



## The Haunting of L.

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Much in the way that a developing picture gradually appears on photographic paper, Howard Norman's *The Haunting of L.* is slow and deliberate in its unveiling of characters and themes. Set in Canada in 1926, twenty-eight-year-old Peter Duvett leaves his job as a newspaper developer to travel to the frozen, remote town of Churchill, Manitoba, to become a photographer's assistant for Vienna Linn. He arrives on the same day that his employer marries the beautiful Kala Murie; before the wedding night is over, Peter and Kala have begun an affair.

Kala is obsessed with Georgiana Houghton's *The Unclad Spirit*, a book that details stories of photographs which have captured "uninvited guests," ghostly images of the deceased. Before long, Kala confesses to Peter that Vienna Linn has a wealthy and powerful patron in London, Radin Heur, who has paid extravagant sums for Linn to arrange horrific accidents that he is able to photograph for Heur's private collection. Having failed in one of his assignments, Linn has retreated to Churchill in fear of Heur's retribution. Although he soon becomes aware of Peter's affair with Kala, he takes no action save to draw his assistant into his scheme to regain his patron's good graces.

As Peter falls further in love with Kala Murie and begins to realize what depths his employer Linn will sink to, the reader comes to understand that Peter's personality is portrayed through the central metaphor of the "spirit photograph." Just as the photographs depict souls separated from their bodies, so is Peter detached from the harsh truth of his compliance with Linn's actions. Subtly and surely, the novel compels the reader toward Peter's final choice between Linn's moral ambiguity and Kala's search for meaning.

## Sources for Further Study

*The Atlantic Monthly* 289 (June, 2002): 112.

*Booklist* 98 (February 15, 2002): 971.

*The New York Times Book Review* 107 (April 21, 2002): 8.

*Publishers Weekly* 249 (January 7, 2002): 43.

## Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:  
<http://www.enotes.com/haunting-l-salem>