

PRESENT AND YET ABSENT, BODIED AND YET BODILESS: THE PARADOXICAL DYADS OF BRAMSHILL, BEING THE MEMOIRS OF JOAN PENELOPE COPE

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IN 1937, triggered by the imminent sale of her ancestral home Bramshill, Joan Penelope Cope began writing and illustrating her memoirs. She was twelve years old at the time, thirteen upon publication, and *Bramshill, Being the Memoirs of Joan Penelope Cope* (1938), was “never intended for publication otherwise I would have been more discreet” (introduction). Nevertheless, it was published by Constable and Company in 1938 and reviewed with some acclaim in the national and international press. A. G. Macdonell, writing in *The Observer*, described *Bramshill* as one of the “most extraordinary books I have ever seen” (7), whilst Edith Olivier, in a review for *Country Life*, wrote that Cope’s memoirs had a “unique quality” (614). Hilary Carpenter’s review for the theological journal *Blackfriars* was of a similar nature: after recognizing Cope’s membership in an “ancient catholic family,” he wrote that Cope had used “her many remarkable nascent gifts” to produce a “unique record of child memories” (62). The *Victoria Daily Times* of British Columbia, Canada, wrote admiringly of her illustrations: “Joan has illustrated the book her self [*sic*] and although she has never had a drawing lesson, Mr Philip de Laszo said, ‘I can teach her nothing’” (“Child”). Cope was also featured in *The Washington Post* who, as part of a “celebration of youth,” writes exuberantly: “At 12, Joan Cope has written her memoirs and gotten them published!” (“British”).

As much as these critics praised Cope’s lively authorial style and recognised her juvenile precocity along with the skill of her delicate and characterful illustrations, they also paid attention to the impact of Bramshill itself. *Bramshill, Being the Memoirs of Joan Penelope Cope* documents the final few days of the Bramshill estate under Cope ownership and so allows the readers to witness the fall of a country house from the intimate perspective of a family who had been long associated with it. The cumulative result of this attention, not only in the critical reception afforded to *Bramshill* but also

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within the aesthetics of the text itself, is a privileging of place over writer and of legacy over lived experience.

In what follows, I argue that *Bramshill* is a memoir written with an anticipatory sense of its reception within the world. This anticipatory aesthetic comes from Cope's knowledge of her own familial and social capital alongside the wider cultural readings afforded to young authors in the mid-twentieth century. Cope's understanding of her place in the world as a woman is explored through her representation of ghosts and ghostliness within *Bramshill*, which ends with Cope asking us to imagine an alternative ending to her story, in which, at the very moment of leaving her ancestral home, she is, paradoxically, entombed within the estate forever.

One of the noteworthy features of Cope's writing, which her publishers preserved, is the liberal usage of ellipses and em-dashes. I reproduce them here as they appear in *Bramshill*; they do not indicate any omission or selective quotations on my part.

“[T]he most perfect and beautiful Elizabethan house”¹

A HANDSOME English prodigy mansion with history dating back to the fourteenth century, Bramshill first entered the ownership of the Cope family in 1699 when it was purchased by Sir John Cope for £21,500. The new owner benefitted from the substantial work and development carried out by a previous owner, Edward de la Zouche, the 11th Baron Zouche, who had owned Bramshill between 1605 and 1625. During this period, de la Zouche had begun work on the mansion itself. His renovations incorporated elements of the earlier building on the site, which had been present in some form since 1351, whilst also introducing the structural and aesthetic carcass which is still recognizable today (“Bramshill Park”; “Listed Building”). Upon Cope's purchase, further refurbishment followed with notable interest being paid to the interior of the property. Despite being considered for purchase by the Duke of Wellington following his success in the Napoleonic Wars (Ellesmere 113), the property remained with the Cope family until 1936 when it was sold to private owners. Joan Cope, born on 1 January 1926, was ten years old at this point.

