

Ghost Speed: The Strange Matter of Phantom Vehicles

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SHORTLY after seeing Marley's face on his door knocker, Scrooge encounters another portent of the haunted night to come: "a locomotive hearse going on before him in the gloom" of the stairway leading to his rooms.¹ Although this vehicle never reappears in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), it lays the groundwork for a narrative propelled by spectral modes of transportation. These are not actual vehicles but anthropomorphic spirits who use their ghost power to whisk Scrooge from one spatiotemporal location to another. In what is perhaps the most dramatic of these journeys, the Ghost of Christmas Present transports him from the streets of London to a "bleak and desert moor" inhabited by miners, a desolate lighthouse overlooking a stormy sea, the warm domestic setting of his nephew's Christmas celebration, and numerous other destinations: "Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited."² The ability of ghosts to travel quickly is established at the beginning of the novel when, after Scrooge queries Marley's ghost, "You travel fast?" his spectral business partner replies, "On the wings of the wind."³

The human vehicles in Dickens's story harken back to the spectral coaches that come to collect the sinful or dying in European folklore dating to the Middle Ages. One of the most famous of these stories is of Lady Howard, a sixteenth-century woman whose ghost was doomed to ride on a phantom coach through her estate in Okehampton in Cornwall. While in some accounts of the legend she is depicted as a victim of her fate, in others she is represented as a figure of revenge: having murdered her four husbands when alive, she continues her acts of violence posthumously. Most famously, perhaps, Thomas Hardy revives this trope in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) in writing about the ghostly conveyance that haunts the descendants of "a certain d'Urberville of the sixteenth or seventeenth century [who] committed a dreadful crime in his family

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coach.”⁴ Strikingly, Lady Howard’s coach, as well as many others in the spectral vehicle tradition, is composed of human body parts: “Every night in the year, at the stroke of midnight, she issues from the ancient gate of Fitzford, seated in a skeleton coach, made from the bones of her four husbands. To complete the design of this gruesome vehicle, there is a pinnacle at each top corner decorated with a skull belonging to one of these unlucky wights.”⁵ Physical components become even more grotesque in other folktales, such as the old German legend of the phantom car that haunts Count Berthold: “This car was fearful in the extreme. The wheels were formed of skulls dripping with blood, as if the scalps had been freshly ground off. The body of the vehicle was formed of human bones, of every kind and shape, and human ribs composed the railing thereof. The seat, the bars, the whole, in fine, were composed of the festering remnants of mortality.”⁶

Dickens’s ghost story is a kinder and gentler version of these prior tales, retaining the vehicles’ human elements while avoiding their monstrous physicality. Instead of being figures of violence, his specters embody a nostalgia for a time when modes of transportation were supposedly more human, and more humane. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes in his classic study of the nineteenth-century railway, “As the new technology terminated the original relationship between the pre-industrial traveler and his vehicle and its journey, the old technology was seen, nostalgically, as having more ‘soul.’”⁷ What, we might ask, can have more soul than a spirit? Indeed, the Ghost of Christmas Past travels at speeds surpassing a train’s and takes Scrooge to the nostalgic scenes of his pre-railway youth: “He was conscious of a thousand odours floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten!”⁸ Earlier modes of transportation were also associated with more intimate forms of human contact—with fellow passengers, the coachman, or even with the horses themselves. In *The English Mail Coach* (1849), Thomas De Quincey famously laments a time when “speed was not the product of blind insensate agencies, that had no sympathy to give, but was incarnated in the fiery eyeballs of an animal, in his dilated nostril, spasmodic muscles, and echoing hoofs. This speed was incarnated in the *visible* contagion amongst brutes of some impulse, that, radiating into *their* natures, had yet its centre and beginning in man.”⁹ In other words, what was missing from the railroad was evidence of life.

Turning to ghosts to find evidence of life can be tricky. While *A Christmas Carol* gives its vehicles human form, other Victorian narratives

express transportation nostalgia through the representation of ghostly conveyances: spectral coaches, ships, trains, and rickshaws. Drawing from the folkloric tradition of ghostly transportation, these texts engage doubly with the past, through a return to earlier modes of travel and to prior narrative traditions. In doing so, they illuminate Ruth Livesey's claim that "nostalgia in Victorian modernity . . . is a kind of motion sickness."¹⁰ In what follows, I argue that by using ghosts to express nostalgia for more human(e) modes of transportation, Victorian narratives explore what it means to feel profound attachments to material things that are no longer accessible. The longing for lost objects results in a grotesque materiality that blurs the line between persons and objects. This is an unusual strain of commodity fetishism, an objectification of persons and animation of things provoked by a desire for a time in which these categories were distinct. In the first section of this essay, I focus on mid-Victorian writings that explore the process through which transportation nostalgia triggers uncanny exchanges of the human and the thing, thus exposing nostalgia itself as a dehumanizing and even violent process. In the second section, I turn to accounts of spectral vehicles in Victorian ghost stories, a genre that focuses on production—or, more precisely, its absence—as central to the dehumanizations of transportation nostalgia. In these narratives, the fact that nostalgia is able to trigger the reconstitution of a material object, but veils its production process, heightens the ways in which emotions can produce their own forms of commodity fetishism. I conclude with a discussion of Rudyard Kipling's "The Phantom Rickshaw" (1885), a fin de siècle story that revives the spectral tradition within the context of imperial nostalgia and racial labor.

TRANSPORTATION NOSTALGIA

Jen Cadwallader ascribes the prevalence of ghosts in Victorian stories about the railroad, including Charles Dickens's "No. 1 Branch Line: The Signal Man" (1866), to a desire to instill humanity in a mode of transportation that was thought to be dehumanizing. She writes that "ghostly human figures walk the tracks and even hijack the engine, disrupting service and pointing toward a way of life that will not die quietly. In various ways, the ghosts uphold a moral code that is out of sync with a world guided by time-tables; they represent a human element that refuses to be subsumed by Technology."¹¹ While this may be the case in stories involving human ghosts, those that incorporate phantom vehicles add

another, and far less reassuring, element of humanity. As seen especially in narratives of spectral coaches, popular in the first half of the Victorian period, this nostalgia for a long-lost humanity grants an uncanny agency to old things.

