


ARTICLE

## Phantoms in and of the Archive: Mary Cudmore's Encounters with a Ghost in Cork in 1688 and 1689

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### Abstract

In October 1688, and again in May 1689, Mary Cudmore claimed to have encountered a 'spectre' in her employers' house in Cork city. The great interest the story aroused among the townspeople is indicated in letters from prominent inhabitants and an examination of Mary by the bishop of Cork and Ross. They allow us access into the homes and heads of the people of Cork at a point when significant challenges were being mounted to the Protestant authorities' dominance of the city, as the War of the Two Kings loomed, and as memories of other conflicts stirred. As observers weighed questions of scruple and certainty, and balanced concerns about imposture and credit-worthiness, we also glimpse shifts in supernatural belief and contemporary debates about the construction of proof and truth. That anything of Mary's experiences has survived is remarkable, given the loss of most of the contents of the Dublin Public Record Office in 1922. In the context of ongoing deliberate and negligent destruction of archives, this article thus also argues for consideration of and consideration to partial and phantom histories.

'You are commonly more afeared than hurt' said the ghost of Hugh Langford to Mary Cudmore, a maid living in the household of John and Millicent Palfreyman in Mill Street, Cork city, when he appeared to her on a May night in 1689. They had an extensive conversation about his life and death as Hugh paced around the room. He instructed Mary to reveal some information and to do some tasks on his behalf. This was not the first time Mary had claimed to have had strange experiences in her employers' house. She had previously chatted to the same ghost at midnight on 11–12 October 1688, when Hugh revealed he had been murdered, took her by the hand, and pulled her through the house to his burial place. On digging next morning, human bones had been revealed.

Mary's accounts of the 'spectre' caused a sensation in Cork, so much so that some of the citizens sent letters about her to correspondents in Kerry and

London. Mary was interviewed by the mayor and former mayor, and by the Church of Ireland (Anglican) bishop of Cork and Ross, Edward Wetenhall. Hugh Langford's spectre may have been seen by no one other than Mary Cudmore, lying awake in a shabby street in a small provincial city. But a king was about to arrive there, and the consternation caused by the ghost reveals some of the tensions besetting the inhabitants of a religiously and ethnically divided community on the eve of war, in a manner not otherwise easily visible in the limited surviving sources. While accounts of uncanny events perceived during the upheaval of the 1640s and '50s have received a lot of notice, the persistence of similar phenomena during the 1680s crises and the War of the Two Kings have been less frequently considered. Mary's descriptions of her experiences, and local reactions to them, thus also allow us to view ongoing debates about the supernatural, and about truth and proof, that animated scientists, churchmen, and other educated observers throughout the Irish and British Isles.

In some ways this is a tale of two ghosts: the ghost in the records and the ghost of them. I came across Mary Cudmore's story first in a transcription by Richard Caulfield, a nineteenth-century Cork antiquarian, in *Notes and Queries*. He submitted it in response to an earlier query, saying 'I lately met with it duly registered among the records preserved in the Consistorial Court of the diocese of Cork' and that he had copied it 'verbatim from the MS. as it was taken down and deposed before the then Bishop'.<sup>1</sup> When Caulfield was writing in 1858, a large body of documentation from the Church of Ireland diocese of Cork and Ross (and the diocese of Cloyne, to which Cork and Ross has usually been united) was extant. He published some other parts of this material, such as a register of late sixteenth-century wills that appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1860–1, and the mid-seventeenth-century parish registers of Christchurch parish in Cork city. His histories of St Finbarr's cathedral in Cork and St Colman's in Cloyne drew on vestry records and other documents.<sup>2</sup>

However, the bulk of the diocesan documentation that Caulfield had access to, along with a large part of the Church of Ireland's surviving parish registers for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was destroyed in 1922. In the explosion of the Dublin Public Record Office (PRO), the words taken down in Mary's presence were vaporized, along with most of the other documents that might have provided some context for her story and some details of her life. She too became a spectre, granted some sort of shadow life by Richard Caulfield's decision to respond to a 'query' with a Cork ghost story. But, as we will see, seventeenth-century ghosts are surprisingly insistent. A hint at the end of Caulfield's transcription about another surviving account of Mary's experiences leads to a letter which he published in truncated

<sup>1</sup> R[ichard] C[aulfield], 'Ghosts and apparitions', *Notes and Queries*, 2nd series, no. 112 (Feb. 1858), pp. 151–2.

<sup>2</sup> *The twenty-first report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records in Ireland* (Dublin, 1889), pp. 3–7; Auction notice, *Athenaeum*, 21 Jan. 1888, p. 71; Joan Rockley, *Antiquarians and archaeology in nineteenth-century Cork* (Dublin, 2009); Richard Caulfield, *The annals of St. Fin Barre's cathedral* (Cork, 1871); Richard Caulfield, *Annals of the Cathedral of St. Coleman, Cloyne* (Cork, 1882); Richard Caulfield, *The register of the parish of Holy Trinity (Christchurch) Cork* (Cork, 1877).

form in the *Saturday Magazine* – again, the original cannot now be found. That manuscript transcripts of the examination of Mary by the mayor and former mayor of Cork were in circulation is testified to in the commonplace book of an eighteenth-century successor of theirs (discussed below), though none of these copies are extant, and the corporation records for the relevant period have disappeared too.<sup>3</sup> The fact that one original letter about Mary actually survives – noticed in the Pepys papers and kindly forwarded to me by Elaine Murphy – seems in the circumstances almost providential.

Mary's testimony is all the more significant when we note that surviving reports of the direct speech of young lower-sort women from Ireland in this period are vanishingly rare. The labours of historians like Caulfield and many others in the period before 1922 – transcribing, abstracting, and disseminating – mean that some of the contents of the PRO survive in partial or proxy form. But the histories that can be won out of the jaws of oblivion are far more maimed, fragmentary, fragile – ghostly – than they would otherwise have been. Of course, all archives present only fragments of fragments, but it is undeniably the case that social and cultural histories of early modern Ireland can never be written in the same manner and with the same amplitude that historians of some other parts of Europe can muster. As a consequence, it is difficult to publish them where they can be accessed by a wider audience, since they risk being met with the argument that they are too slight or too incomplete.<sup>4</sup> Conjuring the ghosts of Mary and her community feels like an act of defiance against the hubris of the hard men of 1922 and the colonial legacies that shaped both the destruction of the PRO and persisting opinions of Irish history as merely 'local'. This article thus also argues for consideration of and consideration to partial and phantom histories.

The story here follows the fairly standard theme of a ghost who reveals a murder. But Caroline Callard notes the 'historical particularity of ghostly manifestations' in the early modern period, and argues that 'Each apparition can and must be carefully contextualized and ... the context does not exhaust the historical significance of their presence.'<sup>5</sup> A range of recent publications have demonstrated that case studies of alleged encounters with apparitions of the dead can reveal much about popular beliefs and the cultural and political context in which percipients like Mary Cudmore told their stories and bystanders transmitted them.<sup>6</sup> The most famous Irish-related example is the

<sup>3</sup> Richard Caulfield, *Council book of the corporation of the city of Cork from 1609 to 1643, and from 1690 to 1800* (Guildford, 1879).

<sup>4</sup> Clodagh Tait, 'Writing the social and cultural history of early modern Ireland: wills as examples and inspiration', in Sarah Covington, Valerie McGowan Doyle, and Vincent Carey, eds., *Early modern Ireland: new sources, methods and perspectives* (Abingdon, 2018), pp. 27–48.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Callard, *Spectralities in the Renaissance: sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, trans. Trista Selous (Oxford, 2022), pp. 1–13.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Marshall, *Mother Leakey and the bishop: a ghost story* (Oxford, 2007); Laura Sangha, 'The social, personal, and spiritual dynamics of ghost stories in early modern England', *Historical Journal*, 63 (2020), pp. 339–59; Laura Gowing, 'The haunting of Susan Lay: servants and mistresses in seventeenth-century England', *Gender and History*, 41 (2002), pp. 183–201; Todd Butler, 'The haunting of Isabell Binnington: ghosts of murder, texts, and law in Restoration England', *Journal*

case of the ghost of ‘Mother Leakey’, whose intervention in the late 1630s contributed to the downfall of John Atherton, bishop of Waterford and Lismore, as discussed by Peter Marshall.<sup>7</sup> Andrew Tierney has considered reports during the 1640s of a series of ‘hauntings’ at Gaelic and Old English castles, seeing them as ‘a potent symbol of the violent intersection between politics and religion’.<sup>8</sup> James Haddock’s 1662 appearance near Belfast to Francis Taverner, whom he dispatched to intervene to prevent Haddock’s widow’s new husband from disinheriting his son, attracted the attention of the English clergyman-philosopher Joseph Glanville, who published it in his doubter-flouting *Saducismus triumphatus* (1681).<sup>9</sup> Glanville also discussed the case of a man in north Cork or west Waterford who had claimed to be tormented by a ‘spectre’, and was visited by the local ‘stroker’ or healer, Valentine Greatrakes.<sup>10</sup> More limited documentation survives for the small number of additional late seventeenth-century ghost encounters later compiled by William Pinkerton and St John D. Seymour.<sup>11</sup> Raymond Gillespie also identified several accounts of hauntings for which some evidence is available, alongside a range of other sorts of ‘apparitions’ that might trouble Irish communities.<sup>12</sup> But Mary’s story has previously been discussed by no one other than Caulfield.

