

THE POSTMODERN SPIRIT:
THE POSTMODERNIZATION OF THE GHOST FIGURE
IN TWENTIETH CENTURY NORTH AMERICAN FICTIONS

GERARD COLLINS



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in Twentieth Century North American Fictions

By

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Abstract

The ghost figure in twentieth-century fictions perfectly embodies the inclusion and normalization of formerly monstrous others that results from the loss of referents, questioning of boundaries, and destabilization of the self in the postmodern era. In an era of gross commodification, with all foundational truths under constant scrutiny, we adjust our self-constructs, unable to impose labels and meanings with certainty and, as recent depictions of spectres illustrate, supposed others become more of a daily presence. With identification and interpretation possible only in context, the beholder's hesitation is a space that contains the ghost. Dubiety regarding phantoms is lessening because uncertainty about former adversaries is increasingly giving way to an understanding of multiplicity in supposed others.

This thesis shows the ghost figure shifting from fearful other to nearly human. Chapter One explains the theory behind this dissertation. Chapter Two discusses the simultaneous absence and presence of a ghost in both Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. Chapter Three explores how two 1970s novels, Stephen King's *The Shining* and Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*, cast ghosts as both independent and specular at once. Chapter Four focuses exclusively on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in which the ghost is normalized almost instantaneously. Chapter Five analyzes Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* to show just how ubiquitous, elusive, and specular the ghost figure has become. Ultimately, the distinction between ghost and human has become so tenuous that the only productive response is to accept that the ghost and human, however different, are one.

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Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Postmodern Ghost

1.1 Everyday Gothic

A spectre is haunting postmodern literature. It is the spirit of normalization: the ever-decreasing gap between ourselves and that which we have long perceived as other. Every moment, our constructs of self, history, and boundaries are being weakened by an overload of information and a suspicion of foundational truths. Once destabilized, however, these historical narratives are reconfigured in transmogrified form to co-exist with the newly perceived reality, often in the form of ghosts. Really, they have never gone anywhere, since the “return of the repressed” is merely the recognition that repression, or the nomination of otherness, is futile and that uncertainty is perhaps our normal state. Increasingly, the world resembles one of those 1970s horror movies where we find that the ominous stranger is calling from inside our own house, and the law cannot protect us. Furthermore, our notions of normalcy, taboo, and illegality *never could* keep us safe; our sense of security was a time-honoured illusion. But in the postmodern era, such illusions are no longer possible, as new rules for engagement with formerly presumed adversaries appear constantly, ever-shifting to reflect and/or anticipate a new, referent-free, borderless, and indecipherable landscape. No figure in literature embodies this normalization of chaos more than the ghost, which, at the end of the twentieth century is represented with less hesitation and more acceptance of its innate combination of phantasm and human, of other and self. It is widely recognized that Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) marks a turning point in depictions of ghosts, leaving the reader in a state of suspended hesitation, knowing that to name the object in the proverbial mirror is to impose closure on an unsolvable question, which just gives rise to other ghosts. In effect, James’s irresolute narrative causes the text to overspill its presumed boundaries, making the unseen ghost

more palpable and pervasive than ever before; the nature of the text itself comes under scrutiny, as the haunting spreads through the novelist's unsolved hesitation. In the latter half of the century, widely-read authors like Shirley Jackson, Stephen King, Peter Straub, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, and Michael Ondaatje show us, increasingly, that chaos is normal, that spirits are present even in their absence, and that the identity of the ghost is both inextricable, and yet separate, from us. In literature, ghosts signify that peace of mind comes from surrendering to prolonged uncertainty about differences and embracing them as human, a shift that perpetuates a displacement of old self-constructs.

Definitions of the Gothic are just as numerous as those concerning the postmodern, with most major critics focusing on the Gothic's performance as a deviant, ever-shifting narrative. Jerrold Hogle suggests that one major difficulty in studying Gothic's rise is in how "pliable and malleable" it is, "stemming as it does from an uneasy conflation of genres, styles, and conflicted cultural concerns" (*Companion* 2). With a nod to this inherent instability and flexibility, Judith Halberstam describes Gothic fiction as a "technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known.... Gothic may be loosely defined as the rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader" (2). Fear often arises, she says, from a "vertiginous excess of meaning" (2), such as that reflected in the ornamental excess of Gothic architecture, "a rhetorical extravagance that produces, quite simply too much" (2). It is this looseness of style, its conglomerate nature, and dependence on emotion, which Becker also points to (23), that account for Gothic's lack of definition as much as for its otherness. As Halberstam suggests, the central monstrosity of a Gothic fiction "seems available for any number of meanings" (2), but most significantly, it often employs a monster that "condenses various racial and sexual threats to nation,

capitalism, and the bourgeoisie in one body” (3). Halberstam’s emphasis on the skin as “the ultimate boundary” in monster fiction is particularly useful in studying postmodern ghosts because, in traditional Gothic, the ghost is defined, at least physically, by its transparency or *lack* of skin—a trait that is in large part responsible for its perception as other. Nowadays, the ghost is, in fact, likely to have skin, even if it is rather afflicted because it still bears the marks of a perhaps-violent death or former life. In this way, since “the skin houses the body” by providing a material divider between the insides and outsides, the skin may be seen as a “text,” providing, as the Gothic does, “an elaborate skin show” by which we might read that with which we are confronted. Monsters are “meaning machines” (26) and the ghost (whether overtly monstrous or not) is certainly multiple in its signification. Ultimately, says Halberstam, Gothic “is the disruption of realism and of all generic purity,” (26) which, for the purposes of this thesis, is what makes it the perfect postmodern genre, since it has always been an anti-foundational structure without a structure.

As the postmodern Gothic evolves in the last half of the twentieth century, it becomes less of a disruption of the normal and more of an everyday sort of darkness. In fact, the postmodern ghost might be seen as the epitome of the cultural shift in emphasis from exclusiveness to inclusiveness, which is driven, at least in part, by capitalism. Notably, Terry Castle considers the Gothic to be the “first ‘postmodern’ experiment in English literary history” (“Novel” 678) because of its effort to “reanimate, artificially, an extinct historical style for the purposes of mass entertainment” (678). Furthermore, Fred Botting charts the manner in which Gothic fiction articulates the shift from a feudal economy to a bourgeois economy (“Aftergothic” 284-5), suggesting that economics play a role in the content and form of the Gothic. Thus, he observes that a shift in global economic practice in the twentieth century also has precipitated a modification in

the “significance” of the Gothic, as it “begins to shed its older negative associations and assumes a defining role within an anxious and uncertain postmodern culture” (285). As Botting says,

no longer objects of hate or fear, monstrous others becomes sites of identification, sympathy, desire, and self-recognition. Excluded figures once represented as malevolent, disturbed, or deviant monsters are rendered more humane while the systems that exclude them assume terrifying persecutory and inhuman shapes. (“Aftergothic” 286)

The result, he says, is a “reversal [that], with its residual Romantic identification with outcast and rebel, alongside its feeling for liberation and freedom, makes transgression a positive act and diffuses the negative charges of spectral paternal prohibition. Transgression becomes just another permitted social activity” (“Aftergothic” 286). So it is that transgressors also are seen as just another allowable normal event, which is where we now find the postmodern ghost; once a deviant narrative, the ghost is now an acceptable corollary to the normal.

Largely, it is the loss of a stable self that results from the destabilization of referents, history, and grand narratives that also transmogrifies artistic representations and cultural perceptions of phantasms. Botting surmises that today’s computer games are “fictions” that are indebted to horror cinema and the “generic history of Gothic fiction” (“Aftergothic” 277) whose depictions of “artificial sublimity” are comparable to eighteenth-century aesthetic notions confronting an event “whose immensity the mind cannot comprehend” (278). The result is a sense of identity destabilization as the viewer is first “overwhelmed by the spectacle” and alternately “elevated by the sense of grandeur,” much the same as Gothic architecture, or Radcliffe’s fiction, is designed to perform. In this way, “self-possession is lost then regained on another, more imaginative level” (278). Ultimately, “Gothic figures come to represent these anxieties and give

them fearful form as monsters, ghosts, and demons whose return terrifies bourgeois normality and undermines ordered notions of civilized humanity and rational progress” (“Aftergothic” 279).

Susanne Becker also sees a reflection of the eighteenth century in late-twentieth-century culture. Similar substantive changes mark both eras, and the Gothic that arises from such uncertain times is somewhat parallel. Becker marks the continuity while also noting the change:

Two hundred years after Radcliffe: the pull of the millennium, the sense of economic and ideological crisis, the advent of huge cultural shifts on a global basis. Gothic times again?

Yes: I think that in the 1990s we do live within a neo-gothic culture that not only recalls a comparable political and philosophical situation from the 1790s but also begins to suggest a major shift in postmodern culture on the threshold of a new century. (253)

Over the past hundred years or so we have seen treatments of ghosts in literature and popular culture, generally, that have both reflected and perpetrated a shift in social consciousness. Like the Gothic itself, the ghost has long been closeted, an unspeakable horror that has been quarantined for fear that it will contaminate. But now, the ghost (like the Gothic) is becoming not only a more common figure in literature of all genres and cross-genres of fiction, but is practically a ubiquitous figure in twentieth-century culture. Besides the novels discussed here (some Gothic, some gothicized), there are the multitudes of television shows, some reality ghost-hunting (rather like safaris, really, simply to observe, take pictures of the awesome other, and then return to daily life to talk about the experience as if it were a part of some other world that, really, is a part of the same world), and the use of words like “phantom,” “spirit,” and “ghost” on labels of all sorts to describe products of all kinds. The Gothic lifestyle is available in music (iconic singer/performer Marilyn Manson, British rock band The Darkness, or the more mainstream, Evanescence) and goth clothing (black cloaks, neck chains, skull-and-crossbone logos, jewellery and tattoos), all signs of a hip

youth culture that embraces the darkness (at least in part) for its “cool” factor. Most significant has been the spate of popular movies about ghosts which show phantoms as different from humans and yet the same, sometimes similar creatures dwelling on a different plane of existence, as in *The Others* (2001), or on the same plane as humans, as in *The Sixth Sense* (2000) or *Field of Dreams* (1989). Those first two films in particular show spirits, not as figments of the imagination, but as material beings and former “others” who are just different forms of human.

Castle astutely suggests that our twentieth-century “nervous laughter” over the “macabre” nature of the Gothic genre “merely indicates how much further the process of repression has advanced in our day” (“Spectralization” 243). This “nervous laughter” can certainly be seen in media portrayals of spirits such as television advertisements and movies which show them as friendly, benign, or even insipid. Humorous films like *Ghostbusters* (1984), *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Casper* (1995), and *The Frighteners* (1996) share a psychological and physical space with more supposedly frightening fare such as *The Amityville Horror* (1979), *Ghost Ship* (2002), and *The Grudge* (2004). Furthermore, in the last few years of the twentieth century we see more depictions of ghosts who are both friendly and frightening or, more to the point, ambiguous in their alliances. Movies such as *The Return of the King* (2003), *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003), and television shows such as *Ghost Whisperer* and *Medium* humanize the ghost and show how thin, or non-existent, the veil is between “us” and “them.” More and more, we are unsure how to react to any ghosts, for even when we are expected to cower in fear, we might just as well be convulsing in laughter. And yet, underlying these dueling emotions is a hint of uneasiness about the connotations of these media-made ghosts that are based on no original but are copies of past copies drawn from the fictions of Radcliffe, Dickens, and Poe, and such late modernist films as *The Ghost and Mr. Chicken* (1966) and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947), even late Sixties television series like

Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased), whose human half of the human-ghost detective agency was obsessively ashamed of his relationship with a spirit that no one else could see. And then, of course, there are our own imaginings (though it is nearly impossible to claim such an inheritance as uniquely our own) about how ghosts might look and behave.

Of course, the most significant change to the ghost in recent years is that it is no longer exclusively a gothic “monster.” Long relegated to the realm of the other, the ghost in literature has entered on both sides of the mirror between the human beholder and its perceived binary opposite. This placement is merely a matter of acknowledgement, perhaps, for the ghost always has occupied the middle ground. The postmodern era, however, with its wholesale challenge and reworking of foundational categories such as history, science, law, and genre brings a wider recognition that the ghost is fused with the human, that the Gothic is not antithetical to the literary, that the supernatural is natural, and that reactions to the ghost are less marked by horror than they once were. Over the past century, the hesitation to nominate a ghost because of the uncertainty, fear, and chaos inherent in such an utterance has given way to a recognition, naming, and embracing of the very things we have long been expected to fear. Thus, it can be argued, the postmodernization of the ghost is a process of gradually accepting the insolubility of hesitation, embracing chaos as normal, seeing spectral images both as mirrors of ourselves and yet exterior to us at the same time, and seeing them as “simulacra” that bespeak of repressed history, even as we deny that there is any such thing. Furthermore, while the ghost’s otherness dissipates, its differences from the human still assert themselves. Increasingly, spectres in literature are becoming seen as speculars at the same time as they are being humanized and normalized; equally, the human is being specularized and destabilized with the prevailing challenge to foundational narratives and an accompanying subversion of personal identity constructs.

It is not by sudden transformation or by accident that the Gothic has achieved its current state. Castle has laid important groundwork in the study of ghost-normalization, offering a bridge between Ann Radcliffe's eighteenth-century Gothic and the ghost literature of today, showing the beginning of a centuries-old process of spectralization of the everyday. Asserting the Gothic's literary genesis as an anti-foundational, "savage" genre, Castle suggests that the spirits in Radcliffe's novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), signify a shift in cultural perspectives on the supernatural. With Radcliffe, ghosts started to be seen as part of daily events, a veritable "spectralization of the other" in which the supposed enemy, a near-physical manifestation of the self's desires, was depicted as a spirit from the land of the dead, but dwelling in the world of the living and usually not seen. In *Udolpho*, she says, "the supernatural is not so much explained... as it is displaced" into the "realm of the everyday" wherein "the old-time spirit world is demystified, the supposedly ordinary secular world is metaphorically suffused with a new spiritual aura" ("Spectralization" 236). Prior to Radcliffe, "mental simulacra, especially images of other people, had been clearly distinguished as such—as fanciful, nostalgic, or unreal," says Castle, although the exceptions were "the ambiguous visionary phenomena known as ghosts or spectres" which were "felt to exist outside the self, as real—if not material—objects of sense" ("Spectralization" 247). By the end of the eighteenth century, however, spirits had come to seem "even more real at times than the material world from which they presumably derived" (247), thereby suggesting a relative move towards materiality and the human plane, as opposed to the "Invisible World" to which Dickens's Jacob Marley refers (38). As well, Castle concludes that "human beings become ghostly too—but in an antitethical sense that they seem insubstantial and unreal" (249). As the dead "migrate" to the mind so, too, do the living, so that they occupy the same space. Most significantly, Castle asserts that "a crucial feature of the new sensibility of the late eighteenth

century was... a growing sense of the ghostliness of other people,” a sensibility that has become “completely naturalized” in the twentieth century (237). Furthermore, the “anti-Gothic prejudices of early modernism” in the twentieth century have lately given way to a keen interest in “mentalité” and historical detail. In our own age, in which “demonic images from the past haunt us sleeping and waking,” we see that the Gothic resurgence of the late eighteenth century provides a “powerful reflection of our own aspirations and fears” (678).

Thus, the process of unification, or full intellectual sympathy, between self and other begins with the earliest depictions of ghosts and continues with Radcliffe, persisting in the nineteenth century and into the modern and postmodern eras. Indeed, this “spectralization of the other” has become a “normalization of the spectre” in the postmodern era wherein it is not just a matter of the “other” becoming ghostly, but of the ghostly becoming routine. Radcliffe undoubtedly suffuses the everyday with hints of both the supernatural and the Gothic, and her “safe” explanations that there are no ghosts *this time* scarcely dispel the reader’s fright. Still, Radcliffe attempts (even if half-heartedly) to close the door that she has opened. It is the reader who must shut it completely, but, as in Jackson’s Hill House or King’s Overlook Hotel, it is a portal not easily shut once opened. In the postmodern era we see a further deepening of the materiality of ghosts as they are depicted not just in the mind, but in the everyday, external world—not just in Radcliffean (or even Carpathian) mountains and castle ruins, but in plain sight, in the flesh (both literally and figuratively), with plenty of witnesses and with much interactivity between ghosts and humans.

Despite the continuity in the reputation of ghosts over time, one can discern a subtle, but significant, break between those ghosts and those of late twentieth-century literature. There is, for example, no way that one can place such full-bodied ghost-characters as Peter Straub’s Eva Galli or Morrison’s Beloved alongside *any* eighteenth- or nineteenth-century ghost and say they act, speak,

and signify the same. Contemporary writers are more likely to re-imagine history and claim new qualities for their Gothic monsters. One might think of the newly-discovered Judas gospel or the vampires depicted in Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*; Jesus and vampires, gods and demons, are all subject to a binarily opposite, equalizing, normalization. There is a tendency among writers and artists in the postmodern era simply to tally and empty out the signifiers by denying them an individuation and meaning (which, nonetheless, will assert themselves despite their ineffectuality). Naming has become less an attempt at truth-signification than a mere matter of convenience. A hesitation to apply labels to an experience, then, which has long been the norm in confronting eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century ghosts, gradually decreases as the twentieth century advances. While we still play the "language game," to use Lyotard's phrase, when faced with a spirit, we are more likely to be concerned with how it performs than with what to call it.