Published in the *Illuminated Magazine* in 1843, Wilkie Collins's story "The Last Stage Coachman" represents transportation nostalgia as a gothic genre. At first, it appears to be a straightforwardly wistful piece, which, as Lillian Nayder argues, looks back to "preindustrial England" by drawing a correlation between "industrialization and unemployment."¹² The text begins with a lament for a period in transportation history that afforded direct contact with a friendly conductor: "We experience a feeling nearly akin to disgust, at being marshalled to our places by a bell and a fellow with a badge on his shoulder; instead of hearing the cheery summons 'Now then, gentlemen,' and being regaled by a short and instructive conversation with a ruddy-faced personage in a dustless olive green coat and prismatic belcher handkerchief. What did we want with smoke? Had we not the coachman's cigar, if we were desirous of observing its shapes and appearances?"¹³ The speaker soon experiences a vision in which he meets the pathetic figure of the last Stage Coachman, condemned to a jobless and root- (or route-) less existence following the advent of the railway. Both men witness the appearance of a phantom coach that, despite its grotesque appearance, fills the coachman with vengeful satisfaction rather than horror:

A fully equipped Stage Coach appeared in the clouds, with a railway director strapped fast to each wheel, and a stoker between the teeth of each of the four horses.

In place of luggage, fragments of broken steam carriages, and red carpet bags filled with other mementos of railway accidents, occupied the roof. Chance passengers appeared to be the only tenants of the outside places. In front sat Julius Caesar and Mrs. Hannah Moore; and behind, Sir Joseph Banks and Mrs. Brownrigge. Of all the "insides," I could, I grieve to say, see nothing.

On the box was a little man with fuzzy hair and large iron grey whiskers; clothed in a coat of engineers' skin, with gloves of the hide of railway police. He pulled up opposite my friend, and bowing profoundly motioned him to the box seat.

The delighted coachman, whose earlier "melancholy" is replaced by "a gleam of unutterable joy," climbs on to this monstrous vehicle, cracking his whip and provoking the "shrieks of the railway directors at the wheel."¹⁴

Drawing from legends of phantom carriages comprised of body parts, Collins raises the specter of nostalgia while signaling its cost. In “The Last Stage Coachman,” a desire for the past quickly transforms into a full-fledged revenge fantasy, garnished with the remains of those associated with technological progress. Engineers, railway policemen, and train directors are reduced to heaps of suffering flesh, indistinguishable from the carriage itself. The only humans who have maintained physical cohesion are the “chance” celebrities who ride on the coach but who are nonetheless marked by a thinglike passivity. By presenting a grossly literal version of what it would mean for archaic vehicles to regain the (actual and figurative) lives lost through industrialization, Collins shows the sinister side of longing for the humanity of past forms of transportation.¹⁵ If, as Nicholas Dames writes, nostalgia is a form of assemblage, as it “consists of the stories about one’s past that explain and consolidate memory rather than dispersing it into a series of vivid, relinquished moments,” then the reassembly of the past presented in Collins’s account bears the terrifying hybridity of Frankenstein’s monster.¹⁶ The spectral vehicle collapses persons and things, the past and the present, into an undifferentiated mass. In sum, it attests to the fact that nostalgia can produce violence.

Twelve years later, in an 1855 article for *Household Words*, George Sala would employ comparably grotesque imagery to determine whether it is possible to find “Poetry on the Railway.” He posits that the best way to locate beauty in industrial technology, which he dismisses as “ugly, dull, prosaic, straight,” is to imagine the *ghost* of a train accident. By situating the train as a relic from the past, destined to return to haunt the living, he breathes life into the dead matter of technology. The result is an unsettling hybrid of human and material specters:

See, from a siding comes slowly, noiselessly along the rails the PHANTOM TRAIN! . . . The carriages themselves are mere skeletons—they are all shattered, dislocated, ruined, yet, by some *deadly principle of cohesion*, they keep together, and through the interstices of their cracking ribs and framework you may see the passengers. Horrible sight to see! Some have limbs bound up in splinters, some lie on stretchers, but they have all faces and eyes; and the eyes and the faces; together with the phantom guard with his lantern, from which long rays of ghastly light proceed; together with the phantom driver, with his jaw bound up; the phantom stoker, who stokes with a mattock and spade, and feeds the fire as though he were making a grave; the phantom commercial travellers wrapped in shrouds for railway rugs; the pair of lovers in the first-class coupé, locked in the same embrace of death in which they were found after the accident, the stout old gentleman

with his head in his lap, the legs of the man the rest of whose body was never found, but who still has a face and eyes, the skeletons of horses in the horse-boxes, the stacks of coffins in the luggage-vans (for all is transparent, and you can see the fatal verge of the embankment beyond, through the train). All these sights of horror flit continually past, up and down, backwards and forwards, haunting the line where the accident was.¹⁷

Sala's account of the afterlife of an accident captures the gothic imagery that emerged around railway technology in the nineteenth century, which Cadwallader describes as the "‘spectralization’ of the locomotive: a rewriting of technology which marks it as a haunting, alien, uncontrollable force rather than a tool for human betterment."¹⁸ By representing the train as a ghost, an entity from the past, Sala displaces it to an earlier time, transforming it into an antiquated relic that comes to haunt the present. His play with temporality opposes the rigid punctuality of "Railway time," which he describes as an "atrociously matter-of-fact system of calculation."¹⁹ This return to the past is also apparent in Sala's choice of narrative mode, which draws from the bodily imagery of the spectral coach tradition. He creates a morbid illustration of the cost of nostalgia; to try to humanize the train by making it more poetic is to create (to put it in modern cinematic terms) a Cronenbergian hybrid of bodies and machines.

Transportation nostalgia produces the blurring of the animate and inanimate that Freud would describe as central to the uncanny. In Collins's and Sala's accounts, this aspect of the uncanny is provoked by the unsettling realization that humans can be stirred—or moved—by memories of material things. This possibility may seem less foreign to us now, when a quick visit to an internet site like BuzzFeed can produce longing for "25 Things You Haven't Thought about Since You Were a Kid, but Will Instantly Remember" or "25 Nostalgic Items of Technology You Probably Haven't Thought about in Years." In contrast to the souvenir as a tangible, possessed thing that, according to Susan Stewart, can metonymically "evoke" an experience "but can never entirely recoup" it, the remembered objects of transportation nostalgia (or BuzzFeed) are no longer available and thus become the locus of longing themselves.²⁰ What we miss is the irrecoverable feel of the coach seats or the scent of the markers we used to have.