The subsequent impact of the Second World War, and the associated decline of the country estate within Britain, saw Bramshill enter into a different type of service. The Red Cross used it as a maternity home for evacuee mothers during the war, before it then provided refuge for the exiled Romanian royals, King Michael and Queen Anne. Bramshill was subsequently acquired in 1960 by the Home Office to become the home of the Police Staff College. This move was seen as beneficial by the press, particularly in light of the increased difficulties faced by private owners of country estates with publications such as *Country Life* writing that it “brought encouragement to those with the preservation of Britain's architectural heritage at heart” (Hussey 1426). Despite these efforts towards preservation and a concern for

the future, however, it was recognized in 1989 that the house was “in a poor state of repair” and would require “urgent expenditure if it is to be preserved” (Wheeler 485). Governmental activities were slowly relocated over the following years until Bramshill was ultimately acquired by developers. It was most recently offered for sale with the chance to “restore it to its former glory” in 2021 (Evans).

Presently Bramshill is a Grade I Listed property and so possesses “special architectural or historic interest considered to be of national importance and therefore worth protecting” (“Listed Building”). The detailed listing recognises the “rich period decoration” within the house whilst also noting the importance of copious external detail (“Bramshill Park”). Much of the latter has its own separate and individual entry on the register; the arched doorway which Cope clings to at the end of *Bramshill* is, for example, listed independently along with several other architectural features mentioned in Cope’s memoirs. This is no coincidence but rather an indication of Cope’s anticipatory aesthetic. She is an author who is aware of the legacy of Bramshill and sets about documenting its features as much as, and if not more than, she documents her own childhood. This begins immediately with the title of the text itself: *Bramshill, Being the Memoirs of Joan Penelope Cope*. Here Cope creates a hierarchy of interest which understands Bramshill as primary and herself as secondary, lesser. She also hints at how the building constitutes a three-dimensional embodiment of the text: her memoirs have already been written in stone and in wall, across the Bramshill estate and embedded into its cultural resonance.

Cope’s anticipatory and occasionally self-effacing style is grounded in an acute understanding of how her work will be read and received by a wider audience. This stems from her family’s social status along with Cope’s personal experience of such cultural capital in circulation. For the publishers of *Bramshill*, Cope is of interest not only due to her precocity as a child-author but also due to her family lineage. As they write on the interior dust wrapper:

Joan Cope, a member of an ancient Roman Catholic family, and daughter of Sir Denzil Cope, was born and lived to the age of eleven in Bramshill—perhaps the loveliest Jacobean house in the south of England. The influence of this house and of the long family tradition behind her, working on a mind of ancient receptivity, has produced a book

Here, Bramshill’s “influence” is credited with “producing” the book: its creative force is either stronger than, or even responsible for, the creative abilities of Cope herself. This description, then, does more than focus attention upon the practical fabric of the estate instead of on Cope’s own childhood; it establishes a hierarchy whereby the building is more important than the child.

The publishers’ representation of Cope’s subordinate relationship to Bramshill accurately reflects her own stance within the memoir, which is replete with hints of

erasure and diminishment. In other words, the hierarchy is one that Cope often tacitly accepts and even comes to perpetuate. For example, she writes about her first arrival at Bramshill as a baby, around a “month or two” in age (11), who is about to be baptised in the family’s chapel. Her description of the room follows: “the room was originally intended as the bedroom of Henry Prince of Wales. It used to be hung with the most priceless Gothic tapestries [*sic*] but they were sold when I was about three or four” (11). This passage illustrates something of Cope’s acute eye for detail: she notes the material reality of the chapel along with its historical legacy and then ties these events to her own life story. This focus on herself is brief, however: Cope presumes a high level of interest in the fabric of the estate that, ultimately, supersedes any interest in herself. This presumption continues throughout the whole of *Bramshill* and is sustained with some expertise.