In our time, Gothic is merely harnessed and tamed, residing amongst so-called civilized company under the guise of postmodern Gothic. Critics praise it, academics study it, and readers generally devour it. But there always remains the sense that the Gothic only allows you to pet it despite its natural proclivity for chewing off your hand. The postmodern ghost is both destabilizing (as in *Beloved*) and stabilizing (as in *Beloved*, after the ghost departs). Furthermore, the ghost is stabilizing in its absence, which has been preceded by its presence. That is, the ghost's healing, or stabilizing, influence comes just as much from its having been there as from its renewed absence. It may well be that the ghost has always been postmodern in some ways, but one can mark a distinction between, say, the shape-shifting ghost of Eva Galli in Peter Straub's 1979 novel and the ghost of Christmas Past in Dickens' 1843 text. Straub's and Dickens's phantoms share much in common, metaphysically and symbolically; the biggest superficial difference might be that Eva Galli is the ever-changing (simulated, fictional) and unfixed spirit of a person of unknowable

origins while the ghost of Jacob Marley is the static, creaking old ghost of a very specific individual. The past that Marley represents is sentimental and horrible, but mostly dream-like, abstract, largely empty, and simulated. The Straub ghost represents a past that is likewise simulated, but neither ghost represents the future, for they are simulacral phantoms bearing no relation to “any reality whatsoever” (Baudrillard 10), despite Dickens’s claims for the Ghost of Christmas Future. That is because the past, which can only be simulated, is unable to be represented, only faked (or “counterfeited,” to use Hogle’s word) and in a rather transparent way, at that. To appropriate Hogle’s similar comments on Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), “there is no level” in either of these novels that is “not fake *and* a faking of what is fake already” because, as in *The Monk*, all of the “passionate desires” in the book are “aroused, intensified, and answered by images more than objects or bodies, by signifiers...more often than signifieds or referents” (“Ghost of the Counterfeit” 1). These images are more surface than depth (“more of gravy than of grave”), and the signifiers are shifting in their signification. Both Straub’s and Dickens’s ghosts inspire reactions from protagonists and readers by a series of depthless images and signifiers that resembles Jameson’s concept of the “endless slideshow,” pretending to offer up images of the past while really doing nothing of the sort. The agenda, as Hogle points out, is the “ideological endeavour to fashion a viable selfhood...that employs hollowed-out signs” as ways to market or “sell the acquisitive and uncertainly grounded self in an increasingly capitalist world” (“Ghost of the Counterfeit” 3). In a paradox typical of postmodern theory, these ghosts potentially represent a reality which allows only simulation rather than representation—a reality in itself, despite the assertion by Baudrillard that representations of reality are impossible.

Thus, the long process of the “normalization of the spectre” has shifted in the latter half of the twentieth century so that the ghost is no longer seen as simply other, but is at once a part of the

self and an external entity, in part because of an overspilling of supposed textual boundaries. A key difference between these newer ghosts and those of modernism is in their embodiment of all possibilities, including sameness and otherness, and their depictions as normal while retaining the differences that make them uniquely phantoms. They are empty signifiers, full and empty of meaning all at once (though the emptied signifier returns immediately, at times with a vengeance), at once dead and living, at once symbolic and empty. The ghost is a simulacrum, a copy of a copy without an original and it is a commodity with value only for those who see it and buy it out of equal parts fear and desire. In an era marked by its questioning (and near dissolution and always-already return) of boundaries, labels and foundational truths, the ghost figure is ubiquitous, meaning nothing and everything because its signification is variable, depending on the beholder. As well, for as much as spectres once signified chaos, they now signify the potential for unification between adversaries; and yet, the received narrative of otherness is ever-present, but invisible.

Both the Gothic and postmodern theory ascended in popularity under similarly destabilizing conditions. The common, “crucial elements” are the “influence of science on perceptions of human knowledge and identity; the impact of increasing urbanization and mechanization; the accelerating collapse of the social and cultural hierarchies which had traditionally dominated the West” (Gregson 1). Hurley, Halberstam, and Hogle each account for *fin de siècle* Gothic in similar manner at the end of the nineteenth century as advances in sciences and human knowledge create a fracture in selfhood and belief systems. Even at that time, the “I” becomes destabilized as the world’s boundaries are shaken and stirred, becoming more ghostly, so to speak, in contrast to science’s propensity for fixing boundaries “between normalcy and deviance, human and abhuman,” essentially categorizing human identity (Hurley 27). Hurley explains that “Gothic is the realm of disorder, wherein cultural ordering systems are revealed as always already having collapsed” (28),

and, since chaos suggests an unlimited array of possibilities, the Gothic's "obsession with abominations" manifests "a certain gleefulness at the prospect of a world in which no fixity remains, only an endless series of monstrous becomings" (28). Becker posits that the Gothic "always contextualizes what is most virulent and active in its time and culture" (256); as such, following three decades, from the 1960s through the 1990s, in which emotional fiction found no place in postmodern discourse, the Gothic, which has always been "proudly" anti-realist (Becker 1), helped form part of the "subversive" undercurrent. Now, the Gothic "shapes a media culture that feeds the need for emotional directness and instant gratification simmering beneath postmodern intellectualism" (283).

Considering nineteenth-century Gothic and, specifically, the short stories of preeminent Gothicism Edgar Allan Poe, we can see that ghost stories of that era usually exhibit an obsession with fear, especially towards death. That fear seems to arise largely from the notion that death, and therefore the ghost, is itself other: not an extension of life, but the end of life, giving rise to an oppositional force. With the rituals, denial, and bleak periods of mourning that accompany death, there is little that is markedly normalized about representations of it. Because he wishes his stories to be "realistic" above all, to maintain the "effect" that he considers paramount, Poe does not use "real," unambiguous ghosts. Part of realism, for Poe, is an acknowledgement that humans, generally, fear death; at any rate, his narrators are fearful. In story after story, he portrays revenants as loathsome creatures attempting to snatch his narrators from this world and drag them to the grave or force them to live out terrified existences (on the other side of the mirror) thereafter.

But while Poe acknowledges some specularly, he never implies that there is no other side. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the telltale sign is the narrator's final flight *away* from the madhouse (not towards it, as Eleanor Vance does in *The Haunting of Hill House*). Like Ichabod

Crane attempting to traverse the bridge between himself and his other, Poe's narrator crosses the "causeway" that separates him from the Ushers and, in turning to see what he is leaving behind, sees by the light of a full moon that the "once barely discernible fissure" in the house's foundation has now begun to widen "rapidly" until finally the house collapses in on itself (Poe 101). Thus, the "hideous dropping of the veil" (80) is complete, revealing only an insane brother who has buried alive his ill sister, a woman subsequently escaped from the tomb. There are no ghosts here, but the fear of death, madness, and contamination is abundant. A more personal and intimate portrait of death occurs in "Ligeia," wherein the narrator's lover has died and been entombed, only to return from death, or so it appears. The narrator expects her death to "come without its terrors," but finds otherwise (43). By his own admission, Poe's narrator is confused by an opium addiction, stultifying darkness, a heavy breeze that plays with the curtains (48), and a "vague terror" of his new mistress's death (49). Ultimately, he presides over the dying of his new wife while she appears to die, then revivifies, over and over, while the narrator watches her "struggle with some invisible foe," slipping evermore towards "irredeemable death" (53). He is never truly sure that the "enshrouded" corpse that walks "boldly and palpably" towards him is the second wife (Rowena), his first wife (Ligeia), or a product of his "mad disorder" of mind (54). His enduring horror, however, is indubitable, since Poe does not reveal whether there is a ghost and where exactly she comes from: reality or imagination, or both. A more postmodern authorial stance might reflect that such decisions are useless and unreliable, harmful in themselves. The overriding pattern of fear towards external threats of death, disease, and madness as an infliction pervades Poe's works, of which "Berenice," "The Black Cat," and his poem "The Raven" are further examples. Most times, in a Poe story, the beholder is thereby exonerated from responsibility for ghostly apparitions;

dulled and confused by either madness, lucid dreaming, darkness, drugs, or mourning, the haunted protagonist finds a terrifying other.

Nor was it just Poe who conveyed this fearful attitude towards death and its spawned entities. Protagonists in the works of Irving and Hawthorne, the other two preeminent American storytellers of their time, were equally fearful when confronted by spectres. Irving's Headless Horseman, from whom the citizens of Sleepy Hollow flee in terror of losing their heads, is the epitome of the fearful spectre. Likewise, Hawthorne populates his fictional Salem with characters who fear the past and the possibility of its return in phantasmagoric form, the dividing line between ghost and human being clear and irreparable. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, in fact, Phoebe, the pretty young protagonist has a "gift of making things look real, rather than fantastic, within her sphere," and yet it is a "questionable venture" for her to "cross the threshold of the seven gables," wondering if her

healthful presence [is] potent enough to chase away the crowd of pale, hideous, and sinful phantoms that have gained admittance there.... Or will she, likewise, fade, sicken, sadden, and grow into deformity, and be only another pallid phantom, to glide noiselessly up and down the stairs, and affright children, as she pauses at the window? (297)

The ghostly threat is removed, nonetheless, after a rather long build-up regarding a Pyncheon family curse upon the house of the seven gables. But the inferred boundary between Phoebe's human "realm" and that ghostly realm which she fears joining is obvious, the mere ability to frighten children as a ghost being the most probable fate for the healthy young woman.

The main difference between older ghosts and the newer ones lies in the postmodern penchant for inclusiveness rather than the modern insistence on autonomy, a shift that owes its occurrence to the very same capitalistic and communication forces that Fredric Jameson, Jean

Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, and numerous other critics point to as forces of the postmodern. It is an era in which we see artists as a part *of*, and not apart *from*, society; an age when former opposites and enemies are humanized and normalized, becoming part of our daily lives. Thus, it is no surprise that artistic representations of ghosts should be more inclusive, more about commonality, humanization, and, particularly, normalization than ever before. In the past, nomination has been largely a matter of warring truths. But the postmodern allows for only provisional truths, and such battles for ideological primacy become unnecessary and, if they appear to happen, are merely staged: “What no longer exists is the adversity of adversaries, the reality of antagonistic causes, the ideological seriousness of war. And also the reality of victory or defeat, war being a process that triumphs well beyond appearances” (Baudrillard 38). Each fiction discussed in this thesis features such a war at its heart, but it is an illusory war between a self and an other, both of whom have been displaced by the advent of the ghost. It is under such circumstances that the ghost becomes normalized and not quite the other that it once was. While still retaining difference, the ghost is no longer an adversary, and we are certainly no longer at war, except in some fictions that still sell otherness in a marketplace overflowing with choice.

In *The Turn of the Screw*, the haunting is increasingly both internal and external, besides mirroring the particular desires and fears of the beholder, so that there is no visible dividing line between the ghost’s existence and its beholder’s wishes. But what marks it as particularly postmodern in spirit is the insoluble, unrepresentable nature of the ghost, and the manner in which James brings attention to his own narrative-building and the multiple nature of a haunting. Leder astutely points out that a realization of our connection with the spirit world and its inherent reflection on the human one is not new to twentieth-century literature, for readers of Poe’s fiction in the early nineteenth century were “confronted with the dissolution of boundaries that

accompanies the penetration of unknown territory” (32). But postmodernization requires more than a “penetration of the unknown”; although it advances with such a breach, postmodernization requires a recognition of difference, signaled by a movement towards commonalty, rather than away from it. Unlike Ichabod Crane, Phoebe Pyncheon, or an Edgar Allan Poe narrator, protagonists of more recent ghost fictions are more apt to hold, feed, embrace, and empathize with their attached spectres than to run away from them. Traditionally, spectres have been depicted as abnormal, insane, and taboo. But contemporary literature normalizes ghosts, portraying them as entities that are not necessarily opposed to society’s norms, but mere extensions of the narrative of “normal,” needing only to be dragged into the light of day to decrease the fear component and rectify the illusory traditional power imbalance between those who fear and those who are feared. “Binary structures are always power structures,” Becker notes (44), emphasizing the divide between privileged (master) and unprivileged (slave), normal (white, male, or human) and abnormal (black, female, and ghost). The predominant discourse creates an oppositional discourse, she says, but in late twentieth-century fiction the ghost figure is more recognizably an element of the human experience and the discourse is less oppositional, more inclusive. When ghosts appear in these fictions, the author bypasses the beholders’ hesitation to name, for postmodernization of the ghost is a process of minimizing the gap between utterance and response, between ghost and nomination.

At the end of the twentieth century, the space of hesitation is more quickly filled with the nomination “ghost” because these newer ghost stories are less about fear than their early-century predecessors were. These fictions are more about accepting the simultaneous possibility of meaning and meaninglessness, and embracing our others, holding a mirror up to ourselves to show us what we are, what we fear becoming and desire, but also to reflect the unsolvable nature of

questions of self and identity. Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977), and Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* (1979) all retain elements of older Gothic tradition, featuring ghosts with a trace of the fearful other. But each succeeding novel shows more and more of James's influence in the illustration of the ghost's human origins and mirroring nature, as well as the manner in which ghost stories circulate and infiltrate. By the end of the 1970s, Straub's novel even features storytelling characters named James and Hawthorne, while King explicitly acknowledges both Jackson and Poe as touchstones for his own brand of ghosting. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988), depicting the text as an undecipherable question, veers from traditional depictions of phantoms by making the ghost both real (almost human) and a specular of various characters, occupying the same space and interacting materially. In the following decade, Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* (1993) and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000) forego the necessity for nomination, relinquish hesitation, and accept the ubiquitous, insoluble nature of spirits. Ghosts in these novels represent the forgotten, repressed past; but they also offer hope for a more tolerable present and future through transcendence of that version of the past.

1.2 Postmodern Times are Gothic Times

Numerous features of postmodernism are relevant to the postmodernization of the ghost, which is largely a process of normalizing that which has long been other, a change that is signaled by a gradual reduction in the hesitation to nominate. Most significantly, these elements include the loss, and simultaneous return, of referents, as well as postmodernism's movement towards borderlessness, at once unsettling the old sense of self (and other) and instigating a new sense of self (and other). Botting sees the postmodern era marked by a "lack of credulity" of meta-narratives (modernity, science, democratic government, and so on), paralleled by "increasingly

nonhuman economic interests pursued by techonoscience and corporate bureaucracy”

(“Aftergothic” 292). In essence,

to live in Gothic times at present means that Gothic loses its older intensity, shedding some of the allure of darkness, danger, and mystery. A matter of life-style, life-choice, even personal taste, Gothic currently exists in domains of fashion and entertainment as one genre among many: normalized and commodified. (“Aftergothic” 287)

With the reconfiguration of traditional communities, family, bodies (being surgically altered), the “bonds of human culture are unraveled. There is a ‘gap’ or ‘divide’ between human formations and machines of production, innovation, and the exchange” which is “a source of anxiety, a black hole of horror which no single figure can fill” (292). Since there are “no limits to what commerce can exploit in these techno-Gothic times” (292), the result is a loss of self wherein the

modern subject defined in terms of individual, familial, and national identity as a morally responsible, rationally self-conscious, and economically productive being is no longer a central figure. Instead, as a consumer of goods and services, she/he is determined by what she/he buys: identity is externalized as an effect of images, consumer object, and the lifestyles they conjure up. Integral identity is hollowed out and filled up by the rapid, repetitious transmission of images (292),

which are simulations themselves, neither real nor representations of any real; they are without meaning. It might be added, with regard to ghost fictions, the consumer “buys” an image that promises terror, danger, and so on—reflecting the buyer’s nostalgia for a time when foes (and perhaps friends) were obvious and predictable. Increasingly, though, as mentioned, some ghost fictions promise truth, life-lessons, and even humour regarding such adversarial attitudes. Whether they deliver, however, is largely a matter of “buyer beware,” for the ghost is what it does. Gothic

has always been a provocative, rebellious fiction, “against order, control, and powers of restrictive ideologies,” Becker points out, and “this skeptical time seems to need the most provocative, rebellious—and for some nihilistic—narrative form to provide resonance and orientation without enforcing what is both dreaded and desired: order and stability” (4).

It is a commonplace that postmodernity resists simple definition. Nonetheless, as with the Gothic, there are traits and performances of the postmodern which give it a consistent, though rather loose, shape. Postmodernism operates in part as a theory that has taken hold, particularly in academia, in the latter half of the twentieth century, concerning the breakdown of the previous causal relationship between signifiers. In this framework, all truths, all grand narratives, boundaries, and monoliths are constantly being challenged. As Leah Wain suggests, in the postmodern, “multiple meanings are possible and any single meaning is suspended” (370). Similarly, Gregson summarizes that “the dominant attitude in postmodernism is disbelief,” while the “dominant strategy of both postmodern philosophy and postmodern aesthetics is deconstruction, which is disbelief put into practice” (47). As such, because deconstruction is “an anti-system, or a system that subverts systems” and “exposes mechanisms,” one can easily see that he considers the predominant postmodern philosophical stance to be skepticism.

Most often, postmodernism can be understood in terms of its relation to the period that preceded it. Jameson, for one, defines postmodernism as “what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good” (*Postmodernism* ix), again reflecting the postmodern absence of causal relationships between signifiers. Wain sees it as a “continuation in a certain manner of the project of modernism,” suggesting that, for example, “where modernism argues for the fragmentation of narratives, postmodernism *performs* their dissemination” while resisting historicism (360). Likewise, Niall Lucy does not see postmodernism as radical, but as a

“generalization or flattening out of the romantic theory of literature which marks it as a ‘radical’ theory of nonfoundational, structureless ‘structure’ of truth” (x). This paradox of “inside/outside relations,” Lucy says, extends “across the whole field of culture and society” so that “what was once the romantic space of the literary becomes, for postmodernism, a general plane of human existence, on which concepts of identity, origin and truth are seen as multiple and structureless assemblages” (ix). The constant would seem to be that postmodernism is what it does, making it difficult to define, but relatively easy to see at work. Meanwhile, what postmodernism does is to empty signifiers of any fixed meaning; what happens after that might be considered the *effects* of postmodernism, which still might be considered a part of it, perhaps even the major part, since postmodern narratives are performative.

While the last half of the twentieth century since the Second World War has been known as “the postmodern period” particularly in reference, if abstractedly, to the artistic developments of that time, the term is “somewhat synonymous with a knowing self-referentialism in a work of art” (Wain 259). Ultimately, however, for most observers, “postmodernism is a move *away* from narrative, from representation” (Gregson 2). Its origins go back at least to the Victorian period and the “cultural crisis of that time” precipitated and/or accompanied by scientific theory, especially Darwinism, and scientific discourses, “especially geology,” but the “crisis deepened in the modernist period” (Gregson 19). The word “postmodernism” originally referred to a definition for a certain architectural style and was first employed by literary critics in the 1940s as a definition for experimental writing which proceeded modernism. But the name came into its current most frequent usage as a school of theoretical thought in the 1970s and 1980s. Largely, postmodernity presents a number of key concepts, namely “non-representation, undecidability, fragmentation, and dissemination” (Wain 363), which concern just about every treatise on the postmodern. These

ideas emanate in large part from a troika of theorists: Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, and Jean Baudrillard, although many others of note have written about postmodernism. The postmodern ghost may, or may not, exhibit all of these traits, but their increasing inclusion in western culture is a commodification and normalization that seems directly attributable to postmodern times.

