by Ferriar, and the risks of indulging in reverie. Visual learning was considered an

appropriate pastime, and a valuable way of harnessing one's thoughts to run along the right track. Sometimes the pedagogical content was somewhat questionable, but the philosophy was always the same; through observation it was possible to acquire knowledge that met the three conditions, the truth condition, the acceptance condition and the justification condition. According to the justification condition, justification must be complete and based on evidence, evidence that Victorian society could find through empiricist epistemology.

As mentioned earlier, the foundation theory of justification builds on a foundation of basic beliefs that are, from an empiricist point of view, based on observation and therefore self-justified. This was not only the general consensus, but also the scientific model of the time. This model was undoubtedly shaken by the realisation that if senses could be fooled, like in the cases presented by Ferriar, all observations were at risk of becoming unreliable. Without reliable observations the foundation of empiricist knowledge would be shattered, and the idea of science as such would become futile. This is why it was essential for individuals to hold on to whatever knowledge they had and were able to process, and this is why the concept of the spectre was so problematic for the network of Victorian epistemology. Should one trust one's eyes, or the testimony of others? Or would it be wiser to trust scientific evidence, or perhaps abandon secular reasoning and accept a spiritual explanation? All this would mould and build up the Victorian acceptance system, that is, the set of information that one uses in order to weigh in the truthfulness of new information. With the overwhelming amount of new information and knowledge pouring in from all the new areas of science and technology, it is no wonder that the Victorian felt that truth was slipping out of their hands. Knowledge became precarious, vague and volatile, and the Victorian individual grasping for control of it felt helpless and constantly drifting closer to the edge.

Decoding meanings and acquiring knowledge through perception were the key factors in the Victorian culture of knowledge. The ability and willingness of using one's vision for personal benefit were considered crucial for an individual, as opposed to letting weaknesses such as idleness

or disease blur one's perception. In a world based on empirical observations maintaining control over one's thoughts and observations were of paramount importance. Failure in these processes will be further discussed in my analysis of "The Signal-man".

4.3 "The Signal-man"

"The Signal-man" is a thrilling ghost story written in 1866 by Charles Dickens. The story revolves around the interaction between its two main characters, the signalman, who works at a signalling box on a railway line, and the narrator, who accidentally finds his way to the signalman's post and finds the solemn railway man peculiar but interesting. The narrator, of whom very little is revealed, visits the signalman's post three times and learns that the railway cutting is in fact haunted by a ghost appearing on the railway line in front of a dark and ominous tunnel, always foretelling some kind of calamity on the railway line. The signalman, being a responsible worker, feels absolutely anguished for not being able to understand the warnings that the ghost is trying to communicate to him and prevent the accidents from happening. The narrator is determined to help the troubled man, but unfortunately too late. On his last visit to the signalling box he finds the signalman killed by a train dashing through the tunnel.

Like most works of Dickens in general, "The Signal-man" yields various interpretations and readings that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The text has previously been read, for example, as a way of processing personal trauma (Matus 2001) and as a warning of the dehumanising effect of modern technology (Tytler 1994). The ambition of my analysis is to apply the theory of Victorian epistemology and control of knowledge formed in the previous section to this supernatural story, and deliver a novel reading of it.

4.3.1 Control of perception

The apparition of the story shows itself only to the signalman, and only very briefly at a time. The first appearance, the ghost standing on the railway line in front of the tunnel, calling "Halloa! Below there! Look out!" and fervently waving its right arm, predicts an accident taking place a few hours later on the same railway line (Dickens 1866, 7–8). The second appearance, occurring approximately six months later, was silent, and this time the ghost was leaning against a warning light and covering its face in its hands. On the day of the second appearance a young woman mysteriously dies in one of the train carriages passing by (9). On both occasions the signalman sees the ghost, receives the warning, but is unable to understand its meaning and take any precautionary actions. Now the ghost is back, ringing the signalman's message bell and appearing on the line, again waving its arm vehemently. This disturbs the poor man to the extent that when he first meets the narrator of the story, he mistakes the narrator for the ghost. This impression is further supported by the words uttered by the narrator, who coincidentally calls out in the exact same words that the ghost had used a year before (1, 8).