Callard and others consider the last quarter of the seventeenth century a time of transformation of ghost beliefs, as ‘the secular and religious authorities

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*of British Studies*, 50 (2011), pp. 248–76; Jacqueline Pearson, “‘Then she asked it, what were its sisters names?’ Reading between the lines in seventeenth-century pamphlets of the supernatural’, *Seventeenth Century*, 28 (2013), pp. 63–78; Sasha Handley, ‘Voix de femmes, cruauté maritale et histoires de fantômes dans l’Angleterre du xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Revue historique*, 688 (2018), pp. 837–68 (available in translation as ‘Women’s voices, marital cruelty and ghost reports in early modern England’, [https://research.manchester.ac.uk/files/86804325/Contesting\\_marital\\_cruelty\\_womens\\_voices\\_and\\_ghost\\_stories\\_in\\_early\\_modern\\_England\\_FINAL.docx%23:-:text%3DIndeed%252C%2520ghost%2520reports%2520like%2520that,in%2520number%2520from%2520the%2520mid%252D&ved=2ahUKEWjnqK9x4eFAxUCWEEAHRD6AscQFn0ECA8QAw&usq=AOvVaw38kX8SY4CCOGh1d-hy81VQ](https://research.manchester.ac.uk/files/86804325/Contesting_marital_cruelty_womens_voices_and_ghost_stories_in_early_modern_England_FINAL.docx%23:-:text%3DIndeed%252C%2520ghost%2520reports%2520like%2520that,in%2520number%2520from%2520the%2520mid%252D&ved=2ahUKEWjnqK9x4eFAxUCWEEAHRD6AscQFn0ECA8QAw&usq=AOvVaw38kX8SY4CCOGh1d-hy81VQ)); Kathryn A. Edwards, ‘Female sociability, physicality, and authority in an early modern haunting’, *Journal of Social History*, 33 (2000), pp. 601–22. On early modern ghosts, see also Owen Davies, *The haunted: a social history of ghosts* (Basingstoke, 2007); Peter Marshall, *Invisible worlds: the supernatural in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 2017); Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002); John Newton and Jo Bath, eds., *Early modern ghosts* (Durham, 2002); Sasha Handley, *Visions of an unseen world: ghost beliefs and ghost stories in eighteenth-century England* (London, 2014); Kathryn A. Edwards, ‘The history of ghosts in early modern Europe: recent research and future trajectories’, *History Compass*, 10 (2012), pp. 353–66; Timothy Chesters, *Ghost stories in late Renaissance France: walking by night* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Marshall, *Mother Leakey and the bishop*.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Tierney, ‘Return of the repressed? “Haunted castles” in seventeenth-century Munster’, *Éire-Ireland*, 45, 3 (2010), pp. 7–26.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Gillespie, ‘Voices from beyond the grave: a seventeenth-century Belfast ghost story’, in Salvador Ryan, ed., *Death and the Irish* (Dublin, 2016), pp. 81–4.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Elmer, *The miraculous conformist: Valentine Greatrakes, the body politic, and the politics of healing in Restoration Britain* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 128–9.

<sup>11</sup> William Pinkerton, ‘Down and Antrim ghost stories of the seventeenth century’, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3 (1855), pp. 323–6; St John D. Seymour, *Irish witchcraft and demonology* (Baltimore, 1913), pp. 132–75.

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Gillespie, *Devoted people: belief and religion in early modern Ireland* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 110–14.

no longer needed their services' and as science and philosophy began to narrow the spaces in which they might be understood to operate.<sup>13</sup> George Sinclair subtitled his *Satan's invisible world discovered*, published in Edinburgh in 1685, 'A choice collection of modern relations, proving evidently against the Saducees [unbelievers] and Atheists of this present age, that there are devils, spirits, witches, and apparitions'.<sup>14</sup> These decades pitted those who saw the defence of belief in the supernatural as a means of defending belief in God against those who were more sceptical. All sides engaged with questions of proof and imposture.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as we will see, for some like Bishop Edward Wetenhall, Mary Cudmore's account of the 'Specter' was of academic as well as personal interest. The lay observer William Hovell, in a letter to a nonconformist correspondent, also drew on scientific and theological language in relation to it. But neither the growing lack of interest of the learned classes nor the return of the political status quo in Cork at the end of the War of Two Kings brought an end to the spectre's story, since some of the citizens continued to recall it decades afterwards.

## I

Later seventeenth-century Cork had long burst its medieval boundaries. The city, built on the marsh that gave it its name, was expanding into the higher, drier land to the north and south, and programmes of reclamation were beginning to tame the surrounding wetlands. The population of the city and suburbs at mid-century may have been anywhere between 8,000 and 14,000, but had grown to at least 25,000 by the 1680s, when one observer estimated that two-thirds of the townspeople lived outside the decaying walls. However, the medieval core remained important to Cork's commercial activities. Many of the buildings there had been confiscated in 1644, when their Catholic Old English owners were expelled from the city, though David Dickson suggests that many went no further than the suburbs. Their former property was distributed largely to Protestants, and 'By 1661 the "English" constituted 65 per cent of the tax-paying adults within the walls and 46 per cent of the city and suburbs overall'.<sup>16</sup> While some of these 'New English' were immigrants, others had roots in the late sixteenth-century/early seventeenth-century Munster plantation. By the 1680s many were second- and third-generation settlers, who would have had personal or family memories of the killings, war, dispossessions, and repossessions of the 1640s and '50s. After the granting of a new charter in 1656, a large number of new Protestant freemen were created: thenceforth until the late 1680s, most of the mayors and sheriffs of the city

<sup>13</sup> Callard, *Spectralities in the Renaissance*, p. 239.

<sup>14</sup> George Sinclair, *Satan's invisible world discovered* (Edinburgh, 1685).

<sup>15</sup> Jo Bath and John Newton, "'Sensible proof of spirits": ghost belief during the later seventeenth century', *Folklore*, 117 (2006), pp. 1–114.

<sup>16</sup> David Dickson, *The first Irish cities: an eighteenth-century transformation* (New Haven, CT, 2022), pp. 18–22. See also Mark McCarthy, 'An historical geography of the Atlantic port city of Cork, 1600–1715', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, 22 (2019), pp. 20–41; Henry A. Jefferies, ed., *Cork: historical perspectives* (Dublin, 2004).

were Protestant. Working with British and other business partners and investors, Protestant merchants took a significant role in Cork's commercial activities, especially the burgeoning provisions trade with the British Atlantic colonies and further afield.<sup>17</sup> While the majority of Cork's Protestants at this time were members of the Church of Ireland, there was also a growing group of nonconformists, including Baptists, Quakers, and even Muggletonians.<sup>18</sup>

Surrounded by the river Lee, the city within the walls was divided into two small parishes, Christchurch and St Peter's, and bisected by a long main street. Narrow lanes ran off the South and North Main Streets, with others branching off them: this was a tightly packed and bustling community. One lane that was somewhat wider was Mill Street, part or all of which was also known as Fishamble Street, located at the boundary of the two parishes.<sup>19</sup> This street was in the area of present-day Liberty Street; in the seventeenth century, at least judging from the survey of 1663/4, it had some substantial houses.<sup>20</sup> The mill was a grist or flour mill, called Droop's Mill, which was probably in operation in the 1680s. The channel running down Mill Street that fed it was later diverted after having been culverted and paved over, but the mill still existed in 1859.<sup>21</sup>

And it was on Mill Street, on the night of 11 October 1688, that Mary Cudmore saw a ghost. The following day, the merchant William Hovell wrote to a correspondent in England, Joseph Herne ('one of London's richest merchant-financiers'), about matters related to the East India Company.<sup>22</sup> In an enclosure with the letter, he described 'a Specters appearance in my neighbourhood last night'. The story Hovell told began at 'the house of John Palefreeman Clothier an English Protestant'. The 'Specter or Aparition' took 'the shape of a middle siz'd man, not very aged, having a great ruff beard, not gray butt rather browne, in a mounteer [montero] cap a little band [or collar] and band strings'.<sup>23</sup> The percipient, Palfreyman's servant Mary Cudmore, was twenty-three. She was a Protestant 'of good certuous Demeanor', and had been born to English parents in Lismore, Co.