In many ways, postmodernization is a reaction to, and extension of, high modernism. A quasi-romantic movement in art that desires unification of humanity, modernism (roughly from 1880 to 1920) nonetheless also proclaims the artist's autonomy from social influences. In contrast, postmodernism is an inclusive theory of art and humanity that, while embracing difference, does not promote otherness; it is a non-foundational, ahistorical, apolitical concept that purports to have no agenda. And yet it is associated with late capitalism in modern society—a point when the process of commodification has emptied all signifiers of their meaning, including their history. Postmodernism does not search for meaning; it grants preeminence to no single meaning over others and yet allows for all possible meanings—hence, its inclusive properties. This “break” from the “waning or extinct hundred-year-old modern movement” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 1) marks the end of a variety of forms of expression, possibly including Gothic, and “what follows, then, at once becomes empirical, chaotic, heterogeneous” (1-2).

Gregson distinguishes between modernism and postmodernism on the point of self-referentiality, or self-consciousness. Modernism, he says, “inaugurated an unprecedented self-consciousness about writing out of a historical epoch and responding to its cultural conditions. In the postmodern period that self-consciousness has reached highly sophisticated levels and has been incessantly theorized” (xiii). He suggests that this shift has been strengthened by its endorsement from academic institutions and the publishing industry (xiii) and points to the period of the Second World War, particularly the Holocaust, as an “obsessive focus” for postmodernists. “There were

historical and social changes,” he says, “which caused radical shifts in cultural perceptions and therefore caused the break away from modernism.” Among these changes are

the end of the empire; the rise of the women’s movement, black and power and gay pride; the hugely increasing importance of popular culture; the enormous expansion of secondary and further education. Key economic and social changes are associated with postmodernism, which have been identified with ‘late capitalism’, especially the shift from economic structures based on heavy industry to those based on technology. (Gregson 1-2)

Technology and media, “especially television,” have also had a deep impact on “social experience and cultural perception,” creating a “crucial postmodern phenomenon,” as Lyotard asserts in *The Postmodern Condition* (Gregson 2).

As distinct from the modernist “embrace of autonomy,” reflecting an “obsession with purity,” the postmodern questions the “inevitable self-delusions and hypocrisies that deliberately chosen posture of alienation [and self-alienation] entail” (McGowan 8-9). Thus, paradoxically, in many twentieth century ghost fictions we might see an isolated protagonist in *Beloved*’s Sethe or *Ghost Story*’s Ricky Hawthorne, initially standing alone from society. On the other hand, we have ghosts whose performances within the novels suggest, and even encourage, inclusion—an attraction between self and other, individual and world. We see autonomous individuals in *Hill House*, *The Shining*, *The Robber Bride*, and *Anil’s Ghost* who are alienated from their families and/or society but find kindred spirits in the ghosts that haunt them. They move towards inclusion even as the ghost mocks their confusion about whether they belong. Time and again, the protagonist seeks individuation only to find that attempts at both separation (from the human) and attachment (with the ghost) are futile. The ghost is specular, just as the human is, each similarly hungry for what is missing, perpetually experiencing a sort of emotional/ psychological void.

Despite some differences, all theories of the postmodern bear basic similarities, claiming for postmodernism an anti-foundational, “small narrative,” decentering quality. The negative, potentially anarchical (but also potentially utopian), feature with which postmodernism is often associated arises largely from a breakdown in meaning wherein individuals and their utterances are emptied, conveying signification only in the relationship between speaker and respondent, even while the utterance itself carries historical connotations of its own. Even then, the “breakdown of temporality” or solid, unchanging referents leads both utterance and subject to become like sentences in “free-standing isolation” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 28). As such, “the only point of reference for postmodernism, in the absence of anything else, is itself, as self-reference” (Wain 260). As Lyotard describes it, postmodernization is a process of emptying signifiers of their previously supposed meaning, granting that meaning is gained in the “exchange” between subject and object because knowledge ceases to “be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use-value’” (*Condition 3*). The chain effect of this process is that “grand narratives” lose their claim to truth and that “truth” itself is an unfixed concept, constantly interrogated.

The displaced “grand narrative” most often referenced by postmodernists is history, which is considered to be absent—a potentially destabilizing notion that has great significance for a discussion of ghosts, which usually are thought to represent the past but, in fact, signify timelessness, or a “flattened” continuum of a sort. Postmodernism is, perhaps above all, ahistorical, recognizing that all times are one, and the one time is the present. While it is Baudrillard who is most famously concerned with the end of representation, culminating in the concept of the “simulacra,” notions of postmodernism as anti-narrative and anti-representation are evident in Lyotard’s writings. In fact, one of the defining features of Lyotard’s rendering of postmodernism as a discourse is that it “replaces grand narratives with little narratives” (Wain

363), displacing beliefs in monolithic structures in favor of acknowledging the non-foundational and the structureless narrative, which, of course, is potentially a monolithic structure in itself. According to the postmodern, history is a “form of fiction” or at least a narrative with no greater claim to authoritative status than any other narrative (Wain 260). As Wain explains, Lyotard’s recognition that historical narratives are being destabilized, only to be replaced with other “totalizing narratives,” leads him to pursue an “alternative narrative which involves desire and the Sublime.” Since, according to Wain and Lyotard, “non-representation signals absence,” this absence itself “perpetuates the desire (itself an event) for something, that other thing, which is not yet unrepresented (Wain 365). In ghost novels, it is usually a phantom (whose presence is first signaled by an absence or silence) that fulfills the function of the “something.”

Filling the void created by non-representation with a classic Marxist narrative, Jameson denotes the postmodern era, like Lyotard, as one in which knowledge is commodified by the “all-pervasive” forces of capitalism (or “late capitalism”),¹ particularly mobility and miniaturization, which concerns itself largely with “mass-production and image” (Wain 260). Broadly understood, advertising and mass consumerism have contributed to an environment in which the image, taken for “real,” has become its own referent. Jameson elaborates that the so-called “signified” is “now rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves” (*Postmodernism* 26). In effect, then, signifiers share a language in which they signify to each other, independent of any beholder. When

¹Jameson’s term for advanced commodification, “late capitalism,” has two main features, including a “tendential web of bureaucratic control” and “the interpenetration of government and big business” (*Postmodernism* xviii); Jameson elaborates: “Besides the forms of transnational business..., its features include the new international division of labor, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges..., the forms of media interrelationship, computers and automation, the flight of production to Third World areas, along with all the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies and gentrification on a new global scale” (xix). More specifically, “What ‘late’ generally conveys is rather the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with older convulsions of modernization and industrial” (xxi).

that relationship between signifiers “breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers.” The result is a linguistic malfunction and the psyche of the schizophrenic may then be grasped by way of a twofold proposition: first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future within one’s present; and second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language.... If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience of psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or... a series of unrelated presents in time. (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 26-7)

While this “breakdown of the signifying chain” characterizes the postmodern crisis, it also describes the function of the ghost in literature, enmeshing the beholder(s) in a timeless, spaceless condition without any of the usual referents available because everything about his or her received narrative has been thrown into question. One need look no farther than Eleanor Vance at Hill House, the governess at Bly, or any other protagonist of a ghost novel discussed in this thesis to see that the ghosted world very much heralds a newly “schizophrenic,” chaotic existence.

Many writers, such as McGowan, Gregson, Connor, and Jameson, agree that postmodernism itself has become a monolithic narrative, displacing all others that aspire to a place within it. Still, they consider this destabilizing force to be useful because it “unsettles the realist historicism that has been used as a power-tool by ruling orders for centuries. Ahistorical narratives empower us by providing us with an unfamiliar look at the present, exposing history as myth... and sheltering us from, and familiarizing us with, the possibilities of the near-future” (Wain 369). Postmodernism “reads inclusively and non-categorically,” making it a “potentially attractive theory

for many politically marginalized groups”—not just feminists and libertarians, but Gothicists. Jameson points to the historical novel and science-fiction narrative, noting that these genres “defamiliarise the reader from a text which, presented under another realist genre, would reproduce the myth of presence” (Wain 365). As the text becomes located “in the historical other,” there occurs a “process of reification whereby we draw back from our immersion in the here and now (not yet identified as a ‘present’) and grasp it as a kind of thing—not merely a ‘present’ but a present that can be dated and called the eighties or the fifties.’ This is reading the present (text) as not present. It does not represent presence or the present, but represents presence or the present as un(re)presentable” (Wain 365). The paradox “is that, in the process of not representing the presence or the present, the text achieves just that” (365). Jameson “argues that we thus become aware of an image of collective otherness being constructed through the representation of presence as unrepresentable” (Wain 363) even though his “Marxist grand narrative sits somewhat uneasily with the postmodernist destabilizing repetition of self-reference” (Wain 365).

Baudrillard argues that, in the postmodern era, representation is no longer possible, but that all is simulated. Through his concepts of simulation, the simulacrum, and hyperreality, he illustrates that two large elements of the postmodern are its self-referentiality and unrepresentability. In fact, Baudrillard calls it “the era of simulation” that is “inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials” (Baudrillard 2) proceeded by “their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions” (2). In a sense, all referents are lost to the subject, existing in an endless chain of referents, absent of meaning and yet simultaneously loaded with inherent, rather than intrinsic, signification. Meaning implodes, he suggests (31), consisting of a retraction “of the old polar schema that always maintained a minimal distance between cause and effect,

between subject and object: precisely the distance of meaning, the gap, the difference, the small possible gap” that vanishes. Furthermore, what is abolished in the postmodern age is “relation” or “causality,” and that is “where simulation begins” (31). Once the postmodern is more or less defined as an era in which all referentials are exterminated, “postmodernization” can be seen as a process—though not necessary a final stage—of emptying referents of their meaning while, at the same time, retaining a function that is denied them. In this way, “grand narratives” and absolute, foundational, truths lose significance, and history becomes an illusionary simulacrum, a signifier without an original. Baudrillard explains that it is “no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (Baudrillard 2), a process that occurs because commodification has emptied signifiers of meaning, leaving us in a Western world without referents or any sense of “reality,” a word rejected by postmodernists because it refers to nothing.

Ostensibly, postmodernism has no particular agenda, for it seeks to reveal no “hidden meanings” in its subjects. As Wain says, it suspends the idea that a text hides a “truth or reality, but resists taking the opposite stance that all is fiction, which only reinforces the idea of reality” (Wain 360) by virtue of invoking its own binary opposite. Baudrillard avoids this dichotomy by introducing the notion of the “hyperreal,” a term whose operation “suspends the binary dialectic. Hyperreality is a simulacrum and not a referent. Once we learn to view the world as such...we undermine those institutions which rely on such power structures” (Wain 361). In this way, a postmodern text is, above all, self-referential: “Referring to itself, and to its non-referential status, the self-referring postmodern text undoes the power of reference on which realist narrative constructs apply” (Wain 361). Linda Hutcheon avoids the term “postmodern,” however, when speaking of “metafiction,” “fiction about fiction” that includes within itself a commentary on its

own narrative and/or linguistic identity. She finds the word “limiting,” mostly because it is “much too inclusive” (Hutcheon 1), connoting not so much an event that occurred after modernism so much as “an extension of modernism and a reaction to it” (2). Regardless, she argues that the “life-art connection” has not been severed or destroyed, but rather reimagined and “reforged” so that the imaginative process of storytelling takes precedence over the product (the told story), casting the reader into a new, more involved role as the “vehicle of this change” (3). In effect, the reader, as a result of the author entering into his own novel, becomes drawn into the “fictional universe” and thereby made hyper-aware of the process of narrative-making (9-10).

With the enlargement of the text through fragmentation and often disconnected imagery, in fact, Jameson (and Wain and others) prefers the term “pastiche” to “text,” particularly since everything becomes a text, coinciding with the “disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal style” (*Postmodernism* 16).

Wain summarizes that the notion of text, then, becomes rather confining as well:

if, as Baudrillard claims, everything is simulation or composed of simulacra, then no text is original. If something is not original it surely refers to something preceding it. Yet, in order to avoid perpetuating a negative power struggle, it must not be a referent [which would create a binary opposition]. Postmodern pastiche has many textual referents, each of equal and no value. As a text, therefore, it has no one point of reference. Postmodern pastiche destabilizes the genres from which it borrows its composite parts. It disseminates texts so that no central or original point of reference can be located and scatters the fragments randomly to form an eclectic work. (Wain 361)

While not every ghost fiction is self-referential, the ghost in literature and popular culture embodies the fragmented, explosive, disseminating traits of the postmodern. In fact, the ghosts of *The Turn*

of the Screw, The Haunting of Hill House, The Shining, Ghost Story, Beloved, The Robber Bride, and *Anil's Ghost*, even if they offer glimpses of a material ghost, profoundly scatter the ashes, aura, smoke, particles, or invisible influence of the spirit far and wide, through time and space, hither and yon. An origin might be suggested or implied, but the material proof of one is not forthcoming.

Thus, the postmodern is not merely being coy in its insistence on withholding truth. There simply is no single truth either given, implied, or omitted. Because of this absence, according to postmodernists, “the most ethical mode of representation is non-representation” (Wain 364)—a “non-referential chain which leads only to itself” (364). As a result, “postmodernists are interested in the mechanisms of textual non-representation...[and] in saying that nothing can be said directly by saying something about the un(re)presentable through indirection” (364). According to Wain, “The postmodern text represents the unrepresentable, not by seeking to represent it, but by attesting to its unrepresentability” (362). In this sense, the postmodern is performative, rather than just theoretical. Nonetheless, “the text is not a complete unit and no one reading is beyond question” (362), leaving all interpretative possibilities available. However, “postmodernism does not prohibit the text from writing an answer to the questions it asks. It answers the questions with questions and defers any final answers, implying that all answers are relative and provisional” (362).

In this way, not only is the “text” haunted, but the haunting overflows the borders of the text, its performance calling into question whether the text has any such borders at all and challenging all definitions of text. In fact, the inclusive quality of postmodernism denies the primacy of the monolithic “literature” with the assertion that “everything is a text” (Lucy ix), thereby rendering the very idea of text “anti-foundationalist” (ix). In postmodernity, the “question of literature” constitutes the “problem of deciding what is inside and what is outside the space of the literary” (ix). While that issue is largely undecidable, postmodernism celebrates text as

something that “makes a game out of searching for the truth” (ix), rather than as something that offers truth. Furthermore, text has become something that constitutes “nonstructure,” whereas poststructuralists are concerned with critiques of structure. Insofar as it concerns the Gothic, the postmodern text, ideally, would seem to be one in which questions are answered only by more questions regarding the nature of the text itself, as best discerned by its performance. The ghost figure, meanwhile, is a text whose function is to question its own function, as well as the “reality” of its beholder. The beholder reads the ghost but at the same time, he/she is reading him/herself and possibly also being read by the ghost itself because the “skin show” operates in multiple ways.

At the same time that postmodernism (and technology, as both Botting and Halberstam might suggest) challenges all boundaries and embraces all others, the self dissolves and individuation is lost—a sense of “autonomy,” to use McGowan’s word (a central tenet of both romanticism and modernism), is inconceivable. Thus, a signifier has no meaning that is independent of its present social context. All that matters for interpretative purposes is the present experience; history is lost, leaving us without a point of reference in time for the present condition. Potentially, according to Jameson, this condition leaves the individual in a state of “schizophrenia.” At the same time, as McGowan suggests, he or she is left with the potential for unlimited freedom, which in itself might be destabilizing and/or chaotic. Still, such freedom would entail any, and every, possibility both imaginable and beyond imagination.

Paradoxically, in the relaxation of foundationalism we also find the recipe for postmodern inclusion, and normalization, of the Gothic since all narratives become fictions whose “truths” are under perpetual suspicion. Postmodernism is “supposed to be about rejecting canons and subverting orthodoxies of all kinds” and yet it “has managed to impose this orthodoxy with awesome effectiveness” (Gregson xiii). In fact, it is postmodernism’s own inclusiveness which

might circumvent such criticism. For example, Gregson describes John Ashbery's writing as "thorough postmodernism" because it "relentlessly deconstructs notions of a stable self" (xv), but it is not only "thorough postmodernists" like Ashbery, Thomas Pynchon, and John Barth who "deserve" discussion in a work dedicated to the postmodern period. Gregson decries the "deadening fastidiousness found in academic circles which fences off thoroughly postmodernist texts from others which are contemporary with them, but which do not sufficiently match up to the postmodernist script" (xvii). The juxtapositions of postmodernist and non-postmodernist texts "defamiliarise these mostly famous texts so that they are seen from a refreshing angle" (xvii), he argues. I would add that the gothicised normalcy and the de-gothicised ghost accomplish the same defamiliarisation, as many of the novels discussed in this thesis show. Gregson points out that Toni Morrison, particularly in *Beloved*, "uses some postmodernist strategies and demonstrates some awareness of poststructuralist theories like Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva but [her] political project involves a novelistic excavation of African American history and is to that extent significantly anti-postmodern" (xv-xvi). Still, he includes her works in his discussion of postmodernism because it is useful to do so and counter-productive, as well as elitist (therefore un-postmodern) to exclude it.

The notion of inclusion in the postmodern era might also be seen in the blurring of boundaries between genres. Again, the Gothic (as well documented by Castle, Halberstam, Botting, Becker, and others) has long been among the "excluded" (a paradox in itself, to be "included" in such a self-alienating group) forms of literature and culture. In fact, such exclusion has long been a matter of self-alienation, much in the way that many Gothic protagonists (think Victor Frankenstein, Dr. Henry Jekyll, Eleanor Vance, Jack Torrance, and most others) either find themselves on the outside of society or place themselves there intentionally. "Once the dark

underside of modernity, Gothic horror now outlines the darkness of the postmodern condition,” Botting explains (“Aftergothic” 181), because Gothic is no longer quite the “dark mirror in which modern culture recognize[s] higher values and return[s] readers to normality, family order, and paternal authority in a social context in which rational judgment, useful production, and empirical reality establishe[s] the dominant framework for everyday life” (181). This loss of moral and intellectual standards occurs, according to Botting, as a result of human qualities being increasingly displaced by those of machines and technology, “rendering rational judgment and morality redundant” (181). The term “literary” might be used to distinguish between the Gothic and novels whose main emphasis is relatively more intellectual, especially in terms of narrative technique and prose style, placing less (if any) emphasis on terror, and yet the distinction itself seems archaic. That in itself is a reflection of the postmodernization of genre and the Gothic, specifically. Part of what this thesis shows is that the Gothic is becoming increasingly “literary,” as Straub refers to *Ghost Story*, at the same time that the “literary” is becoming more Gothic. As always, with the postmodern, distinctions between genres are becoming more difficult and meaningless while the term “literary” retains some usefulness but is increasingly absurd.