Transportation nostalgia further blurs the line between persons and things by making the lost object return as a ghost, a category usually reserved for humans. To imagine that something can have a ghost is to assume that it has died and was thus once alive. As Michael Taussig

queries, “How is it that the distinction between subject and object, between me and things, is so crucially dependent on life and death? Why is death the harbinger and index of the thing-world, and how can it be, then, that death awakens life in things?”²¹ “De Mortuis,” an 1864 article from *Temple Bar*, explores the peculiar outcomes of trying to invoke obsolete objects by imagining them as specters, the “ghostly visions of dead realities.” The author visualizes things like the oil street lamp and the tinderbox—“an incomprehensible fable, or at best, a classical myth in the minds of a younger generation”—as “spectral forms” coming back to haunt the present.²² Among these outdated things, the essay features the sedan-chair and the post-chaise as modes of transportation that no longer appear in modern-day London. Referring to the sedan-chair, for instance, the author writes, “I just came into the world to witness its decease. . . . The sedan *must* be dead; or why should its spirit haunt me now? Its skeleton may still be found, I doubt not.” If things can die and leave skeletons behind, then they also have the capacity to reappear as specters. Likewise, the fact that the post-chaise can return as a ghost—its “spirit now comes to haunt me with remembrances not altogether pleasant”—seems linked to the human behaviors it displayed before its death: “there was an amount of inconvenience, wretchedness, and never-shattering malice about that rickety old yellow machine.” Importantly, what is not revived in this discussion of the sedan-chair or post-chaise are the human laborers who were charged with carrying it. These “human beasts of burden,” as the author refers to them, have not been given a second life.²³

When things are granted a humanity that allows them to become ghosts, what happens to humans? Collins’s and Sala’s accounts, as well as the ghost stories I explore in the next section, signal that a kind of devil’s bargain takes place: when things adopt aspects of personhood to become specters, persons become more like things. In “Poetry on the Railway,” as in “The Last Stage Coachman,” it is difficult to differentiate the human from the material thing. The carriages are “mere skeletons” with “cracking ribs” and a “murmuring” whistle, while the workers and passengers, in their stillness and injury, are thinglike, legs torn apart from bodies, faces hidden in shrouds.²⁴ In some sense, this confusion is characteristic of railway accidents, in which the remains of persons and things intermingle in horrific ways.²⁵ Yet the fact that this is not just an accident but the *ghost* of one—an attempt to grant life to what was never actually alive—foregrounds the uncanny materiality of nostalgia.

Dorothy Van Ghent argues that such devil's bargains between persons and things are an essential aspect of Victorian literature and ideology, as seen particularly in Dickens's writings. She describes this uncanny exchange as the "general principle of reciprocal changes, by which things have become as it were daemonically animated and people have been reduced to thing-like characteristics—as if, by a law of conservation of energy, the humanity of which people have become incapable had leaked out into the external environment."²⁶ She attributes this dynamic to the multiple dehumanizations of Victorian England, "a process brought about by industrialization, colonial imperialism, and the exploitation of the human being as a 'thing' or an engine or a part of an engine capable of being used for profit."²⁷ Alternating between describing this process in industrial and gothic terms, Van Ghent references a "daemonically motivated world, a world in which 'dark' or occult forces or energies operate not only in people (as modern psychoanalytic psychology observes) but also in things: for if people turn themselves or are turned into things, metaphysical order can be established only if we think of things as turning themselves into people, acting under a 'dark' drive similar to that which motivates the human aberration."²⁸ Her shift from the social realities of industry and social oppression to supernatural forces purposefully echoes Marx's own range of reference in "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret" (1867), in which he describes the ghostly animation of made things: "The table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will."²⁹ The table can dance because the persons who made it cannot any longer: both they and their labor have disappeared in granting life to the commodity.

Transportation nostalgia causes a similar switch between persons and things, but for a different reason: through an attempt to access an inaccessible time when manufactured things had not yet taken over human identities. In reaching back to mythical periods in British history supposedly not yet marked by the objectifications of capitalism, the nostalgia for the humanity of a stagecoach or spectral train produces its own dehumanizations. This nostalgia exposes the grotesqueness of desiring lost things under the guise of yearning for a period in which things allowed humans to be more human. In the process, nostalgia emerges

as its own uncanny mode of production, as it causes vehicles from the past to rebuild themselves in mysterious and monstrous ways. Sala acknowledges this problem when he references the “deadly principle of cohesion” holding the ghost train together.³⁰ Reconstituted vehicles are not spectral in a ghostly, ethereal way; they are manufactured things that have been remade by a mysterious force.

Svetlana Boym offers one model for thinking about nostalgia as a mode of production. She presents the concept of “restorative nostalgia,” which “proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps,” in contrast to “reflective nostalgia,” which “dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance.”³¹ As Boym elucidates, however, restorative nostalgia resides in the aspirational rather than the possible, since any act of rebuilding or restoring an object from the past is fraught with inauthenticity: “What drives restorative nostalgia is not the sentiment of distance and longing but rather the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition.”³² The restorative nostalgia of spectral vehicles provokes anxiety of a different kind: not of inauthenticity, but of losing human agency when things rebuild themselves and haunt the living.

DEADLY COHESION

Ghostly vehicles run rampant in Victorian supernatural fiction as well as in witness accounts of spectral sightings. Sage Leslie-McCarthy writes of the unexpected pervasiveness of this trope: “Machines, by their very nature, are considered soulless. Nothing made by humans can be imprinted with the unique stamp of divine creation. In spite of this seeming paradox, sightings of spectral vehicles have been routinely reported since the middle ages, and as vehicular transportation evolved so too did the nature of the phantoms. Carriages, hansom cabs and ships gradually gave way to the steam train, the motor car and the aeroplane in the ghostly stakes, and spectral vehicles of various configurations continue to be sighted throughout the industrialised world.”³³ Absent from Victorian accounts, however, are explanations of *how* such phantom vehicles came to be. One exception is the American spiritualist Eugene Crowell, who, in *The Spirit World: Its Inhabitants, Nature, and Philosophy* (1879), describes an intricate system of otherworldly production. He lays out the structure and operations of a multilayered heaven, arranged according to racial and

social hierarchies, which organizes the manufacture of spectral things: “Spirit mechanics have tools and implements of every description, and by their labor they accomplish as much in one day as a mortal, equally skillful and correspondingly employed, can in a week.”³⁴ He later elaborates, “The legendary phantom ship is not a myth. Spectral, or spiritual ships, are sometimes constructed on earth by spirits of mariners from the second sphere, who launch them, sail them on our oceans, and sometimes make voyages in them between different ports.” For their part, “Spectral railway trains are equally matters of fact, the ‘materials’ of which they are constructed being supplied in the same manner to the spirits of engineers, firemen, brakemen, conductors, etc., existing on the same planes as the mariners.”³⁵ The vehicles made through this production process are stronger than actual ones: “They never wear out, or require repairing, or become tarnished by time and use.”³⁶ While Crowell does not describe the specific practices through which these objects are produced, he provides an origin story that differentiates between spectral persons as makers and spectral vehicles as made.