Within the context of the genre, the ghost sightings made by the signalman are fairly lucid. The first one takes place on a moonlit night, and the second "one morning, as the day was breaking", so the visual observation of the ghost is not distorted by external factors, such as darkness. The ghost seems to be able to fool the signalman's eye quite entirely, as the poor man succeeds in approaching this lifelike apparition to almost touching distance without noticing anything ghastly about it (7, 9). The signalman need not rely on his vision alone, but he may also use his hearing, as the ghost first catches his attention by calling out (7). Later in the story, when the ghost tries to deliver its last warning, it calls "for many minutes together, in an agonised manner" and rings the bell that the signalman must monitor at all times in case of messages arriving from other signalling boxes or stations (10). Compared to the typical corner-of-the-eye flits and the barely audible sighs and whispers that one could expect, this ghost seems to appear to the signalman in a very candid manner, using more than one sensory channel for communication. From an epistemological point of view, the

signalman appears to be a supporter of the *camera obscura* notion of knowledge, as he bases his view of the situation upon his observations of the ghost without challenge. He never once doubts himself, or questions his observations, but remains adamant about the realness of the ghost throughout the story without even considering the limitations of his perceptual ability. According to Lamont, the followers of the Victorian Spiritualist movement often had the same reason for their beliefs; the séance room phenomena was more than often credited as the primary reason for converting to and supporting Spiritualism (2004, 898). Here the signalman follows the same epistemic path, he sees the ghost with his own eyes, and fully believes in it.

The narrator, along with the reader, only experiences the supernatural of the story through the signalman's testimony. It is therefore important for the reader to have a notion of certain integrity and reliability of the signalman's character. A character showing clear signs of poor judgement, mental illness or pathological dishonesty could not catch the interest of the narrator or the reader, as his sightings of the apparition could easily be dismissed as delusion, lies or excessive superstition. As the narrator becomes acquainted with the signalman, he learns that although the work at the post is fairly simple, the man is well educated, perhaps even above his station. He had been "a student of natural philosophy, and had attended lectures" before working on the railways, and has managed to make use of his time on his solitary work post (4):

> He had taught himself a language down here [at his signalling box] —if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation, could be called learning it. He had also worked at fractions and decimals, and tried a little algebra; but he was, and had been as a boy, a poor hand at figures. (4)

As noted by Lamont, and discussed earlier in section 4.2, according to the contemporary scientific ideals, valid observations could only be made by the scientifically trained eye and mind (2004, 910). Here the signalman's education, although incomplete, makes him more competent in observing this strange phenomenon than for example a simple member of the peasantry with no education would

be. This gives him adequate control of his own processes of forming knowledge and justification for it, and it makes his testimony of the ghost sighting at least partially reliable. His endeavour for education can also be read as a form of learning as a pastime activity, as discussed earlier in connection to visual learning. According to the Victorian ideal, one should guide one's thoughts on to a path that was useful instead of idling away and taking the risk of reverie. Moments spent in solitude were considered a risk factor for this condition that distorted one's judgement, especially when spent in places that were isolated and gloomy, like the work place of the signalman (Castle 1995, 183).

The railway cutting occupied by the signalman is not only isolated, but also extremely dark, grim and unsettling. This is brought to the reader's attention by the narrator on numerous occasions throughout the story; the cutting is described as "extremely deep, and unusually precipitate […] made through a clammy stone that became oozier and wetter as I [the narrator] went down." (2) The narrator continues his description of the area in a rather bleak tone:

> His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way, only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction, terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world. (2)

The "massive architecture" of stone with "a barbarous, depressing and forbidding air" instantly brings in to mind the Gothic architecture of the time with its bombastic arches and towers. The image in its entirety, with its "earthy, deadly smell" perhaps alludes to that of a grave, where only a narrow strip of the sky would be seen between the earthen walls. When spending solitary night time hours in this environment, not to forget the presence of the ominous, black tunnel, it might prove a challenge to anyone to maintain their concentration on the work at hand. Perhaps this explains the poor learning

results achieved by the self-educating signalman, whose language skills are limited to only knowing the language "by sight", and whose exercises in fractions, decimals and algebra had not been a great success (4).