This thesis does not really choose sides in the various debates concerning postmodern paradoxes, except perhaps to suggest what “selfhood” could mean in the postmodern era, particularly when our spectral others are being normalized and specularized, becoming parts of us. While McGowan considers “what selfhood could possibly mean once we grant the cogency of postmodern accounts of the subject’s constitution by social order and codes” (x), he posits that the postmodern’s “denial of autonomy” is necessary for social unity to respond to the loss of foundational truths. Freedom, he says, comes from a socially-built set of principles that insist on inclusion, but also on the institutionalization of difference within the whole. With McGowan, one

can see the potential in the postmodern for a totalizing monolith. One can also see the “positive,” the move away from otherness and towards normalization; the self being dissolved and re-formed by interaction with others, awareness of difference and sameness as neither negatives nor positives, and yet potentially both. To McGowan, postmodernism “refers to a distinct shift in the way humanistic intellectuals...view the relations of their cultural work to society at larger” (1). Postmodern “can be best defined as a particular, if admittedly diminished, version of romantic dreams of transformation,” with a suitable “despondency” that accompanies it.

Postmodern times are also Gothic times, full of a prevailing fear of those same questionable boundaries between the supposed real and the presumed fantastical. Both Botting and Becker make note of Angela Carter’s famous observation, “We live in Gothic times” (“Aftergothic” 285) as an expression of “the way that genres once consigned to cultural margins have begun to prevail over their canonized counterparts” (286). As Botting explains, “Gothic figures and fictions now circulate with greater visibility to manifest the absence of strict, prohibitive mechanisms of a strong, exclusionary force” (“Aftergothic” 286). Certainly, this is true of the ubiquitous ghost which may appear anywhere from movie titles (*Ghosts of the Abyss* and *Ghosts of the Mississippi*, for example) to catch phrases (“ghost of a chance” or “ghost writer”). Such normalization not only transgresses the old, paternal notions of taboo, but flaunts their dailiness by their ever-present quality. At the same time, in much the same way as capitalism is a divider, ruler, and subjugator, it might also be seen as an inescapable, commonizing monolith.

As a result of the prevailing skepticism regarding truths and meaning, depictions of ghosts in literature are changing. In the postmodern era, that process seems to be a foregone conclusion, since “representations” of ghosts, or any other supposed original, is impossible. The ghost has no referent except its own history as a simulacrum, the copy without an original, which would seem to

make it all that much easier to depict ghosts in new, largely unexpected ways. It is not even that the referent, or grand narrative, is lost so much as that, according to postmodern theory, it never existed (and yet, in a ghostly way, all such referents do exist). The postmodern ghost (or, indeed, all ghosts) might be taken to imply a ghost whose author shows it to represent no reality except its own particular negative reality, that there is no reality except one that admits no reality. The author inscribes within the phantoms a self-referentiality encouraging the reader and at least one character to recognize this winking, seeing the ghost for what it is: simulated ghostdom and humanness at once, both different and the same. One can now discern both a normalization of the ghost and a shift of its status to that of a signifier with no fixed signified, having relinquished its sense of self, time and/or place. W.P. Kinsella's ghost of Shoeless Joe Jackson (1982), for instance, wonders why he is not in heaven but in an Iowa cornfield, and all he seems to know about himself is that he likes playing baseball. For the reader's purpose, he is a simulation of a Shoeless Joe of history: a simulacrum, or representation without a true original. We do not know what a "real" Shoeless Joe or "real" Eva Galli is any more than we know what a "real" ghost is. Like the scrapbooks and newspapers we frequently encounter in postmodern ghost novels, history is presented as pastiche, and its entirety is "out of reach" (*Postmodernism* 25).

Presumably, then, depictions of ghosts have always been shifting towards something postmodern—not as an end point, certainly, and not in any progressive way, but on their way to becoming whatever they will become. One could call it postmodern (Becker, for one, avoids the term "postmodern Gothic," preferring "neo-gothic" to suggest an entity that is of the postmodern age and yet not quite of it, perhaps even opposed to it). The term is used here because it is the postmodern aesthetic which currently appears responsible for the slow transformation of spirits from "excluded" to "included." But one could as easily say that they have changed to represent the

times of which they are a part, just as modern ghosts represented the modern aesthetic. But that is the key component of phantoms which make them so perfectly postmodern: they are always-already, always a part of every time and space. They are not purely postmodern, mostly because they are so *perfectly* postmodern. They belong to no specific time, but to all times both generally and specific; they adhere to no fixed notions of what they are, for they are ever-shiftable even when they seem, or presume, to signify historicity. The postmodern spirit is non-foundational, personal, and specular.

Goddu explains that the tendency towards ghettoization of the Gothic can be seen as a “criticism” of “where the genre ranks in the canon’s hierarchy” as the “drive to order and identify the gothic stems less from a critical desire to discover its particular essence than from a need to differentiate it from other, ‘higher’ literary forms” (266). Fredric Jameson’s apparent dismissal of the older forms of Gothic seems based on a similar compulsion to rid literature, and humanity, of what has been identified by some critics as an impurity, essentially, and paradoxically, making an “other” of the Gothic in an era marked by its obfuscation of, and embracing of, distinctions. Goddu sums up the conundrum: “As Jacques Derrida suggests in his essay, ‘The Law of Genre,’ the critical desire for generic classification signals a fear of contagion: the law of genre depends upon the principle of impurity,” and the Gothic “must be quarantined” from other literary forms (267). Jameson relegates the pulp form of Gothic to the “airport paperback” category of literature (*Postmodernism* 2-3), labeling it a “boring and exhausted paradigm” that “depends absolutely in its central operation on the construction of evil” (2-3), a dependence upon the concept of otherness that “we are well off without” (290). He describes the inherited Gothic, the kind in which both men of property and women, generally, are victimized by an “evil” figure, usually male (289). However, Jameson does not discuss the postmodern Gothic, a hybrid genre in which chaos is

normalized and otherness is decreased, on its way to nearly vanishing (if anything can be said to really disappear for good). The eighties filmic examples he offers (Ray of *Something Wild* and Frank Booth of *Blue Velvet*) “don’t scare anybody any longer,” he says, adding, “nor ought we really to require our flesh to creep before reaching a sober and political decision as to the people and forces who are collectively ‘evil’” (*Postmodernism* 290). Jameson might well be correct, as the fictions discussed in this thesis illustrate a movement away from “otherness,” creeping flesh, and demonizing while also recognizing that part of humanity which instinctively, if not intellectually, fears. While Jameson’s ruminations about “modern” Gothic (290) are legitimate, neither the ghost nor the Gothic can be legislated, or rationalized, away. Once repressed, they will return, appearing different from their previous incarnations.

Gothic is primarily a literature of uncertainty and destabilization, but no other figure in literature or film embodies the spirit of the postmodern age so much as the ghost. While retaining the *milieu* of the fearful nineteenth-century spectre, twentieth-century ghosts are increasingly of, from, and by us, despite their distinction as spirits. By its very definition, a ghost is death incarnate, the spirit of that which supposedly has died. Traditionally, it has represented all that we fear, all that we desire, all that we repress. But the ghost story, as Atwood says, “is a way of examining the self coming to terms with the self” (“Halloween”). Of course, as Lyotard explains, “a self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before” (*Condition* 15), thereby invoking the notion of inclusion, rather than otherness, which is seen time and again in postmodern ghost fictions. The ghost story, except one told by a ghost (as in Robertson Davies’ *Murder and Walking Spirits*), requires a narrator, one who beholds the subject. Atwood suggests that the ghost gains meaning through the beholder and the teller of the tale, and vice versa; in fact, its existence depends upon a

human need, or desire, to be understood. Her choice of words, in fact, implies a Lacanian notion of the “self” (a child, in Lacan’s explanation) standing before a mirror (the ghost, in this case) and seeing itself reflected back, and “no clear distinction between subject and object, itself and the external world, is yet possible” (Eagleton 164). In this way, the beholder finds “something” with which to identify and to provide him/herself with a “defined center of self, in which what ‘self’ we have seems to pass into objects, and objects into it, in a ceaseless closed exchange” (164). The self-image acquired during the Lacanian “mirror-stage” of identity is illusionary; in the ghost story, however, it hardly matters whether the mirror-image is real or not because the beholder (regardless of age) perceives, or imagines, the spirit to be so.

Besides commodification, another notable significant characteristic shared by postmodernism and the ghost figure is the hesitation to nominate that accompanies the breakdown in the “signifying chain”; what to call something, with any certainty, becomes more problematic, and the ghost is an utterance that invites a response neither pre-ordained nor germane to its presence. The ghost—both the word and the literary figure—is at once empty and infused with meaning, its signification dependent upon the beholder’s perspective, as well as the specific ghost, in combination with its inherited connotations. The word itself invokes a materiality, as such, according to Lacan, who explains, that “the unconscious is structured like a language,” pre-determining “certain relations between signifiers,” thereby organizing human relations “in a creative way, providing them with structure and shaping them” (*Four* 20). While a ghost can exist independently of an anticipated observer, at the same time a ghost is never just a ghost, for it also necessarily conveys meaning to the beholder, including other characters and the reader. To a reader, much like the “signified” described by Jameson, ghosts in novels (like all other characters) operate within the same diegetic universe, all conversing with each other in a timeless, spaceless

intertextual relationship that is without beginning or end. The ghost floats freely from text-to-text, always-already existing. Like Punter's notion of genres being built by a process of "supersession" (*Pathologies* 17),² the ghost's form and signification relate to those of other ghosts in other novels and art forms. The relations between ghost and beholders in literature have been changing for decades, if not centuries, and the ghost has always been "becoming," shifting however gradually towards what it will eventually be. Although at once loaded with signification and yet devoid of meaning, it has so many potential meanings as to be vastly meaningless. In postmodern terms, the signified becomes divorced from its signifier, for the ghost is separate from its reasons for haunting, and yet its meaning is both separate from, and intertwined with, its beholder. On the other side of the ghost-utterance is the ghost-beholder (Lacan's "self"), who is an utterance as well as a response. In fact, the ghost itself is a beholder, as well. James's governess character, for example, portrays herself and the perceived ghost as "two sides of the same question," which accurately illustrates Lyotard's notion of the "social bond" between subject and object in the "language game" (*Condition* 4), which is one of "inquiry."

Ultimately, as Jameson suggests, when confronted with an empty signifier, and a new reality, the instinct to make a "decision" about its meaning or implications is futile, since it is what it is, asking questions of a beholder (and reader) which cannot be answered with any sense of finality. When the governess at Bly meets a ghost, she assumes its meaning, practically making it speak to her even when it says nothing, a decisiveness that renders her wholly un-postmodern. On the other side, though, besides the ghost who does not speak is the housekeeper who cannot decide the nature of either the spirit or the new governess. She appears to stand in for the notion of non-representation because she does not decide. In the end, James does not tell us whether there is a

² Punter writes: "Gothic is...all about supersession, about the will to transcend, and about the fate of the body as we strive for a fantasy of total control, or better, total exemption—from the rule of law" (*Pathologies* 17-18).

ghost or not, does not assign any fixed meaning to the apparitions purported to be seen by the governess. Instead, we merely observe, transfixed and confused to the end, exemplifying in our own uncertainty the Jamesonian edict that there is no “justifiable” reason for our confusion. The breakdown of the “signifying chain,” in which knowledge exists as independent “atoms” (as do humans), leads to a Gothic kind of uncertainty when we are faced with “the decision as to whether one faces a break or a continuity—whether the present is to be seen as a historical originality or as the simple prolongation of more of the same under different sheep’s clothing” (*Postmodernism* xiii). By the time Morrison publishes her ghost novel in the 1980s, the ghost is materially present in the text even when absent, putting an end to the confusion about, and relevance of, the ghost’s identity and focusing on what it signifies for their beholder as well as itself, the two sides being inseparable in the “language game.” In the next decade, with Atwood and Ondaatje, we see no “real” ghosts, only humans standing in for ghosts, the question of species itself being so irrelevant and counter-productive that identification is not necessary, merely an understanding that life is normally chaotic, that the ghost-figure behaves and functions like a ghost. The fact that a human behaves as a ghost, and vice versa, fuses the two labels (ghost and human) so that they are indistinguishable. As Jameson says, “the moderns were interested in what was likely to come of such changes and their general tendency: they thought about the thing itself, substantively, in Utopian or essential fashion. Postmodernism ... only clocks the variations themselves, and knows only too well that the contents are just more images” (*Postmodernism* ix). He is, once again, inadvertently describing the function of the ghost figure in literature, since recent authors such as Morrison, Atwood, and Ondaatje seem to stop looking for a single Utopian meaning, but seem more capable of having fun—or play—with their ghosts.

1.3 The Hesitation to Nominate

With the loss of referents and associated contestation of boundaries, the very act of naming any new reality is fraught with hesitation. Halberstam says that, in the Gothic, “multiple interpretations are embedded in the text and part of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot” (3). Far from being mutually antithetical to each other, the Gothic and the postmodern are binary opposites, like twins separated at birth, with Jameson seeing postmodernism as the result of “late capitalism” and Halberstam asserting that Gothic is capitalism’s “hideous offspring.” That said, despite the prevailing uncertainty associated with the postmodern era, many theorists advocate identifying, classifying, and labeling the characteristics of this destabilization; they encourage us to forget notions of otherness and simply embrace the supposed enemy, the inclusion of whom might just signify chaos, effectively negating the need to identify anything or anyone as other. Haraway specifically rationalizes a prevailing suspicion of technology (and, I add, its inherent “ghost in the machine”),³ suggesting that “our bodies do not end at our skins” and that we *are* our surroundings, our gadgets, our environment, as well as the environments of all those around us. Our bodies are endless and that, she suggests, is a cause for celebration, rather than fear. Furthermore, Kristeva’s theory of the abject suggests that the abject body is of us, from us, and that is part of the power of horror because we are repulsed by seeing our insides on the outside, rendering us closer to death (4). Jameson suggests that there is no longer a need for a literature of terror while Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia” and Baudrillard’s notion of the “empty signifier” declare that we only fear those monsters of our own creation, signifiers otherwise devoid of meaning. In the postmodern world, meanings come in layers, supplied by the all rather than just the one. And yet the one has

³ Admittedly, while computerization might still be regarded as other, the gap is decreasing substantially, just as Haraway says, because of increasing miniaturization and ubiquitousness, not to mention technologies of the body.

meaning, as well, for each of us is a genre with, as Derrida explains, rules defining what *kind* of human we are. The ghost is merely a particular kind of human, and that is precisely how Western literature is beginning to portray it, a condition which might further propagate chaos if not for the tendency to emphasize the sameness, rather than just the otherness, of the ghost.

While this thesis is largely concerned with ghost novels of the latter half of the twentieth century, *The Turn of the Screw* provides a significant touchstone for ghost literature because it marks a documented moment in literary history in which the ghost and the ghost-text become bigger than themselves and physicality is beside the point. In fact, the ghost is just as palpable in its absence as it would be in its presence, perhaps even more so. Because nomination cannot resolve hesitation, the question gradually moves beyond “what is it?” (at the turn of the twentieth century) to become, increasingly, “what does it want?” (at the turn of the twenty-first century), and how does it perform within the text. The text itself becomes the main focus, as critics scrutinize James’s open-ended narrative for signs of meaning, only to find that it yields no single meaning while it offers many possible interpretations, remaining “the shape of the unintelligible” (Punter, *Pathologies* 4). After all, in fiction, both absence and presence are illusions anyway, each invoking the other.

As the twentieth century has advanced, James’s slippery non-representation of “truth” in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) has found a home in an era wherein most master narratives and foundational truths are regarded with skepticism. Turn-of-the century short stories such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) and Edith Wharton’s “Afterwards” (1909) present spectral entities in much the same irresolute manner. But James is the one who enlarged the ghost’s materiality through its absence in the text by having it spill its borders, to “bust wide open” (16), as Ralph Ellison writes in *Invisible Man*, a novel about the ghostly nature

of certain people who have the ability to slip undetected through life, beneath the social radar, and thereby cross, blur, and explode any and all boundaries. James's novella takes the ghost figure from the realm of the Gothic sub-genre and places it firmly in the mainstream of twentieth-century literature where the fear of a ghost's *potential* existence is equal to the fear of its *actual* presence, rendering the protagonist clearly haunted regardless of the outcome of the hesitation (which actually is never resolved). By not deciding for us whether the ghost has been purely psychological or material, James leaves both character and reader in a state of suspended uncertainty, without any sense of boundaries to distinguish the "real" from the "imaginary," an existence in which objects mirror themselves and each other endlessly and the subject, and "no real differences are yet apparent" (Eagleton 166) between signified and signifier, subject and world, or in Lacanian terms, between "the organism and its reality" ("Mirror" 899).

The attempt to apply a label to an unreadable event is equally an endeavour to identify a genre and its intrinsic rules for inclusion and exclusion, while the characters' and reader's preoccupations with classifying an apparently supernatural experience derive from a human preference for control over chaos, certainty over uncertainty. As we define these tendencies, we also imply those that the object seemingly does not possess, for every genre has its restrictions, which identify the "not" as well as the "is." Though signifying a desire for certainty, the academic exercise of affixing labels of genre, and thereby placing limits on the text, is itself laden with hesitation: "the supreme act of nomination" (*Postmodernism* 13) being so arbitrary as to be perpetually questionable. A text might be *predominantly* "Gothic" or "literary" or whatever, but to say it is *exclusively* this or that is specious. Jameson asserts the inherent "ambiguity of naming a phenomenon and [thereby] designating or foregrounding it: once isolated in the mind's eye, it becomes an object for judgment irrespective of authorial intention"

(*Postmodernism* 209). While acts of nomination are convenient, they are exclusive and potentially limiting, if only for their implicit certainty in the face of perpetual instability.

In the case of ghosts, both identification and self-identification seem essential to the beholder's mental and physical well-being, but such certainty is not forthcoming. By articulating the experience with the encountered "other" (either ghost or not-ghost), a character attempts to define the terms of the events. Unable to do so, he/she will remain in a state of hesitation, without any solid sense of boundaries, expectations, or reality. Todorov explains that the entire concept of the genre of the "fantastic" is based on doubt or hesitation, when there is a moment of indecision and decision; in between, there is the imagined line separating confusion and certainty (*Fantastic* 25). The "duration of this uncertainty" is where the genre of the fantastic resides. In the end, though, the reader might decide whether there is a diegetic ghost, opting for either a "real" solution or a "supernatural" one, even if the character does not. Todorov labels *The Turn of the Screw* as "fantastic" and likely would designate *The Haunting of Hill House* the same, for both texts contain supernatural elements, but the exact origin of the haunting—whether internal or external to the beholder—remains unknown at the end even though the tale occurs in the "everyday context" (Todorov, *Poetics* 156). Bakhtin, likewise, designates the moment of hesitation following an utterance when there is the "anticipation of an utterance" and thus uncertainty of what is to come and how a speaker (and/or utterance) is to be identified. While Todorov's word for response to a fresh utterance is "hesitation," Bakhtin's is "anticipation" and Halberstam, Hurley, and Sedgwick call it "silence": the moment of confusion regarding what the other is. While "primacy belongs to the response," as Bakhtin says, we should not ignore the intentions or influences of the original utterance. Each of the author, the ghost, and the book itself is an utterance in the same way that Sedgwick speaks of the homosexual male and Hurley speaks of the ruptured skin as an utterance of

an “other,” as a performance of difference from (and towards) some abstract hegemony of normalcy—normal maleness, normal sexuality, normal skin, and so on . Each, when encountered in the novel, however, speaks its own discourse, meeting on a plane where various discourses intersect. The answer to the question “What is it?” is increasingly likely to be answered with what it/he/she does within the novel.