In contrast, Victorian ghost fiction (I write this recognizing that Crowell’s book reads a lot like fiction) purposefully omits spectral vehicle production stories. Narratives like Dickens’s “The Story of the Bagman’s Uncle” from *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), Frederick Marryat’s *The Phantom Ship* (1839), Amelia Edwards’s “The Phantom Coach” (1864), and Rudyard Kipling’s “The Phantom Rickshaw” (1885) treat the appearance of these vehicles as a *fait accompli*. One way in which the above stories (with the exception of Marryat’s) allows us to circumvent the question of production is by letting us interpret spectral vehicles as products of delusion, hallucination, or illness. A phantom coach might emerge from a dream, as suggested in Dickens’s story; from a weather-induced hallucination, as in Edwards’s; or from the toll of working as a British official in India, as in Kipling’s. These narratives, like many Victorian ghost stories, generate the state of indecision that Tzvetan Todorov ascribes to the “fantastic,” “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.”³⁷ At the same time, however, these stories assign spectral vehicles an extremely detailed materiality that compels the reader to view them as manufactured objects. Much of the unease that comes from these narratives is traceable to the absence of their origin stories, the fact that they result from a hidden process of spectral production.

This absence is key in what may be the earliest Victorian narrative of spectral transportation, Dickens’s “The Story of the Bagman’s Uncle.”

The titular character discovers an abandoned storehouse filled with eighteenth-century mail coaches, “crowded together in a very forlorn and dismantled state.” These vehicles instill him with nostalgia, as he “thought of the busy, bustling people who had rattled about, years before, in the old coaches, and were now as silent and changed.”³⁸ After taking a short nap, he awakens to find that the coaches are fully restored and animated, and he is swept into a world filled with ghostly speeding horses, damsels in distress, and violent ruffians. As Jonathan Grossman argues, this epic in miniature represents an “imagined return—relayed within appropriately dated generic narrative codes—to even earlier days of coaching.”³⁹ Despite his own skepticism in recounting this story, the bagman’s nephew explains that his uncle remains convinced that “the ghosts of mail-coaches and horses, guards, coachmen, and passengers, were in the habit of making journeys regularly every night” (625).

The revival of the past and its objects in Dickens’s story is motivated by nostalgia, but of an unusual kind. Grossman writes that in this narrative and others, “Dickens looked back over and again to changes that he associated primarily with stage coaches, and he did so with an acuity that was something like the opposite of a hazy-dazy nostalgia: shedding light for his readers on how what had been wrought then was making their present.”⁴⁰ Dickens challenges expected structures of nostalgia in another way: by exploring the consequences of reviving the past through attachments to its material objects. In “The Story of the Bagman’s Uncle,” abandoned and decaying coaches possess what Jane Bennett describes as “vitality,” the “capacity of things . . . not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.”⁴¹ While the coaches’ second life may have been put into motion by the uncle’s nostalgia, the process of their reconstitution emerges from deep within their matter.

When the uncle first sees the coaches in the storehouse, he focuses on their decaying materiality:

The doors had been torn from their hinges and removed, the linings had been stripped off, only a shred hanging here and there by a rusty nail; the lamps were gone, the poles had long since vanished, the iron-work was rusty, the paint worn away; the wind whistled through the chinks in the bare wood-work, and the rain, which had collected on the roofs, fell drop by drop into the sides with a hollow and melancholy sound. They were the decaying skeletons of departed mails, and, in that lonely place, at that time of night, they looked chill and dismal. (614–15)

Through its details of crumbling materials, the passage depicts—in Alan Weisman’s words—the “world without us,” what happens to things when humans no longer care for them. Things fall apart, of course, but their dissolution grants them agency. Indeed, the above passage might function as a case study for one of the basic tenets of thing theory: as Bill Brown contends, “We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily.”⁴² Dickens starts by detailing the human actions that initiated the disintegration of the vehicles—the doors torn off from hinges and the linings stripped away—and then moves on to imagining the decay that occurred in the absence of the human (the wearing away, the rust, the effects of raindrops). By the end of the passage, the coaches take on human characteristics, as they are described as having “decaying skeletons,” while the ensuing adjectives “chill” and “dismal” seem to reference sensations experienced by the carriages themselves.

In another manifestation of Van Ghent’s “general principle of reciprocal changes,” traces of personhood in the thing lead to the materialization of human ghosts. Once he awakens from his nap, the bagman witnesses a strange scene of “life and animation”:

The mail coach doors were on their hinges, the lining was replaced, the iron-work was as good as new, the paint was restored, the lamps were alight; cushions and great coats were on every coach box, porters were thrusting parcels into every boot, guards were stowing away letter-bags, hostlers were dashing pails of water against the renovated wheels; numbers of men were rushing about, fixing poles into every coach, passengers arrived, portmanteaus were handed up, horses were put to, and in short it was perfectly clear that every mail there was to be off directly. (615)

The reemergence of things precedes the materialization of persons—the living characters can only appear after the coaches have been reconstituted. Humans emerge as an afterthought, next in importance to the cushions and greatcoats restored on the coach boxes. Indeed, the fact that humans appear as material accessories to the mail coach can also be traced to the vehicle’s original function as a carrier of inanimate things. As Grossman writes, Dickens “laughingly pries apart the Royal Mail coach’s service as a passenger transport system carrying live bodies from its postal purposes. The fairytale’s mock-moral, also punch line, is

that living people cannot dream themselves back into the letter bags of those ‘ghosts of mail-coaches.’”⁴³

Just as it withholds who dismantled the coaches in the first place, the text never reveals who is responsible for rebuilding them. In both contexts, Dickens describes these actions in a passive voice that effaces the human: the “linings had been stripped off,” and then “the lining was replaced” (615). This vagueness contrasts with meticulous descriptions of vehicle construction, found in an article like the *Penny Magazine* “A Day at a Coach Factory” (1841), published four years after Dickens’s story. Following an elaborate account of each part of the coach-building process, the article ends with the statement, “Eight pages form but a narrow field for the building of a coach; and we can only hope to have given a few general notions on this very diverse, complicated, and ingenious department of English manufacture.”⁴⁴ Dickens’s story details the labor involved in maintaining and using a coach (cooling the wheels, loading packages, etc.) but omits the work required to rebuild it. Given this absence, we can assume the vehicles remade themselves.

The spectral vehicle’s ability to restore itself and the human world around it illustrates Heidegger’s description of the “self-supporting” nature of things.⁴⁵ According to Barbara Johnson, Heidegger demonstrates this thingly independence through cryptic phrases such as “the thing things” and the “world worlds”: “To transform the nouns ‘thing’ and ‘world’ into verbs may be precisely what Heidegger is after. In any case, the ‘doing’ of thing and world tells us no more than we learned from the noun—*except that the thing has now become an act.*”⁴⁶ The thing does not need us, it can restore itself without our agency, and yet it is instrumental in shaping our being—or, in the case of vehicles, taking us places. The self-sufficiency of phantom conveyances motivates Frederick Marryat’s rewriting of the *Flying Dutchman* legend, *The Phantom Ship* (1839). In this novel, which looks back to the middle of the seventeenth century, a spectral ship that reconstituted itself following a shipwreck serves as an omen to sailors who spot it on the open seas. One of the most menacing aspects of these sightings, besides the ghostliness of the ship and crew, is the vessel’s obvious self-sufficiency. It even carries its own microclimate: “Although it was a perfect calm, she [the ship] was to all appearance buffeting in a violent gale, plunging and lifting over a surface that was smooth as glass, now careening to her bearing, then recovering herself.”⁴⁷ When there is a storm at sea, the “ship seen appeared not to be affected by the tumultuous waters, but sailed steadily and smoothly on an even keel.”⁴⁸ The independence of the ship grants it

the agency to determine the lives and fates of the human characters in the narrative.

