‘There Is No Death’: Familial Love, Loss and (Re)connection in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualist Literature

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In her aptly named Spiritualist manifesto, *There Is No Death* (1891), prolific author of Victorian sensation and Gothic fiction Florence Marryat (1833–99) relays a peculiar encounter with the apparent ghost of her lost child, her infant daughter also named ‘Florence’ who had died at just ten days old. Looking down from the spirit world, the spectral ‘Florence’ is arrestingly precocious in her matured and emphatic speech as she seeks to comfort and console her mother:

> Don’t fret, dear mother. Remember *I* am always near you. No one can take *me* away. Your earthly children may grow up and go out into the world and leave you, but you will always have your spirit child close to you.[1]

By discouraging her mother’s tendency to ‘fret’, the spirit of ‘Florence’ appears highly intuitive in her attempts to assuage her mother’s anxieties about their physical and emotional distance. However, the young ‘Florence’ also asserts a kind of familial dominance when suggesting that her unwavering love and loyalty to her mother supplants that of her siblings: Marryat’s still living ‘earthly children’. The ghostly ‘Florence’, through her unexpectedly maternal demeanour, enacts a striking mother-daughter role reversal in which a revenant ‘spirit child’ is depicted as communing from beyond the grave to provide a fiercely loyal display of love and comfort to her own parent. The spirit’s assurance that (despite her own corporeal demise) she, in fact, would not ‘grow up and go out into the world and leave’, is especially curious given that, for most materialist observers, the death of an infant would sadly mean just that. Yet, fervent Spiritualists like Marryat believed that the life of a loved one not only continued after death, but that human existence blossomed, heralding a new spiritual pathway which could be both beautiful and transformative. Alongside tens of thousands of ardent believers in Spiritualism, Marryat emphasized that, after her daughter’s death, she maintained direct communication with the young ‘Florence’, one who had ‘developed into the merriest little spirit’ whose ‘childhood has now passed away’, ultimately rendering her departed daughter ‘more dignified and thoughtful and

[1] Emphasis in original. Florence Marryat, *There is No Death* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1891), 115.

womanly […] joyous and happy'.[2] For readers, it is these empowering, yet often deeply perplexing, accounts of unforeseen hope and enduring contact in times of mourning which raise important epistemological questions concerning familial love and loss. How, for instance, did the Spiritualist denial of the concept of 'loss', affect how a child could be memorialised? In what way, as the reappearance of 'Florence' does, could a dismissal of death, yet a continuation of contact, upturn traditional familial hierarchies and thereby challenge established social practices relating to love, motherhood and marriage? And how did literature produced from within the Spiritualism movement seek to reinforce and persuade others of a worldview in which the death of a loved one could be seen as sanguine?

As this chapter demonstrates, it is in the striking paranormal accounts of parent-child reconnection that Spiritualism's ability to invert expected cultural and emotional norms of mourning becomes most apparent. I therefore consider family-centric Spiritualist memoir, supernatural fiction and anti-Spiritualist poetics written by a select group of British authors, through which Spiritualism was both defended and mocked, to demonstrate how late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Spiritualist literature addressed the complexities of love, loss and reconnection following the death of a child. Given that even the mainstream literary climate at this time teemed with what Timothy L. Carens deems 'idolatrous' models for love, Spiritualist literature brazenly threatened to imbalance socially acceptable and theologically conventional representations of love.[3] Spiritualism (with its attendant array of fiction, manifesto and life-writing invested in the psychical) was unapologetic in its disruption of conventional dynamics between parent and child, the mourner and the mourned and, at its core, between life and death. For the bereaved, Spiritualist heterodoxy consequently destabilised the perceived interrelatedness of love and longing, while its accessibility proposed to break down barriers of economic privilege so that, at least ideologically, everyone could access the immortal.[4] Given the Spiritualist promise that powerful expressions of love for (and from) the dead intensified when conversing with familial spirits during a séance, extended periods of melancholy and yearning appeared to be unproductive, even unnecessary. Following the infamous 'table-rappings'

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2 Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 109.

3 Timothy L. Carens, *Strange Gods: Love and Idolatry in the Victorian Novel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 1–33.

4 By the 1870s, as Alex Owen reinforces, Spiritualism was 'most securely established amongst the ranks of respectable working- and middle-class people' as séance practices also took place outside of the parlours of the elite. Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 8.

Figure 6.1. Portrait of Florence Marryat from *The 'Two Worlds': Portrait Album of Spiritual Mediums, Workers, and Celebrities* (Manchester: Labour Press Society Ltd., 1897), 18. IAPSOP.

of the Fox sisters in mid-nineteenth century New York, these disruptive beliefs spread quickly to Britain as it became a more established religious movement and set of socio-cultural practices (see Figure 6.1). The breadth of Spiritualism's appeal was extended by the fact that it 'humanized the afterlife, peopling it with identifiable personalities' and assured direct verbal contact which, as Pat Jalland stresses, 'transformed' the movement for 'many thousands of bereaved relatives', thus rendering it a deeply affective movement.[5] Spiritualist practice shifted as it moved away from the popular physical manifestations of the late 1860s and early 1870s – including 'direct voice phenomena (writing and speaking through a

[5] Simon During, 'From Magic to Film', in *Modern Enchantments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 135–77, 151; Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 371.

medium)' and full-body materialisations, in which mediums went into a cabinet, fell into a trance and the form of a materialised spirit emerged – to 'more mental, psychological aspects of communication taking precedence in the 1880s'.[6] This led to the formation in 1882 of the still-existent Society for Psychical Research and a predominating culture of psychical scrutiny in which, as Efram Sera-Shriar notes, 'investigations of spirits and psychic forces were beginning to find a significant place in Victorian intellectual life' amidst an emergent 'crisis of evidence'.[7] As part of the *fin-de-siècle* Spiritualist response to mounting societal pressure to catalogue and defend meaningful and empirically verifiable encounters with the spirit world, Spiritualist authors such as Marryat made it their mission to use both memoir and fiction to promote their highly devout 'investigation[s] of the science of Spiritualism' and to assert continued contact with their deceased loved ones.[8]

Marryat serves as an exemplary case study for the multi-modal potency of Spiritualist literature in engaging bereaved readers through provocative non-fictional and fictional forms which centralised revenant children. Marryat's memoir *There Is No Death* and novel *The Dead Man's Message* (1894) are persuasive Spiritualist narratives which capitalised on the unceasing nature of family ties post-mortem. The maternal and proof-centric impetus of Marryat's work explores how, by disclosing her own lived experiences of child loss and séance reconnection with her readers, she promotes the eternal bond of earthbound mothers and spectral children. I then review the best-selling narrative of scientist-turned-Spiritualist, Oliver Lodge, whose medium-derived contact with his son killed during World War One, *Raymond or, Life and Death* (1916), is a pertinent paternal counterpoint to Marryat's tales. Examining Lodge's memoir enables an extended look at the turbulent afterlife of Victorian Spiritualism, stressing how the image of the continuing spirit in the context of wartime bereavement 'provides an antidote to grief', also complicated by the pain of war.[9] I argue that narratives such as these presented the bibliotherapeutic potential of the Spiritualist cause as they challenged

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6 Tatiana Kontou, 'Sensation Fiction, Spiritualism and the Supernatural', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, Andrew Scott Mangham ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 141–53, 143.