The important distinction to note here is that, in pre-postmodern ghost fictions, even the insinuation of the ghost intrinsically invokes a state of “hesitation,” as characters and/or readers are suspended between one space and another—forced to choose between the sanctioned and logical territory and the unsanctioned and illogical territory. To plant a foot on either side is to speak for a genre, with its own set of norms and boundaries; Todorov allows that “by maintaining the ambiguity at the tale’s heart, James has merely obeyed the rules of the genre [of the fantastic],” but the hesitation “persists only in the reader” (*Poetics* 158). There is, however, an in-between space conjoining and dividing the two rival territories, a neutral space which comprises its own set of rules and contains all questions and possibilities, yet no positive responses. That space embodies both the “ghost” and the “not-ghost,” identifying itself at once with neither and both responses. As Gelder says, “Todorov’s ‘hesitation’ over whether something is real or spectral is now broadly registered as modernity’s loss of confidence over the difference between reason and unreason, good and evil, humanness and monstrosity, norms and deviancies, self and other, inside and outside” (“Part One” 12). The more we scrutinize these seemingly disparate categories and the more we gaze at the boundary between them, the more similarities we see and the less the dissimilarities mean. Moreover, a critical distance makes labelling more difficult, less comfortable. When we cannot decide, all that remains is the question of what we are to make of this hesitation, this

inability to choose between territories and their inherent rules and perspectives. Regardless of the outcome, the variable nature of truth has been exposed.

This “hesitation” to nominate is mostly the realm of the Gothic, which by its very nature is a genre without fixed rules, though it does, as Hogle and others point out, have norms. And, if the genre is defined by its lack of order and completion—practically *depends* upon that chaos and questions/threatens convention, rules, safety, and civilization—then it truly contains itself and its own binary opposite within the one label, Gothic. Fear is not logical—and that is Jameson’s problem with older Gothic: it depends upon, even exploits, this basic irrational human reaction to that which is other, not logically acceptable in a civilized, safe society. It is not at all clear that such a society even exists, naturally, for where there is happiness there is also a reactive *loss* of happiness. For Freud, the “uncanny” is that which leaves the reader in “uncertainty,” and ghosts, he says, “could be a sign of immortality, but instead become harbingers of death,” (387) pointing to the duality inherent within phantoms because their meaning is not a matter of steadfast rules, but of malleable perspective. Increasingly, ghosts in literature and film are less pure harbingers of death and more “signs of immortality,” and yet they are both. There is a choice to be made and yet no choice to be made; the possibilities, because they can never be proven or disproven, cancel each other out. Why torture ourselves to decide what we cannot know?

1.4 “Deafness to History” results in “Return of the Repressed”

As Botting suggests, that which dies and is buried might simply arise in another body (*Gothic* 180): when we try to forget the bad past, often by choosing to remember a better version of history, we seem to anticipate, if only unconsciously, the apparent resurrection of the dead. As such, the return of the repressed results from the human propensity for artificially distinguishing

between times, labeling temporality in terms of “present,” “past,” or “future”; the postmodern (and the Gothic) confronts the individual with an obfuscation of time in which there is no securely retrievable past. Spirits might be our attempt to think historically and to signify a revived narrative that substantively alters our self-constructs. Clemens describes a “return of the repressed” as an accumulative process combining fear and memory:

Something—some entity, knowledge, emotion, or feeling—which has been submerged or held at bay because it threatens the established order of things, develops a cumulative energy that demands its release and forces it to the realm of visibility where it must be acknowledged. The approach and the appearance of the repressed create an aura of menace and ‘uncanniness,’ both in Freud’s sense of *‘unheimlich’*—something that becomes apparent although one feels it ‘ought’ to remain hidden (17: 224, 241)—and in the Jungian sense of something possessing some awesome or transpersonal, numinous quality. (4)⁴

Likewise, the postmodern era is marked by a nostalgia for the Before, as Jameson describes it: before things got exceptionally bad. But it is a trick of the mind to assume we even know the past: “It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as the attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (*Postmodernism* ix). Jameson, ever the Marxist, in referring to our collective cultural “historical deafness” that results from an origination story, says that the result is a sort of “return of the repressed” that is a “return of the narrative” inherent in “the supreme act of nomination.” The mere act of naming resurrects the old, received narrative—the “unforeseeable return of the narrative as the narrative at the return of the narrative” (xii). History—in the form of historical or “nostalgia” films especially—is itself experiencing a return of the repressed, which is a “total flowing” really “of past, present, and

⁴ Freud explains that *heimlich* means that something is familiar, “not strange,” or “homely.” while *unheimlich* means the opposite, unfamiliar, strange, and unhomely, or not of a particular place: “uncanny” (370-271).

infinite future of which the “endless slide show” is the best example (xvii). The ghost figure perfectly illustrates this “endless slide show” of temporal images, being from the so-called “past,” representing someone or something which is considered dead (whatever that means), culturally, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and physically. Yet the ghost always appears in the beholder’s present, as Punter explains, “filled to the brim with something that looks like ourselves but is irremediably other, to the point that we are driven out, exiled from our own home, removed from the body.” In what Kristeva might call a state of “abjection,” thus, “it is we ourselves who are cast as the ghost, the spectre, the ‘revenant’ who can in fact never return, but who can only watch this mysterious body performing actions below” (*Pathologies* 6-17).

Whether we are talking about Hill House, Sweet Home, or The Overlook Hotel, all Gothic is about homelessness and destabilization, which, in many respects, are effects of the postmodern condition. “Home” is a master narrative and an origin space, a “how it used to be” or “how it could be if only...”; the desire for home is a nostalgic craving for a center where things will be good, happy and peaceful, without fear. Becker, like Kristeva, describes abjection as “the state of necessary, but painful separation” (59), invoking a sense of meaninglessness, which creates emotions of terror and desire. Here, one can also see Haraway’s objection that the loss of a sense of origin need not be so terrifying. In arguing for the advent of the human “cyborg” as “a condensed image of both imagination and material reality,” Haraway suggests that reproduction and history are the spoils of a “border war” between species of organism and machine. While she argues for taking “pleasure” (as, notably, Eva Galli and most other ghosts do) in the “confusion of boundaries” as well as their construction (so as to take responsibility for contributing to a “postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis” or end), Haraway posits that cyborgs (human .

hybrids) have “no origin story” (151). To her, “abstract individuation” has been the goal of Western society’s “escalation” towards the “awful apocalyptic *telos*” which has pushed forth the cyborg as a new species of human-machine hybrid. In this regard, the Western origin story “depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history” (151).

While it may well be that “origin” is a fiction we are better off without, the Gothic, however, *is* concerned with the origin story even if it merely simulates the momentary confusion that accompanies the realization of such loss; without it, as Becker says, we are in limbo, desiring a home which is no longer ours. Theorists of postmodernity (Jameson, Haraway, Lyotard, and Baudrillard, among others) say the origin story never existed. Gothic reclaims that narrative by showing the characters (and readers) what they have lost or been doing without: a personal ghost that, in theory, provides them with individuation. But such individuation, according to most ghost fiction, would seem to be a fiction. That is why, at the heart of nearly every good ghost story, there is a “home” that is haunted. Indeed, most fiction is haunted by that which it most fears and desires, and what a character most fears is both having and losing the thing that he/she most desires. Usually, as in *The Great Gatsby*, that “thing” is an object of love or lust that the protagonist feels would complete him, thereby hypothetically stabilizing his/her identity, providing him/her with a center. Every love story contains this element of need, just as every Gothic story is haunted by it. The ghost in contemporary literature often represents this yearning, which also signifies an emotional link with the fictional past: a longing for that which has passed away and become unreachable. “When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning,” Baudrillard declares (6). Sometimes what has passed away is not just the other, but the self, as well; likewise, what returns is not just an other, but a part of the self. As Jameson says, we are

deaf to history—we can recall sensory images, but not relive the moment exactly. Something always gets lost, and that “something” is the experience itself. The loss, or lack, of knowledge, of a trustworthy and totalizing narrative, of boundaries and rules, can be destabilizing, evoking *desire* for that which is missing: an identity and/or an individuating story. In Lacanian terms, what is missing is the self reflected back in the mirror-stage, the “the ego ideal...that being that he first saw appearing in the form of the parent holding him up before the mirror,” which is the “reference point” he clings to and informs his identity-construct (Lacan, *Four* 257).

1.5 Postmodern Ghosts: The Normalized Transgression

Genre classification is symptomatic of the postmodern crisis of personal identity confusion. When Haraway, for example, refers to the “skin” as a boundary she aligns her Cyborg theory with much contemporary gothic theory. Similarly, Hurley asserts that the abhuman, or abject human, is created when skin is ruptured, diseased, discolored, or disfigured in any way; when the insides of a human (the organs, blood, water, pus, and so on that we identify with slasher flicks and horror novels) are presented on the outside, the human becomes abhuman: less human and yet still human. By extension, as the skin fades or falls away, withers and dies, and so on, again the human becomes less identifiably human; with a new reality with inherent new rules, the human subject sheds his or her old identity-construct in favor of a different one, “continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other” (Hurley 4). Kristeva explains that, while the abject is “something rejected from which one does not part,” it is, however, “not lack of cleanliness or health” that causes it, but that which “disturbs identity, system, order,” by transgressing borders, positions, and rules, essentially drawing attention to the “fragility of law” (4). Abjection, as she

describes it, is a “kind of narcissistic crisis” in which the self expels a part of the self and becomes an other, concurring with a loss of the “foundations of its own being” (4).

This transgression and subsequent loss of foundations and identity produces a kind of terror that is distinct from that of older Gothic because of the removal of meta-narratives (although their ghostly remnants remain) and the stability they appeared to offer. Botting explains that, “in the context of a movement from a modernity associated with rational production to a *post*modernity linked to accelerated technological consumption, Gothic images and horrors seem less able to restore boundaries by allowing the projection of a missing unifying (and paternal) figure” (“Aftergothic” 281). In a postmodern era, there is no single framework that “stabilizes social meanings and identities” (281). Botting sums up, “Once the darkside of modernity, Gothic horror now outlines the darkness of the postmodern condition” (“Aftergothic” 281). Possibly. But this destabilization of moral absolutes and standards also underscores the lessening dependence upon the language of superstition and oppositional politics, instead emphasizing commonality while, admittedly, exposing an amorality.

Historically, the Gothic has been “bound up with the function of the paternal metaphor,” as Botting explains, “focusing on the transgression and, in ‘safe’ Gothic, eventual restoration of the paternal order” (“Aftergothic” 282). Botting explains the paternal metaphor with the father as the key figure, “the one who protects when, in his proclamation of law, he links spaces, rules and language within a single and major experience” (282). Thus, the father becomes synonymous with law, rule, and even modes of interaction. Seen this way, transgression of law is rather a transgression of paternal ideology, just as feminist texts proclaim. Botting points out that the father function can be assumed by different figures, such as God, father, teacher, priest, and so on, many of whom are represented in the novels discussed in this thesis. Furthermore the symbolic, paternal

structure “depends on the identification of those positioned within it and is underpinned, not by any positive content, but by a fundamental absence, gap, or lost object providing a locus of projection and subjective fantasy. The primary signifier—the phallus—is therefore ‘a ghost’” (“Aftergothic” 283). Steven Bruhm charts similar territory in his study of *The Shining*, pointing out the “ghosts” arising in Danny Torrance’s psychological scarring and sexual awakening. Similarly, Kristeva explains the abject’s unconscious basis lies in the expelling of, or revulsion towards, that which “separates me from the mother and father who proffer it” or forbid it, as a “sign of their desire” (Kristeva 3). One can see similar paternal narratives in nearly every novel discussed here; in the absence of a father in *Hill House* and *Beloved* (although *Hill House*’s history includes a father, Hugh Crain), a teacher appears. Regardless, Gothic fiction “seems to threaten paternal order” (Botting, “Aftergothic” 283); even at the end of *Udolpho*, despite a “providentially ordered cosmos where virtue is rewarded and vice is punished... nothing real, then, is recovered: a fairy-tale, but acceptable form of reality is projected in place of its imagined and nightmarish opposite” (284).

While the “normal” connotes the standard of what is to be considered sane or decent, the current hesitation resides in how to define normalcy and how to respond to the attempt at control that the very word “normal” connotes. This crisis is decidedly deepened by the absence of such referents, or monolithic ideals, in the postmodern era and so the identity destabilization denoted by the thought or utterance of the word “ghost” creates a lengthy hesitation, one that gradually succumbs to infinite questioning regarding its, or the beholder’s, identity. Literary phantoms of the late twentieth century express this chaotic existence that is neatly, conveniently defined as “human,” as the new normal increasingly embraces the taboo, including ghosts which are usually a return of the repressed. In civilized, reasonable society, ghosts are subversive, and a belief in ghosts is equally subversive because such a belief, frightening for so many reasons, is a

contravention of accepted civilized manners of belief. To “see dead people,” as the boys in *The Shining* and in Shyamalan’s film *The Sixth Sense*, or the women in *Beloved* do, is to perceive what we usually are told we cannot. In King’s novel, the parents take their subversive (ghost-seeing) son to see a doctor; the boy in *The Sixth Sense* has his own personal psychologist; and Sethe in *Beloved* creates a ghost by rising up against “Schoolteacher.” Furthermore, in *The Haunting of Hill House*, paternal law is represented by a scientist; in other ghost novels, social monoliths such as social law, medicine, education, religion, and so on, signify standards of normalcy that the ghost breaches by its presence and the beholder threatens by his/her new, unsanctioned knowledge or (in)sight. The ghost, in effect, invokes its own structureless system of rules within a space; sometimes, the rule is that there are no rules, particularly of time, space, and identity. Society has laws, as Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, designed to protect the soul and mind through protection of the body.⁵ When those laws are broken, the soul and mind of the “guilty” are cracked by means of corporeal punishment. But when the punisher is a ghost and therefore exempt from laws of time, space, and rationality, there are no limits to the punishment that might be enacted upon the soul of the haunted. The phantom may threaten the body, but usually it attacks the mind so that the subject’s sanity is questioned by society, as well as by the subject himself.

In part because of its position as an outlaw narrative, the Gothic (and the ghost) is the mad laughter identified by Bakhtin and the empty discourse barely acknowledged by Jameson. The former is aware of Gothic’s strength as logic’s other, while the latter nods at it as one would a

⁵ Foucault suggests that the law is less concerned with the “transitory” body than it is with the soul. He describes this entity, which is “physical yet intangible” (28), as a “corpus” of knowledge, born of punishment, supervision, and constraint. The soul is not an “illusion,” but a “reality” produced by “a power that is exercised on those punished,” supervised, trained and corrected (29). There seems little, if any, difference between this “soul” described by Foucault, the “return of the repressed” in physical form entailed by Clemens, and the ghost figure depicted in many ghost novels. The abstract, but real and substantial element of the complete entity (in this case, humans) arrives as part of the culmination of a plethora of events, traumas, or ruptures and yet is not separate from its human history, but an extension of it. Just as the postmodern marks the dissolution of demarcations between “self” and “other,” Foucault likewise argues that there is no separation between a man and his soul—there is no supersession of the man by his soul.

corpse at a funeral if one were only distantly acquainted with the dear departed. But any attempt to bury Gothic as if it were long dead is bound to regenerate it. The act of premature interment is like Roderick Usher's attempt to get rid of his diseased sister Madeline: she is bound to come back and, when she does, she looks just like him: just as hideous and bearing all the same physical traits. Such is the case with Gothic and postmodern: they look, smell, and feel the same. In fact, they are the same, perhaps separated at birth. And when they re-unite and join together, they look an awful lot like our friendly neighborhood ghost who suddenly finds itself a repatriated expatriate in civilized society, who knows no boundaries, obeys no rules or limitations, and is cognizant of its own cultural amnesia. The historical condition of the ghost is its present condition and, presumably, its future condition. While reminding the textual beholder of a once-buried past, the ghost itself exists in the now, for always.

Sometimes the ghost exists only to wreak havoc for its own sake, to have fun through apparent destruction of rules, boundaries, and perceptions. Bakhtin says that self-implicit in the novel is the "laughter," or implied self-criticism of the connections, truisms, ideologies, and methods of the text; for every "serious" subject, he explains, there is a binary "laughter" that is parody. The clown figure represents this laughter, and, I would suggest so does the ghost, as well as the Gothic in general. The serious, he says, always has its "comic double"—the appropriate has its "inappropriate double"—for the "norm" there is the abnormal" and for the "not-ghost," I add, there is the "ghost" and vice versa. Gothic parody, according to Becker, with its "mockery, irony, [and] allusion...creates a state of metaphysical uncertainty" and might be seen as "repetition with a critical difference" (Becker 26). Punter points rightly to Gothic's role as a "contamination" of law, reason, intellect, and security: the "mad laughter" in the face of attempted control, when chaos shows up at your doorstep, knocks on the closed door, always

prepares to break through a window or break down the door. As Jameson says of the postmodern, “we know it’s only fun: a prodigious exhilaration with the new order of things” if not the things themselves (*Postmodernism* x).

As Atwood’s explanation of the ghost implies, the ghost story will exist as long as there are humans who need to understand themselves. But then, that is why authors write about anything. This compatibility of writing and ghosting is not accidental, for the ghost is an attempt (however doomed) at an individuating narrative. It exists in the story and for the story, but it also exists outside of the story, for ghosts are known for their transgression of boundaries, whether of time, space, shape, identity, or signification. Ghosts might well be just one more medium for telling stories of ourselves; in a postmodern world, their reality or imaginary quality is increasingly beyond the point because deciding the difference is virtually impossible.