As a tour guide tells stories to visitors, so does Cope in her memoirs. Not only is this based upon her anticipatory aesthetic but also on her real-world practical experience of living in Bramshill. She recounts in one chapter how she would follow her mother around the house when visitors arrived (41) before then describing the constituent elements of this tour for the reader. She references various works of art such as the “Van Dyck pictures,—and the lage [*sic*] Rubens over the side board of the Holy Faimly [*sic*]” (41) before then taking the reader to “the Morning Room, (in which we usually lived,) with its black laquer [*sic*],- and exquisite cool-looking Mortlake tapestries” (41). Cope’s focus here is on recounting the legacy of Bramshill and thus, reaffirming its importance within the reader’s mind. The personal detail is relegated towards self-conscious brackets, afterthoughts.

The tour guide episode also introduces a new note into Cope’s writing, namely one of worship and reverence. She describes both the immediate detail of an object whilst also taking time to bring forth its familial weight and resonance. Furthermore, she is aware of its wider importance in terms of cultural and popular history and is able to bring this out in her writing with some skill. This skill is only emphasised when Cope brings the reader to the Long Gallery, a feature still referenced in the current Grade 1 listing for the house. As she writes:

—the Long Gallery in all its hundred and thirty feet of silver grey beauty. Its walls were panelled in deal, which in Jacobien [*sic*] times was highly valued as a rare wood, and had been painted streaky blue and pink and yellow, - which charicteristic [*sic*] crude coulouring [*sic*] had faded with the sun and light of years which poured in the five great curtainless [*sic*] windows,—to an exquisite mellow grey shade.
(43)

Whilst this passage, and indeed other references to the house, might echo the information provided by Cope’s mother on her own tours of Bramshill, they also demonstrate Cope’s undoubted skills and ability as a writer. Not only does she capture

the faded grandeur of the estate along with its emotional impact upon the inhabitants but she also recognises its lengthy history. The “light of years” has faded the colours on the wall, and yet Bramshill endures, survives. It is a powerful moment and one that I suspect led critics such as Carpenter to describe *Bramshill*... as a “literary gem” (63).

The end of the tour sees Cope bring the reader to the banquetting hall. It is here that Cope shows that, as much as she foregrounds the legacy of Bramshill itself, she can bring forth the human aspects of that legacy at the same time. “[W]e would end our round in the Great Banquetting [*viz*] Hall,” writes Cope, “here to gaze at the stone arches erected in 1666, with all the arms of the Copes, tracing their descent from Edward 1” (44). A banquetting hall is a lived and human space, and one that takes its name from the human events located within. In ending the tour here, Cope finds interest in the people at the heart of Bramshill. The reader is asked to study the stone arches and to stand witness to the stories which have gone before.

What is also interesting here is how Cope draws attention to a feature of the house erected thirty-three years prior to her family’s ownership. According to one of Cope’s ancestors, Sir William H. Cope, when the stone arches were built, the estate was in the ownership of the Henley family and about to experience something of a fall from grace. Following the death of Sir Robert Henley in 1681, the estate was £20,000 in debt (14); and Sir Robert’s brother, Sir Andrew Henley, had married “a person apparently in humble life” (14) and then “killed a man and fled for it in 1695” (14). It is perhaps no surprise that Bramshill was then sold to Sir John Cope in 1699 for £21,500 by the “representatives and creditors of the Henleys” (15). In referencing the stone arches and then overlaying them with the story of her own ancestors, Cope reminds the reader of the intimate connections between people and place but also, paradoxically, of how quickly such stories can be forgotten.

Some of Cope’s confidence here can be ascribed to her social class and cultural capital. She is the daughter of a notable family that possesses a notable cultural legacy for reasons beyond its association with Bramshill. Indeed, I suspect that her membership in an “ancient Catholic family” is one of the reasons that Carpenter of *Blackfriars*, a theologically orientated journal, reviewed her memoir in the first place (15). This journalistic preoccupation with family persists following the sale of the house and the publication of the memoir. In 1938, for example, Cope is featured alongside her mother in a glamorous photograph in *Sketch*. The caption is factual while also respectful in tone:

Miss Joan Cope, only daughter of Sir Denzil Cope, BT., and Lady Cope has, at the age of twelve, written her memoirs and illustrated them. Her note to this book ... says that she started writing in her play-time—“so as to enable me to retain a vivid picture of my “young days”—spent in the glorious surroundings of Bramshill.”