7 Sera-Shriar's study considers the concurrent emergence of British anthropology as a case study for interrogating issues of human belief while reinforcing recent Spiritualist criticism which asserts that the movement emerged as a response to a Victorian 'crisis of evidence', rather than to a crisis of faith. Efram Sera-Shriar, *Psychic Investigators: Anthropology, Modern Spiritualism, and Credible Witnessing in the Late Victorian Age* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022), 5, 4.

8 Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 1.

9 Andrew Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma, 1914–1934: The Ghosts of World War One* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 110.

cultures of mourning by turning death into an opportunity for continued communion, and of construction rather than destruction. When considering social relationships in this way, scholars of Spiritualism typically highlight feminist debates concerning female mediums appearing in novel and vocal public positions of power, while at the same time experiencing a relinquishment of bodily control, as well as the sexually transgressive potential of the movement, enabled through 'the intimate spaces underneath the tipping tables' which threatened 'all rules of decency and decorum'.[10] However, few assess the pivotal affective role that love and specific familial dynamics, including parent-child relations, play in Spiritualism's literary history. Emma Griffin emphasises that '[e]motions history invites us to step outside the norms of our own culture and offers a genuinely different way of understanding historical societies in all their specificity'; in this way, viewing such 'genuinely different' Spiritualist history and culture through an affective lens is both nuanced and rewarding.[11]

In conducting a balanced review of the movement's standout literary representations of love and its post-life consequences, I close with an examination of the poetics of popular Spiritualist sceptic Robert Browning and his dramatic monologue: 'Mr Sludge: "The Medium"' (1864). Browning's highly theatrical monologue critiques early Spiritualist charlatanism by depicting sham medium 'Mr Sludge' leveraging familial bonds and vulnerable paying clients to portray a fine line between the provision of emotional solace and financially manipulating mourners. As a repeatedly polarising movement, Spiritualism not only caused large-scale shifts in thought concerning conceptions of the mortal and the immortal, but it also disrupted the microcosmic, unsettling the domestic sphere. I thus consider speculation surrounding the contentious nature of Spiritualism for Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the differing imprints that the movement left on poetry attending to the psychical. I highlight Browning's *dramatis personae* in the context of child loss in the séance room, reflecting on it as one which stresses the haptic desires of ghost-seekers, while presenting Spiritualism's limitations for truly consoling the bereaved. Assessing literature produced by believers and their sceptical counterparts initiates a wide-ranging look at the literature of the beyond to consider its changing pre- and post-wartime aesthetic and social character, while crucially emphasising Spiritualism's unyielding focus: the continuation of an unenduring love not quelled, but strengthened, by death.

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[10] Marlene Tromp, 'Spirited Sexuality: Sex, Marriage, and Victorian Spiritualism', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31:1 (2003), 67–81, 67.

[11] Emma Griffin, 'The Emotions of Motherhood: Love, Culture, and Poverty in Victorian Britain', *The American Historical Review*, 123: 1 (2018), 60–85, 62.

'[A]ctual, irrefragable proof': Florence Marryat, *There Is No Death* and *The Dead Man's Message*

Marryat's *fin-de-siècle* Spiritualist texts are quintessential reflections of late Victorian supernatural discourse, which sought to proselytise and persuade readers of the veracity of their cause by relaying audacious details from the séance room. Central to the rhetorical power of Marryat's popular memoirs of the psychical, *There Is No Death* and *The Spirit World* (1894), is her open and profoundly personal style, through which she confidently shares her experiences of being visited by the materialised spirits of her lost infants and children. Marryat goes further than professing only of the enduring nature of love, instead insisting that spirit-world love was a developed one, a connection which was far more potent, mature and meaningful than the love felt between a parent and child when on earth. In both, her séance retellings and supernatural fiction, Marryat evocatively depicts the spiritual development of her lost children as a process which inevitably advanced their capacity to give and receive love. Unlike other sentimentalised textual renderings of the departed, in which, as Mary Gryctko points out in the case of many mid-century authors from Dickens onwards, 'the dead child in frozen permanently in its ideal form, unable to grow up or change', Spiritualist offspring typically aged and developed in order to thrive.[12] The spiritual growth of the once ten-day-old ghost of 'Florence', for instance, is demonstrated through her newfound abilities to converse, write letters and even enact a parental role to her own mother. As a consequence of the superior learning process that juvenile spirits were said to be subject to, parents could look forward to 'constant and increasing intimacy' from their offspring, who, most desirably, could 'express superhuman love and provide superhuman comfort' to their bereaved parent.[13] Bridget Bennett concurs that Spiritualism 'removed fear from encounters with the dead and replaced it with tenderness, benevolence, and love' and this focus on emotional growth was just one of the many ways that Spiritualists sought to destigmatise death.[14] Marryat's retellings of séances placed concerted energies on the tender moments of actively communicating with the dead, rather than on solely memorialising them. This in turn reflected an unconventional mourning process which, rather than centralising absence, focused on presence. As one minister-turned-Spiritualist affirmed, the movement's 'real spirit' lay in 'construction

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[12] Mary Gryctko, '"The Sweetest Little Thing That Ever Died:" Nineteenth-Century Comfort Books and the Creation of the Immortal Child', *Victorian Review*, 48:2 (2022), 293–308, 292.

[13] Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989), 40–41.

[14] Bridget Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 36.

rather than destruction', further attesting to the Spiritualist intention to celebrate and depict displays of developing, and not dwindling, love.[15]

At the heart of Marryat's dedication to her cause was a desire to convince others of the 'indisputable fact, that the dead are *not* gone beyond the reach of those who love them' by appealing to the *fin-de-siècle* demand for psychical research. Psychical research involved seeking and promoting empirical evidence which supported the claims that Spiritualist mediums could make contact with a world beyond the veil.[16] Writing in *The Spirit World*, Marryat invokes readers with deeply sentimental language which underscores her compulsion to prove the existence of the ghostly:

> The torn and bereaved heart wants proof – actual, irrefragable proof, that those who have gone before us, live and breathe somewhere; that they are not entirely beyond the limits of our sight and love and remembrance; that the deepest feelings of our hearts have not been wasted, but are bearing fruit still, and even our sorrow for their loss affords a tender pleasure to the spirits who sympathize with us.[17]

The repeated use of first-person plural pronouns invites an empathetic community of bereaved readers to choose Spiritualism as a demonstrable, optimistic answer to 'torn and bereaved' heartache. Marryat's eschatological commitment to a bettered life after death even led her to trivialise earthly loss. In her later Spiritualist defence, *The Spirit World*, she asks why we 'grieve so terribly "as those without hope", when we lose our friends by death', but do not feel the same when they travel abroad, at risk of 'all sorts of dangers from sickness and traveling', 'lost to our sight and hearing'.[18] Skilled at anticipating recurrent scepticism, Marryat acknowledges that the main difficulty of proving Spiritualist hypotheses was that so many of the facts revealed via mediumistic communications were personal and 'so strictly private a nature that it would be impossible to put them into print', resolving that '[t]he best tests we receive are when the very secrets of our hearts, which we have not confided to our nearest friends, are revealed to us'.[19] Thus, Marryat knew that her most convincing case studies would be those which exposed these 'secrets of our hearts' by revealing detailed encounters with her lost children which could be regarded as genuine exemplars of spirit-world contact.