1.6 Summary

In keeping with the spirit of the postmodern age the ghost figure in literature is being evermore normalized, met with decreased hesitation and lessening fear despite, and often because of, its traditional signification of chaos. Many of the concepts integral to a discussion of the postmodernization of the ghost are inextricable from each other, and so each chapter in this dissertation focuses on a specific element of that process while keeping in mind that the overall effect of the postmodern is an increasing acceptance of the difficulty inherent in nomination that, in the past, has usually brought a sense of security, normalcy, place, and individuation. Chapter One explains the theoretical framework for this thesis. Chapter Two highlights the “Hesitation to Nominate” which Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) emphasizes and Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) brings forward into the postmodern era. Chapter Three focuses

on “real ghosts,” as seen in Stephen King’s *The Shining* (1977) and Peter Straub’s *Ghost Story* (1979). These works are inextricably linked, especially since Straub claims King and James, among others, as influences and yet his ghosts are true “shape-shifters,” different from those seen before. Chapter Four is devoted exclusively to the normalized ghost of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1988), featuring a real, almost-human ghost who interacts materially with humans. Chapter Five explores the most recent phase of ghost-postmodernization, illustrated by Margaret Atwood’s *The Robber Bride* (1993) and Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* (2000), as the ghost figure becomes ubiquitous to the point where characters themselves are wondering whether ghosts are really so different from us. As Halberstam says, there are no easy answers, but there are Gothic “responses.”

Chapter 2:

The Hesitation to Nominate: “That hush in which something gathers”

As both Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) illustrate, the progressive normalization of ghosts in twentieth-century fiction is symptomatic of a loss of referents, which culminates in the blurring of the boundaries between reality and imagination, subject and object, producing a hyperreal existence in which a sense of self is increasingly diluted and/or re-worked. In James’s novella, unresolved hesitation about whether a “real” spirit inhabits the text leads to a collective dubiety among author, characters, and readers because the results are similarly destabilizing, regardless of the haunting’s origin. *The Turn of the Screw* presents a new kind of ghost figure that haunts a young governess without ever appearing to the reader in tangible form, demonstrating how the mere proposal of a spirit can have the same lasting, material effect as a lucid apparition. More than five decades later, *The Haunting of Hill House* repeats James’s methods of sustained hesitation and presence through absence by featuring an alienated young woman who is beset by a ghost that the reader never meets; Jackson even extends the chaos, implicating society in the creation of its own terrors. In each work, a disenfranchised beholder arrives at an estate seeking individuation and sanctuary, but the contemplation of a spectral visitant overturns both reason and stability. The ghost apparently provides a mirror to the beholder’s narcissistic quest, reflecting the chaos that they fear is more prevalent; however, the insoluble nature of the haunting leaves the text wide open for interpretation. Because the author chooses not to elucidate on whether there truly is a ghost, the reader is left with the illusion of power, entrusted with nomination of the ghostly phenomenon, but unable to resolve the matter. The reader ultimately doubts the beholder’s sanity and perspective,

thinning the line between the spectre and the spectator, while being left in a state of irresolution and granting the tale itself a specular, though unsolvable, quality. As a result, the text itself, rather than the ghost within it, becomes the object that haunts and attracts, as the reader becomes increasingly interested in *how* the haunting is created and “not just in what is created” (Hutcheon 8).

The Turn of the Screw purports to be a ghost story about a young governess who, in search of a position, finds one at the house of Bly, caring for two children of an absent man known only as the “Master.” An unnamed frame narrator introduces a middle narrator named Douglas, who relates the story of the governess and warns his listeners that the story will not overtly reveal whether there actually is a ghost. The governess reports seeing a phantom almost immediately upon her arrival at Bly. Her confidante, a literal-minded housekeeper named Mrs. Grose, suggests who the spectre might be, informing the governess of details regarding her dead predecessors, Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. The governess assumes Jessel and Quint to be the apparitions and, in a presumed effort to protect the children (Miles and Flora) from the ghosts of their former guardians, tries to make everyone in the household believe that she has seen them. None of the inhabitants corroborates her story, and so the governess stands alone in her visions. In the end, Miles dies suddenly in her arms with the governess declaring victory over the spectres.

The Haunting of Hill House concerns a thirty-two-year-old woman named Eleanor Vance who embarks on a journey of self-discovery. After her mother dies, she accepts an invitation from a Dr. Montague to stay with him and two other occupants (Theodora and Luke) in a secluded old house reputed to be haunted. The house, once owned by a Hugh Crain and his two daughters, is now cared for by the housekeeper, Mrs. Dudley and her husband, while Luke stands to inherit the estate. Eleanor is mentally unstable when we meet her, and as the story progresses and the supposed ghost of the mansion (seemingly the female companion of the older daughter, but a child-

ghost is also implied) increasingly seeks her out, she gradually becomes obsessed and deluded, thinking that the ghost and the house are her real family. Because of her precarious mental condition, the others, particularly Montague, banish her from Hill House. Figuring to defy them by joining her “real” family, she kills herself by ramming her car into a tree.

While the turn-of-the-century publication of Henry James’ novella *The Turn of The Screw* signals a shift in the spectre-spectator relationship within fiction, *The Haunting of Hill House* deepens the rupture at the mid-century point. The supposed phantom of Bly, where the governess turns up for her new job, is grounded to the spectral space, apparently awaiting for her arrival to give it meaning. According to the governess, the phantom bears signification in and of itself, while Mrs. Grose is uncertain what to believe. Meanwhile, conversations between those two characters are so open to deciphering that the reader is drawn into the dual roles of spectator and interpreter: of ambiguous actions and dialogue, the governess’s mental stability, Mrs. Grose’s and the children’s loyalties, and the ghost’s signification. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Eleanor Vance shows up at Hill House to engage in an experiment on human fear; her intention, likewise, is to ascertain a purpose and meaning for her life, and to find a home, both literally and metaphorically. As with James’s novella, the major conflict for much of the duration of *Hill House* concerns whether there actually is a ghost. Furthermore, even allowing that there is a phantom, uncertainty persists about its nature and its demands. Meanwhile, the spectre is never seen by any other character or by the reader, while conversation about ghosts avoids positive identification of one. The lack of authorial closure, again, leaves the reader to interpret the ambiguous signs.

Thus, beginning with *The Turn of the Screw* and continuing with *Hill House*, the hesitation to identify a ghost belongs not just to some characters, but to the author as well; as a result, the reader is unable to verify the nature of the spectre. This normalized chaos (blurring lines between

text, author, and reader, and exploding the very concept of text) is an accepted role for the postmodern reader, but James's turn-of-the-century ghost figure triples the hesitation and heralds a new kind of ghost figure that is physically absent, but present through the word itself. For the governess, as well as for Eleanor Vance, the word "ghost" is enough to conjure a spirit; furthermore, the other characters, regardless of their beliefs, are thrown into chaos by the mere insinuation of a ghost. In each case, the ghost exists performatively in word, thought, effect, and (at times) action, making it impossible to remove the spirit or the idea of one; once spoken or conceptualized, it exists indefinitely despite, and through, its physical absence.

Whereas, in a postmodern view, the present might not be a sign of anything, only itself, both the governess and Eleanor read meaning into every sign. In both cases, the implied spirit, simultaneously empty of meaning and loaded with potential meaning, is a specular because the beholder sees herself reflected in the spirit, whether it exists independently of her or not. The spectre is an inhabitant of the estate to which the beholder is a visitant who, naturally, brings her own expectations. Exiled and disenfranchised, similar to the governess, Eleanor's journey towards meaning, individuation, and belonging finds an end at Hill House where the ghost supposedly resides. Ultimately, the spectator becomes the spectre, moving towards death, straddling the boundary between human and other. Both the governess and Eleanor are like the ghost, and the ghosts are like their beholders; the line between them is virtually non-existent and indiscernible, and yet it exists by virtue of having existed conceptually. Thus, with their sustained uncertainty because of a loss of referents, both *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Haunting of Hill House* are so postmodern in spirit that they seem to have required the word "without knowing it" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* xiii), for the ghosts of Bly and Hill House are postmodern in nearly every way.

2.1 Unresolved Hesitation in *The Turn of the Screw*

Since its publication in 1898, critical readings of James's novella have been many and various. To many critics, *The Turn of the Screw* constantly requires explanation, inviting the view that it is perhaps a failed narrative. In recent decades, however, critics are increasingly inclined to reconcile the various interpretations, proposing that the text is inherently, artistically ambiguous. The very nature of traditional literary criticism, particularly regarding *The Turn of the Screw*, entails labelling and the choosing of sides in a battle for generic primacy. Hoople argues, as this thesis does, that much of the criticism of James's ghost story marks, or masks, "scholars' own need to add to the text, to force it to fit their own way of seeing literature, and to join 'battle' with other critics" (1). Most often, the contest between interpretations has come down to choosing a side, but James's novella defies such rigid side-taking, and the result, says Beidler, "is an ambiguity bordering on confusion" (Beidler, *Ghosts* 240). Various critics have argued that the main question is whether the children see the ghosts (Todorov, *Poetics* 158) or whether the governess *really* sees them (Boehm 247). The earliest critical discussions over the novella, according to a "Freudian dimension," which was drowned out by subsequent "reassessments and advances in critical theory," usually taking the form of a battle over the governess's "psychology": largely a fight between "hallucinationists and apparitionists" (Hoople 17). There are a few, such as Hoople, Fleming, Lustig, and Deledalle-Rhodes who see the futility in such polarities while others, notably Beidler, choose a side even while acknowledging the insoluble nature of the novella's mysteries.

Having written extensively on the novella's critical lineage, the context for both its creation and publication, and particularly on *The Turn of the Screw* as a ghost story, Beidler notes that criticism has ranged from reader-response, to deconstruction, feminism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, among others. The most controversial view, and one that casts a long shadow

across any new readings of the novella, is the “Freudian,” or psychoanalytic, stance taken by Edmund Wilson in his “landmark” essay, “The Ambiguity of Henry James.” Wilson argues that the governess’s story is largely the result of sexual repression, while the ghosts are ““not real ghosts but hallucinations”” (Beidler, *Ghosts* 131). The reactions to Wilson’s psychological reading have been many, including that by Fagin, who points out that James could “scarcely have read” Freud (132), but, even though Wilson briefly retracted his argument, it nonetheless stands as a touchstone for readings of future, and earlier, criticism on the novella (133). Some earlier scholars, including Enck, Siegel, and McMaster suggest that “the story permits both readings simultaneously” (Beidler, *Ghosts* 135). Most contemporary readings, in fact, particularly those of Brook-Rose, Rimmon and Felman, which collectively amount to a “foundation for the postmodern ‘we-can-have-it-both-ways’ view” (Beidler, *Ghosts* 135), represent an increasing uneasiness in the 1980s and 1990s with asking “‘either-or’ questions” about the story when “the only ‘correct’ answer is likely to be ‘both’ or ‘we cannot decide’” (136).

Identifying whether a ghost exists or whether the beholder is at least slightly daft has never been a simple matter of gathering facts and rationally choosing a side. And yet that is what most critics have tried to do with *The Turn of the Screw* until recently, proposing that either the governess who sees spirits is insane, or the House of Bly where she has come to work is haunted. “Needless to say,” says Deledalle-Rhodes, “the omniscient author does nothing to enlighten the reader” (208) on this matter. As Hoople also points out, the dominant various critical streams range from the early, “naïve” view of Miles and Flora as innocent victims of the ghosts and the governess as virtuous and heroic, and vice-versa, to arguments that the governess is “a neurotic woman who merely imagines that she sees the ghosts” (Beidler, “Discord” 3). While Beidler offers illuminating plot summaries of both the ghosted and non-ghosted propositions, he concedes that the

“mad governess” view is the preferred one in contemporary North American readings, despite finding the most personal satisfaction in the “evil-ghost” view because it does not discredit either the governess or various plot devices. But even Beidler ultimately maintains that *The Turn of the Screw* is a “rich and complex” text that defies single-minded interpretations (*Ghosts* 239).

Deledalle-Rhodes, in her semiotic approach, surveys James’s novella as a system of signs, suggesting that the numerous “unsatisfactory” interpretations of the text are interesting simply because “there are so many of them.” The situation, she admits, “serves only to enhance the ambiguity of the tale” (209).

As Lloyd-Smith says, “that the story is constructed of ‘blanks’ does not however preclude its having a strong current of suggestiveness to their probable content” (154). There is a middle ground between this and that other side, and within that seemingly neutral space, on the dividing line itself, is where James’s novella, its ghost, the governess, and all other characters dwell. The novella is, in fact, structured in this way, so that the book signifies nothing—the tale does not “tell in any literal vulgar way”—but we supply the answers that James invites us to supply. The question “what is it?” is then applicable to both the text and the diegetic ghost, rendering word and ghost equals, if not exactly the same, occupying the same space, or double-space; a ghost, after all, is conjured by a word, and a word is a ghost: signifier of a larger, abstract signified. The hypothetical line between ghost and not-ghost (or between any two binary opposites) is full of potential meaning, while resisting the imposition of certainty. “James is undoubtedly raising questions about boundaries” (Lustig 7), for his entire novella defies traditional side-taking and labeling. One might easily take a side, as the governess herself does, only to find that the story defies closure, simultaneously attracting and repelling interpretation. To close a door deliberately left open is counter-productive to understanding what it is and how it works, or if it works at all.

That is the approach, as well, of Deledalle-Rhodes, Lustig, Boehm, and others. Fleming sensibly summarizes the lack of dilemma, seeing the novella in a way that

mediates between the two sides of this debate, seeing both the governess's reactions and the ghosts, whether real or imagined, as related halves of a particular world-view or perceptual paradigm.... The question thus ceases to be whether or not the governess produces, or imagines, the ghosts (for, in my view, we can as well say that the ghosts produce the governess), but instead, what the implications are of the presence of both for an understanding of this work.... (Fleming 135)

The problem with some of these critics, although it is reassuring to have their complicity on this thorny issue, is that they either elaborate in theory only and leave out the analysis of the literature, or that they do exactly what the governess does, imposing their own ideological certainty upon the text for the sake of saying *something* that might be truthful. Indeed, James has constructed a tale that polarizes readers as much as its characters, and, if anything, the novella is both an indictment of certainty as a form of naiveté and an illustration of the wide space occupied by uncertainty. A postmodern reader would seem to embrace the latter as a possibility, at least.

This thesis takes the postmodern road by neither doubting nor crediting the governess, for either stance would invite its opposite, effectively threatening the credibility of both positions. Lucy points out that this issue of undecidability is “not because the text is at fault.... On the contrary, it is precisely that the text refuses to come to a decision on the governess that counts as a critical difference within the text itself. It is therefore on the basis of this textual difference that critical differences of opinion have emerged, and have done so necessarily” (129). Given the apparently insoluble nature of the ghost's authenticity in these two similar works, the greater question would seem to be: what, then, do we make of this built-in doubt, this prolonged

uncertainty regarding the ghost's actuality? The logical answer would be that a lot depends the reader. But that would be making assumptions before any closer scrutiny begins, and that would land us on the side of the governess, who proclaims truth and assigns meaning to details where empirical evidence is absent. On the other hand, the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, occupies the neutral space wherein uncertainty presides, for she offers possibilities of the ghost's identity and relates the history of Bly and its master, as well as its deceased servants, but never says that the past has offered up ghosts, nor offers a solid opinion on the events which pass. She is not convinced that Bly has ghosts, though she seems open to the possibility. She is an empty text whom the governess reads, the signifier who gives up no signified. The children, who claim not to see the ghost, fulfill a role similar to Mrs. Grose's, for the governess usually reads their absence of malice as a presence of malice. The inability to name is represented by those three characters who do not see the ghosts of the former governess and valet, Miss Jessel and Peter Quint, respectively. The governess, meanwhile, assumes the ground of *certainty*, based on her own beliefs and expectations. Ultimately, though, it is James himself who has the power to nominate, but refuses to name, thereby erasing the textual boundaries between fantasy and reality, and between text and reader, turning the text into a sort of physical manifestation of the ghost: the ghost-as-text and/or text-as-ghost. Postmodernization of the ghost begins with recognition that the ghost represents a narrative that is at once full and empty of meaning, and the longer an author withholds nomination, the wider the space for interpretation. But it must also be seen that the author does not hold the answers either; ostensibly the reader does, but that, too, would seem to be an illusion wrought by a text that *seems* determined to make the reader see a ghost that is and is not there.

After a century of close readings, many of which merely adjust "the language of criticism to their own times and styles," critics are still unable to "resolve its critical issues into a consensus or

meaning” as the text “refuses to yield unassailable, absolute meaning” (Hoople 17). Like the traditional ghost-story author, the governess is attempting to tell a tale in a “literal vulgar way” (James 3) but she is foiled at each turn. James might be implying that ghost tales have grown intellectually “gross,” or low-brow, with the straightforward identification of the ghost rendering such an occurrence relatively common and unchallenging to the reader, as he suggests in his 1908 prologue (Beidler, *Ghosts* 226). Perhaps the answers are only inherent in the text, equally there and not there. Whichever side we choose, we become like the governess in our megalomaniacal pursuit of a single belief, truth, or interpretation of an empty signifier: ghost hunters all, ghost-hunted all.

James’s goal might be not so much to engage the reader with the haunting within the text, but to disengage us from it in order to be critical, or at least feeling that we are; at the same time, he expands the margins of the text so that the “haunting” is palpable, asserting itself beyond the text and onto the reader so that one is unable properly to say what is real and what is not. We are cast in as much doubt as any of the characters. Bakhtin might well be right when he says, “the utter inadequacy of literary theory is exposed when it is forced to deal with the novel,” and yet it *is* forced to deal with the novel, an utterance that Bakhtin asserts has a built-in self-criticism (8) by virtue of its inherent swirl and interplay of different languages (characters, author, history, culture, reader, and so on). Lustig offers examples of critics’ “hostility to uncertainty” (113)—but an equal amount of aggression might well be uncovered in the face of certainty. Is James’s ambiguity “unpleasant and irritating” (Lustig 113)? Yes. Is the novella “a self-reflexive meditation on the medium of art?” (113) Again, yes. It is both and neither. It can be emotionally wrought and emotionally dead. It is also both intellectually wrought and reified. An argument could be made that such is true of all works of fiction; Bakhtin asserts that “every utterance participates in the

‘unitary language’ ...and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia” (272), with its meaning perpetually changing, depending upon circumstances. But *The Turn of the Screw*’s formal properties highlight that very fact, that a reader could choose to occupy either one territory (ghost) or its opposite (not-ghost), but the dividing line between the two choices is at once a neutral and categorical territory: the “fantastic mid-point” (Lustig 114) taken by Todorov and endorsed by Lustig where hesitation prevails. On the boundary line between one supposed truth and its opposite, all truths can be possible. James, however, does not choose, and this (non-)event alone tinctures the text with a brush of the postmodern as we judge it, and the ghosts, by what they do rather than what they tell us, the *how* being at least as important as the *what*.