Written in the sensational 1860s but looking back to the 1830s, Amelia Edwards's "The Phantom Coach" (1864) graphically depicts the connection between material reconstitution and the convergence of humans and things. The story maps out a narrative that Leslie-McCarthy argues is characteristic of the spectral vehicle subgenre: "lonely, dark roads; a person caught out in the elements wanting a lift; a noise heard in the distance and when the vehicle finally arrives it either drives straight through the observer or picks them up only for them to soon discover it is driven by the dead. Such stories usually close with a brief explanation that there are reports of a terrible traffic accident having occurred in that area some time ago."⁴⁹ Accordingly, the narrator of Edward's story finds himself on a snowy country road late at night, near the location of a tragic coach accident that, nine years ago, had killed four people. Without realizing he has reached the fatal site, he eventually spots the "body" of a carriage, which picks him up. He is immediately struck by its dilapidated state, including its "damp and disagreeable smell," but it takes him a while to notice that the other passengers and coachmen are dead. The spectral vehicle crashes again, as it had nine years earlier, and the narrator leaves us with the chilling pronouncement that he "*know[s]*" he had been a passenger of the ill-fated Phantom Coach.⁵⁰

Intimating that this is a "real" ghost coach rather than a dream vision, Edwards describes the vehicle in tangible, multisensory detail:

Every part of it was not only out of repair but in a condition of decay. The sashes splintered at a touch. The leather fittings were crusted over with mould, and literally rotting from the woodwork. The floor was almost breaking away beneath my feet. The whole machine, in short, was foul with damp, and had evidently been dragged from some outhouse in which it had been mouldering away for years, to do another day or two of duty on the road.⁵¹

Unlike the beautifully restored mail coaches of Dickens's story, this one has not been lovingly repaired by an invisible hand. This return to the past goes against Boym's definition of restorative nostalgia, in which "the past is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay; it has to be freshly painted in its 'original image' and remain eternally young."⁵² The gothic images of Edwards's story prevent the "fresh paint" of nostalgia from camouflaging the creepiness of its reconstitutions. Given that the coach had been subjected to a terrible accident, *someone* must have put it back

together and “dragged [it] from some outhouse” to do its work. The only reference to labor required to produce vehicles is in regard to the “regular mail,” which, the narrator hypothesizes, must be “under repair.” Any sense of normalcy that his reference to regular labor might provide, however, is thwarted by the awful realization that both the coachman and his fellow passengers are corpses: “A pale phosphorescent light—the light of putrefaction—played upon their awful faces; upon their hair, dank with the dews of the grave; upon their clothes, earth stained and dropping to pieces; upon their hands, which were as the hands of corpses long buried. Only their eyes, their terrible eyes, were living; and those eyes were all turned menacingly upon me!”⁵³ In contrast to nostalgic accounts of the “lively communication” and warm interactions that were supposedly aspects of coach life, the only thing resembling companionship in Edwards’s story comes from the silent corpses.⁵⁴

Edwards endows the coach with a sensory power that overwhelms both the narrator and readers. Srdjan Smajić argues that “when it comes to ghosts, seeing is the critical prerequisite for believing.” Vision, however, can provide tenuous proof, as “ocular evidence is at once the most compelling and most questionable form of evidence for the existence of ghosts.”⁵⁵ Edwards’s story deprioritizes vision as *the* essential sense in the spectral encounter, describing the various other ways in which ghosts can be apprehended. He explains that “The icy coldness of the night air had struck a chill to my very marrow, and the strange smell inside the coach was affecting me with an intolerable nausea”; “the leather strap broke in my hand”; “the whole machine, in short, was foul with damp.”⁵⁶ These descriptive moments endow dead objects with surprising agency through the sensory assaults they inflict on the living. As William Cohen argues, in contrast to the “distance senses (hearing and vision),” “the proximate senses of smell, taste, and touch . . . bring the external world into or onto the body.” Cohen adds that this process of internalizing sensation “enables embodied subjects to experience themselves as objects, and objects reciprocally to function as subjects, so as to permit a mutual perviousness between self and world.”⁵⁷ In actively possessing the narrator’s senses, the coach further collapses the human and the nonhuman.

Both the coach and its passengers are subject to a process of decay that culminates in their uncanny reanimation. Technically, they are ghosts, but not the flowy, ethereal kind; their living death is predicated on an extreme and interrelated materiality. They exist as an inseparable unit, in which the dead passengers are now part of the composition of

the coach. When the vehicle reassembles and reanimates, the passengers do too, condemned to reenact the trauma of their fatal journey. The power of dead vehicles is expressed through the narrator's persistent attention to the details of their decay, the threadbare sashes and moldy fittings, which take on a life of their own. As Brown writes, "The thingness of the object, just as it is irreducible to the object form (be that thingness physical or metaphysical), threatens the coherence of the object. If the thingness of the table resides in the remarkable patina of the bird's-eye maple (the thing thus emerging from the physical register), the isolation of that property undoes the integrity of the object."⁵⁸ Thingly decay and disintegration in these stories bear the power of reversal and reconstitution. They thus challenge one of the central tenets of thing theory: that it is when objects cease to function that they unleash the disruptive capacities of the thing. Here, it is when things rebuild themselves and function again that they cause the most havoc.⁵⁹

The Victorian narratives I have discussed thus far recognize the cost of transportation nostalgia, the fact that its reconstitutions collapse categories of personhood and thinghood. That the tangible absence of production catalyzes this process recalls David McNally's gothic description of capitalism as "both monstrous and magical. Crucially, its magic consists in concealing the occult economy—the obscure transactions between human bodies and capital—on which it rests."⁶⁰ He specifies that these transactions are vampiric, as "value flourishes only by attaching itself to, by temporarily possessing, entities whose objectivity is appreciably more palpable. But this attachment takes the form of a grotesque doubling, as the soul of value strives to capture the bodies of value, to possess them, and to evacuate them of all sensibility and concreteness, indeed to suck the life from them in the case of living labour."⁶¹ Narratives of spectral transportation signal that these processes of exchange and monstrous doubling extend beyond the body of the worker—whose labor has already been effaced—to overtake consumers, or passengers. In doing so, they also demonstrate the vampiric processes of commodification, which reach back to the past to map themselves onto a time in which they were supposedly not yet existent. It is the very desire to find this time before the fetishizations of late capitalism, even if it exists as a site of horror, that causes the logic of the commodity to return with a vengeance. As I discuss in the final section of this essay, Kipling's "The Phantom Rickshaw" situates the confluence of nostalgia and thingification in yet another vampiric system: imperialism.