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[15] J. M. Peebles, Christ*ianity, Churchianity, or Spiritualism - Which?* (London: L. N. Fowler & Co., 1913), 3.

[16] Emphasis in original. Florence Marryat, *The Spirit World* (New York: Charles B. Reed, 1894), 33.

[17] Marryat, *The Spirit World*, 8.

[18] Marryat, *The Spirit World*, 22.

[19] Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 39.

There Is No Death epitomises Spiritualist literature which aimed to persuade others of a life after death by presenting a vibrant catalogue of séance phenomena and Spiritualist mediums, while also promoting compelling interactions with the apparent spirits of Marryat's own departed children. Marryat is characteristically bold in shunning patriarchal expectations of Victorian propriety when discussing the reproductive female body and repeatedly discloses her experiences with stillbirths and premature child loss. Confident that they 'lived again', she is direct and matter of fact when revealing that, during her second marriage, she had 'lost several infants from premature birth'.[20] She admits being 'very curious to speak with these unknown babies of mine' and reveals that she used to task her favoured spirit of 'Florence' to 'bring them to me'.[21] Marryat's tone is often frank and less sentimental when relaying these highly personal lived experiences and this is especially surprising when considered against the deeply sentimental tone and style of popular Victorian consolation literature and child-centred comfort books. The apparent ageing and growth of Marryat's 'unknown babies' into spirits capable of communication with mortals conflicts with popular comfort manuals which, as Gryctko highlights, denied the agency and development of the apotheosised child, rendering them as 'objects, angels, and text – never as characters or people'.[22] In comfort manuals, '[t]he dead child becomes a real-world version of Peter Pan, the boy (or girl) who never grows up' as a means of representing 'perfect childhood'.[23] By contrast, in depicting the continuing development of child spirits like 'Florence' and her other lost infants, Marryat promotes a resistance to mid-late nineteenth-century literary mourning culture. She reinforces the bold Spiritualist mission which claimed that deceased loved ones continued growing, and, by doing so, they thrived.

Though discussing many of Marryat's encounters with young spirits which took place within the séance room, *There Is No Death* also reveals instances of her materialised relatives appearing in domestic settings as a means of demonstrating the pervasiveness of Spiritualist phenomena in her day-to-day life. In one engaging vignette, Marryat recounts seeing two apparitions of 'a wild young fellow', her step-son Francis Lean, in Brighton in 1880 when, much to her surprise, he was believed to be aboard a ship sailing to South America.[24] With a nod to the popular nautical accounts of her famous father, naval officer and author Captain Frederick

[20] Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 215.
[21] Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 216.
[22] Gryctko, '"The Sweetest Little Thing That Ever Died:"', 305.
[23] Gryctko, '"The Sweetest Little Thing That Ever Died:"', 305.
[24] Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 62.

Marryat, Marryat initially presumes Lean to be a renegade, but an unnerving 'second vision' of her step-son appearing to her in his naval uniform while she was in bed confirms her suspicion that 'something must have happened to the boy'.[25] Sure enough, Marryat asserts her clairvoyance and dramatically reveals that Lean's ship had capsized and he had drowned two months before she had seen what she claimed to be his ghost. Anticipating the investigative challenges of the era, and the accompanying discourse which typified the climate of psychical research, Marryat seeks to pre-empt critics who would dismiss her visions as a 'very remarkable case of "optical illusion"'.[26] *There Is No Death* was a 'best-selling account […] praised and castigated in equal measure' and, while Marryat 'received hundreds of letters of gratitude from bereaved parents around the world, […] the press ridiculed her'.[27] By describing Lean as appearing to her in his naval uniform 'with the peaked cap on his head' and 'smiling', Marryat asserts that the spectral Lean has developed into a deferent and peaceful iteration of his former 'wild' self so that she could further leverage her familial encounters to underline the transformative and consolatory potential of the spirit world.

The mischievous spirit of 'Florence' pervades *There Is No Death* to provide readers with both entertainment and solace. The accounts of 'Florence' provided audiences with 'great comfort', especially as they bolstered one of the ultimate Spiritualist endeavours, providing support for those 'consoled by the idea of a son or daughter enjoying a second, and healthier, life'.[28] Chapter Eight is dedicated to the spirit of 'Florence', and Marryat begins by deploying evocative medical terminology to describe her infant's 'most peculiar blemish', which appeared 'as though a semi-circular piece of flesh had been cut out by a bullet-mould, exposing part of the gum'.[29] She reveals intimate details relating to her daughter's congenital disorder, describing baby Florence's cleft palate. Marryat claimed that doctors had observed this as being so rare that it was reported in the *Lancet* 'as something quite out of the common way'.[30] The multi-layered mediatisation of her daughter's condition is compounded as she goes on to depict the condition as relayed by the spirit-world version of 'Florence'. Attending a séance hosted by the famed medium Florence Cook at the British National Association of Spiritualists, Cook is described as summoning the spirit of young 'Florence', who, by this point, has aged to seventeen years old, and after requesting proof that this

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25 Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 62.
26 Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 61.
27 Catherine Pope, *Florence Marryat* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2020), 31.
28 Pope, *Florence Marryat*, 153.
29 Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 97.
30 Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 98.

spirit was really her departed daughter, the spectral 'Florence' commands her mother to 'look at my mouth' and see the '*peculiar defect on the lip*' with which she was born. Marryat applauds this visual evidence as 'incontrovertible proof of identity' and stresses her book's opening mission to 'leave the deduction to be drawn from […] my readers'.[31] Despite outlining the persistence of her daughter's physical affliction, there is no suggestion of a prolonged pain or suffering and she concludes the chapter with a note of overriding optimism. She observes that, in 1873, when first encountering the spirit-child version of 'Florence', her daughter was 'a simple child who did not know how to express itself', yet, by 1890 she had become 'a woman full of counsel and tender warning'.[32] It is this soothing notion of spirit-world independence and spiritual growth that Marryat later embeds into her subsequent Spiritualist fiction to suggest the true power of a belief system which, if committed to while on earth, could be utterly transformative in the next life.