This was not Cope's first appearance in *Sketch*. In 1930, eight years prior to the publication of *Bramshill*, she was also part of a photographic portrait with her brother and mother. "A Family Study" shows the two children posed in front of their mother, Edna, as she looks directly at the camera. The accompanying caption sees three sentences devoted to Edna, Mrs. Denzil Cope, her family, background, and marriage, with Joan and Anthony sharing a sentence. The conclusion to this caption is of particular interest as it illustrates the enduring potency of *Bramshill*: "Captain and Mrs. Denzil Cope live at Bramshill Park, Winchfield, Hants, the beautiful and historic seat of the Cope family, which was bought by the fifth Baronet in 1699 ("A Family Study," 359). In March 1943, Cope is featured in the pages of *Country Life* as a debutante. She is seventeen years old at this point, and whilst recognising her ingénue status, the caption also pays attention to her authorial achievements: "She wrote and illustrated *Bramshill*, which appeared in 1938, about her old home, and later, a short novel, *Bygone Flowers*" (563). It seems that all roads lead back to *Bramshill*. The estate and its legacy persist.

Upon the publication of Cope's second book, *Bygone Flowers*, in 1940, L. P. Hartley² of the *Observer* wrote that this story of "three ... frail flowers of Early Victorian times [who] strove with or against their parents' consent, to get themselves married ... inevitably challenges comparison with [Daisy Ashford's] "The Young Visitors" and comes off badly." He concludes, however, that *Bygone Flowers* is "very readable, contains some charming phrases" and "reveals, what is rare to find in a child-writer, a genuine feeling for Nature and an extraordinary knowledge of 'period' in architecture and interior decoration" (3). For the publisher, however, interest was not to be found in what *Bygone Flowers* might deliver for the reader but rather in the author as commodity. Accordingly, the inside of its dust wrapper features a large photograph of Cope herself. The image is in black and white, shot from the waist up, and shows her wearing a simple polo neck with her hair loose. She is smiling off to the side, and the overall impression is one of friendliness and approachability. The caption reads: "This is JOAN PENELOPE COPE at the age of twelve, when she wrote this delightful Victorian Story: BYGONE FLOWERS [original capitals]." Despite being fourteen when *Bygone Flowers* is published, Cope is firmly aged down two years. The result of this is to position Cope in some kind of stasis: she is the innocent child, eternally twelve years old and forever the author of *Bramshill*

As if to underscore this connection, the dust wrapper to *Bygone Flowers* devotes substantial space towards reminding readers of the brilliance of *Bramshill* and its popular reception:

The volume reproduces the exercise book in which the Memoirs were written, and all the author's illustrations and decorations are in coloured facsimile.

"These delicious memoirs" (*London Mercury*) are "as near perfect as an autobiography can be. Furthermore, the publishers have

produced them in an extremely intelligent way. The binding is brilliant” (SYLVIA LYND in *Harper's Bazaar*). “If Joan Cope wrote and illustrated this book unaided (*as she did—Publisher*) she is half way to genius” (BRUCE LOCKHART in the *Evening Standard*).

Sylvia Lynd (1888–1952) was an author and literary critic with a particular interest in promoting the writing of women, whilst the Bruce Lockhart referenced here seems to be Sir Robert Hamilton Bruce Lockhart (1887–1970), a former spy and the author of the bestselling *Memoirs of a British Agent* (1932). Prior to the Second World War, Lockhart had worked for the *Evening Standard*; after the war, he returned to writing. In referencing these two well-known critics, the publishers invoke the authority of bestselling authors who are also notable members of the establishment. The message is clear: Joan Cope is an author of note, to be considered as part of the literary establishment, and *Bramshill* is a definitive work of literary excellence.

Lynd's comments are worth exploring further for what they say about the material qualities of *Bramshill*. She is right in noting that this is a text that has been produced with some attention; indeed, it was the result of this attention that caught my eye in the bookshop. The book's cover was plain and quiet and bore no identifying marks save a small label on the front with title and author detail. The dust wrapper itself had been long since lost, and the overall impression was of a school exercise book rather than a more typical literary memoir. I do not see this as an accident on the part of the publishers but rather as a calculated emphasis on Cope's age.