IT FOLLOWS

Kipling's "The Phantom Rickshaw" (1885) imports the spectral vehicle tradition to India. His defamiliarization of a familiar genre is what may have led one 1891 writer from the *Edinburgh Review* to comment on the absurdity of this narrative: the "abrupt intrusion into everyday life of a crudely material supernaturalism, and its rude collision between the invisible and the sensible, may in the future move [readers] to laughter instead of tremor."⁶² While British readers had acclimated to the extreme materiality of ghostly coaches and trains, there seems to be, for this critic at least, something ludicrous about applying these conventions to an Eastern vehicle, the rickshaw. But the spectral rickshaw is unusual more than for its foreignness; unlike the other vehicles described above, it runs on human power: that of its *jhampanies*, or drivers. Their status in the story attests to the continuity between the dehumanizations of colonialism and capitalism, as forces that, in Van Ghent's words, participate in "the exploitation of the human being as a 'thing' or an engine or a part of an engine capable of being used for profit."⁶³

"The Phantom Rickshaw" details the misadventures of Jack Pansay, a British civil servant in India. He has an affair with a married woman, Mrs. Agnes Keith-Wessington, whom he then abandons after falling in love with the younger Kitty Mannering. After Agnes's death, Jack begins to spot her rickshaw and its four *jhampanies* traveling through the hill town of Simla. While he initially assumes that someone else had purchased the rickshaw and hired its drivers, he soon learns that following the owner's decease, the rickshaw had been dismantled and its drivers had died of cholera; he concludes that he is being pursued by their spectral manifestations.

The prevailing emotion of Kipling's narrative is not vehicular nostalgia, as the rickshaw was a relatively modern vehicle at the time of the story's writing: it was introduced to Japan in 1869 and to India in the early 1880s.⁶⁴ Instead, the story is motivated by a longing for a time that seems as impossible to locate as the one preceding the dehumanizations of capitalism: colonial nostalgia. The narrator of the story frames his account with an expression of yearning for an idealized period when British officials had an uncomplicated authority over India and its people: "One of the few advantages that India has over England is a certain great Knowability. After five years' service a man is directly or indirectly acquainted with the two or three hundred Civilians in his Province, all

the Messes of ten or twelve Regiments and Batteries, and some fifteen hundred other people of the non-official castes.” The narrator ties this cognitive authority to a superior form of mobility: “at the end of twenty [years] he knows, or knows something about, almost every Englishman in the Empire, and may travel anywhere and everywhere without paying hotel bills.”⁶⁵ While the narrator describes this confluence of knowledge and mobility as a current state of affairs, the story he subsequently tells situates this idyllic description as an expression of longing for an impossible moment in colonial history.

Jack Pansay’s belief system and freedom of movement are challenged through the spectral materialization of the rickshaw and its drivers. Although he is horrified by the ghostly return of his jilted lover, Agnes, he is most perturbed by the resurrection of the vehicle and its *jhampanies*: “One may see ghosts of men and women, but surely never of coolies and carriages. The whole thing is absurd. Fancy the ghost of a hill-man!” (119). The drivers’ spectral return unsettles his—and perhaps the white British reader’s—preconceptions about what can and cannot become a ghost. As Laura Otis writes, “In [Jack’s] mind, the four men pulling Agnes can not be ghosts, since they were never human to begin with.”⁶⁶ The *jhampanies* are twice dehumanized, both through their race and their professions. Comparable to sedan chair drivers, who were deemed “beasts of burden,” rickshaw drivers were viewed as low enough on the social scale to perform labor intended for animals.⁶⁷ Jack’s unease in seeing them precedes his realization that they are ghosts. When he first spots them on the roads of Simla following Agnes’s death, he responds, “Whoever employed them now I thought I would call upon, and ask as a personal favor to change her *jhampanies*’ livery. I would hire the men myself, and, if necessary, buy their coats from off their backs. It is impossible to say here what a flood of undesirable memories their presence evoked” (115–16). While the memories he references are ostensibly about his ill-fated affair, the extent of his reaction to the *jhampanies*—here and after he realizes they are ghosts—signals that they are a major source of his anxiety. He goes on to examine aspects of the drivers’ lives that he might have otherwise ignored. In the above passage, he thinks about their employment history, albeit with the intention of calculating whether the anxiety they provoke might be mitigated by rehiring them. When he learns that they are specters, he goes further in this line of questioning: “So there *were* ghosts of ’rickshaws after all, and ghostly employments in the other world! How much did Mrs. Wessington give her men? What were their hours? Where did they go?”

(122, emphasis in original). It is only when they appear as ghosts that Jack comes to ponder their labor conditions, which would have otherwise remained invisible to him. While these questions do not compel him to consider the labor power that went into rebuilding the coach, his fear brings him closer to thinking about the modes of labor required to uphold imperialist structures.

The image of the rickshaw reflects earlier accounts of spectral vehicles, which provide material specificity while omitting any explanation of how the conveyance was rebuilt. It, too, seems to have been reassembled through a “deadly principle of cohesion” that has reproduced its essential details: it is a “yellow-paneled, cheap, bazar ’rickshaw”; “Save that it cast no shadow, the ’rickshaw was in every respect as real to look upon as one of wood and iron” (115, 138). The invisible labor that went into building this rickshaw seems that much more impressive given the dimensions of this type of vehicle. As Pamela Kanwar explains, the Simla rickshaw “seated one person, was usually about nine feet long and weighed over three hundred pounds. It was far heavier than the rickshaw used in other Indian towns such as Calcutta, and four coolies were required to propel it in ascent and descent.”⁶⁸ The spectral version is visually indistinguishable from the real one and only displays phantom features when persons pass through the vehicle and its drivers “as if they had been thin air” (116).

The question of reconstitution in this story goes beyond the vehicle itself to the hierarchical relations that emerge alongside the rickshaw’s regeneration. It is a concrete manifestation of the strangeness of imperialism itself, the assemblage of white and brown bodies into systems of oppression and control. Unable to find a precise term for this traveling imperial relationship, Jack refers to the human/thing vehicle as “It.” When he spots the rickshaw in the presence of his new fiancée, for instance, he orders her to “Come and look at It!” and adds, “I have an indistinct idea that I dragged Kitty by the wrist along the road up to where It stood, and implored her for pity’s sake to speak to It; to tell It that we were betrothed! That neither Death nor Hell could break the tie between us” (129–30). His capitalization of an object pronoun acknowledges the rickshaw’s categorical instability; “It” is a manifestation of the inseparable bonds of colonial relations, reproduced through a mode of transportation that blurs the line between the animate and the inanimate.