The signalman is deeply troubled by the apparition, and his main concern is the meaning of the spectre. "What is its warning against? […] Where is the danger? What is the danger?", he asks, and remains without answer (11). This is clearly a problem of inference, as the signalman hears the message loud and clear, but is unable to decode it in order to prevent the accident from happening.

The failing communication between the signalman and the ghost resembles the typical, rather obscure communication between a séance sitter and the "spirits" he/she is trying to communicate with through a psychic medium. The information psychic mediums were able to gather from the "spirits" was often vague, fragmentary and even absurd (Lamont 2004, 898).

The signalman is unable to understand why the ghost chose him to receive the warnings; "And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signal-man on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed, and power to act!" (12) By this he means that it would have been easier to prevent the accidents if only the ghost had delivered his message to someone with more authority, like the signalman's superiors. This may be a comment on the psychic mediums of the time. Why would the great men of history on the other side contact a random medium working in front of an audience somewhere in Great Britain, and not choose to converse with someone more important?

What Dickens seems to be implying with this distress experienced by the signalman is that although messages from the "spirits" could be received, they would not necessarily be of any use. Like the signalman, the average person would never be able to answer the questions "what does the spectre mean?" or "what can I do?" (11) Just like the signalman, the average person would not necessarily have the courage to react to those messages, out of fear of being labelled mad, a fear that haunts also the signalman's mind (11). The empathetic narrator pities the overburdened signalman,

and concludes that this problematic communication "was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life" (11). Explicitly, this "responsibility involving life" relates to the safety aspects of the work of on the railway line, but under the surface this may as well be a comment on the overly enthusiastic interest in the supernatural shown by Victorian society. Perhaps this "mental torture", proving to be exhausting for the signalman, represents the burden of seeking for answers to the ultimate questions of life. What Dickens may well be doing here is questioning the human ability to find answers for those questions, and criticising the Spiritualist methods used in the process.

There is something peculiar in the way the signalman reports his ghost-sightings to the narrator. Every time he reveals more about the reason of his distress to the narrator, he keeps touching the narrator on his arm. The first time this occurs is immediately after the narrator has offered him a diagnosis of nervous disorder: "I [the narrator] asked his pardon, and he slowly added these words, touching my arm" (8). Simultaneously, the signalman tells the narrator about the horrible accident on the line, foretold by the apparition. Interrupted by the narrator, the signalman goes on with his story. "'This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm […] "was just a year ago'" (8). This time the revelation is that he saw the apparition again, after six or seven months. The third touch also coincides with an unveiling of a horrible incident in the tunnel: "He touched me on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice, giving a ghastly nod each time" (9). This time the signalman is communicating the murder of a young woman travelling on a passing train. What is also interesting is that the intensity of touching increases every time. The first touch is just a touch, the second time the signalman actually lays his hand on the narrator's arm, and on the third time he taps the narrator's arm with his finger two or three times. Perhaps the signalman is using these touches as a rhetorical device. He wants the narrator to believe him, and is perhaps trying to establish a stronger contact between himself and the listener. This way the gap between the two narrows, and the narrator begins to trust the signalman.

The touches may also have something to do with mesmerism. It was a technique developed by and named after Anton Mesmer, a scientist who believed that by "physical manipulation" of the body's "magnetic poles" various conditions, especially mental disorders could be cured. One of his techniques was "laying-on" of hands, where the touch was supposed to mediate "a magnetic power" from the healer to the patient (Briggs 1977, 55–57). According to Briggs, Dickens was highly interested in mesmerism and hypnotism, insomuch that he had successfully experimented on his talents not only on his wife and friends but also on a patient suffering from mental problems. This interest in mesmerism can be seen in one of the most famous ghost stories by Dickens, "The Trial for Murder" (1865), where the narrator communicates his vision of a ghost to another character by touching him on his chest (Briggs 1977, 55–57). Considering the fact that "The Signal-man" was published only a year after "The Trial for Murder", it is possible that Dickens returned to the idea of touch relaying ideas or energies. The signalman is undoubtedly doing his best to convince the narrator, and is clearly using these touches and the laying-on of a hand in order to create the desired reaction in the mind of the recipient. If the signalman represents a believer of spirit communication and spiritualism, it is possible that he would do his best to make the sceptical narrator believe in the supernatural phenomena occurring around his work station. This miniature mesmerism the signalman is applying in order to make his point seems to be working moderately well, because the narrator is not entirely rejecting his supernatural stories, but keeps coming back for more.