The Dead Man's Message (1894) demonstrates how Marryat's alleged experiences of her children's spirit-world transformations are creatively reimagined in her Spiritualist fiction, while it also outlines her multi-modal approach to depicting parental love as a means of persuading readers to join her cause.[33] Marryat's supernatural stories are highly preoccupied with figures of mothers – figures both beleaguered and revered, as well as biological and surrogate – and of children, most often depicting those threatened during their existence on earth and saved through their spirit-world redemption. Exemplifying many of these archetypal Spiritualist characterisations, *The Dead Man's Message* is a convoluted and melodramatic reenvisaging of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) in which Dickens' denouncement of Ebenezer Scrooge's avarice is replaced by a, rather unsubtle, advertisement for pursuing an unquestioning Spiritualist life. It follows the sudden death of dismissive and dogmatic scientist Professor Aldwyn on his Odyssean spiritual quest for redemption after he becomes trapped in a purgatory of his own making when transported into the spirit world. Led by his mysterious spirit guide, Aldwyn is forced to confront his immoral ways, observing in frustration as he is shown how domestic life (both on earth and in the spirit world) progresses without him until 'his spiritual eyes seemed to open' and he is

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[31] Emphasis in original. Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 113.

[32] Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 116.

[33] Likely due to her transatlantic popularity in the 1890s, *The Dead Man's Message*, subtitled 'An Occult Romance', was first published in New York before it was later renamed to reflect a far more retributive tone as *A Soul on Fire* (1898) when published in Britain four years later.

left as a 'repentant child' watched over by the spirit of his first wife, Susan.[34] These striking kinds of esoteric reincarnation novels first emerged in the late nineteenth century, and Christine Ferguson identifies how they enabled those experiencing 'the loss of traditional faith' to gain a 'source of renewed spiritual optimism'.[35] In *The Dead Man's Message*, Marryat presents 'first and foremost, a warning to those who neglect their spiritual needs', but also challenges scientific cynicism in responding to a 'dismissive attitude to spiritualism by having a dedicated man of science undergo a spiritual awakening'; Marryat then ultimately posits a 'co-existence and mutual understanding' between scientific and Spiritualist ideologies.[36] Exemplifying what Ferguson affirms as one of 'the least-discussed genre of modern Spiritualist writing: the afterlife novel', *The Dead Man's Message* uses its cautionary moralising to underscore the importance of cultivating positive familial relationships on earth, and, most crucially, of nurturing exemplary ones in the hereafter.[37]

The novel centres around the inversion of domestic hierarchies and consequently serves to reinforce Spiritualism as an evocative movement which challenged and reimagined established social practices relating to love, motherhood and marriage. Marryat foregrounds prematurely deceased children and their apotheosised mother, Susan, to depict a strengthened spirit-world bond of love and highlight how, as Bennett affirms, Spiritualist ideals were 'domesticating […] the spirits of the dead'.[38] These depictions recall Marryat's séance experiences with her own precocious daughter who in the spirit world adopts the role of maternal caretaker to Marryat. In *The Dead Man's Message*, Susan usurps her first husband's place as the head of the household by becoming the spectral caregiver for hers and Aldwyn's 'still-born babies […] the loss of which she so much grieved'.[39] Susan, in the novel's closing pages, is ultimately 'commissioned' as Aldwyn's new spiritual guide, imbued with supernatural knowledge which, Aldwyn is told, is an 'influence [which] will lead you aright'.[40] Though Ferguson is right to acknowledge that Susan's passivity in this closing

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34 Florence Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message* (New York: Charles B. Reed, 1894), 174, 178.

35 Christine Ferguson, 'New Religions and Esotericism', in *The Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature*, Dennis Denisoff and Talia Schaffer eds. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 413–424, 421.

36 Depledge, 'Introduction', xxiii, xiv.

37 Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848–1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 87.

38 Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 36.

39 Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message*, 71.

40 Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message*, 178.

appointment could be considered as a form of 'silenced enslavement' in closing with a 'patriarchal model of perpetual marriage', it is Susan's maternal abilities (which Marryat presents as being evidently superior to Aldwyn's parental skills) that further conceptualise the spirit world as a place of redemption and growth for once-threatened children.[41] Marryat thus ultimately privileges Susan with a crucial maternal role of a spirit-world caregiver.

Underscoring the veneration of maternity so central to Marryat's fiction, Pope stresses that, by establishing Susan as 'a divine mother who is strong and passionate', Marryat 'marginalises the father figure, instead making a bold statement of the supremacy and divinity of both motherhood and femininity'.[42] This is most apparent in an intimate depiction of infant loss in which Aldwyn is brought to a spiritual plane on which their still-born children exist, grow and yet again thrive. While Aldwyn is barred from communicating with his lost children, he is forced to watch as Susan reclaims their offspring, redirecting them to a fertile Elysian realm as she 'disappeared beneath the grove of the trees, holding her infants by the hand'.[43] The mobility of the infants – now 'little children' – suggests their matured age and the authoritative use of 'her' and not 'their' infants reinforces how Susan's psychical maturity imbues her with privileged ways of knowing and raising the children. Underscoring Aldwyn's relinquished paternal influence, Susan pointedly reminds him that he had squandered his parental opportunities while on earth, indicating that '[a]ll of them that belonged to you lies in Kensal Green Cemetery'.[44] Here, Marryat's arresting reminder of corporeal death boldly exemplifies her prioritisation of familial relations which valued an unyielding connection with – and commitment to – the spirit world. By depicting the empowering of Susan through her continuing maternal role as the psychically attuned and spiritually responsible parent, Marryat underlines the overriding endeavour which drives her Spiritualist literature: to nurture and promote the ceaseless spirit-world love between parent and child and, most prominently, between mothers and their prematurely deceased infants.

'[S]entiment is not excluded': Oliver Lodge and *Raymond*

By contrast, *Raymond*, the later Spiritualist memoir of physicist and author Oliver Lodge, demonstrates how the patriarchal horrors of war induced a shift

[41] Ferguson, *Determined Spirits*, 105.
[42] Pope, *Florence Marryat*, 148, 145.
[43] Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message*, 78.
[44] Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message*, 71.

Figure 6.2. Frontispiece of Raymond Lodge in *Raymond, or Life and Death* by Oliver Lodge (New York: George H. Doran, 1916). Internet Archive.

in Spiritualist literary aesthetics. This shift prioritised mediumistic reconnection with young adult male soldiers among the many millions of military casualties caused by the First World War. The Great War itself had engendered a darkly fitting affective climate for Spiritualism, which helped to revive enthusiasm for a psychical cause marred by accusations of fraudulent mediumship and the transatlantic commercialisation of planchette or Ouija boards. The horrors of war were compounded by the tragic dearth of human remains, denying many bereaved parents the corporeal evidence needed for closure and for acknowledging loss. George M. Johnson highlights that '[t]hese men's bodies – nearly half of those killed – were never recovered, and this distressing situation encouraged mystical responses to loss'.[45] Lodge begins *Raymond* with a sobering acknowledgement of

[45] George M. Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond: Grappling with Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), xi.

the 'appalling' amount of 'premature and unnatural bereavement at the present time' and stresses his profound sense of civic 'duty', that he should risk 'possible scoffers' by 'exposing one's own sorrow and its alleviation'. Lodge then articulates the prevailing bibliotherapeutic intent of his Spiritualist memoir: of a 'service […] rendered to mourners' so that they 'can derive comfort by learning that communication across the gulf is possible'.[46] Though certainly reminiscent of Marryat's Spiritualist mission to provide comfort to bereaved parents, Lodge's acknowledgement of the wounded cultural milieu and evident shadow that physical death on a mass scale was causing across the globe, dismisses the energetic optimism of Marryat's prose and suggests an understandably more pessimistic and, rather paradoxically, realist eschatological worldview.