The rickshaw’s persistent pursuit of Jack forces him to recognize that he has become a part of It. The vehicle follows him into all domains of

British colonial life, areas in which colonizers could ordinarily shield themselves from the realities of the colonized: “Morning after morning and evening after evening the ghostly ’rickshaw and I used to wander through Simla together. Wherever I went, there the four black and white liveries followed me and bore me company to and from my hotel. At the theater I found them amid the crowd of yelling *jhampanies*; outside the Club veranda, after a long evening of whist; at the birthday ball, waiting patiently for my reappearance; and in broad daylight when I went calling.” Despite his horror at being pursued, Jack acknowledges his strange attachment to the vehicle. “I felt vaguely unhappy when I had been separated too long from my ghostly companion,” he confesses. “The presence of the ’rickshaw filled me by turns with horror, blind fear, a dim sort of pleasure, and utter despair” (137–38). His bond with the vehicle has an affective in addition to a physical dimension.

This attachment leads Jack to cross over into the category of vehicle himself. The frame narrator who introduces his story previews the man’s vehicular status in describing the work of the doctor who takes care of Jack until his death: He “kept, in addition to his regular practice, a hospital on his private account—an arrangement of loose-boxes for Incurables, his friends called it—but it was really a sort of fitting-up shed for craft that had been damaged by stress of weather” (106). Jack, too, is doomed to become a mode of transportation, a “craft,” at risk of breaking down and becoming nonfunctional. While the story does not tell us how real or spectral rickshaws are reassembled, it does afford a glimpse into how this process works (or does not, in this case) for human colonizers who are “fitted-up” in the doctor’s shed. By the end of his experiences with the rickshaw, Jack’s transformation into a vehicle is confirmed when the narrator describes him as being “hag-ridden” in his final days (108). He expresses his friend’s particular oppression and affliction by a language that conveys his metamorphosis into an ill-fated ride.⁶⁹

Following her death, Agnes also loses her personhood through her connection to the vehicle; her fate is to become a human package. Rather than functioning as a powerful colonial agent, she resembles the living-dead riders of Edwards’s phantom coach: “The hood dropped noiselessly and I was face to face with my dead and buried mistress. She was wearing the dress in which I had last seen her alive: carried the same tiny handkerchief in her right hand; and the same card-case in her left. (A woman of eight months dead with a card-case!)” (136). Jack is struck

by the now empty signifiers of her status as an upper-class British woman vacationing in Simla. She has become human cargo, a burden of British female identity that the *jhampanies* must carry around forever.⁷⁰ She comes to embody Jack's view of her very "existence" as an "inexpressible burden" to him (113). More importantly, she now literalizes the burden of imperial oppression: she is dead weight.

At the end of the story, Jack tries to restore the British woman's significance by turning her into a modern-day Lady Howard. He closes with the following confession: "Yet as surely as ever a man was done to death by the Powers of Darkness I am that man. In justice, too, pity her. For as surely as ever woman was killed by man, I killed Mrs. Wessington. And the last portion of my punishment is even now upon me" (140). Through his admission of wrongdoing, he transforms his story into a traditional revenge narrative, in which a jilted woman rides a coach comprised of human body parts to avenge herself for her husband's misdeeds. In making this switch, he also attempts to excise the colonial ramifications of the narrative, turning it into a recognizable British ghost story. His shift is the narrative equivalent of physically leaving India, which he cannot do. After the doctor advises that he take a sick leave, Jack responds skeptically, "A request that the Government would graciously permit me to get rid of five ghosts and an airy 'rickshaw by going to England! Heatherlegh's [the doctor] proposition moved me to almost hysterical laughter" (139).

If there is a figure of revenge in this story, it is not Agnes as Lady Howard but the *jhampanies*. The unprecedented vivacity and agency of the drivers come from the same object that shackled them when they were alive: the rickshaw. While this vehicle reinforced racial hierarchies, it also had the potential to undermine colonial systems. As Richard Bulliet argues, the rickshaw embodied a form of modernity distinct from Western systems; in China, Japan, and India, "It competed, and still competes, with the European transportation technologies of railroads, streetcars, and automobiles. And the armies of rickshaw pullers to which it offered low-paid urban jobs formed a proletariat that was decidedly nonindustrial." He adds that "rickshaws can also be regarded as local low-tech responses to the horse-drawn carriages that contributed to the lifestyle of European imperialism."⁷¹ Indeed, the spectral speed of the rickshaw and its drivers overwhelms the very system of British mobility with which the narrator begins the story. This image of ordered exploration is opposed by that of an English officer wandering aimlessly, at the behest of a phantom rickshaw that remains distinctly unknowable and thwarts the British sense of order: "It lay in readiness in the Mall, and,

in what seemed devilish mockery of our ways, with a lighted head-lamp” (124).⁷²

Simon Hay describes the ghost story genre as a “*failed* modernity narrative.” He elaborates, “The modernity on display in the ghost story has not successfully distinguished itself from its past; indeed, the whole point of the ghost story is that the present *cannot* wrench free of the past and so has not become fully modern. The ghost story, in other words, holds to a model of history as traumatically rather than nostalgically available to us.”⁷³ The stories of spectral transportation I have discussed here present nostalgia as its own form of trauma. This trauma is different from the one we usually associate with nostalgia in thinking about its status as a disease—including one that could produce spectral hallucinations—until well into the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ Instead, stories of spectral vehicles narrate the trauma that emerges from a longing for objects and moments from the past that would allow us to deny or forget current acts of dehumanization. If in Hay’s account the anachronisms of the ghost story typically provoke the persistence of the past in the present, here we find the persistence of the present in the past. Spectral vehicles do not bring us to a time when things allowed us to act more humanely toward ourselves and others. Instead, they sweep us into a circular tour through the dehumanizations of capitalism and imperialism, and we have no choice but to go along for the ride.

NOTES

1. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 49.
2. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 92, 99.
3. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 55.
4. Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, 214.
5. Carnsew, “Haunted Roads,” 467. For more on Lady Howard, see also “Some English Ghosts,” 722; Westwood and Simpson, *The Penguin Book of Ghosts*, 101; and “The Tale of the Wronged Lady.”
6. Roberts, “The Phantom Car,” 156.
7. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 13.
8. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 63.
9. De Quincey, *The English Mail Coach*, 243 (emphasis in original).
10. Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*, 5.
11. Cadwallader, “Death by Train,” 58–59.
12. Nayder, *Wilkie Collins*, 18.