When the narrator visits the signalman for the first time, he notices that on two occasions the Signalman hears the sound of his little message bell, even when the bell is not actually ringing. He also finds out that the signalman, according to his own words, feels "troubled", a statement that supports the narrator's observation of the signalman's "inexplicable air" (5). In a conversation that follows, the signalman sets a bait that the narrator happily takes:

> He [the signalman] would have recalled the words if he could. He had said them, however, and I [the narrator] took them up quickly.
>
> "With what? What is your trouble?"

> "It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very, difficult to speak of. *If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you.*"

> "But I expressly intend to make you another visit. Say, when shall it be?"

> "I go off early in the morning, and I shall be on again at ten to-morrow night, sir."

> "I will come at eleven." (7, italics mine)

Here the signalman succeeds in attracting the narrator's attention with his suspension of disclosure. Intrigued by the strange behaviour related to the bell and the approaching revelation, the narrator agrees to visit the signalling box again, even before the signalman delivers his final touch to this feat of manipulation. He asks the narrator not to call out in the manner of the ghost when he arrives on the next day, and wants to know why the narrator chose to utter the exact same words as the ghost:

> Let me ask you a parting question. What made you cry 'Halloa! Below there!' to-night?"

> "Heaven knows," said I. "I cried something to that effect—"

> "Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well."

> "Admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below."

> "For no other reason?"

> "What other reason could I possibly have!"

> *"You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?"*

> "No." (6, italics mine)

After this dialogue, the narrator leaves the signalling box and hurries back to his quarters. Much is left unexplained, and the possibility of some sort of supernatural activity is suggested. This, together with the persuasive, perhaps even mesmerist touches discussed earlier and the promise of revelation upon return make the signalman seem like a psychic medium or some other kind of supernatural showman trying to lure his one-man audience in for another sitting. Adding to this impression, the signalman does his best to convince the narrator of the veracity of his testimony: "True, Sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell you" (11), and receives his messages through a bell, one of the

instruments psychic mediums used in their pursuits of relaying messages from the dead (Lamont 2004, 901). Even Dickens' description of the signalman's appearance sounds unusually gloomy, as he is described as "a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows", having "fixed eyes", a "saturnine face" and a "peculiar low voice (2–3, 6).

Why had the Signalman ended up in his position of relaying other-worldly messages to this world? No clear reason is given in the text, but the narrator does state that in his youth, after attending natural philosophy lectures, the signalman "had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down and never risen again" (4). Here the narrator describes a degradation and loss of scientific knowledge as a transition downwards. From the very first paragraph of the story, Dickens creates a clear dichotomy of *up/above* and *down/below*, always placing the signalman and his spiritual communication to a low position. Examples of this can be found on pages 1, 2, 6, etc. Tytler takes notice of this positioning as well, and reads it as a symbol of "the contrast between the signalman's social comedown and the narrator's privileged status" (1994, 27). This is a justifiable reading, because the text does comment on various aspects of Victorian life, such as the position of the worker and the influences of industrialisation. However, the comedown of the Victorian might be forgetting the principles of enlightenment and the importance of reason. The signalman is like the personification of the problems included in the epistemology of the time; relying on one's observations alone, without any depth or questioning might lead into trouble, especially when all observations cannot be trusted.

4.3.2 Control of cognition

If the signalman represents the Victorian spiritualist, living in constant bombardment of fragmentary information, the role of the sceptic falls on the narrator. The narrator conveys the questions and arguments of the reader, and so the strategy of the sceptic narrator helps the reader to trust the narrator.