<sup>17</sup> Michael McCarthy, 'The forging of an Atlantic port city: socio-economic and physical transformations in Cork, 1660–1700', *Urban History*, 28 (2001), pp. 25–45.

<sup>18</sup> Phil Kilroy, 'Radical religion in Ireland, 1641–1660', in Jane Ohlmeyer, ed., *Ireland from independence to occupation, 1641–1660* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 201–17.

<sup>19</sup> See Howard B. Clarke and Máire Ní Laoí, *Irish historic towns atlas 31: Cork/Corcaigh* (forthcoming, 2024); Howard B. Clarke and Máire Ní Laoí, 'The digital atlas of Cork city', 2023, <https://www.ria.ie/digital-atlas-corkcorcaigh>.

<sup>20</sup> Robert C. Simington, *The civil survey A.D. 1654–56, county of Waterford vol VI with appendices: Muskerry barony Co. Cork; Kilkenny city and liberties; also valuations c.1663–64 for Waterford and Cork cities* (Dublin, 1942).

<sup>21</sup> *Linehan v. Dibble*, 1859, *Irish Common Law Reports*, 9 (1860), pp. 309–17.

<sup>22</sup> W. Hovell to Joseph Herne, 12 Oct. 1688, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Pepys' papers, vol. xvii, MS Rawlinson A. 186, fos. 110–11 (emphases in subsequent quotations are in the original). See Andrew A. Hanham, 'Herne, Joseph (1639–99)', <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/herne-joseph-1639-99>. On Hovell, see James O'Shea, *Irish maritime trade in the Restoration era: the letterbook of William Hovell, 1683–1687* (Dublin, 2022); J. J. Muskett, *Suffolk manorial families being the county visitations and other pedigrees*, II (Exeter, 1908), pp. 38–40.

<sup>23</sup> 'Montero caps', *The 1642 tailor*, 30 Mar. 2014, <https://the1642tailor.com/2014/03/30/montero-caps>.

Waterford. A few Cork Cudmores are mentioned in records from the 1640s onwards,<sup>24</sup> though no Palfreymans appear before the 1680 marriage of John Paulfreman Jr and Milicent Walker.<sup>25</sup> As an 'English Protestant', John may have been a relatively recent arrival.

The spirit, Hovell said,

had nott onely troubled the maid butt the whole house for several weekes before the said time, and tho' they took care to fasten (locking and barring) all the doors and windows by which it might come (if it were a body) yet they were every night almost disturbed with it and more especially the maid who several times adventured to speak to it, but received noe answer.

Finally, on the night of 11 October, the spectre 'came to her bed side ... looking down on her (for shée laye in a settle bed)'. She could see it as she had a candle, and she engaged it in conversation. 'What is your wil?' she said and 'My will (answered the Specter) is with you. Then said the maid, *God's will be done* believing she was to dye.' But the spectre had another purpose. He told her 'I was murdered in the room over head 33 yeares ago' (so around 1655, after the Old English had been expelled from Cork and around the time of the grant of its new charter). 'Follow me', the spectre said, and the maid got up to do so but

her heart failed her and she made a stand, wheron it turned back and struck her a little slap on her shoulder wch has left two black marks bigger then two crowne peeces yet seem'd nott to hurt her, and tooke her by the hand and led her along (she saw butt could nott feel his hand) the other hand he held up every finger of it seem'd to give light to the roome, and thus goeing along the doors opened before 'em till he came to a ground place under a pair of staires when standing still it said, *Dig here and you'll find me*. Then he vanished.

Mary returned to her bed, and next morning told her employers. They called in a mason, 'who digging, presently found the bones, which are very proportionable to the bignesse assumed by the spectre'. The bones were buried in St Peter's churchyard.

Hovell vouched for the maid, saying that she was 'in perfect health' – presumably meaning mental as well as physical health – and that 'the thing is real or related without scruple'. He expected 'that the discovery of the murder will follow, tho att present the maid remembers no body to be named for its Authour'. He also testified to the character of the Palfreymans, 'very honest

<sup>24</sup> For example: Deposition of Mary Cudemore, 7 Nov. 1642, Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, 1641 Depositions, MS 822, fo. 248r–v (available at <https://1641.tcd.ie>); Paul Cudemore, mentioned in Edward Keane, P. Beryl Phair, and Thomas U. Sadlier, eds., *King's Inns admission papers, 1607–1867* (Dublin, 1982), p. 114. See Noel Murphy, 'Cudmore family notes for Limerick', [www.limerickcity.ie/media/Cudmore%20family%20history.pdf](http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/Cudmore%20family%20history.pdf), accessed 30 May 2023.

<sup>25</sup> *Index to the marriage licence bonds of the diocese of Cork and Ross, Ireland, for the years from 1628–1750* (Dublin, 1896), pp. 35, 100.

prudent people to my own knowledge, and of my acquaintance, who are incommoded much by the flocking of the people to their house. They are ready to depose all this before the Mayor, or other Magistrates.' The account was 'believed by all here without Scruple' and even the Church of Ireland bishop was satisfied that 'there is no cheat or imposture in the least'. Hovell's friend and partner in the serge trade, Charles Sympson, lodged with the Palfreymans and had previously told him 'that the house was certainly troubled with a Spirit, which till now I did not believe'.

A second account of Mary's encounter with the ghost was written on 18 October 1688 by 'Counsellor Galway', probably the Old English Catholic John Galwey of Lotabeg, afterwards an MP in James II's parliament. His correspondent, Sir Thomas Crosbie, was a Kerry landowner from a Gaelic Protestant background and formerly a parliamentarian soldier.<sup>26</sup> Many of the details are very similar to Hovell's, though this account suggests that there were two conversations between Mary and the ghost. When it was published by Caulfield in 1866, he claimed it was appended to a discussion of a legal matter.

It starts: 'In a house in [Milstreet] in which Sir William Fenton and some others of note before and after him lived, happened a singular accident.' A maidservant (unnamed this time), 'being in bed alone', an 'aged man, with a large beard and good countenance, appeared to her'. Again, part of the dialogue is reported:

Shee asked in God's name what he was; he tould her the next tyme he came he would informe her. Last night he appeared again to her, tould her that it was thirty-five years since he was murdered in that house, burryed in a part thereof, and that shee should goe with him, and he would shew her the place of his buryal.

The rest of the account mostly closely follows Hovell's:

She got up and did, but before she went far she began to be fearful and stayed, he therefore clapped his hand on her shoulder, and there has left an impression visible. He had a flame or a light in the other hand. He shewed her a ground closet or small ground roome, where he said he was buried, then vanished.

On digging in the indicated place, 'the heade and boanes of a man is found'. Galwey ended his letter: 'Now all tire at work to find, if possible, who this murdered man was, and who lived in ye house at ye time. This I thought fit to trouble you with, because it is strange.'

<sup>26</sup> 'Church of the Holy Trinity, Cork', *Dublin Saturday Magazine*, 2, no. 91 (1865–7), p. 459. All quotations in the remainder of this section are taken from this letter. The letter may survive in the Crosbie papers in the National Library of Ireland, but, despite my searches of this material, it has not yet come to light. See Micheál Ó Siochrú, 'Crosbie, Thomas', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2009, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/crosbie-thomas-a2235>; W. B. Blackall, 'The Galweys of Munster', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 71–4 (1966–9).



## II

Strange enough at any time, but right then the appearance of a ghost must have seemed especially ominous. The ripples from James II's accession were making themselves felt in Cork. At some point at the end of 1687 or beginning of 1688 the Protestant mayor, William Ballard, had been deposed and a Catholic, Ignatius Gould, elected in his place. A few days before the ghost's appearance, on 4 October 1688, a new Catholic mayor, Patrick Roche, was sworn in.<sup>27</sup> As already noted, a later account, discussed in more detail below, says that both Roche and Ballard, who was still a justice of the peace, examined Mary Cudmore under oath about her story, and that copies of that examination were circulated, though none have survived.