Such moments of calculation are also visible inside *Bramshill*, perhaps most notably in the foreword. Here the publishers write that “Not a thing has been altered” (n.p), repeating a phrase used by Cope herself in a later chapter when she writes about a Mummings play at Bramshill: “Not a thing has been altered,—and this is copied [*sic*] from the original manuscript written by the Mummings themselves, and the spelling is the same” (33). The publishers explain that they decided to follow this “excellent precedent” in their treatment of *Bramshill* . . . ; and yet there is a qualification: “The spelling (and, we would add, the punctuation) are the same” (n.p). At its most immediate level, this comment speaks to those readers who might think of *Bramshill* as some had thought of other juvenilia: that it is “too sophisticated, too knowledgeable, too *good* . . . to be the work of a child” (McMaster 47). It offers these readers proof that the text was not altered or improved by adults. Yet, as Anna Redcay argues, the preservation of misspellings and grammatical errors often ties into wider discussions about the “moral and literary truths” supposed to be present in juvenilia (22). Such errors are part of an “aesthetics of innocence” (iv) and thus to be protected throughout any editorial process. Christine Alexander recognises something similar in her discussion of Daisy Ashford, whose “initial editor had not actually invented new errors, but he had standardised existing ones” (88). This meant that any words which were spelt correctly elsewhere in the text were changed to conform to any misspellings Ashford had made. As Alexander points out, this was “textual fidelity”

giving “way to marketing strategy” (88), and Redcay recognises something similar: such editorial practices are, at their heart, acts of “strategic marketing” (111). I would suggest that the decisions about *Bramshill* are cut from a similar cloth.

The cumulative impact of these editorial and paratextual processes, particularly when read alongside the dominance of *Bramshill* in the memoir itself, is to position Cope within a series of paradoxical dyads. She is required to be both present within the text and yet absent, bodied and yet bodiless, of primary and yet secondary interest. Cope’s familial capital allows her to anticipate many of these readings, as we have seen; nevertheless, it is worthwhile underscoring the impact of adults upon *Bramshill*. In writing about juvenilia from the 1920s, only a generation prior to the publication of Cope’s memoirs, David Sadler recognises the adult influence on child-authored texts of his era. “There was,” he writes, “a tendency to see the freshness and innocence of the child and their writings as a commodity demanded by their elders” (29), and although he cautions against readings of exploitation, he nevertheless recognises that there was an “appetite for childish ingenuousness which” these child-authors “helped to satisfy” (29). For the adult readers of her work, similarly, Cope needed to be the innocent child whose agency was present and foregrounded within the text whilst simultaneously acknowledging the impact and influence upon that creative agency of adult expectations and appetites. Such paradoxical dyads could often present themselves with brittle immediacy, as in the case we have already seen of Lockhart’s comment, quoted by the publisher on the dust wrapper for *Bygone Flowers*, being immediately followed by the publisher’s rejoinder in red italics: “If Joan Cope wrote and illustrated this book [*Bramshill*] unaided (*as she did—Publisher*).”

Hilary Carpenter’s review of *Bramshill* proceeds along a similar path. “The whole volume makes a curious *mélange*,” he asserts, “yet it achieves an undoubted balance” (63). He is concerned about Cope’s focus on the paranormal, an inappropriate subject for the “daughter of an ancient Catholic family” (63), and yet is ultimately fulsome in his praise: “The youthful author” has used “her many remarkable nascent gifts in producing this unique record of child memories” (63), and her “artistic taste and her draughtsmanship are as remarkable as her literary excellence” (63). Nevertheless doubt persists, and nowhere more noticeably than in the final sentence of his review: “We wonder what this child will become?” (63). I find it interesting that Carpenter is concerned not with *who* Cope becomes, for she is most clearly somebody of note due to both her authorial prowess and social position, but rather *what*. What was Cope destined to become? And if her future self is so difficult to imagine, let alone identify, then perhaps Carpenter is also asking what the world was to do with her.