As mentioned earlier, the text gives the reader very little information on the narrator. He (male, as stated on page 3) is staying at an inn located within walking distance from the railway

cutting, and has an interest in "these great works", meaning the railways (6, 3). This kind of scarcity of information on the narrator is very typical of the genre, the ghost story being a type of short story. One of the effects of this type of narration is the apparent transparency of it. With less information on the narrator, the reader often assumes less interference in the mediation performed by the narrator. It is important to note that the only view on the signalman available to the reader is provided by the narrator, so all observations on the mental and physical condition of the ghost-seeing railwayman are filtered, or focalised, through the narrator's experience. The case is then very similar to the limited rationing of knowledge so prevalent in "Maud-Evelyn", as the choice of narration raises questions of reliability and judgement. A fascinating example of this is one of the many assumptions the narrator makes about the signalman's thoughts, brought to the reader right in the middle of their first encounter:

> In me, he [the signalman] merely saw a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly-awakened interest in these great works. (3)

This rather enigmatic statement shows that the narrator assumes that he is able to decode the thoughts of the signalman, and this is what the reader has to settle for. The image of "narrow limits" mentioned here does not yield a convincing interpretation on a concrete level, but according to my reading, it is the effect that counts. By describing his release from those limits the narrator expresses a certain transition, literally a shift from one perspective to another. Some factor had previously restricted his thought and perception, and now that he is free from that factor, he can fully see the world and its great marvels and achievements, such as the railroads. This liberation, a transition from narrow-mindedness to the supposed abilities of broader perception and a higher position create a distinct counterpoint to the downward transition made by the signalman. This is how the two characters form an opposition where two different modes of perception and knowing are contrasted.

As suspicion enters the storyline, the narrator becomes fixated on observing the signalman like a physician observes a patient. He takes careful note of the signalman's voice, facial expressions and even perspiration (5, 6, 11). The narrator also evaluates the mental condition of the Signalman to be "intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact" (12). He asks numerous questions, and even takes on a slightly superior position towards the poor Signalman:

> Said I [the narrator] when I rose to leave him [the Signalman]: "You almost make me think that I have met with a contented man."
>
> *(I am afraid I must acknowledge that I said it to lead him on).*
>
> "I believe I used to be so," he rejoined, in the low voice in which he had first spoken; "but I am troubled, sir, I am troubled." (5, italics mine)

The narrator believes that through this manipulation he has gained the advantage, but as shown in the previous sections, it is the signalman who is in control of the situation and succeeds to lure his guest in for another visit. Either way, the intention of the narrator is to get the signalman to reveal more details about his agonies.

By gathering symptoms and trying his hand at the art of deduction, the narrator delivers several diagnoses for the suffering signalman. He speculates on an "infection" in the mind of the signalman and describes his manners "feverish" (3, 12). The most elaborate diagnosis follows the signalman's confessions about the first encounter with the ghost; the narrator explains the ghost away as "a deception of his sense of sight" caused by "disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye". According to the narrator, these figures, such as the ghost seen at the entrance of the tunnel, originate in this disease and "were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves" (8). This corresponds nearly word for word to the theory of the renewal of external impressions, as proposed by Ferriar five decades earlier. This condition, as described in more detail in section 4.1, had nothing to do with the sanity of the patient, but was caused by organic failure alone (1813, 17–22). Perhaps this is why the theory seems like a safe choice for the narrator, as stated

before, it does not stigmatise the sufferer as insane. Ferriar's theory, published over fifty years before "The Signal-man", may have been already familiar to the contemporary reader. It is hard to tell, however, whether a contemporary reader would find the renewal of external impressions a plausible explanation for the signalman's ghost sightings, or would it be immediately excluded as obsolete and far-fetched. At all events, an organic explanation would spare the narrator from having an uncomfortable discussion with his "patient", as questions of sanity could be disregarded.

The narrator continues to explain the strange phenomena along the lines of Ferriar; the "imaginary cry" of the ghost was merely the wind howling in the telegraph wires, and the accident following the first ghost-sighting was "a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress [the signalman's] mind" (8). These bear a great resemblance to the examples of ghost-seers being fooled by their senses, given by Ferriar (1813, 17), but fail to convince the signalman.