Raymond is Lodge's influential meditation upon the loss, and allegedly renewed existence of his son (Figure 6.2) who had been wounded by a fragment of shell and killed in battle on 14 September 1915. It is an assemblage of letters, reminiscences and 'unusual communications' with mediums, and, upon its publication, it was an exceedingly popular text, as demonstrated by its multiple print editions which sparked a Spiritualist literary trend, through which 'numerous spirit soldier testimonies [….] followed in its wake'.[47] For Lodge, *Raymond* also 'became the most famous of his books on the war', even surpassing that of *The War and After* (1915) which was 'an earlier, almost as popular book'.[48] Ardent Spiritualist and friend Doyle praised *Raymond* as a crowning glory for England, citing Lodge as one who, by publicising Spiritualism in such a confessional manner, helped 'to rescue this system from being a mere playing with *Poltergeists*'.[49] Lodge's initial interest in Spiritualism was piqued at the same time that Marryat was publishing her Spiritualist works. He was especially impressed by the séance materialisations of spirits, particularly of his Aunt Anne, and his involvement in, and later presidency of, the Society for Psychical Research stimulated his specific interests in 'physical phenomena' and the persistence of human 'personality' post-mortem.[50]

The opening of *Raymond* is especially striking in the way in which the memoir's array of paratexts (which includes, among others, an obituary from his brother, an epitaph from Raymond's headstone, and a brief reflective portrait of his son's

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[46] Oliver J. Lodge, *Raymond, or Life and Death* (New York: George H. Doran and Company, 1916), viii.

[47] Lodge, *Raymond*, 3; Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond*, 230.

[48] Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond*, 75.

[49] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Is Sir Oliver Lodge Right?: "Yes." by A. Conan Doyle. "No." by Edward Clodd', *The Strand* (January– July 1917b), 49–54, 51.

[50] Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond*, 73–75.

curtailed life) at first betrays such a starkly confessional disclosure of Lodge's emotional pain – that 'the outlook of life felt irretrievably darkened' – but then quickly resolves to underscore the industrious 'service' that his son was completing in the spirit world.[51] Lodge assures readers that Raymond 'has entered another region of service now' and that 'his activity is not over', while another of Lodge's sons entreats readers not to think of Raymond 'lying near Ypres with all his work ended, but rather, after due rest and refreshment, continuing his noble and useful career in more peaceful surroundings'.[52] Despite some Christians perceiving the messages in *Raymond* to be of demonic origin, emerging 'not from above, but below', Lodge's portrayal of Raymond's continued communications and duteous sense of love and familial devotion reflect Christian ideals of spiritual diligence by literalising the concept of a 'labour of love'.[53] In another episode which would have been particularly compelling for readers (the spirit of Raymond castigates his father, exclaiming 'For God's sake, father, do it'), Raymond emotively implores Lodge to match his same work ethic when conducting his psychical research, warning him that 'if you […] could only see what I see: hundreds of men and women heart-broken […] you would throw the whole strength of yourself into this work'.[54] Clear parallels emerge here between Raymond and the busy spirit of Marryat's 'Florence'; 'Florence' is not only tasked with taking care of her own mother, but also claims to be employed as 'mamma's nurse maid', while exasperatedly suggesting she is also overworked, having 'enough to do to look after her babies'.[55] Resisting literary iterations of lost children as the 'glorious carefree child-emblems of heaven', 'Florence' and Raymond are instead put to work post-mortem.[56] The conflict presented here between Lodge's confessional expression of emotional pain, and his belief in the continued utility of his son's spirit, is one which pervades the narrative of *Raymond* and suggests how the traumatic wartime context of this later iteration of Spiritualism was one through which a hopeful afterlife was tainted by the attendant horrors of a deferential war. What is also evident is the pragmatic approach to, and reframing of, loss that pre- and post-war Spiritualists sought to promote through their influential

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51 Lodge, *Raymond*, 10.

52 Lodge, *Raymond*, 10, 6.

53 Charles Lindley Wood Halifax (Viscount), *"Raymond;" Some Criticisms* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Company, 1917), 6; 1 Thessalonians 1:3 (KJV).

54 Lodge, *Raymond*, 102–3

55 Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 323.

56 Jen Baker, 'Death (un)Personified: Pronouns, Patriarchy, and the Child Ghost', in *Vision, Contestation and Deception: Interrogating Gender and the Supernatural in Victorian Shorter Fiction*, ed. Oindrila Ghosh (Kolkata: Avenel Press, 2021), 52–80, 64.

séance-room literature. While Lodge's and Marryat's representations of the Spiritualist expectation to continue working is most at odds with the sentimentalised ideal of being 'at rest' after death, it reinforces the need for the continued development of their loved ones post-mortem, even if, rather oddly, this spiritual 'development' was conceived in industrious vocational terms.

Lodge begins the 'supernormal portion' of his work with an emphasis on the affective weight of assembling *Raymond*.[57] He outlines that, despite his readers' expectations for his famed scientific objectivity (citing his psychical research tendencies for being 'intellectual rather than emotional') he acknowledges that, when it came to such a deeply personal family account concerning his lost son, 'sentiment is not excluded'.[58] In contrast to Marryat's devout Spiritualist manifesto, Lodge's memoir is far more willing to acknowledge the fallibility and limitations of Spiritualist belief, especially in relation to the heartbreak of a bereaved parent. Recalling the first séance that he attended after Raymond's death, he describes how his intent was, in fact, not to contact his lost son, but to comfort a bereaved French acquaintance who 'was in great distress at the loss of both her beloved sons in the war, within a week of each other'. Lodge does not idealise the mourning process and underscores her emotional emptiness in admitting that 'she was left desolate'. He consequently arranges sittings with a medium in which the 'sons of Madame communicated, on both occasions, though with difficulty', and highlights that it was these linguistic and interpretative difficulties – 'that one of them gave his name completely, the other approximately' – led the mother, a woman uninitiated into the Spiritualist cause, to be only 'partially consoled'.[59] This aligns with what Andrew Smith identifies as the core theme of *Raymond*: the 'pursuit of coherence'. This motif is typified by instances such as this when '[m]essages appear to be fragmentary or incomplete, and the desire to make sense of them is in part linked to a desire to make sense of World War One as a whole'.[60] This fragmentary style of narrative is reinforced by the paratexts of the opening section and the epistolary format of the third chapter, which showcases a multitude of letters concerning Raymond. In many of these epistle fragments, military colleagues are frequently reassuring that Lodge's son was not understood to have 'suffered much pain'.[61] In underscoring the emotional gravity of the French woman's loss and highlighting letters which accentuate Lodge's parental

[57] Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 1.
[58] Lodge, *Raymond*, 83.
[59] Lodge, *Raymond*, 97.
[60] Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma, 1914–1934*, 124.
[61] Lodge, *Raymond*, 76.

anxieties concerning the extent of his son's suffering, Lodge's representations of the nature of Spiritualist love when encountering loss are shown to be far more realist, visceral and marred by the dark shadow of war than those of his pre-1914 predecessor, Marryat. The shifted character of post-war Spiritualist texts like *Raymond* therefore overshadowed the diligent Spiritualist optimism of believers that had come before; they presented a stark juxtaposition through representations of a spirit-world love which was irrevocably imprinted with, and inseparable from, the wartime trauma from which they were inevitably engendered.