William of Orange's intentions were becoming clear and he landed in England a few weeks after the spectre's appearance. In late 1688 and early 1689, tensions grew in Munster.<sup>28</sup> At Christmas 1688, a rumour circulated that the Protestants of Cork were about to be massacred. The Cork Quaker linen draper Joseph Pike later recalled how,

after the change of the government into Irish hands, great numbers fled into England, and the English who staid behind, were often abused and confined; two or three could hardly meet or speak together without danger, so that they were in constant terror of their lives, remembering the massacre of 1641, and, at times, fearing another.<sup>29</sup>

As Toby Barnard and Richard Ansell have explored in detail, the spectre of that massacre was regularly invoked in sermons and print too.<sup>30</sup>

Pike and his community were especially alarmed when the Protestants of Cork were disarmed by James's supporters in early 1689, 'which they began in the evening near night, lining the streets with soldiers armed with lighted matches', so that even the Irish inhabitants of Cork feared what might happen. In late February the 'English' of Bandon (west of Cork) revolted and turned out the Irish garrison that had been imposed on them. Soldiers loyal to James who

<sup>27</sup> Cork City Library, 'The mayoral book of Thomas Pembrock 1733', <https://digital.corkpastandpresent.com/Documents/Detail/ye-mayoral-book-of-thomas-pembrock-1733-volume-1/3227>, image 377. This commonplace book is only intermittently paginated, and some runs of pages duplicate page numbers that also appear elsewhere. Thus the image numbers of the digitized volume are given here instead or as well.

<sup>28</sup> For an overview, see Toby Barnard, 'Ireland, 1688–91', in Tim Harris and Stephen Taylor, eds., *The final crisis of the Stuart monarchy: the revolutions of 1688–91 in their British, Atlantic and European contexts* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 157–88.

<sup>29</sup> John Barclay, ed., *Some account of the life of Joseph Pike of Cork, in Ireland, who died in the year 1729, written by himself* (London, 1837), pp. 50–1.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Ansell, 'Revolutions: the 1688 revolution in Ireland and the memory of 1641', in Mark Williams and Stephen P. Forrest, eds., *Constructing the past: writing Irish history, 1600–1800* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 73–93. See also Ethan H. Shagan, 'Constructing discord: ideology, propaganda, and English responses to the Irish rebellion of 1641', *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), pp. 73–94; Toby Barnard, 'The uses of 23 October 1641 and Irish Protestant celebrations', *English Historical Review*, 106, 421 (1991), pp. 889–920.

assembled at Cork to tackle the insurgents plundered a house at Red Abbey, fired shots, and ‘gave out that the English were gathering there, to rise with the Bandon people’. In the ensuing confusion, crowds gathered, ‘the soldiers running to arms, the Irish in an uproar, crying out, “The Bandon people are come and killing thousands out of South Gate;” others, in confusion, cried out, “Kill them all, kill them all.”’ Pike and his brother were threatened, but escaped. He recalled that ‘During this time of confusion, many husbands left their families and houses, and ran on board the first ship they could get, as did also many women and children, as believing the English would all be slain.’ The alarm spread with them: ‘The ships, sailing directly for England, carried the news, that all the English were murdered; but, in a little time, this confusion ceased.’<sup>31</sup>

James II landed in Kinsale, twenty miles south of Cork, on 12 March; Lord Deputy Tyrconnell joined him in Cork two days later. During the few days he spent in Cork, the king heard the Protestants’ petitions and pardoned the men of Bandon, but several of them were subsequently tried at the assizes anyway, and one Mr Brown was executed, allegedly being hanged, drawn, and quartered.<sup>32</sup> Another boatload of refugees left on 25 March, most of them prominent men; many of their families were left behind. One of the refugees, Dean Rowland Davies of Ross, wrote a diary. It records his worry about the infrequency of news about the fate of his wife and family.<sup>33</sup> At least he had a circle of relations and friends to support him in England. Second- or third-generation English-Irish and those from the middling and lower sections of society – people like Mary Cudmore – would have had few connections in England to leverage, even had they managed to leave. And many of their leaders had fled.

The people of Cork city must have heard stories of the seizure and destruction of Protestant property elsewhere in Munster; maybe their minds flickered to the origins of their own or their employers’ possessions. On 24 April 1689 William Lloyd wrote from the seat of the Percevals at Burton, near Buttevant, Co. Cork, that

All here in this kingdom in a manner is destroyed ... there is not one Englishman in the County of Kerry that has the value of sixpence left, neither do I believe twenty English are left in the county. Our stock in this county is likewise destroyed, and so it is all over the province, so that I fear there will be a famine.

<sup>31</sup> Barclay, ed., *Some account of the life of Joseph Pike of Cork*, pp. 51–2.

<sup>32</sup> James Buckley, ‘The landing of James the second at Kinsale, in 1689’, *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 3 (1897), pp. 143–8; *The doctrine of non-resistance or passive obedience no way concerned in the controversies now depending between the Williamites and the Jacobites* (London, 1689); George Bennett, *The history of Bandon and the principal towns in the West Riding of Cork* (Bandon, 1869), pp. 270–81.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Caulfield, *Journal of the Very Rev. Rowland Davies, LL.D. dean of Ross (and afterwards dean of Cork) from March 8, 1688–9, to September 29, 1690* (London, 1857).

He continued 'it grows worse and worse every day with us ... all people of the Protestant profession have lost the greatest part of their substance, and I fear that abundance of us will starve, if God of His mercy do not relieve us'.<sup>34</sup>

### III

If the Protestants of Cork were receiving similar information, it is not surprising that a few days after Lloyd sent his letter the spectre was back. The account given on examination by Mary Cudmore to the bishop of Cork and Ross, Edward Wetenhall (the one published by Richard Caulfield), tells us that, on Thursday 2 May, 'between the hours of twelve and one of the clock or thereabouts, as near as she can compute', Mary Cudmore was again lying awake in bed in John Palfreyman's house in Mill Street, with a candle lighting in her room, when 'making no manner of noise nor disturbance "the ghost" came to the bed side'.<sup>35</sup> Mary accosted him. She said 'I adjure you in the name of God to tell me what you are, or what you came for?' The spectre replied, rather rudely, 'You need not adjure me, for I come on purpose to tell you, & you are commonly more afraid than hurt.' Pacing several times between the bed and the table, he told her: 'I am a poor man that came out of England and was up and down here to gett a liveing. This house being a Marshalls [marshalsea; a prison], I got in to be a keeper, where in short time, I got about 26 pounds.'

The ghost began to give more specific details: 'There was one John Jackson & his wife Joane Jackson being livers in Cross Lane ... who came out of Cornwall.'<sup>36</sup> At this point, the writer of the examination noted that 'the maid not knowing the names of the English Shires cannot positively remember whether it was Cornwall or some other like place, but she says it was Cornwall or Cornshire or some such word.' In any case, according to the spirit, John Jackson 'owed a debt for which he was putt into the Marshalls. We had some few words about the fees, for which his wife and he contrived to murder me.' They bribed another prisoner in the Marshalsea, a man from Skiddy's Castle Lane, paying him £3 10s. to keep quiet. Indeed, Mary told the bishop, the man in question had been one of the witnesses to the exhumation of the bones. The ghost continued,

the day that my bones were taken up, this man was in the Roome, the third man next to the Bishop, standing upon one of the turky work chairs; his colour went and came, which if God had given you the knowledge of, to have looked in his face it would have discovered him & I myself would have been a witness against him, but he had one debt to pay, and he has paid it, for he is now dead.

<sup>34</sup> William Taylor to Edward Lloyd, 24 Apr. 1689, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the manuscripts of the earl of Egmont* (3 vols., Dublin, 1909), II, p. 190.

<sup>35</sup> Caulfield, 'Ghosts and apparitions', pp. 151–2. Caulfield's placing of some phrases in inverted commas may indicate that he was not transcribing the original as exactly as he suggested.

<sup>36</sup> There were some Jacksons in Cork in the period: *Marriage licence bonds*, p. 72.

He said he did not know the man's name 'but he described the cloths which he had on (viz) an old Grey Searge [serge] Coat & an old white hatt with an old pair of shooes & a dirty crevat' – clearly the witness had not prospered later in life. The murderers were also dead, Joan Jackson having lived only a month afterwards and 'being disturbed at her wicked action she walked as frequently as he did; he added that his declaring it, would also be a means to sett her at rest as he believed'. Her husband had since died in England.

The ghost claimed he had previously attempted to tell his story. About seven years after his murder (so after the Restoration, around 1662), 'there was a Schoolemistress living in the house & two younge girls lodging with her'. He had taken one of the girls out of her bed at night and told her the story '& desired her to discover it; but she neglected to do so, whereupon in a short while she dyed'. He claimed that the 'occasion of his coming now' was that three men had come under suspicion for his murder and he wanted to exonerate them; '(then he named three certain gentlemen)'. He also told Mary that she should pay his 'gossip' 36 shillings, but declined to tell her the person's name.<sup>37</sup> She 'should not enquire after him, till he enquired after her, which he would certainly do'. She was to pay the sum herself, even if she had to 'sel her cloaths to make it up'. He told her the reason for the payment 'but bid her not to discover it to anyone, onely because some might think it to be worse than it was'. If she acted according to his instructions, the money would 'be made up some other way to her'.