The phantoms of *The Turn of the Screw* are so abstract, so completely connected with the governess herself, that it is only natural that they should perfectly satisfy the governess’s requirements of a haunting, as well as her personal fears and desires, while also transcending diegetic boundaries of time and space. Whether or not the ghost is textually “real,” the tale will not tell, we are advised (James 3). With that self-conscious address in the frame narrative, James himself, through his secondary narrator, invites the reader to partake in the story as both spectator and interpreter. To complicate matters, there are three narrators: the governess through her written account; the anonymous frame narrator who reads the governess’s diary, written twenty years earlier; and the primary teller, Douglas, who reports the reading of the tale through a middle narrative. Thus, including the author, there are four narrative layers to increase our critical distance from the subject of the haunting. There is even a sense in which the reader becomes the fifth narrator, compelled to tell his/her own tale in a manner most befitting his/her bent, even while knowing that the tale is both dead and alive: dead until the reader comes to it, but always in the process of becoming what it will become.

A full understanding of the ghost's role is not so simple as merely classifying and rationalizing, for James never makes it clear whether there is a ghost or not, in which case even motives and identities of the spirits become relatively unimportant. After all, what would it matter *why* a spirit haunts the governess if there were, indeed, no spirit to begin with? With no textual explanation or disclosure upon which to hang either a ghost or a not-ghost, all that remains is the text, which, because it gives us nothing but an absence, is an empty signifier that is nonetheless full of potential meanings. James devises a story that is a "trap" (Hoople 15) in which there is no meaning, except that what we see in the text, as well as the ghosts, says more about us than it does about either the story, the characters, or the author. Even the author himself notes in his 1908 preface to the novella that he need "only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough.... Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications" (Beidler, *Ghosts* 226). This desire to avoid "weak specifications" might well explain many ambiguities and gaps in the novella, but, as this chapter argues, it is in these openings that the ghost resides. In *The Turn of the Screw*, then, we behold a ghost made of gaps, meaning nothing and something, an absence in which much is present.

2.1.1 Herself and Others: What the Governess Sees

The governess in *The Turn of the Screw* is typical of many protagonists in tales involving postmodern ghosts in that she fears disintegration of her own solidity while, in fact, she has never actually known the accord for which she quests.⁶ In identifying the ghost, the governess, in fact, obliterates the few referents she has known, for the spectre is chaos incarnate, regardless of

⁶ Time and again, protagonists in each ghost novel explicated in this thesis find themselves confronted by chaos in the form of a spirit when what they mostly want is preservation of a sacred, solid normal that they associate with a harmonious past. In postmodernism, such a past does not exist. But the human propensity for nostalgia and the need for such truths remains, even in an era marked by irony and skepticism.

questions about its veracity. As Lustig points out, the recognition of the ghost of her predecessor, Miss Jessel, “seems only to destabilize her own identity” (163). When the young woman encounters each ghost (Miss Jessel and Peter Quint), she scrutinizes it and describes it to Mrs. Grose, who supplies the remaining details. The result of the governess’s grip on “truth” is a polarizing struggle for control of Bly, whether it is a household that believes in hauntings (including the return of the repressed past and the ensuing chaos) or one that holds to the status quo (including no ghosts, no questioning of boundaries or the “Master’s” edicts). The ghost, ultimately, poses a threat to the master narrative by which Mrs. Grose, “keeper” of the house, runs Bly. It could be said that the governess has brought the ghost with her. No one else, neither the children nor the housekeeper, ever speaks of its presence directly, and she assumes their silence to be an admission of conspiracy. She asks what they have seen and rarely, if ever, takes them at their word. The “caretaker” brings the only real fear and danger they know and, ultimately, she (and the ghost she brings) *is* chaos, while Mrs. Grose represents stability and rules.

While the ghosts are connected with Bly’s past, their stories and forms gain substance through the listener, just as the governess and the other characters gain materiality through the reader. In the Lacanian sense, the governess enters language, “born in so far as [she], the signifier emerges in the field of the Other” and so comes into being (*Four* 199), solidifying into a signifier. The governess comes to the estate with certain desires and expectations, as does the reader, for we discover from Douglas early on that *The Turn of the Screw* is a ghost story. From the outset, we are spectators perched at the beginning of the narrative who, promised a tale of the supernatural, will see exactly that in the story told, unless we are of a critical turn of mind. On coming to Bly, the governess has no “connexions” (James 14)—a common condition for governesses of literature such as Jane Eyre, conveying an innocence often associated with the uninitiated, unpropertied

female who is a sort of visitant within the household of her employment.⁷ As such, the governess seeks solidity and placement, but the ghost is decidedly *un*solid and representative of her own potential *dis*placement. Early on, as the governess takes “a turn” in the grounds, enjoying a “sense of property that amused and flattered [her],” she begins to feel “tranquil and justified” (14-15). Taking “a turn” is the beginning of the turn of the metaphorical screw into the wood; that is, she becomes possessed with that which possesses her, including the children, the estate, and the sense of belonging. Although the grounds and children are not hers, her false impression of ownership fuels both her sense of well-being and the fear of losing it all; thus, almost immediately, her dual sense of security and purpose becomes the spoils of an oncoming battle.

While “evil times” had occurred at Bly prior to the narrative, the arrival of the governess seems to activate the spirits, as if they have been waiting for her to breathe life into them. Once Mrs. Grose supplies her with the basic facts about the house’s history, including Quint’s and Jessel’s departures, her expectations of what such spirits might look like seem to conjure them. The causes of their deaths go unspoken by Mrs. Grose—the former governess, Jessel, “went away,” while Quint fell down an “icy slope” (27)—with both pronouncements lending themselves to either literal or figurative interpretation, if not both at once. With an abundance of such ambiguous statements, the entire story feels like sliding down an “icy slope” for all concerned. Even when first confronted by the ghost, she can arrive at no conclusions about its identity, admitting that “the truth I had now to turn over was simply and clearly the truth that I could arrive at no account whatever of the visitor” (17). Her uncertainty is uncharacteristic, as we see in the rest of the novella, for her confidence seems to be for its own sake; certainty, in fact, would seem to be her *only* certainty. She is tenaciously convinced about things which are a matter of conjecture and resolute about what is “right,” seeing no “grey prose” in her office (33), but only black and white,

⁷ Lustig, in fact, includes a section comparing the governess to Jane.

such as the letters she writes, that make up both her own history and the novella, even though a reader can see little else *but* ambiguous “grey prose.”

But her insistence on security seems to invite chaos, for her ironic admission that she fears *becoming* frightened by a *visitor* begets a ghost (14).⁸ With her own psychological baggage in tow, the governess encounters phantoms that she can recognize (in itself, a form of control or self-possession): two spirits, including the former governess, whom she fears might usurp her position with the children, thereby displacing her, and robbing her of the sense of importance she craves. This psychological sort of self-haunting, later repeated in *Hill House* wherein Eleanor finds solace with a maternal ghost despite her fear of her own dead mother, shows the protagonist becoming terrorized by the very thing she fears being terrorized by, possibly even creating her own monster. Just prior to meeting the ghost, the governess concedes to a sensation that imagination and reality have blended and the expectation of encountering “someone,” and so it is unremarkable that she does; the “non-representation signals an absence” which “perpetuates the desire” for “something” (Wain 365). The governess concedes to lacking critical distance towards her new situation, and shows herself susceptible to emotion and overwhelmed by the demands of her new post, for she is “under a charm,” and “lifted aloft on a great wave of infatuation and pity” (James 14). Soon after arriving, she goes out for a stroll, thinking to herself that “it would be charming as a charming story suddenly to meet some one” who

would appear there at the turn of a path and would stand before me and smile and approve....What arrested me on the spot...was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real. He did stand there! (15)

⁸ In Wharton’s “Afterwards” (1909), a couple buys a house specifically because it is haunted. In essence, they buy not just property, but a ghost: an individuating ghost story and ready-made history.

Nearly all critics, regardless of whether they take the ghosts for real and/or the governess for “normal,” skip by this early indicator that the ghosts might have been conjured by the governess or that, in Lacanian terms, her unconscious and language intersect; more precisely, the governess’s “unconscious” shows a “gap through which neurosis recreates a harmony with a real” (Lacan, *Four* 22). With such innuendo abounding in the text, it hardly seems “naïve” at all that early readers doubted the governess’s sanity (Hoople 28), for James certainly implies the possibility, even if he does not mean it to be taken literally.

With her newfound freedom from restrictions, the governess is becoming rather more ghostly from the moment she arrives at Bly and continuing throughout her stay, a condition that likely contributes to her empathy with the ghost’s position. Compared to her inexperienced and necessarily narrow view of the world, she learns of “space and air and freedom” for the first time. But, even while she tastes these fewer restrictions, she laments the dangers that accompany such transformation: “and then there was consideration—and consideration was sweet. Oh it was a trap—not designed but deep—to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever in me was most excitable” (James 14). By “consideration,” she might be referring to her regard and obligations for the children, or simply her career at Bly, which while being “sweet” is a weighty matter for one so young. Above all, the governess yearns for esteem or consideration; she desires property and a place in the world, which a Victorian governess usually lacks, living with someone else’s family in an estate she does not own.

For all her excitement at the potential uses for freedom, she insists upon restraints (“a trap”) for herself, the housekeeper, and above all, the children. The position at Bly, entailing the moral instruction of two children, is a return to nature and innocence for her, or at least the preservation of it through her symbolic embracing of Flora and Miles—a “return” that might actually be a

fairytale. Protecting them is protecting that innocent part of herself that she is far from ready to relinquish. “I used to speculate,” she says (14); we are left to assume that she does not merely speculate anymore, but deliberates with certainty. Regardless of what her words signify, James clearly invites the reader into his “trap” of interpreting according to his/her own “vanity” or “whatever” will provide entertainment. Her expectations now lead the governess to certainty, rather than mere speculation, though she might mean the term “speculate” to suggest the making of spectres. One of her apparitions is described as emanating from herself thus:

It produced in me, this figure, in the clear twilight, I remember, two distinct gasps of emotions which were, sharply, the shock of my first and that of my second surprise...the man who met my eyes was not the person I had precipitately supposed. There came to me thus a bewilderment of vision. (15)

Sounding like Todorov’s state of “hesitation” when expectations conflict with new perceptions, the governess’s language again brings attention to her inability to see properly, but also draws attention to herself as “the one who counts,” as Lacan says (*Four* 20); that is, the governess becomes aware of herself as the thinker and speaker of the words which create her expectations and, thus, her own bewilderment. Ambiguously, she admits that “the figure that faced me was...as little anyone else I knew as it was the image that had been in my mind” (James 16), strongly suggesting that the ghostly figure is a product of the meeting of two conflicting perspectives: that which she has expected (the image in her mind) and that which she could not have expected (unlike “anyone else I knew”). At least early on, then, she is uncertain of where the ghost originates, and this doubt is not easily erased in the reader’s mind, once mentioned. In fact, it is a duality that haunts the text long after its publication, a further turn of the screw.

Any doubt the governess admits is soon replaced by an assuredness that her impressions of a ghost are true, regardless of insecurity regarding its origins. And, again, the point would seem to be that the ghost's origins are inconsequential. To erase any doubts her reader (or she) might have, the governess declares: "the gold was still in the sky, the clearness in the air, and the man who looked at me over the battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame. That's how I thought, with extraordinary quickness, of each person he might have been and that he wasn't" (16). She is "extraordinary" in her own mind, just as later she insists upon the "extraordinary flight of heroism the occasion demanded of me" (27) and that she "needed to be remarkable" (15) in order to face the ghosts of Bly. Clearly, this is a young woman who, regardless of the ghosts' veracity, seem to *want* them to be real; at the very least, they mark her as "extraordinary" and "remarkable" and a heroine to herself. She wishes to be all those things to the children, but finds it impossible. But her "consideration" of herself has at least been raised to a "sweetness" now that she has an incredible story to tell.

Whether out of necessity or not, the more she tells the tale, naturally, the more certain she becomes of its reality as well as of the ghosts' identities. She sees the ghost of Quint as plainly as the letters produced in her handwriting, as if they are equally real. They are, in fact, produced at nearly the same time, for in the writing about the ghost, the phantom is given body in the word itself: "So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page...and even as *he turned* away still markedly fixed me. *He turned* away; that was all I knew" (17; italics added). In this case, the ghost is a word, and the word is a ghost. She conjures the already-existing spirit with the form of letters and word, just as James himself has done, just as any ghost storyteller does. Furthermore, he is constantly turning, as if he is the screw and she is the wood. Shortly after, she claims to be "deeply rooted" (something she desperately wants) and says, "I can't say how long I turned it over,

or how long, in a confusion of curiosity and dread, I remained where I had had my collision.... [Agitation] certainly had held me and driven me, for I must, in circling about the place, have walked three miles..." (17). Symbolically, she re-enacts the movement of a turning of the screw, and the more she mulls over the problem before her, giving it fuller "consideration," the more confused with "curiosity and dread" she becomes. No matter how much she walks she is unable to relieve herself of the shadow cast by the ghost, Bly, or least of all herself. That is possibly because she carries them with her; Bly might be merely the blank space, or page, upon which she casts her own fears and wants, just as, perhaps, the text is for the reader; in narcissistic terms, "the thin paper is the reflecting pool; the text is its own mirror" (Hutcheon 14), reflecting upon itself. Even if there are actual ghosts, they are also phantoms derived from her own expectations and understanding, for she is the only one who sees them. One hint of this is that while she is walking, the scenery before her was "empty with a great emptiness.... There were shrubberies and big trees, but I remember the clear assurance I felt that none of them concealed him. He was there or not there: not there if I didn't see him" (James 20). Of course, her certainty of not seeing a ghost is rewarded, since she is the author of her own spirits, even if authorship simply means choosing the words that shape experience and/or cause its materialization.

Despite her bewilderment, she is aware that the ghost is an embodiment of her desires and fears, and what she seems to want is an enemy, to give her a purpose at Bly. Her chosen enemy is the uncertainty signified by the ghosts and fostered by Mrs. Grose's skepticism, both of whom threaten her sense of order and need for security. Thus, she counters anarchy with conviction, wielding her sword in the double cause of truth and justice. The supposed ghost is a "visitant" with a "touch of strange freedom...in the sign of familiarity of his wearing no hat" (16), signifying a dissipation of class boundaries. "We were the question," she says of her first encounter with the

apparition, “too far apart to call each other, and yet “at shorter range, some challenge between us, breaking the hush, would have been the right result of our straight mutual stare” (16). In short order, the governess has admitted to the specular nature of the spectre, even implying that they are mutually implicated by the situation, forming opposites of a single “question”: “what is it that I am beholding?” The spectre not only gives no ground, but its assumed air of “strange freedom” poses an affront and issues the sought-after “challenge” to her precarious authority by breaking “the hush” of hesitation. Based on her stance that truth and conviction are both possible and right, the governess’s expectations apparently cause her to form preconceptions of both her impending experience and its implications. “I had an absolute certainty that I should see again what I had already seen,” she says, practically ordering up the next apparition, for she has “absolute certainty” that they will re-appear and for what purpose. She says of the ghost: “I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page; then, exactly, after a minute, as if to add to the spectacle, he slowly changed his place—passed, looking at me hard all the while, to the opposite corner of the platform” (16). In her instantaneous certainty about the spectacle he immediately shifts to the “opposite corner”; she sees him as shifting and opposite, and feels her world shifting in relation to the supposedly solid letters that “I” form on the page. There are no hints of being manipulated by her convictions, inspired by muses, or swept up in the spirit of the moment. She perceives an image and assigns meaning to it, illuminating the absurdity of such speculation. She proclaims, “my vision was instantaneous; it was all there” (19), as if speaking of an image from inspiration, conjured creatively like a story scene or character, which might be why he appears to her in her “letters.” Later, when she observes the ghost (19-20) looking “straight in” at her, she sees him with no “greater distinctness,” even though she is nearer to him, because she has already made up her mind.

And yet she lays claim to a “forward stride” in her presumed relationship with the ghost of Quint, even though no words pass between them.

Regardless of authenticity, the ghost gains clarity for the governess, for a subsequent visitation provides her with a “better view.” This time, as in *Wuthering Heights*, we are privy to the face of a ghostly visitant, but are separated from him by a window pane, creating the effect of distance where little exists.⁹ Quite possibly, the governess glimpses a gothic disortion of her own narcissistic self reflected in the glass. But, perhaps, it is also a matter of the governess growing bolder in telling the tale. Her details become more distinct with a “better view” because the ghost lingers for a while, allowing her to hesitate, but also allowing for a double gaze: spectre and spectator beholding each other, perhaps questioning the actuality of the other. Appearing on the other side of a pane of glass, he thus places a thin membrane between the living and the dead, again occupying opposite sides of the same question. Suspiciously, though, she claims to have been gazing upon him for a long time and even to have “known him always,” even though it is Mrs. Grose who supplies the probable name and identity to the apparition (20).

Already feeling alienated by virtue of her position in the household, the governess further segregates herself from the other inhabitants with her firm stance and air of self-sacrifice, making “others” among the living and aligning herself more properly with the ghostly “others.” In fact, Oates’s short story, “The Inhabitants of Bly,”¹⁰ suggests that the governess has less reason to feel welcome than any of the others, living or dead. At first, the governess seems dumb to the possibility that it might not be Bly that is haunted, but herself, particularly since no one else seems to see what she sees. She muses about Mrs. Grose’s seemingly undoubtable support:

⁹ In *Wuthering Heights*, the ghost of a child, Catherine Earnshaw, appears at the window and breaks through it to grasp the hands of the visiting Mr. Lockwood, who is equally without space of his own, forced to rent from Heathcliff, who might well be the precursor of the “Master” of Bly who offers the governess a place (21-22).

She herself [Mrs. Grose] had seen nothing, not the shadow of a shadow, *and nobody in the house but the governess was in the governess's plight*; yet she accepted without directly impugning my sanity the truth as I gave it to her, and ended by showing me on this ground an awestricken tenderness.... (24; italics added).