As the 'supernormal portion' of *Raymond* develops, Lodge bolsters a theme common to both his and Marryat's Spiritualist works by reinforcing the inversion of domestic hierarchies between parent and child when faced with bodily death. He recounts his first sitting with medium, Mrs Leonard, taking place less than two weeks after Raymond's death when he learns that Raymond was tasked with 'a great deal of work to do'.[62] It is specified that Raymond's spirit-world duties included being a guiding caretaker for his father, and of bolstering Lodge's Spiritualist cause, as the medium relays that Raymond 'is going to be a light that will help you; he is going to help too to prove to the world the Truth'.[63] Here, we see the reemergence of the Spiritualist literary tendency to empower its spirit-world children, imbuing them with active caregiving responsibilities, all necessitated by the implied fact that the bereaved parents are indeed in need of such psychical 'help'. Johnson's claim that *Raymond* 'enabled Lodge to renegotiate his distant relationship with his son, to take responsibility for the loss as both father and non-combatant and to find a larger purpose' highlights this idea of a renegotiation, of a dramatic reformulation of parent-child relationships that such open and expressive Spiritualist texts could enable.[64]

Lodge's text, however, was also 'not beyond mockery from sceptics'. *Raymond* was accused of alienating readers through its evidently upper-class markers of spirit-world life, in which 'spirits can wear tweeds, smoke cigars […] like a gentleman's club to many'.[65] In these moments, Lodge's suggestion of a wealthy and patriarchal spirit world tends toward a more exclusionary visualisation of life after death which, I argue, sits in contrast to the more ubiquitous theme of premature child loss which permeates Marryat's bibliotherapeutic Spiritualist works. By openly sharing their séance experiences with their departed children as a means of comforting comparably bereaved and grieving parents who could

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[62] Lodge, *Raymond*, 98.
[63] Lodge, *Raymond*, 99.
[64] Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond*, 63.
[65] Smith, *Gothic Fiction and the Writing of Trauma*, 125.

also be persuaded into communing with the other side, Lodge and Marryat clearly reinforce that the representation of an unending, productive and matured spiritual love is the most important lasting impression with which to leave their readers. Moreover, though the fragmentary and visceral character of *Raymond* foregrounds the spectre of wartime trauma and thereby distinctly contrasts with Marryat's narrative optimism, it still stands as a proudly sentimental text with a shared impetus for consolation.

'[A] family-party, met for family-purposes': The Brownings and 'Mr Sludge'

In 1917, fellow supporter of the psychical, Doyle, wrote a column for the *Strand* magazine prompted by the popularity of *Raymond* in support of Lodge's beliefs in spirit phenomena. Doyle reflects back to the mid-nineteenth century, to a time when he had not yet encountered Spiritualism:

> My knowledge of the subject at the time was confined to Browning's 'Sludge', and to occasional police reports of the exposure of fraudulent mediums. I thought the whole ritual consisted of dark séances, floating tambourines, and absurd messages got by very dubious means. […] This deepened my distrust of the whole subject.[66]

Given that Doyle later grew to become one of the country's most vocal public advocates of the veracity of séance phenomena, spirit photography, and of Spiritualist doctrine, his acknowledgement that Browning's dramatic monologue, 'Mr Sludge', 'deepened his distrust' of 'dark séances' which 'seemed impossible', underscores how influential Browning's piece was for shaping early cultural perceptions of Spiritualism. By 1894, Browning's poem was still causing a stir; a derisive article in the *Saturday Review* expressed concern over Marryat's Spiritualist inclinations, claiming that: 'Miss Marryat, we fear, has not nearly enough sense to mind […] people who indulge in these amusements have […] learnt positively nothing since Mr Browning's "Sludge" put them in their places once and for all'.[67] Yet, at the same time, when writing in *The Spirit World*, Marryat idealises the work of Browning's wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (EBB), citing the seventh stanza of her poem 'Bertha in the Lane' (1844) and asserting it as evidence of a materialised female spirit, centralising the lines: 'Mother […] | Thou art standing in the room'.[68] Alongside extracts from other major poems, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Christabel'

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66 Doyle, 'Is Sir Oliver Lodge Right?', 50.

67 'Materialist *Malgré Elle*', *The Saturday Review*, 78:2034 (1894), 436–37.

68 Quoted in Marryat, *The Spirit World*, 69. Hereafter, Elizabeth Barrett Browning will be referred to as EBB and Robert Browning will be referred to as Browning.

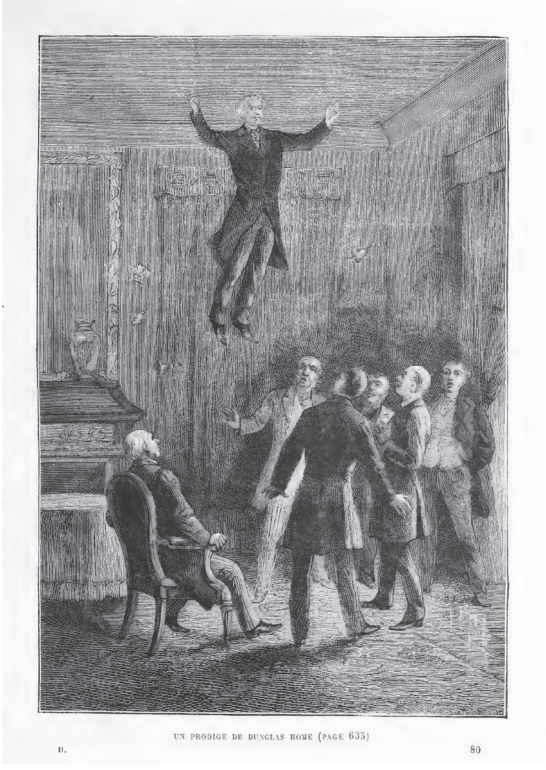

Figure 6.3. 'Un prodige de Dunglas Home (Page 635)' illustration from *Les Mystères de la Science* by Louis Figuier (Paris: Librairie Illustrée, 1880). Wellcome Library.

(1816), Marryat showcases EBB's poetics as those 'which prove the universality of this belief' in Spiritualism.[69] So how then, did the Brownings navigate their radically oppositional literary impact on the beliefs of potential Spiritualists, especially when it came to poetically representing lived moments of loss in the séance room?