Mary finally asked the spectre his name, and he told her that, although he was 'commonly called by another name', his 'right name' was Hugh Langford. He promised 'he would never trouble her anymore'. He then ordered her to turn her head away, 'which she did, tho she had not the power to do it all the while before and straightway turning about again, she could see him noe more'.

#### IV

We do not know if this was the last time Mary saw the ghost. We do not even know if she survived the grim period for Cork's Protestants that followed: the internment of large numbers of them, the bombardment during the siege in 1690, and the epidemics that swept the country.<sup>38</sup> It seems that her employer, John Palfreyman, did not survive, as his wife Millicent married John Breres in 1696.<sup>39</sup> But, though the ghost mentions neither King James nor King William, the haunting itself testifies to the fraught atmosphere of the time. The volume of reports of the ghost of Hugh Langford and their wide distribution lead us into the heart of a community under pressure. At the same time,

<sup>37</sup> The term 'gossip' normally indicates a godparent, but can also mean a close friend.

<sup>38</sup> John Childs, *The Williamite wars in Ireland, 1688–1691* (London, 2007); J. G. Simms, *War and politics in Ireland, 1649–1730*, ed. D. W. Hayton and Gerard O'Brien (London, 1986), pp. 117–27; Barclay, ed., *Some account of the life of Joseph Pike of Cork*, pp. 52–4.

<sup>39</sup> *Marriage licence bonds*, p. 99.

they also supply some more mundane details of contemporary expectations of ghost behaviour, and about everyday life, local politics, and gendered experience.

Reports of encounters with the supernatural tend to cluster in times of crisis, both because social dislocation can incline people to search for meaning and direction wherever they might be offered, and also because these are environments suited to the spread of rumour and sensational stories.<sup>40</sup> Providential readings of the revolution and wars of 1688–91 were to the forefront in the popular press, and in the sermons of clergy.<sup>41</sup> Late seventeenth-century people believed that God's providence could be read in natural and seemingly unnatural events, and times of catastrophe raised both fears of his judgement and hopes of his partiality towards one's own 'side'.<sup>42</sup> Richard Ansell characterizes the War of the Two Kings in Ireland as a 'conflict over meaning'. His focus is the contemporary tussle over 'the interpretation of the Irish past'.<sup>43</sup> But uncanny events were also wide open to providential and propagandistic interpretation. Like the communities they led, those in authority might be more inclined than usual to take heed of odd occurrences and, crucially, more inclined to formally investigate them in a manner that generated records. The mayor and former mayor of Cork examined Mary Cudmore, and we know from later accounts (discussed below) that the examination was written down, though it has not survived. The Church of Ireland bishop of Cork and Ross, Edward Wetenhall, also took an interest in 1688, and examined the second apparition in 1689.

Some other prominent citizens of Cork clearly were interested enough in Mary Cudmore's story to dispatch detailed accounts of the matter to their correspondents in Ireland and beyond. Galway 'saw fit to trouble' Thomas Crosbie with the account of the ghost 'because it is strange'. William Hovell not only directed his version of the story to Joseph Herne but also asked that it be passed to his friend (and very regular correspondent) James Houblon, a non-conformist merchant involved with the East India Company, and later alderman and MP.<sup>44</sup> Its further travels are indicated by its present location among the papers of Houblon's friend Samuel Pepys. The form of Hovell's report is consequently interesting, since it was appended to his main letter as an enclosure – a separate sheet – that would have facilitated it being passed between interested parties. Laura Sangha notes that some of the ghost stories in the collection of Ralph Thoresby of Leeds similarly seem to have been

<sup>40</sup> Jerome Friedman, *The battle of the frogs and Fairford's flies: miracles and the pulp press during the English revolution* (New York, NY, 1993); Gillespie, *Devoted people*, p. 109.

<sup>41</sup> Ansell, 'Revolutions'.

<sup>42</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in early modern England* (Oxford, 1999); Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika, eds., *Disaster, death and the emotions in the shadow of the Apocalypse, 1400–1700* (Basingstoke, 2016); Gillespie, *Devoted people*.

<sup>43</sup> Ansell, 'Revolutions', p. 92.

<sup>44</sup> Perry Gauci, 'Houblon, Sir James (1629–1700)', <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/houblon-sir-james-1629-1700>. See O'Shea, *Letterbook of William Hovell*, p. xvi.

'circulated as enclosures in letters', and cites other examples of the circulation of supernatural accounts in manuscript.<sup>45</sup>

That Irish residents participated in archipelago-wide networks that circulated supernatural as well as other news is testified to by the printed letters of Irish correspondents in collections of supernatural stories like those of Glanville and Baxter: for example, two letters describing a haunting in Belfast (mentioned below) made it into the latter's *Certainty of the world of spirits*. Some surviving pamphlets from the later 1680s, published in London but drawn from correspondence from Ireland, also detailed events that were seen as extraordinary or ominous. *A stupendious apparition of the cross seen on the moon* (1688) was allegedly written by 'a Reverend hand as he received it from a Friend in Dublin', and confirmed by a letter from the lord chancellor of Ireland 'which intimates the truth of this relation'.<sup>46</sup> The following year, *Wonders from the skies: or, a warning-piece to all papists* described a cross and a lion superimposed on the moon, and two armies in the sky, which were interpreted as foreshadowing the defeat of some of James's supporters in Ireland. It was purported to have been printed from the letter of a 'person of quality'.<sup>47</sup>

The Cork spectre's appearance was seemingly preceded by other disturbances, perhaps sounds or poltergeist-type activity. It was rumoured that the maid had attempted to speak to the ghost before, so the implication is that she had claimed to have heard or seen him on other occasions. Seventeenth-century people were surprisingly inclined to engage ghosts in conversation, often preceding their questions with an invocation of the name of God as a means of protection. Mary Cudmore and her community understood that spectres were purposeful, and that they expected to be spoken to and taken seriously.

The nature of the ghost's unbodyed body is notable. It did not glow in the way that we might expect a ghost to: on both occasions, the maid saw it because she had a lighted candle beside her. When the ghost moved through the house, either his hand or a light in his hand shone to help both of them see their way. He had substance: he was able to draw Mary along, and his slap on her back left a mark. Beliefs around the strength and substance of ghosts were likewise alluded to during the investigation of allegations that the ghost of Margaret Lostin had appeared in Drumbeg, near Belfast, in 1685, and had pulled Thomas Donelson, a witness to the assault that caused her death, out of a house as those inside tried to hold him back. He was 'carried up and down over Neighbouring Hedges and Ditches' until he promised to seek the prosecution of Margaret's assailants.<sup>48</sup> Like Hugh, Margaret Lostin could be

<sup>45</sup> Sangha, 'The social, personal, and spiritual dynamics of ghost stories', p. 346; Laura Sangha, 'Making public: communicating supernatural beliefs in England's long Reformation', in Anna French, ed., *Reading the reformations: theologies, cultures and beliefs in an age of change* (Leiden, 2023), pp. 285–307.

<sup>46</sup> *A stupendious apparition of a cross seen on the moon* (London, 1688).

<sup>47</sup> It is included in *The lord chancellor's petition to his highness the Prince of Orange* (London, 1689). See Vladimir Jankovic, 'The politics of sky battles in early Hanoverian Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (2013), pp. 429–59.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Baxter, *The certainty of the world of spirits* (London, 1691), pp. 214–17, 247–9.

seen by only one person. Despite the force he could muster, Hugh was nevertheless insubstantial: he could vanish, and Hovell says Mary could see the ghost's hand in hers but not feel it. He came and went without sound, yet could make his words heard, and clearly could make his presence felt in other ways. He was restless, pacing to and fro as he spoke.

The ghost had a distinctive appearance, wearing a large beard, a mounkeer or montero cap, and bands or a collar with 'band strings'. It would be helpful to know what these elements meant to Mary. Beards, especially large ones, were well out of fashion among the middling and upper sorts by the 1680s. While it is difficult to place the heyday of the montero cap and collars with strings, they may have been read as 'old-fashioned' attire, suitable to a man who had supposedly lived more than thirty years before. Or were they alternatively or also markers of social standing or profession? Soldiers sometimes wore monteros in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms: did his beard also give Hugh Langford a soldierly aspect?