The answer was complicated. Cope provided the qualities sought for in child-authors of the early-twentieth century, namely a sense of ingenuity and innocence, whilst also possessing the sophistication to document the final days of a noted country estate. She was a visible marker of changing times and societal shift in the wider world whilst also being firmly removed from such situations due to her

socioeconomic status and age. She wrote her memoirs, the story of her childhood, whilst also anticipating interest in the history of the estate itself. She was present in her own story and yet absent; a ghost, forced to haunt one story whilst telling another.

The “most haunted house”

FOR JUDITH Armstrong, the ghost within children’s literature symbolises “what-might-have-been as well as what has been” (66). Ghosts are “psychological possibilities” that are intended not to frighten but rather to provoke in readers a questioning of their own potentiality (59). Pointing to such examples as *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (Pearce), *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* (Lively) and *The Children of Green Knowe* (Boston), Armstrong argues that the ghost story in children’s literature is one that tries “to explore and enlighten, and the atmosphere is very rarely one of fear” (59). This is no text concerned with the “mechanics of fright” (59) but rather one of a subtler, more psychological exploration of the world.

Ghosts are also essential to *Bramshill*, but here they are not just symbols of “psychological possibilities”: they are things that exist in a practical and immediate sense. According to Cope, she lives in the “most haunted house” (3), and she recounts many stories of these hauntings for the reader. In doing so, however, she also explores her own psychological death and afterlife. The first ghost that she describes is the Mistletoe Bride who, “according to several versions of the legend, ... was actually an ancestress of ours” (3), although this history is at odds with Sir William Cope’s understanding of the legend. As he writes in *Bramshill: Its History and Architecture*, “the event never took place at Bramshill. No lady of my family ever died on her bridal day nor for years after it” (51). Nevertheless, Cope confidently claims the ghost as one of her own, and this centring of the familial is a key characteristic of her writing. She is unafraid and, indeed, unashamed of prioritising her family and their interests: “I will not pretend not to be,—for I am, and always will be desperately proud of my liniage [*sic*]” (5).

Having established her personal claim on the Mistletoe Bride, and having done so with alacrity, Cope moves on to describe the legend in full. The Mistletoe Bride is a young bride who proposes a game of hide and seek at a party. She goes off to hide but then is not found by the party guests. Time passes and her widower grieves until one day, they discover an old oak chest in the castle:

—A skeleton lay mouldering there,—
In the bridal wreath of that lady fair;
Oh sad was her fate,—in sportive jest,—
She hid from her lord in the old oak chest,—

It closed with a spring,—and dreadful doom!
The bride lay clasped in her living tomb.” (From the *Mistletoe Bough* by
Thomas Haynes Bailey, qtd. in Cope, *Bramshill* 4)

The chest itself remained with the Cope family “until about a hundred and twenty years ago the tenth Baronet, Sir Denzil’s widow took it away to her people” (3). According to Joan, her great-grandfather wrote to the then-owner in an attempt to claim it back: “If your heart is in the right place you will send me back my chest” (3). The reply came: “My heart is in the right place,—it is in my chest” (3).

The episode of the Mistletoe Bride is notable in how it entombs the feminine within Bramshill. It is an idea that Cope returns to throughout her memoirs and, indeed, something to which she herself contributes at its ending. In a chapter called “*Bramshill,—Adieu,*” written “more than a year and six months” after leaving the house (149), Cope describes her last day at Bramshill. She is somewhere around ten years old at the time, “desperately miserable” (149), and takes her time as she goes through the empty house to bid a “last little farewell,—to my beloved ancestors” (149). As she reaches the “front broad [*sic*] stone step,” she sits “down in the archway under the mouldering Renaissance [*sic*] carving,—crying as though my heart would break.” (149). It is at this point that Cope directly addresses the reader and asks them to imagine a very particular scenario:

... pretend I never did leave my home,—and leave me there,—more than a year and six months ago,—caressing the ancient cold stone of the walls that enclosed my ancestors for nearly two hundred [*sic*] & fifty years. . . . And now I float,—ever onwards into the blue grey mist of the dim unknown. . . . (149)

Rather than leaving Bramshill and the legacy of her ancestors behind, Cope instead writes her own death on its doorstep, entombing herself within the fabric of the building as much as the Mistletoe Bride was entombed within the oak chest. This is no house for the living but rather a mausoleum, and one in particular within which the voices of women are entrapped.