As Marryat's and Lodge's work demonstrate, Spiritualism could, on the one hand, offer a unifying promise for reconnecting parents with the phantasms of their departed loved ones, but, on the other, the act of engaging in Spiritualist practice could also become exceedingly polarising for the family unit. In July 1855, the Brownings accepted an invitation to attend a séance hosted at 'Ealing Villa', the home of John Rymer and his wife who had been bereaved of their twelve-year-old son, 'Wat', three years prior. The Rymers invited Daniel Dunglas Home, a Scottish medium 'who had previously mystified New England with his spiritualist phenomena and was recently arrived in England' to host the séance in

[69] Marryat, *The Spirit World*, 67.

the hopes of making contact with the spirit of their departed son.[70] For Browning, the séance experience was far from positive and he developed a strong dislike for Home, publicly professing a 'real anger' towards him, and later invoking him as inspiration for his fictionalised sham medium, the first-person speaker of 'Mr Sludge'.[71] Many assumed Browning's distaste was a result of a creative or sexual jealousy provoked by Home who, in praise of EBB's poetic genius during the séance, was 'placing a wreath on the brow of his wife and [was] omitting to crown his [Browning's] own'; commentators speculated that this interaction 'may possibly have given him deep offence!'.[72] Browning vehemently denied this in an attack on Home's account of the séance ('a fresh vomit of lies') in which he scoffs at how Home 'attributed all my unbelief to my "ludicrous jealousy" of my wife', resolving that Home was 'a beast'.[73]

Though largely considered a definite Spiritualist sceptic, recent critics turn to Browning's poetics to evidence his 'strong fascination' with Spiritualism, as well as the 'affirmation of its most basic principles – the faith in the immortality of the human spirit and the belief that that spirit could be made visible to others'.[74] Indeed, though Browning was evidently vexed by Home's claims to clairvoyancy and the 'vulgar fraud' of the event, the Ealing séance did not entirely destroy his curiosity for the psychical. In a letter written two days after the séance, he affirmed that he would 'like to go again and propose to try a simple experiment or two', though he feared this 'out of my power – my wife having told one of the party that I was "unconvinced"'.[75] In contrast to Browning's equivocations, EBB wrote to a friend one month after the Home séance to confirm that it left her wholly convinced, remarking that, though materialised spirits were often too indistinct to be perceived as identifiable figures, they were certainly 'a shadow on the window: the sign of something moving without – the proof of a beginning of access from a spiritual world'.[76] For EBB, the arrival of Spiritualism 'fit

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[70] Richard Kelly, 'Daniel Home, Mr Sludge, and a Forgotten Browning Letter', *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 1:2 (1973), 44–49, 44.

[71] David F. Goslee, 'Mr Sludge the Medium – Mr Browning the Possessed', *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 3:2 (1975), 40–58, 41.

[72] Madame Douglas Home, *D. D. Home: His Life and Mission* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1921), 34.

[73] Letter published by William Lyon Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', *Yale Review* 23 (1933), 125–38, 138.

[74] Randa Helfield, 'Dead Women Do Tell Tales: Spiritualism, Browning, and the Dramatic Monologue', *Studies in Browning and His Circle*, 27 (2006), 7–25, 7.

[75] Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', 125, 135.

[76] 'Letter from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Miss M. A, de Gaudrion' (29 August 1855), London, Senate House Library, Harry Price Library of Magical Literature, HPC/4C/3.

naturally and easily' into her life because it aligned with her political activism; she 'detested barriers of nation, class, sect, and gender, and spiritualism seemed to be dissolving not only these but also the greatest barriers of all: between life and death, the human and the divine'.[77] Despite Browning's equivocal desire to return to the séance room for further observation, his scepticism prevailed, while, in contrast, EBB had an ease of belief which threatened to create a schism. Contemporaries remarked that 'Mr Browning cannot believe, and Mrs Browning cannot help believing', while critics regard it as the 'only subject' on which they disagreed.[78] I suggest, more specifically, that it was the prospect of the emotional manipulation of bereaved family members, especially in clear cases of fraudulency, combined with Browning's wanting physical contact with spirits, which divided EBB's and Browning's conceptualisations of Spiritualism. Browning, for instance, clarifies the 'honesty & veracity of the [Rymer] family', acknowledging that, during their 'family-party, met for family-purposes', Home's manipulation was the worst 'outrage on their feelings'.[79] Browning's defence of the wholesome and consolatory intent of the séance 'family-party' in turn reinforces Isobel Armstrong's observation that, in *Mr Sludge*, 'Browning seems to have seen in the subject an opportunity for writing more than a topical poem'.[80] Therefore, I highlight Browning's fiery moral defence of mourners as a stirring undercurrent of 'Mr Sludge' which brings attention to the distinctively haptic desires of the séance for bereaved parents.

'Mr Sludge' is an extended dramatic monologue replete with rousing and provocative rhetorics as the eponymous medium considers the varying levels of duplicity inherent within his mediumistic practice. At one pivotal point in his defence, he asks how his clients would respond if table 'raps' were shown to be 'just a certain child who died […] | And whose last breath you thought your lips had felt?'.[81] Browning's depersonalisation in using 'just' and the 'certain' child, as well as his use of highly emotive deathbed language reinforces the affective 'outrage' that Browning believed false mediums like Home caused when claiming to contact the spirits of deceased children. This motif of emotional commodification was something cemented by Browning's séance with Home, and, as a

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77 Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 179.

78 Mrs Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Notes in England and Italy* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1875), 346; Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', 125.

79 Letter published in Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', 132.

80 Isobel Armstrong, 'Browning's Mr Sludge, "The Medium"', *Victorian Poetry*, 2:1 (1964), 1–9, 1.

81 Robert Browning, 'Mr Sludge, "The Medium"', *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, 17 vols (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1888), 7:182–245, 202.

result, he aestheticises the haptics of the séance in 'Mr Sludge' as a pointed poetic response to what he perceived as a practice built on mediums taking advantage of mourners. When recalling his unsavoury experiences during the Home séance, the 'usual spirit' of Wat was said to have appeared and, much to Browning's dismay, neglected to physically engage with him, though doing so with the other attendees: 'Mrs & Mr Rymer were touched by what they recognized as the spirit of their child, & next my wife'.[82] He continues that Wat was 'kissing the family abundantly' and that 'the family like the caresses […] and reciprocate them'.[83] Though Browning admits he was 'touched several times under the table on one knee & the other, – and on my hands alternately (a kind of soft & fleshy pat)', he is denied a sustained touch as he 'desired leave to hold the spirit-hand'.[84] Richard Kelly attributes Browning's frustration to the fact that the 'séance was carefully regulated to preclude serious questioning' and his requests for hand-holding were 'flatly denied'.[85] Yet Browning's irritation appears to stem from the spirit's selective haptic neglect, a theme he later reinscribes into 'Mr Sludge'.