The Palfreymans locked and barred the doors of their premises. A solid living body could not possibly get in, said Hovell, but of course the ghost was there already, and by all accounts had the power magically to open doors. In passing, this reference to the impenetrability of the building also reminds us of the prevailing security situation. Bill Frazer in his excavation of a seventeenth-century settlement at Killelland, Co. Meath, noted that even relatively humble cottages there gave evidence of robust security measures – remnants of sturdy doors and keys.<sup>49</sup> The Protestant inhabitants of Cork had significant reason for stringent security in 1688 and 1689. There are other glimpses of the interior and material culture of the house too: a room under the stairs where the remains were found; the fact that the maid was sleeping 'in' a settle bed (which would have been used as a seat during the day) in a place where there was also a table, maybe a kitchen; and that she had access to candles at night. There were turkey-work chairs (upholstered with a thick, colourful woven fabric) on which the man bribed by the killers to keep quiet stood while the bones were uncovered.<sup>50</sup>

The Catholic letter writer Counsellor Galway noted that the house occupied by the Palfreymans had formerly belonged to Sir William Fenton, whose main estate was located at Mitchelstown, north of Cork. Fenton was the brother-in-law of the first earl of Cork and this was likely a substantial building (as also implied by its subsequent use as a marshalsea and a school). But more than that, Fenton had been involved in the successful defence of Cork during the 1641 rebellion, the entertainment of Oliver Cromwell during his visits in 1649, and the refounding and protestantizing of Cork's corporation in the

<sup>49</sup> William O. Frazer, 'Field of fire: evidence for wartime conflict in a 17th-century cottier settlement in County Meath, Ireland', in Tony Pollard and Ian Banks, eds., *Scorched earth: studies in conflict archaeology* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 173–96.

<sup>50</sup> Some eighteenth-century settles are included in Claudia Kinmonth, *Irish country furniture and furnishings, 1700–2000* (Cork 2020), pp. 151–68, esp. pp. 165–6. For examples of turkey-work furniture, see 'English turkey-work upholstered furniture 1620–1680', Glasgow Museums, <https://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/mwebcgi/mweb?request=record;id=534969;type=801>; 'Turkey-work chair', Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/1619>.

1650s. For some, therefore, this particular house may have been an emblem and a reminder of the dispossession and replacement of Cork's Catholic elite.<sup>51</sup>

As well as these accounts giving insights into beliefs about the nature of ghosts and their purposes, and the shaping of narratives about them, we find allusions to ideas around the aftermath of ghost sightings. Mary reported a black mark on her shoulder caused by the ghost slapping her, and during the 1689 meeting the ghost told Mary 'that he was sensible what trouble she went through (for she had formerly been beaten in her bed & was so ill that she thought she would dye, & had lost the use of one of her legs, for above a moneth upon its first appearance to her)'. He said, rather harshly, that 'it was chiefly occasioned through her own folly': perhaps in the manner of her interactions with him. Mary's bruises, and the suggestion that a schoolgirl the ghost had approached had subsequently died, reflect the notion found elsewhere that encounters with the supernatural could be mentally draining and physically debilitating or harmful. In an eighteenth-century account of Lady Beresford's supposed encounter with the ghost of her friend Lord Tyrone (who died in 1693) on the night of his death, the ghost, pressed to give some proof of his reality, stated 'I must not touch you, it would injure you irreparably: it is not for spirits to touch mortal flesh.' In the end he took Lady Beresford's wrist in his cold hand and 'In a moment the sinews shrank up, every nerve withered.'<sup>52</sup>

Sasha Handley, Laura Sangha, Kathryn Edwards, Jacqueline Pearson, and Laura Gowing have all considered the gendered dynamics of ghost stories and related supernatural accounts in this period.<sup>53</sup> Though those who wrote down Mary's story were men, the ghost seems to have preferred interacting with young women: he had previously attempted to communicate with a schoolgirl. The ghost said that his murderer, Joan Jackson, also 'walked', yet she did not seem to have the power to do anything about her own situation (in this casual comment we also get a sense of a city full of ghostly life). One wonders how Mary's gender and social status affected the reception of her stories. Hovell was enthusiastic to praise her as trusty and of 'good courteous demeanour', but the tone taken by the other accounts is a little more sceptical. There are indications that she may have shaped her narrative strategically. Pearson points out that 'the supernatural gives opportunities to the silenced – women, servants, children – to speak the unspeakable'.<sup>54</sup> But speaking might still mean withholding or concealing information. Whether or not she 'really' believed she had met a ghost, it seems notable that certain details in Mary's examination before the bishop were both so specific and so vague: she described the clothes of the murderers' accomplice but

<sup>51</sup> See Martyn Bennett, 'God's walls of brass: Cromwell's generals in Ireland, 1649–1650', in Martyn Bennett, Raymond Gillespie, and R. Scott Spurlock, *Cromwell and Ireland: new perspectives* (Liverpool, 2021), p. 148; Charles Gibson, *The history of the county and city of Cork* (2 vols., London, 1861), II, p. 391; Patrick Little, 'Three bog-standard Cromwellian elections: Co. Cork and its boroughs in 1654', 13 January 2021, <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2021/01/13/three-bog-standard-cromwellian-elections-co-cork-and-its-boroughs-in-1654>.

<sup>52</sup> Herbert F. Hore, 'Lord Tyrone's ghost', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 7 (1859), pp. 152–3.

<sup>53</sup> See n. 6 above.

<sup>54</sup> Pearson, 'Reading between the lines', p. 66.



did not know his name, though she knew he was already dead; she again did not have a name for the 'gossip' who was to collect money from her; she named the ghost as Hugh Langford, but suggested he might have had another name as well. Most mysteriously, she hinted that some people in the city had been suspected of the murder, but now they could be exonerated. Could they have pressurized her to clear their names, and to pin the murder (proved by the bones) and its alleged cover-up on the dead? Mary's strategies in shaping her story, and the ways in which the questions asked of her directed it, are largely invisible, but the lack of additional information to enable us to unpick her evasions should not cause us to neglect their significance.

## V

Ghosts were only one feature of early modern Irish supernatural beliefs, at a time when ideas about the uncanny were a matter of significant theological and scientific discussion. The people of later seventeenth-century Cork, like many of their counterparts elsewhere in Ireland and Britain, believed in a range of supernatural phenomena as well as ghosts: magical healing; omens read in the skies and in the natural world like the crosses on the moon mentioned earlier; the possibility that dreams and godly prophets could reveal the future; and that certain people might have special powers of magical harm.<sup>55</sup> Christopher Crofts, mayor of Cork, reported to Sir John Perceval on 16 March 1686 that 'My poor boy Jack to all appearance lay dying; he had a convulsion for eight or nine hours.' Crofts's wife 'and several others' believed that the child was bewitched by an old woman whose daughter he had prosecuted. The mayor, however, expressed officials' growing ambivalence toward such notions, asserting 'I have not faith to believe it was anything but the hand of God.'<sup>56</sup>

This ambivalence extended to ghost beliefs. Following the Reformations, ghosts had become something of a headache for Protestants. They had ditched the idea of purgatory, a permeable part of the afterlife that in late medieval Europe had offered a plausible residence for ghosts.<sup>57</sup> How was the fact that ghosts continued to be sighted after purgatory closed to be explained?

<sup>55</sup> For belief in the supernatural in general, see especially Gillespie, *Devoted people*. For healing, see Elmer, *The miraculous conformist*. For revelations of the future, see Caulfield, ed., *Journal of ... Rowland Davies*, p. 18; Anne Marie Plane and Leslie Tuttle, *Dreams, dreamers, and visions: the early modern Atlantic world* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013); Janine Rivière, *Dreams in early modern England: visions of the night* (London, 2017); *Strange and remarkable prophecies and predictions of the holy learned and excellent James Usher, late arch-bishop of Armagh* (Cork, 1679); E. R. McClintock Dix, 'List of all pamphlets, books, &c., printed in Cork during the seventeenth century', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 30 (1912–13), pp. 71–82. For magical harm, see Andrew Sneddon, *Witchcraft and magic in Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2015); Andrew Sneddon, 'Select document: Florence Newton's trial for witchcraft, Cork, 1661: Sir William Aston's transcript', *Irish Historical Studies*, 43, 164 (2019), pp. 298–319; Andrew Sneddon, 'Medicine, belief, witchcraft and demonic possession in late seventeenth-century Ulster', *Medical Humanities*, 42, 2 (2016), pp. 81–6.

<sup>56</sup> *Report on the manuscripts of the earl of Egmont*, II, pp. 181–2.

<sup>57</sup> See Marshall, *Invisible worlds*; Marshall, *Beliefs and the dead*.