This entombment of the feminine persists and is emphasised when male ghosts are encountered. Cope reports coming across one such individual while she is in the pram and “could hardly talk” (15). Despite this limitation, she is still able to provide a description to her mother. The ghost is a “green man” who “Looks like Daddy . . . got no legs” (15). This turns out to be “an eccentric Cope,—a friend of George IV. Who had a kink about the colour of green” (17). Whilst alive, this lively individual “attracted double notice at Brighton [and] was an original . . . generally known by the appellation of the Green Man” (*The Globe*, 8 October 1806, qtd. in Cope 1938, p. 17). Despite returning to Bramshill in his afterlife, the ghost spent considerable amounts of his life beyond the estate. The explanation Cope offers for this is he had died by

suicide at cliffs at Brighton. This is “perhaps that is why I always saw him near water,—even a large puddle” (18). What is important to note here, I would argue, is that Cope witnesses the ghost outside of the house as, in comparison to the Mistletoe Bride, he is able to roam the estate freely and without limitation. The Mistletoe Bride, however, is entombed within the walls of the house itself.

These are not isolated incidents. Cope comes across other female ghosts, all of whom are entombed within the house. Some of them are restricted to certain rooms, such as the ghost Cope comes across in her mother’s room. This is a woman who wears “a high-waisted dark green velvet bodice,—cut in the style of the period of Charles I. and a pale rose-coloured skirt” (19). The mention of the monarch here suggests that the ghost dates from the early seventeenth century and thus from a time prior to the Cope’s ownership. Yet despite this distancing from the family legacy, the ghost remains tied to her mother’s bedroom and thus locked within the fabric of the feminine estate.

Again, in a chapter called “Two Little Tots,” Cope writes about a ghost who appears at her bedside:

In reality I found myself gazing at a youngish woman,—who must have once been quite good-looking,—even a beauty,—but death had deprived her of any charms. Her face was plump, but ashen grey, and all a trifle shadowy. [*sic*] (97).

Cope pursues this description at length:

But the most important thing of all about the girl were her eyes ... for they seemed to swallow up the rest of her entirely;—not that they were extra big,—but they were black with a kind of dead light in them. ... Oh I shall never forget those eyes for they gazed not *at* me but right *into* and through me. ... You felt that she saw ones soul;—and the worst part, they seemed so intensely sad,—and gave her whole face a drawn aspect. (97–98).

At their most immediate level, these passages show how confident and stylish a writer Cope could be. Her style is acute, precise, and she is able to conjure some dynamic moments of interest for the reader. It is clear to the reader that she is not interested in being scared by the ghost but rather in the “psychological possibilities” (Armstrong 59) that the encounter presents. Nevertheless, another reading demands our attention, and it is one which hinges on gender. In contrast to the lively and exterior movement of the Green Ghost, these female ghosts are uniformly held within the interior of the estate, trapped. They are not allowed to retain the qualities of their appearance into the afterlife but must rather fade and recede into the fabric of the house.

In the next chapter, “Sailing On,” a title characteristic of Cope’s breezy style, she returns to the “youngish woman” ghost. Cope sees this individual again, as does her brother, and the appearance of the ghost begins to subtly change in these encounters. Cope describes how the ghost’s cheeks look “almost as though they had tears rolling down them, ... her hair too was dishevelled and hung scarcely in ringlets by untidy locks” (101). The ghost no longer looks directly at Cope but rather “to the side with her eyes cast down” (101). She then finally appears to Cope’s brother, Anthony, twice. The first is when she pointed towards a nearby window and the second sees her appear “so indistinctly that he is not quite sure of it himself” before finally disappearing forever.