Browning's animated letter recounting the séance is deeply preoccupied with corporeal proof, with repeated references to his 'desire' for touch which convey a yearning for contact uncharacteristic of a sceptic and more reminiscent of eager séance participants. Brother of Raymond Lodge, Alec, for instance, who, despite his 'healthy scepticism', recalls séances with the apparent spirit of his brother and found its physical elements 'very impressive'.[86] He claimed he was being clutched 'exactly as if my hand was being held in both Raymond's' and 'felt that his hands were being gripped in a grasp just like Raymond's'.[87] Similarly, when Marryat first encounters 'Florence', it is her spirit hand, 'thrust […] outside the curtain', which was most convincing because 'it was so much like my own'.[88] Nicola Bown brings attention to Victorian post-mortem photographs of children and identifies how, just as the promise of physical contact with a materialised child spirit could soften the pain of grief, photographs filled the 'empty hands of the bereaved parents' with a 'materiality […] central to its ability to console'.[89] It is significant then that Browning's hands, in being denied the

[82] Letter published in Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', 129.
[83] Letter published in Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', 135.
[84] Letter published in Phelps, 'Robert Browning on Spiritualism', 130.
[85] Kelly, 'Daniel Home, Mr Sludge, and a Forgotten Browning Letter', 45.
[86] Lodge, *Raymond*, 162.
[87] Lodge, *Raymond*, 163, 167.
[88] Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 114.
[89] Nicola Bown, 'Empty Hands and Precious Pictures: Post-Mortem Portrait Photographs of Children', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 14:2 (2009), 8–24, 9.

sustained touch of the child spirit during his séance experience, are most literally empty, while Home (as the medium supposedly controlling the spirit) displays preferential physical treatment only for unquestioning believers, the Rymers and EBB. Contrastingly, when retelling her 'convinced' account of the séance, EBB expresses being content when 'touched by the invisible' and having 'sight of the hands', yet, unlike her husband, feels no need to clutch the materialised spectre. She is instead enamoured by the aesthetic beauty of the spirit hand, remarking that it was 'of the largest human size, as white as snow, and very beautiful' and, like Marryat, 'saw it as distinctly' as her own hand.[90] Where EBB found contentment in observing and passively experiencing the hands, Browning insisted upon returning and sustaining the touch of the apparent spirit. While EBB exhibits a more physically passive acceptance of the phenomena, Browning literally grasps for more evidentiary proof, foreshadowing the 'investigations into the science of Spiritualism' that would later enamour Spiritualists like Marryat by the *fin de siècle*.[91] When exploring the transgressive physical nature of the séance room, Marlene Tromp exemplifies how such highly sensual aspects of mediumship reconfigured relations between men and women to the point that it 'fragmented […] social dichotomies' and, more alarmingly, 'splintered […] an understanding of women's identities and marriage'.[92] Considering in this way the gravity of feminine-coded Spiritualist practice in the context of Victorian love and marriage thus reinforces how EBB's and Browning's conflicting behavioural and ideological approaches to the séance did, in fact, pose a real-world threat to loving relations between a husband and wife.

A decade after his formative séance experience, Browning's evident preoccupation with the haptic proof of the psychical, the apparently selective and unjust nature of the spirit world, and the emotional exploitation of the bereaved by mediums who claimed to invoke child spirits, all reemerge as dominant themes with the publication of 'Mr Sludge'. In addition to its provocative treatment of an array of mourning family members, the dramatic monologue contains twenty-three mentions of the word 'hand' or 'hands' and there is a fixation throughout on the unfulfilled prospect of them being pressed, squeezed, or shaken by both spirit and medium, reinforcing how the physicality of the séance room is a poignant theme throughout.[93] Hands then, in the accounts of the Home séance and through how they resurface in *Mr Sludge*, come to represent credulity and

[90] Quoted in Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 180.
[91] Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 1.
[92] Tromp, 'Spirited Sexuality', 78.
[93] Browning, 'Mr Sludge, "The Medium"'.

belief in the beyond, while their spectral emergence also threatened to fracture social codes between husband and wife. Hands symbolise the varying degrees to which, in the case of the Home séance for EBB and the Rymers, and for ardent believers like Marryat and Lodge, séance participants bereaved of their children used their Spiritualist literature to represent how they could be, even literally, touched, by Spiritualism. Those like Browning, who tended toward the sceptical or equivocal in their eschatological belief systems, instead turned to alternative creative expressions, as exemplified by the extended rhetorical poetics of the dramatic monologue form to depict how they felt neglected, excluded, and even rejected, by the sentimental activities of the séance room.

Spiritualist texts which centralised representations of the renewal of contact between a bereaved parent on earth and their spirit-world child, as this chapter has demonstrated, were deeply invested in depicting not only the continuation, but the strengthening and maturing of love, and of parent-child relationships, post-mortem. In surveying a range of differing iterations of Spiritualist text, I considered the tenaciously hopeful, frank and proof-centric timbre of Marryat's non-fictional *There Is No Death* and fictional *The Dead Man's Message*, to the more sentimental and fragmentary, yet similarly pragmatic, accounts of psychical contact inflected with wartime trauma in Lodge's *Raymond*. I closed by looking to Browning's provocative dramatic monologue 'Mr Sludge' and confessional letters of the Brownings which demonstrate how the prospect of fraudulence or the insufficiency of haptic contact threatened to taint the consolatory potential of the séance, as well as the marital unit. Though nuanced in their forms and tones, these authors all stress that Spiritualism led to a reconstitution of what loss, mourning, and (re)connection could mean for mourners who so desperately sought communicative proof that two-way connections of love continued beyond the veil.

Spiritualist ideology, one predicated on the erasure of death yet continuation of contact, dramatically complicated the idea of what 'loss' entailed and so Spiritualist aesthetics thereby responded by inverting expected hierarchies between parent and child. This was seen most strikingly through the usurping of caregiving roles enacted by the spectral 'Florence' and Raymond, as well as through the promotion of an industrious spirit-world existence. Through their tantalising and empowering representations of benevolent contact with the departed, Marryat and Lodge sought to persuade and comfort fellow mourners that death could be seen as a salvation and that two-way feelings of love could not only be idealised, but actualised, during the séance. While Marryat's Spiritualist studies foreground the continuation of a revered maternal bond and continued growth of children – especially of still-born or ailing infants – upon their

ascendance into the spiritual realm, Lodge views parent-child psychic phenomena through a patriarchal and marital lens. Browning, in vivifying his spoiled séance experiences through 'Mr Sludge', offered an alternative depiction of Spiritualist practice to stress how failed and unsatisfying experiences of the séance room could lead to domestic disagreement, alongside sensations of spiritual and physical neglect, and even rejection, in the pursuit of love after loss. Yet Browning's literal grasping at the prospect of physical contact with departed spirits further demonstrates the enticing nature of the movement when it came to particularly provocative instances of familial loss. This was most clearly shown by Browning's encounter with the Rymers and his witnessing of the alluring potential for communication with the returned spirit of their young son. Ultimately, my approach in looking beyond earthly and heteronormative romantic love in the nineteenth century, has looked towards pre- and post-war Victorian Spiritualist literature as representing a movement which was nuanced and fluctuating, but one which invariably returned to its ceaseless foregrounding of an enduring and communicative kind of love not broken, but strengthened, by bodily death.

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