Debates over where ghosts came from and the form they took intensified in the seventeenth century but, at the same time, in England at least, 'seeing ghosts had never been so respectable'. Many clerics took an interest in ghosts. Anglican clergymen increasingly rejected diabolical interpretations, but were perplexed as to why God might be bothered to sponsor ghost appearances. Meanwhile, 'The problem of the supernatural was a significant one for Restoration natural philosophers ... for the debate on the existence or otherwise of such phenomena was in effect an exploration of the limits of natural enquiry.'<sup>58</sup> If one could not prove ghosts, could they still exist? At the same time, observers of a 'hotter' Protestant complexion warned that discounting the possibility of ghosts, fairies, omens, and magic might set the sceptical on a slippery path to atheism.<sup>59</sup>

Bishop Wetenhall of Cork and Ross had a longer-term interest in the potentially ominous. He published *A judgement of the comet*, which referenced sightings of 'the Great Comet' in Dublin in December 1680 (at the height of the popish plot). He argued that viewing such phenomena as omens or portents, 'thereby to read the Destinies of Kings, Nations or Governments, is irrational, fantastical and heathenish'. He had intervened because of 'the strange consternations of many People at that time' who were 'full of Apprehensions touching an Irish Plot, or second Massacre of Protestants'.<sup>60</sup> Whatever the general public thought, Wetenhall was not even of the same mind as some of his colleagues: in 1688 Bishop Anthony Dopping of Meath recalled the 1680 comet as a 'warning of the approaching judgements' and a call to repentance, neglect of which had resulted in further crisis.<sup>61</sup>

In the context of contemporary differences of opinion about the nature and interpretation of the supernatural within and beyond the British and Irish Isles, William Hovell's assertions in October 1688 about the trustworthiness of Mary Cudmore and her employers are worth dwelling on. He concluded that 'the thing is real or related without scruple', and that Mary's account was 'believed by all here without Scruple'. He had not credited earlier reports of disturbances in the house, but he claimed he was 'now morally certaine of the truth of this relation, as that there is such a place as Breda or Belgrade'. He meant that, though he had not seen Breda (one of the seats of William III) or Belgrade (besieged and captured by Habsburg troops in September 1688), he was convinced of the truth of their existence. The invocation of the terms 'without scruple' and 'morally certaine' indicates Hovell's familiarity with contemporary works of science, theology, and philosophy. 'Without scruple' meant 'in good conscience' or 'without doubt', not intending to deceive, but was sometimes used in the scientific writing of the time to indicate

<sup>58</sup> W. Poole, 'Three versions of a Restoration ghost story', *Notes and Queries*, 65 (2018), pp. 213–19.

<sup>59</sup> Bath and Newton, 'Sensible proof of spirits'; Davies, *The haunted*.

<sup>60</sup> 'A person of quality' [Edward Wetenhall], *A judgement of the comet which became first generally visible to us in Dublin December XIII ... 1680* (Dublin, 1682). See also William E. Burns, *An age of wonders: prodigies, politics and providence in England, 1657–1727* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 97–124, esp. p. 100; Patrick A. Walsh and John Cronin, 'Wetenhall, Edward', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2009, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/wetenhall-edward-a8980>.

<sup>61</sup> Gillespie, *Devoted people*, p. 129.

understandings that were strongly and genuinely held, but that might possibly not stand up to, or might be expanded by, new means of proving knowledge.<sup>62</sup> Hovell's statement that 'the thing is real or related without scruple' both strongly asserted his belief in the truth of the ghost's statements and also allowed the possibility that the ghost might not be real at all.

The concept of 'moral certainty' was mobilized in seventeenth-century defences of ghosts, miracles, and faith itself. Defined by Rudolf Schüssler as 'certainty that suffices for action ... a level of certainty where moral risk avoidance becomes unnecessary and an agent is entitled to trust his beliefs without fear of error', its use 'implied that a claim's validity ... was beyond reasonable doubt'.<sup>63</sup> John Wilkins, bishop of Chester, distinguished between infallible certainty (achievable only by God), conditional infallible certainty (that which 'has to be accepted if we are to know anything'), and indubitable or moral certainty 'based on accepting the reliability of our faculties from which we can only reach an assurance "which doth not admit of any reasonable cause of doubting"'.<sup>64</sup> Bishop Edward Stillingfleet, in his defence of scriptural miracles, asked 'Do we not see that the most concerning and weighty actions of Mens lives, are built on no other foundation than this Moral certainty?' Among the examples he used was 'Trading, which go's upon the Moral certainty, that there are such places as the *Indies*, or *France*, or *Spain*, &c.' There are echoes of this in Hovell's statement that he was as morally certain of the existence of Breda and Belgrade as he was of the reality of Mary Cudmore's account in 1688. Stillingfleet argued: 'either we must destroy all Historical Faith out of the World, and believe nothing (tho' never so much attested) but what we see our selves, or else we must acknowledge, that a Moral certainty is a sufficient foundation for ... an *Assent undoubted*, tho' not infallible'.<sup>65</sup> If theologians like Stillingfleet could consider moral certainty as 'a sufficient foundation for faith', it was certainly a sufficient foundation for belief in ghosts.<sup>66</sup> In Hovell's mind, a ghost could exist because there was enough solid testimony – told 'without scruple' by trustworthy people – to generate 'moral certainty'.<sup>67</sup>

For most ordinary people, however, such philosophical and theological niceties were irrelevant and the matter was fairly simple: ghosts existed because people saw them and talked to them. Ghosts had intriguing and scandalous things to say. And though ghostly testimony was increasingly of less interest to the secular authorities, ghosts could still command some degree

<sup>62</sup> See Marie Boas, *Robert Boyle and seventeenth-century chemistry* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 121, 145; Michael Hunter, *Robert Boyle (1627–91): scrupulosity and science* (Woodbridge, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Rudolf Schüssler, 'Jean Gerson, moral certainty and the renaissance of ancient scepticism', *Renaissance Studies*, 23 (2009), pp. 445–62; Rudolf Schüssler, *The debate on probable opinions in the scholastic tradition* (Leiden, 2019), p. 95.

<sup>64</sup> Richard H. Popkin, *The history of scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 65–6, 208–18 (quotation at p. 210).

<sup>65</sup> Robert T. Carroll, *The common-sense philosophy of religion of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet, 1635–1699* (Dordrecht, 1975), pp. 39–79, emphasis in original.

<sup>66</sup> Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian antiquity: the construction of a confessional identity in the seventeenth century* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 225–7, 305–7.

<sup>67</sup> See David Randall, *Credibility in Elizabethan and early Stuart military news* (London, 2008).

of official as well as community attention. For example, Todd Butler notes that ghost stories could be effective ‘tools for catalysing suspicion and investigation’ of accusations in seventeenth-century England (if being of little use in securing prosecutions). He and Jacqueline Pearson discuss the interest taken by magistrates in Yorkshire, and local publishers, in 1662, when Isabel Binnington found bones in her house and reported seeing a ghost, named as Robert Eliot, who accused three women of murdering him over a debt.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, Mary Cudmore was examined by a mayor and a justice of the peace, as well as by the bishop of Cork.

Though few Irish ghost sightings were written down, very many are likely to have circulated orally. It was a perennial theme of later Irish folklore in particular that the dead were strongly associated with their own corpses, and until the twentieth century they regularly demanded the attention and labour of the living.<sup>69</sup> Print and ballad culture probably reflected and helped extend popular beliefs, and primed communities to recognize certain themes. The tropes of ghosts returning to reveal wrongs done to them, and of the recovery of bones on the information of apparitions, were a standard element of printed as well as oral accounts in this period.<sup>70</sup> Mary Cudmore might well have come into contact with printed ghost stories: Laura Sangha talks about a ‘rash’ of pamphlets on spirits ‘published in England between 1670 and 1700’.<sup>71</sup> Pamphlets rehearsing the massacres of Protestants in 1641, regularly published to highlight the perceived dangers of toleration, might recount stories of the apparitions reported at Portadown and other places.<sup>72</sup> How printed accounts might have influenced Mary’s story is impossible to say. But even if she had not personally come across such publications, it is no wonder so many people flocked to the Palfreymans’ house in October 1688.

## VI

There are a couple of sequels to the story of Mary Cudmore and the ghost of Hugh Langford. In 1705, Edward Wetenhall (now bishop of Kilmore and Ardagh) preached a sermon in Dublin. His theme was *Invisibilia*, and he argued that ‘The human soul ... is a real and substantial being’, a ‘Living Substance or Being; for it gives life to, or enlivens the Body’. However, he also stated that ‘none ever saw or could see a Soul; either when it came into its prepared and Organised Body, or while it dwelt therein, or in its passage thence, when it departed into its Invisible Country’. Despite Wetenhall’s interest in the ghost, and his reported conclusion that its appearance was not a matter

<sup>68</sup> Butler, ‘The haunting of Isabell Binnington’; Pearson, ‘Reading between the lines’, pp. 69–72.