These episodes are practical demonstrations of how the landscape and building of Bramshill and indeed, the perpetuation of its narrative, could dominate and often erase feminine voice. It is noticeable that the Green Man ghost, for example, can be recognised as a noticeable ancestor whilst the “youngish woman” and the other female ghosts must disappear with decorous humility, unnamed. This disappearance is only hastened by Cope’s reaction to the “youngish woman” ghost for, upon her second visit, she gives herself “less time to take her in than before,—” and puts her “head quickly under the sheet,—like a tortoise with drawing into its shell” (101). Whilst this may be an understandable reaction for a young person presented with a ghost, it is at odds with Cope’s earlier descriptions of ghostly interactions. Here, it symbolises a denial of the feminine within Bramshill: Cope, the ghost, their stories and indeed their selves are destined to be consumed by the house itself.

“Pretend I never did leave”

FOR EDITH Olivier, *Bramshill* is a text full of endings. As she writes in her review for *Country Life*, Cope’s memoirs are the story of “two children who were the last of their race to inhabit Bramshill” (614) and thus depict a childhood that is “finished—irreplaceable and unforgettable.” (614). Olivier was a writer deeply concerned with the relationship between land and people and often explored issues of the supernatural in her own work. Her admiration for *Bramshill*... has some basis in these interests but also reflects her personal circumstances. As a socialite and hostess, connected to a wide circle of notable individuals, Olivier would have been familiar with the issues facing countryside houses in the early twentieth century. This period, later dubbed the fall of the country house, saw the private ownership of stately homes and landed estates in the United Kingdom rapidly diminish as many estates were sold off, in response to societal shifts that were reflected in an increasingly hostile legislative and economic environment towards privately owned large houses. Olivier addresses this history in her review where she writes about how *Country Life* and others wanted to adopt “a scheme like that which is carried out in the French chateaux” in order to save Bramshill (614). These words hint at the possibility of the

estate being given to or purchased by the state, an idea that would eventually come to fruition but not immediately and perhaps even then only due to the impact of the Second World War. The rationale for state ownership was simple: Bramshill was “the crowning achievement of a romantic and adventurous age” (614) and thus required securing against an unknown future. Here Olivier manages to claim something of a metaphorical toehold for herself and the readers of *Country Life* within the estate. It is a sign of the collective feelings towards national heritage at the time but also another reminder of the pull of Bramshill.

To Olivier, then, Bramshill is the relic of a bygone age but also has some place in the nation’s future. Her view of Cope is similarly paradoxical: she is a child and sibling, roles that imply continuity, but she is also the “the last of her race,” a curious and loaded phrase at best. In this way Cope is rendered familiar but also strange, knowable and yet unknowable, the “last of her race” and yet part of the nation’s collective heritage. As I have argued throughout this piece, such paradoxical dyads were no unfamiliar things for Cope. The cultural capital embedded within and about Bramshill that contributed so much to her family’s legacy, coupled with the reality of their financial necessity, often gave her no other theoretical position to adopt. Yet I suspect that Cope would not have wished to adopt any other. She was a writer who was fully aware of her lineage as a Cope and exerted considerable effort to centre that legacy within her work. It is no coincidence, then, that the text finishes with her imagined death upon the steps of Bramshill; for there is nothing, neither text nor author, without it. Joan Cope wrote her death on the doorstep of Bramshill and yet endured, survived.³

NOTES

¹ Cope, *Bramshill* 1.

² Leslie Poles Hartley, the later author of the notable *The Go-Between* (1953).

³ In 1953, when she was twenty-seven years old and the married mother of three (with two further children yet to come), Cope published a translation of Arabic poetry. *Arabic Andalusian Casidas* is her sole adult work. It is published by The Poetry Society, has a limited print run of four hundred and seventy five numbered copies and runs to just fifty eight pages. Roy Campbell’s preface to the volume is quietly reverential: “The prose translation which can be read as pure poetry is a rare thing. I am honoured to introduce such a rare thing in Lady Grant’s beautiful book.”

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