13. Collins, "The Last Stage Coachman," 209.
14. Collins, "The Last Stage Coachman," 211.
15. This gross literalization is a useful example of what Elaine Freedgood terms "ghostly referentiality," the fact that ghosts can simultaneously inhabit allegorical and literal meanings (*Worlds Enough*, 115).
16. Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 4. Here, I am also drawing from Jack Halberstam's discussion of the "patchwork" bodies of monsters, as nineteenth-century "authors mixed and matched a wide variety of signifiers of difference to fabricate the deviant body" (*Skin Shows*, 1, 3).
17. Sala, "Poetry on the Railway," 418 (emphasis mine).
18. Cadwallader, "Death by Train," 58. Several critics have remarked on the monstrous imagery used to depict the railway in the mid-nineteenth century. See, for instance, Byerly, *Are We There Yet?* (part 3); Carter, *Railways and Culture*; Daly, "Railway Novels"; Freeman, *Railways*; and Smith, "Victorian Railway Accident."
19. Sala, "Poetry on the Railway," 415.
20. Stewart, *On Longing*, 136.
21. Taussig, "Dying Is an Art," 305.
22. P., "De Mortuis," 387, 389.
23. P., "De Mortuis," 391. This last phrase reflects the animalistic qualities ascribed to sedan-chair drivers, who were often characterized through their intemperance and lack of civility (Hart, "The Sedan Chair," 207; MacMichael, "Memoirs," 403).
24. Sala, "Poetry on the Railway," 418.
25. As Charlotte Mathieson argues, in nineteenth-century representations of railway travel, and particularly of accidents, "bodies of travelling subjects are used to significant representational effect, forming the locus of deep cultural anxieties about the relationship of the human subject to the new, mobile spaces of modernity" ("A Perambulating Mass," 46).
26. Van Ghent, *The English Novel*, 130.
27. Van Ghent, *The English Novel*, 128.
28. Van Ghent, *The English Novel*, 129.
29. Marx, *Capital*, 163–64.
30. Sala, "Poetry on the Railway," 418.
31. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41.
32. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 44–45.
33. Leslie-McCarthy, "Spectral Traffic," 279. Tamara Ketabgian complicates the assumption that machines lack souls when she argues

about the breakdown between the “vital and the mechanical” in Victorian literature and culture. As she writes, “Victorian machines were not simply soulless, lifeless, predictable, and unidimensional; not simply opposed to organic feelings and vitality; and not simply reductive material objects—if objects are ever so” (*The Lives of Machines*, 1, 2). While Ketabgian does not discuss phantom objects or machines, her argument can also apply to their role in the ghost story.

34. Crowell, *The Spirit World*, 84.
35. Crowell, *The Spirit World*, 184–85.
36. Crowell, *The Spirit World*, 77.
37. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 25. See also William Scheick’s reading of the fantastic in Kipling’s story (“Hesitation”).
38. Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, 614, 615. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
39. Grossman, *Charles Dickens’s Networks*, 23.
40. Grossman, *Charles Dickens’s Networks*, 6, 27.
41. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, viii.
42. Brown, “Thing Theory,” 4.
43. Grossman, *Charles Dickens’s Networks*, 77–78.
44. “A Day at a Coach Factory,” 508.
45. Heidegger, “The Thing,” 167.
46. Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 62–63 (emphasis in original).
47. Marryat, *The Phantom Ship*, 96–97.
48. Marryat, *The Phantom Ship*, 174.
49. Leslie-McCarthy, “Spectral Traffic,” 279.
50. Edwards, “The Phantom Coach,” 224, 228.
51. Edwards, “The Phantom Coach,” 226.
52. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49.
53. Edwards, “The Phantom Coach,” 226, 227.
54. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 74.
55. Smajić, *Ghost-Seers*, 17, 56.
56. Edwards, “The Phantom Coach,” 225, 226.
57. Cohen, *Embodied*, 6.
58. Brown, *Other Things*, 23.
59. Readers of modern horror will find a return to this tradition of self-regenerating vehicles in Stephen King’s *Christine* (1983). Although the novel depicts a car that has been possessed by a ghost rather than a phantom vehicle, it manifests a similar anxiety about “spontaneous regeneration” (King, *Christine*, 298). Christine is an object of

nostalgia itself, a 1958 Plymouth that has been restored to its original state through a mysterious process. Its owner “could remember starting the bodywork on the dented rear end, but he couldn’t remember finishing it. . . . [E]xactly when he had replaced the springs he couldn’t remember. Nor could he remember where he had gotten them” (258). By the end of the novel, it becomes clear that, terrifyingly, the car can fix itself/herself: “The mudguard and the right-hand side of her body—I only caught a glimpse, but I swear it’s true—they were . . . *reknitting* themselves, red metal appearing from nowhere and slipping down in smooth automotive curves to cover the right front tire and the right side of the engine compartment again” (620; emphasis in original).

60. McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 113.
61. McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 132.
62. “Plain Tales from the Hills,” 139.
63. Van Ghent, *The English Novel*, 283.
64. Bulliet, *The Wheel*, 203; Kanwar, *Imperial Simla*, 176. As Bulliet clarifies, “the rickshaw is modern. It was invented and found immediate popularity in a nation [Japan] that was experiencing rapid modernization in the mid-nineteenth century; it triggered innovations in labor recruitment and organization; it transformed the urban way of life in every country that adopted it; and it was marketed by Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and European businessmen who were well aware of modern manufacturing and advertising practices” (*The Wheel*, 203).
65. Kipling, “The Phantom Rickshaw,” 105. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
66. Otis, “Banned Emotions,” 318.
67. Bulliet, *The Wheel*, 187; Kanwar, *Imperial Simla*, 176. Bulliet explains that following the invention of the rickshaw in Japan in 1869, its drivers were perceived as animalistic because of their position in relation to the vehicle and its passengers: “*Pushing* wheelchairs and baby carriages posed no problem for these critics [of the rickshaw], but *pulling* from the front—with the exception of the Bath chairs so popular at British seaside resorts . . . —turned a man into a beast” (*The Wheel*, 187; emphasis in original).
68. Kanwar, *Imperial Simla*, 176.
69. The *OED* defines “hag-ridden” as “Ridden by a hag; *esp.* afflicted by nightmare” (1) and “Oppressed in mind; harassed” (2).

70. Mathieson argues that the traveler as parcel was a recurring trope in contemporary descriptions of the Victorian railway (“A Perambulating Mass of Woollen Goods,” 53).
71. Bulliet, *The Wheel*, 203–4.
72. As Debashis Bandyopadhyay argues, in Kipling’s narrative the “supernatural is used as a critique of the critical function imperial rationality claims to perform” (“The Past Unearthed,” 63).
73. Hay, *History*, 15.
74. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 3.

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