<sup>69</sup> Clodagh Tait, ‘Worry work: the supernatural labours of living and dead mothers in Irish folklore’, in Sarah Knott and Emma Griffin, eds., *Mothering’s many labours, Past and Present Supplement*, 15 (2020), pp. 217–38; Clodagh Tait, ‘Graveyard folklore’, in Ryan, *Death and the Irish*, pp. 183–5.

<sup>70</sup> Davies, *The haunted*; Poole, ‘Three versions of a Restoration ghost story’, pp. 213–19.

<sup>71</sup> Laura Sangha, ‘Horrid ghosts of early modern England, part II: creeks, screeks and ... bacon?’, 27 Oct. 2016, <https://manyheadedmonster.com/2016/10/27/horrid-ghosts-of-early-modern-england-part-ii-creeks-screeks-andbacon>.

<sup>72</sup> For example, *An account of the bloody massacre in Ireland* (London, 1678).

of imposture, it does not seem to have left him with the conclusion that it constituted a human spirit or soul. His working through of his position on spirits is an example of the course steered (in their own ways) by many other thinkers in this period, as ‘the centre of gravity of educated opinion shifted ... towards a predominantly sceptical attitude’ regarding magic and the supernatural.<sup>73</sup>

Some of the people of Cork, however, seem to have continued to credit and take an interest in the ghost story. Forty or so years later, Thomas Pembrock, a Cork merchant and mayor of the city in 1733, included among the list of his books and papers a ‘Copp[y] of Mary Cudmores Exam[ination] of her Seeing a Spiritt’. This would suggest that several, presumably manuscript, copies of Mary’s account had been in circulation in the city. Notably, the bundle in which this manuscript was preserved also contained ‘Nixon’s Prophecy & part of an Old Prophecy in Writing’ – the prophecies of the supposedly sixteenth-century figure of Robert Nixon continued to be published throughout the 1700s.<sup>74</sup> Pembrock’s commonplace book also contained a ‘memorandum of things happen’d in Cork relateing to the citty and the kingdome’, broken into a few parts and clearly compiled from several sources. One of the entries notes that

The 13 of October 1688 John Palfreeman, Millecent his wife & Mary Cudmore their Maid, Made Oath before Patrick Roche Esqr Mayor of Corke & W. Ballard Esqr Justice of the Peace for the sd citty That thay hard & saw a Spirrit in their house in ffish Shamble Lane of Corke about a fortnight &c before the Date aforesaid.<sup>75</sup>

Pembrock’s religious views may have made him more inclined than some of his fellow citizens to continue to credit the story of the ‘spirrit’. A ‘hotter’ Protestant, he later became a Methodist: his library list shows him buying up many Methodist texts, and he invited John Wesley to speak in Cork in 1750 (the visit sparked riots).<sup>76</sup> Owen Davies suggests that, by the 1730s, ghost belief had declined among Anglicans, and tended to be stronger among evangelicals. He characterizes Wesley and his followers as ‘devout believers in providence, diabolic possession, witchcraft and apparitions’.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Michael Hunter, ‘The decline of magic: challenge and response in early Enlightenment England’, *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 399–425, at p. 424.

<sup>74</sup> ‘No 14 bundle’, Mayoral book, image 229. He also had copies of *Hamlet* and John Temple’s *Irish rebellion*. Jacqueline Simpson, ‘Nixon’s prophecies in their historical setting’, *Folklore*, 86 (1975), pp. 201–7.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Memorandum of things happen’d in Cork relateing to the citty and the kingdome’, Mayoral book, image 405.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Mayoral book’, images 196–9, fos. 97r–98v; images 234–5, fo. 124r–v. See also Simon Lewis, ‘“Five pounds for a swadler’s head”: the Cork anti-Methodist riots of 1749–50’, *Historical Research*, 94 (2021), pp. 51–72; C. H. Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland, vol. 1: Wesley and his times* (Belfast, 1885).

<sup>77</sup> Davies, *The haunted*, p. 122. See also Owen Davies, ‘Methodism, the clergy, and popular belief in witchcraft and magic’, *History*, 82 (Dec. 2002), pp. 252–65; Owen Davies, ‘Wesley’s invisible world: witchcraft and the temperature of preternatural belief’, in Robert Webster, ed., *Perfecting perfection: essays in honour of Henry D. Rack* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 147–72.

Luke Holloway and Martha McGill note that ‘the Methodist response to the supernatural involved a degree of compromise with the folkloric traditions of local communities’.<sup>78</sup> In 1750, Irish Methodists were criticized for their ‘supernatural flights of faith’ and as ‘miracle-mongers’.<sup>79</sup> Their continued interest in ghosts as didactic figures and in demonic intervention is indicated by the fact that in 1788 the Cork Methodists recorded the extraordinary testimony of Cadwallader Acheson (or Acteson). Acheson was allegedly planning to poison his wife, Mary Creed, in order to marry his lover. However, the ghost of his former mistress, Mary Harris, appeared to him one night (by the light of a candle); her second appearance, and visions of a ‘hellish monster’ and ‘Satan, who appear’d to him as a gentleman elegantly dressed’, eventually convinced Acheson to repent and reconcile with his wife.<sup>80</sup> As was the case elsewhere in Europe, ‘the social energy of spirits was not extinguished’ by scepticism in intellectual circles.<sup>81</sup>

## VII

This article has been an exercise in making a story out of that which is not there but which can still be imperfectly perceived. Given the almost total destruction of Cork’s Church of Ireland parish and diocesan records in the PRO in 1922, as well as the loss of key records from Cork corporation for the late seventeenth century, it is remarkable that three detailed accounts of Mary Cudmore’s chats with a ghost in 1688 and 1689 survive, two of them only because they were published in the mid-nineteenth century. Sometimes Mary and the spectre can be spotted precisely where they are not – in Thomas Pembrock’s neatly catalogued lost library and in Edward Wetenhall’s *Invisibilia*. As archive collections continue to be destroyed, historians of some places and topics continue to have to wrestle both with the onerous task of making the lost visible, and with the lesser value placed on stories that can only ever be more incompletely told than usual.

Despite this, we know that Mary Cudmore’s accounts of her interactions with a spectre caused significant interest among her fellow citizens. Even if her own motives and the eventual outcome are not fully recoverable, her reports still allow us a rare form of access to the beliefs of a late seventeenth-

<sup>78</sup> Luke Holloway and Martha McGill, ‘The conversion of a Cork candle-maker: an account by Hester Ann Rogers (1788)’, *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, 14 (2022), pp. 191–204, at p. 203. Thanks to Martha McGill for providing me with a copy of this article. See John Fulton, ‘Clerics, conjurors and courtrooms: witchcraft, magic and religion in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland’ (PhD thesis, Ulster University, 2016), pp. 171–206; John Fulton, ‘Methodism, magic and popular supernatural beliefs in Ireland, 1750–1850’, *Bulletin of the Methodist Historical Society of Ireland*, 24 (2019), pp. 41–65.

<sup>79</sup> Fulton, ‘Clerics, conjurors and courtrooms’, p. 185.

<sup>80</sup> Holloway and McGill, ‘The conversion of a Cork candle-maker’. The document is in Manchester, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, MAM/FL/33/1/4. See also ‘The Georgian ghosts project’, 2022, <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/applyingtostudy/currentstudents/studentresearchportfolio/georgianghosts>.

<sup>81</sup> Callard, *Spectralities in the Renaissance*, p. 239.

century Irish community. They testify to understandings that people who had committed bad acts, or those like Hugh Langford (if that was indeed his name) who had died in an untimely and violent fashion, might find it difficult to rest. Troubled minds and troubling deeds produced troubled spirits. Troubled communities, like Cork in the early stages of the War of the Two Kings, were especially productive of omens, providential prodigies, and other supernatural irruptions into ordinary life. As they squeezed through its narrow lanes, literally rubbing shoulders with their Catholic neighbours, the Protestants of Cork city in October 1688, and those obliged to remain in May 1689, sensed the hovering spectres of plunder and murder.

Meanwhile, we can find hints about how Mary shaped her stories to her employers, her community, and the church and civil authorities. Accounts of the supernatural can thus give us some insight into the anxieties and agendas of groups whose experiences are difficult to access by other means. And as observers weighed questions of scruple and certainty, and balanced concerns about imposture against the creditworthiness of Mary, her parents, and her employers, we can catch glimpses of shifts in belief about the activities and substance of the dead, and contemporary scientific and theological debates about proof and truth.

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