The knowledge-creating model used by the narrator is a very familiar one. He observes his subject and the surroundings very carefully and uses his pre-existing knowledge and power of deduction to "read" what he sees. This Berkeleian model of seeing as reading is highly typical of the detective genre, where the expertise and control of mental faculties yield the truth for the one who seeks it. The narrator seems convinced that by reading the situation, both the Signalman and the surroundings very carefully, he can solve the mystery. He begins this process of decoding meanings on the first page of the story, before there even is any mystery involved, by judging the way his voice echoes off the walls of the railway cutting; "One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he [the signalman] could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came […]" (1) The signalman becomes the narrator's main test subject, as he scrutinises his every expression and movement. Here the narrator sets himself above the signalman, as shown by his attempt at manipulating his subject and the distinct dichotomy between *up/down* on a semantic level, both mentioned in the previous subsection. The narrator trusts his capacity of creating knowledge and controlling his cognitive processes, such as deduction, so strongly, that he feels entitled to observing

the signalman as from above. Where the narrator appears to analyse and interpret everything he sees, his test subject seems to accept the supernatural as it is, without questioning its substance.

How, then, has a detective gotten lost into a ghost story? And more importantly, why? One way of answering these questions is stating that in addition to executing the strategy of the sceptic narrator, this character represents a naturalist view of the world that was very common in the scientific world of Victorian society. He also represents the Victorian endeavour for supreme control of knowledge; observing, mainly through vision, and interpreting these exceptionally accurate observations by using cool judgement and a vast store of knowledge, precisely as the foundation theory of justification requires. This was the ideal procedure when confronting the supernatural, the way of reason and science. Interestingly enough, the narrator falls short on this endeavour for control, as he fails to restrain some of his mental and emotional processes.

Despite his detective-like observations and medical theories, the narrator never reaches the level of control required from a Sherlock Holmes or an Auguste Dupin. This is shown throughout the text in his exaggerated reactions to anything that is related to the gloomy atmosphere of the railway cutting, or simply death. This lack of rationality is questioned by Tytler as well:

> And yet, how rational is the narrator? Despite his ostensible reliance on sense data and reason, he exhibits a markedly superstitious nature, not only through the "irrational" language he uses to describe his nervous reactions to the passing train, the signalman's manner, the accounts of the specter, and the signalbox area itself, which last makes him feel "as if [he] had left the natural world" (12), but even through his use of phrases such as "Heaven knows" (16) and "for God's sake" (17). That the narrator's language is by no means always "rational" is further suggested when, for instance, he finds himself at a loss to describe his emotional responses and, more particularly, when he resorts to anthropomorphism, personification, and pathetic fallacy ("angry sunset", "The wind and the wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail"). (1994, 28)

The narrator does seem highly sensitive, as he is easily upset by the dark tunnel, for example, and states that even the red warning light above it was so unlikable, that he "should have slept but poorly"

if his bed had been under it. This nightmarish image is completed with more imagery related to death, as the narrator associates the body language of the ghost with mourning and "stone figures on tombs" (9). In the excerpt above Tytler claims that the narrator is incapable of describing his emotional responses, but in my opinion, he is also incapable of controlling them, let alone the thought processes and associations caused by knowledge he cannot immediately classify or evaluate. This kind of knowledge is comprised of the reports of the supernatural phenomena given by the signalman. When the narrator hears about the accident on the line, he immediately reacts in a physical manner, and is having difficulties in resisting the reaction: "A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it" (8). The second report, this time on the death of the young lady on a passing train, causes a reaction that is even stronger:

> "A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here, and laid down on this floor between us."
>
> Involuntarily, I [the narrator] pushed my chair back, as I looked from the boards at which he pointed, to himself.
>
> "True, Sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell it you."
>
> I could think of nothing to say, to any purpose, and my mouth was very dry. (9)

This reaction, caused by the information relayed by the signalman, shows how superstitious the narrator is. The rational, detective-like side of him naturally knows that there is nothing wrong with the floor, but still, the idea of a dead body having been placed there forces him to move his chair further away from the spot. The information also affects his thinking, as he is unable to comment the story from any perspective, and is only able to report another unwilling physical reaction, the sensation of dryness in his mouth.

This irrational, superstitious side of the narrator represents the irrational, superstitious side of Victorian society that perhaps *knew* the correct, scientific way to respond to séance phenomena and other supernatural occurrences, but was unable to maintain the cool circumspection required by

methods of science. This irrationality puts the foundation of empirical knowledge in danger of collapsing. Like the narrator, the average Victorian was caught between scientific knowledge and superstitious belief, perhaps not quite ready to let go of this mysticism of the other side, which would give partial explanation to some of the most important questions of life and death. It was clear already in Ferriar's days, that ghost sightings were on the rise after wartime (1813, 109), and the same has been noted in more recent decades. A surge in public interest in Spiritualism has occurred after great wars, because the relatives of those who are killed or lost in battle try to seek for closure and consolation from psychic mediums (Leonard 2005, 29). This idea of comfort in spirit existence links to Castle's theory of ghosts as internalised images of others (1995, 123), because both encourage the devout preservation of loved ones, even beyond death, a theme that was discussed in my analysis of "Maud-Evelyn".

In conclusion of the analysis of "The Signal-man", it can be said that the text does indeed comment on the epistemological turmoil of its time. The difficulties faced by the signalman represent the limitations of human knowledge and cognition, a lack that may lead to destruction, if not taken into careful consideration. Trusting his observations without critical thinking or the ability to question leads the signalman to a downward path from science to spirit, from student life to a solitary work post in a dulling profession, and later on to death. This lack of control over one's knowledge is shared by the narrator, only in a different manner. He is desperately striving for a naturalist, detective-like view of the situation, a view where all supernatural phenomena can be explained away through the laws of science. Unfortunately for him, the explanations he has to offer are not enough, and the superstitious and sensitive side of his very nature prevents him from rising to the occasion. The narrator desperately desires to be in control of his knowledge, and pursues a solution to the mystery of the ghost, but is failed by his own inability to process and evaluate knowledge. These failures in epistemic processes reflect the inward inadequacies of Victorian society. Although

knowledge is pouring in through the progress of science and changes in philosophical paradigms, some matters still remain incomprehensible to the human mind.

5. Conclusions

As previously stated in this thesis, Victorian society was under a great deal of pressure. Science, religion, progress, superstition and the search for truth created the network of Victorian epistemology that characterises the era and its art. The themes of seeing, knowing and believing found their way onto the pages of the Victorian ghost story. Although the genre of the ghost story may have lost some of its popularity, the effects of it still loom in the background of the contemporary view of the world.

The juxtaposition of life and death in both, "The Signal-man" and "Maud-Evelyn", shows a slight disfavour of the latter. The characters who fail to use their mental faculties in a correct manner and result in believing in messages from the life awaiting after death, do not fare well in this one. The endeavour for control of knowledge proves difficult, even for those who appear to show a sceptical side, like the narrator of "The Signal-man". Even when the knowledge is available at hand, it is not always easy to show it openly to others, as suggested by the situation of Lady Emma who fears to confront her young friend and attack his beliefs about the situation.

The attitudes that both Dickens and James show towards knowledge are fascinating. They both start from an empiricist premise, but seem to be able to raise questions that still haunt both, science and religion, and to criticise anyone who takes these matters too bluntly, or tries to cut the corners on philosophical debate. What are the limitations of human knowledge? And how much knowledge is good for us, or are there things that should be left in the dark? For Dickens the control of knowledge and thinking slowly slips through the fingers of his protagonist, the narrator, and the story heads for destruction. Perhaps better control of knowledge and emotion, a cooler, more sceptical standpoint would have been able to rescue the signalman from death. The narrator fails to compose

his thoughts and act in time, as someone with insufficient abilities to interpret the knowledge received is destroyed by reality, a passing train, not any supernatural force.

When Dickens draws attention to the interpretation and use of knowledge, James appears to be focusing on dispensing it. His elaborate use of structure and dialogue leaves no place for doubt; knowledge is always held in the hands of someone or something, and our understanding of it is hardly comprehensive. What resolves the situation is the amount and timing of knowledge, or the promise of it. Something far more safe and characteristic of humans is belief, the force that can even alter truth.

Both Dickens and James set their characters and readers in front of ultimate questions. Can we, as human beings, be persuaded into believing anything by exploiting the limitations of our cognition? Questions like this raise my passion for knowledge, and would likely form an interesting basis for further study. Applying the theory of control of knowledge to a larger set of ghost stories would possibly yield interesting results, just as focusing more closely to the supernatural element of the genre, the ghost. Analyses of this type could be organised into a timeline, and then perhaps certain tendencies or processes could be established, and further analysed.

The Victorian ghost story truly is an intriguing genre, and its sometimes suggested simplicity covers only the surface of the stories. Another world can be found on a deeper level, in the shades, if one only knows how to see it.

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