This meditation has the tone of a martyr, one who sacrifices herself for an unpopular truth, in this case making herself equally unpopular and, in a sense, gradually making a ghost of herself within Bly. She strikes a similar posture when acknowledging her own “dreadful liability to impressions of the order so vividly exemplified” (24), referring, apparently, to her propensity for creative imagining and susceptibility to “impressions” of the supernatural (24). Her tone, particularly in calling her talent a “liability,” gives her an air of superiority, implies that she is privileged in her unique “knowledge,” while verbally torturing the confused housekeeper into confessing what she really does not know. The housekeeper *does not* directly impugn the governess’s sanity, but the very mention of the possibility invokes it, causing the reader, if not Mrs. Grose, to doubt the narrator’s reliability. Obviously, she feels that her sanity merits questioning even though she seems grateful that it *does not* seem to be. “Of whatever it was that I knew nothing was known around me” (18), she says, effectively exiling herself at some psychological distance from, and yet very near by, the other inhabitants of Bly, including the ghosts. The reader must judge the governess’s truthfulness and sanity by her descriptions and self-assessments. But the storyteller is our only guide, for even Mrs. Grose’s reactions are filtered through the thoughts of the governess, as written down “long afterwards” and thus making it impossible for the reader to choose a side.

Repeatedly, James depicts the governess as one who makes assumptions, draws conclusions, and makes meaning of objects that do not necessarily hold any. Fleming also notes

¹⁰ Oates’s story offers an alternative to the master narrative represented by James’ story and, indeed, gives one pause as to the truth of haunting, in much the same way as the films *The Sixth Sense* (2000) and *The Others* (2001) do.

“the incapacity of the governess to conceive in any terms but those of either/or binary opposition” and that her “conception of moral categories is correspondingly binary and absolutist” (137).

James, as well as the governess, fails to show proof that the figure is a ghost, that it even exists, or that *its* purpose is “with certitude” to take away either of the children. She confides to Mrs. Grose, “the more I go over it the more I see in it, and the more I see in it the more I fear.” When the housekeeper suggests she question the girl, Flora, whether she has seen the ghost, the governess proclaims ‘She’ll lie!’” (30), without offering any obvious reason for believing so. Whether delusional, simply naïve, or secretive is impossible for us to judge; the effect is that we doubt her every word, try (like Mrs. Grose) to see what she sees, but in the end are doomed to see nothing of the sort, only perhaps a possibility. All we are left with, like the shattered pumpkin at the end of Sleepy Hollow’s bridge, is an empty shell which, while it signifies nothing, yet conveys a potential world of meaning, depending on which of the many narratives we are prone to believe.¹¹

The governess’s “certitude” of the phantom’s presence and identity grows with each apparition. Perhaps, if Castle is right, it does not matter, for the “true phantasmagoria is the brain” at any rate (“Phantasmagoria” 40), and what she sees is “real” to her. When he appears again, fixing her with a “hard stare” like never before, “through the glass and across the room,” she suddenly is overcome with “the added shock of a certitude that it was not for [her] he had come. He had come for someone else” (James 20). Supposedly, this new “certitude” results from the rather shaky evidence that he fixes his gaze upon other objects in the room. She ultimately concludes, simply by looking at him, that the ghost’s purpose involves the children, rather than herself, and particularly “little Miles.” Thus, we see a subtle shift in her own design, from

¹¹ In Washington Irving’s story, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1819), Ichabod Crane disappears after a nocturnal rendez-vous with the spectre of a headless horseman; in the morning, there is no sign of the schoolmaster, only a shattered pumpkin at the far end of the bridge. Irving’s narrator then lists a variety of possible endings (that Ichabod either had left or been murdered by the ghost, among them), none of them conclusive.

nomination to signification, for the ghost's meaning and performance now become integral to its identity, and vice-versa: what it wants and does are what it is.

James includes a hint that the governess's certitude derives from her aspirations towards authority and identity. When the next phantasmal encounter occurs shortly thereafter, she feels that "the gloves had been dropped there, and I turned in to recover them" (19). She means this literally, of course, in reference to a pair of the children's gloves that she had repaired. But James, if not the naïve governess, surely must be aware of the double *entendre* implicit in the cliché of "dropping the gloves" as well as "to recover" them. Recalling Fredric Jameson's supposition that naming "recovers a certain authority" by putting words to previously held assumptions and experiences (*Postmodernism* xiii), we might speculate that the naming of the ghost has allowed the governess to *recover* her own authority, which has been rendered rather dubious by, ironically, her propensity for naming with absoluteness. But as playfully satisfying as such a reading might be, it cannot be assumed correct, for James leaves all innuendoes open, not even acknowledging their doubleness most of the time which, in a reverse way, constitutes a manner of self-awareness. It is tempting to see James's complicity in such matters, especially through the governess who lacks awareness of the potent ambiguity of her words. In effect, James diverts attention from the "truth," simulataneously drawing our interest towards the process of narrative-building.

If there is a ghost, he has been there all along, and it is the governess herself who must shift her position in order to "become aware," which explains her impatience with the other residents, as if their inability to believe is simply a matter of seeing more properly. Concerning the apparition, the governess says, "the day was *grey* enough, but the afternoon light still lingered, and it enabled me, on crossing the threshold...to become aware of a person on the other side of the window" (James 19; italics added). In spite of the fading light she is able to cross over a boundary, "the

threshold,” and to see beyond herself, to begin to see from the perspective of the “person on the other side.”

James might be implying that what she lacks is perspective, the inability to actually see “the other side,” assuming there is one, even though the boundary between self and other is transparent, thin, and breakable. The ghost is positively identified by no one (at least not outright) but the governess, her certainty seeming to derive from a lack of perspective. After seeing the ghost of Quint, she puts herself in his position: “It was confusedly present to me that I ought to place myself where he had stood. I did so; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had looked, into the room” (20). The moment might be seen as an attempt to usurp the “master’s” position, if only momentarily, like Quint trying on his master’s vest, or, as she has already done, feigning appropriation of the master’s grounds. But she is also assuming the gaze of a ghost; by shifting her position, she sees the empty space as he must have seen her, more or less, suggesting a growing empathy. Mrs. Grose steps into the empty space vacated recently by the governess and receives a start from glimpsing the unexpected visage of the younger woman in the window: “She saw me as I had seen my own visitant; she pulled up short as I had done; I gave her something of the shock that I had received.... I wondered why *she* should be scared” (20-21). This switch in perspectives is in itself interesting, for even though the time and the facts are different—the identity of the apparent ghost is different and is, in fact, not a ghost but the governess—because the effect upon a beholder is just the same, despite different conditions. Significantly, the housekeeper sees the governess as a “visitant”—and because that is the governess’s own word for herself, that might well be how she expects Mrs. Grose to view her: as an outsider with no real place at Bly, again aligning herself with the spectre. Surely, she knows why the housekeeper “should be scared,” for the governess is disrupting the order of the household with her seemingly mad aspersions.

Furthermore, the governess has assumed the ghostly position, which is increasingly what she is becoming, thereby insinuating perhaps that assuredness is tantamount to self-exile—willfully placing oneself on the other side of the glass without realizing that there is no other side.

2.1.2 Reading Mrs. Grose

If the governess is conviction personified, imposing her truth upon Bly, then the housekeeper is an empty signifier upon whose words and actions the governess (mis)places meaning. Mrs. Grose's innate neutrality invites interpretation, like the text itself, for much of the novella's ambiguous dialogue emanates from her. Being an older, married woman who is the keeper of the house, Mrs. Grose represents not only the traditions and history of Bly itself, but also the skeptical reader who remains unconvinced about that which she does not see. She refuses to play the "name game," will not call the ghost a ghost because she simply does not know, even while she fears the possibility (a fact which does nothing to dispel the ghost). She is illiterate, or so the governess assumes, and, figuratively speaking, is unable to read the signs offered up by the house and the ghost. Whereas the alienated governess thinks everyone is against her, Mrs. Grose recognizes that the governess is either self-deceived or a liar, although she does not tell which one. On the other hand, the governess's attempts to interpret Mrs. Grose fail, emphasizing that certainty about some matters might not be possible, particularly if one insinuates the restoration of the dead, the return of the repressed past, and the transgression of boundaries, generally.

While the governess reacts with a positive response ("ghost") to the utterance/apparition, the housekeeper responds with extended "hesitation," as Todorov calls the confused reaction as to what to name something that is new to one's experience.¹² Mrs. Grose's inarticulateness could

¹² Sedgwick, Halberstam, and Hurley all refer to this moment as "silence"; Jameson uses the term "uncertainty" to describe the moment when one is confronted with that to which there appears to be no ready-made cultural response.

mark a refusal to affix labels to a questionable entity, as seen when she is on the verge of identifying a ghost and appears to step back from her own near-speculations, as well as the governess's "trap":

'What *is* he? He's a horror.'

'A horror?'

'He's—God help me if I know what he is!' (22)

Her reluctance to name what is troubling the governess is a signal that she occupies a seemingly indeterminate double space between certainty and uncertainty, making her neutral. At first, the apparition's mere unidentifiability makes him a "horror," rather than a "gentleman" (22), as signified also by the lack of a hat—a gesture that signals a disregard for propriety, rules, and boundaries that pertain to Bly, as well as to the governess. To the latter, what cannot be labeled is unfamiliar and, therefore, a monstrosity. But Mrs. Grose's response to the moment of hesitation—a moment where it must be decided, once and for all, either to name or to remain in suspended uncertainty—is that it is "'time we should be at church,'" which apparently means exactly that, that they ought to be praying. Her sudden declaration is also an avoidance technique, suggesting that she wishes not to engage in the questioning of reality by investigating the past; she would prefer to return to her traditional space of spiritual comfort.

Consistent with her own propensity for interpretation of meaningless details, it is only when the governess lists the ghost's unique physical traits that the housekeeper recognizes the supposed image as Quint, saying that he has died (24). Only then, as Heller points out, does the governess become certain that she has seen a ghost (67-68). Perhaps being "gross," Mrs. Grose professes being unable even to imagine Quint's fate, admitting only that he "went" eventually, but "God knows where! He died" (James 24). It is easy to see how her pronouncement might be taken

literally to mean that Quint is deceased. But even in her admission, Mrs. Grose admits to knowing nothing and seeing nothing. Either she believes that the ghost of Quint haunts Bly, or she is drawing the governess into some kind of wicked game, as she “seemed fairly to square herself, plant herself more firmly to express the wonder of it. ‘Yes. Mr. Quint’s dead’” (24). The governess assumes that Quint must be the ghost, while Mrs. Grose has said no such thing, but merely presented her with an unverified, blank detail, which the governess interprets. As both author and interpreter of events, the governess admits that she was “still haunted with the shadow of *some thing* she had not told me. I myself had kept back nothing, but there was a word Mrs. Grose had kept back” (26). That word would *seem* to be “ghost,” and the hesitation to name it places her in middle territory, possibly knowing that to say it is a ghost is to compromise her own boundaries; conversely, to say it is not a ghost would be to alienate the new governess and to abandon the children and household to utter chaos. But James does not tell us that, revealing only that the governess sees the ghost as an area of shared interest between herself and the housekeeper. Because of her own inelastic constitution, she does not see that she and Mrs. Grose stand on separate ground regarding the ghosts and control of Bly: “I was queer company enough—quite as queer as the company I received; ...how much common ground we must have found in the one idea that, by good fortune, *could* steady us” (24).

Not so steadfast or hasty to label as the governess, Mrs. Grose suggests that “otherness” is a matter of perspective, depending on whom is doing the looking. “‘Did I look very queer?’” (21) the governess asks, immediately after expressing a pleasure in holding Mrs. Grose’s hand for “comfort.” Although the suggestion of sexual deviance might occur to the reader, we are left only with the literal interpretation that she appears different in some odd way from what is usual or normal, which would still denote the governess’s sense of her own otherness. Regardless, the reply

from the housekeeper is: “‘Through this window? Dreadful!’” (21), reiterating, through a qualifying question, that monstrosity, indeed, depends upon one’s perspective. Determined to bring her “sister” over from relatively neutral ground, the governess claims that what she has seen is “much worse,” provoking the question, “What was it?” (21) and raising the issues of how much worse, and how does one define “worse”? Regardless of what she has seen and how she describes it, the term “worse” is value-laden and lacks a basis for comparison. Surely, whatever she sees cannot be “worse” than her own tyrannical stance regarding the housekeeper and children, each of whom refuses to name the ghost. The identification of a ghost, like the telling of a ghost story, would fulfill her need for individuation and is naturally “worse” than what anyone else could see.

Hoople and others are right in that the trap James sets for the reader includes a quantity of “gaps” in the story, many of which are exposed in the governess’s discussions with Mrs. Grose. Often, such as when the governess makes such assertions about the housekeeper’s sense of the situation, the author does not offer a dissenting voice beyond mere silence and ambiguous dialogue for our consideration; as a result, we are unsure of which side to choose. Mrs. “Grose” is quite literal, of course, in all her responses to the governess’s certainties and queries until she eventually gives in and leaves Bly with Flora, who also has openly stated her opinion on the matter of ghosts. Before then, though, the housekeeper’s plain, half-uttered responses represent voids in the story, requiring an interpretation that the governess is all too willing to supply despite a lack of corroborating evidence:

She held me there a moment, then whisked up her apron with her *detached* hand.

‘Would you mind, Miss, if I used the freedom—’

‘To kiss me? No!’ I took the good creature in my arms and after we had embraced like sisters felt still more fortified and indignant. (13-14)

In this exchange, the possible insinuation of lesbian attraction (and if it were true and open, it might set the governess further apart from others) is not even implied so much as presented and left open to interpretation. Even more significant is the declaration of sisterhood between such unlike women, despite the housekeeper's wearing of an apron and having a "detached hand" (which James seems to prefer, while the governess does not). While it is unclear which "freedom" she refers to precisely, she seems to assume they have a secret from the master and, though they find strength in each other, they still fear discovery and share a feeling of shame just as well. The governess fills the gap with meaning, taking the implied freedom and desire for *something* to mean the desire for a kiss and show of sisterhood. Mrs. Grose has not suggested anything of the sort, but instead the governess "took the good creature" in her arms; the governess claims that "we" had embraced, when really the housekeeper had not even finished her statement.

Despite her youth, the governess assumes herself literate enough in reading signs to glean truth from the housekeeper's words and manner, especially her silences. She perceives meaning in the housekeeper's facial expressions, although the elder woman commits to nothing: "Mrs. Grose's eyes expressed plainly that *she* had no wish to be yet [frightened], yet also that she knew too well her place not to be ready to share with me any marked inconvenience. Oh it was quite settled that she *must* share!" (21) The governess's assumptions about the housekeeper's sense of "place" and what she is withholding seem rather self-possessed, perhaps even deluded, particularly for a visitant. Despite Mrs. Grose's seeming indifference, the governess persists in interpreting every nuance of the housekeeper's speech and action:

Mrs. Grose's large face showed me, at this, for the first time, the far-away faint glimmer of *a consciousness more acute*: I somehow made out in it the delayed dawn of an idea I myself had not given her and that was as yet quite obscure to me. It comes back to me that

I thought instantly of this as something I could get from her; and I felt it to be connected with *the desire she presently showed to know more*. (22; italics added)

When Mrs. Grose wonders aloud why she had not been told before, the governess says “...for reasons. But now that you’ve guessed.” To which Mrs. Grose responds with “inconsequence”: “Ah I haven’t guessed!... How can I if *you* don’t imagine?” Her indifference, her utter lack of meaning, is often referred to with equal “knowing” on the part of the governess, and yet she insists on assigning meaning to her meaninglessness, somehow asserting that, despite her “inconsequence,” she was showing “a desire” to know more (22). In the same conversation, the governess asks the older woman if she “fears them,” and all we are told is that “she didn’t answer,” but changes the subject. “What’s he like?” Mrs. Grose asks. “He’s like nobody,” the governess replies (23), which makes him both unique and a ghostly genre unto himself. But her words also imply a nothingness onto which she is projecting somethingness, which is rather the domain of the ghost in literature, as well as the ghost story in general.

Judging from the governess’s descriptions of their confrontations about the ghost, Mrs. Grose seems affronted by the insinuation that she might see, or guess, what the governess sees. She fears the loss of certainty that such an acknowledgement might bring; in effect, she fears that the governess’s dementia will contaminate the household. In fact, when Mrs. Grose later takes a “sudden turn” and “confesses” to having seen the ghosts, she seems to do so only in order to convince the governess of the necessity for whisking Flora away from Bly as quickly as possible (74). She refuses to be complicit in the destruction of her, and the children’s, reality by claiming to have seen *something*. Her words might mean nearly anything, but the governess appropriates them, and interprets them, according to her own needs.

While she likely cannot know the thoughts of a ghost (or anyone else), the governess is convinced that she knows its intentions, likely because such a claim makes her an authority: *someone*. Observing one alleged glance from the ghost of Quint, she guesses that he is ““looking for little Miles.” Even in uttering her conviction, a simultaneous “portentous clearness now possessed” her. While Mrs. Grose asks her how she can be so certain, the governess responds as a zealot who needs no proof other than her own convictions to draw others into a web of her own creation: ““I know. I know. I know!’ my exaltation grew. And *you* know, my dear!’” The reader, as usual, is not privy to any special knowledge or facts possessed by the governess, and so she might well be making it all up to make herself feel privileged. Meanwhile, she assumes the housekeeper’s compliance simply because “she didn’t deny this” (25). As the teller of the ghost tale, the governess apparently aspires to possess the children’s loyalty by claiming to be the only person who knows the spectre’s agenda. The ghost ““wants to appear to *them*!’” she proclaims with “absolute certainty” (25), and her quest for individuation takes another turn, giving her someone upon whom to focus her aspirations of mastery: the children.

2.1.3 The Children: Ambiguous Play

The children of Bly are ambiguous in their relation to both the ghost and the governess, rendering them roughly equal to both Mrs. Grose and the ghosts in their simultaneous meaningfulness and meaninglessness. As well, while the mere insinuation of a ghost mocks the governess’s attempts at order and certainty, the children perform a similar function through their seemingly suspicious behavior, which might appear innocuous under “normal” conditions. Her inelastic pursuit of order, which ends in the death of ten-year-old Miles, is a sign of her own naiveté and her wish to be important, which manifests itself in her desire to save the children from

an evil presence. While the governess's initial expectation of the children is that they are pure and innocent, she ultimately views them as being claimed by the ghosts, united with them against her.

The children, in their beauty and innocence, become the spoils of battle between the governess and the ghosts, emblematic of her desire to possess something, even while assigning those same aspirations to the supposed ghost. In the children's view, the governess represents rules, while they are incapable of being "bad" (13). In effect, they become symbolic of her apparent self-delusion since her attempt to impose a "rigid control" (26) results in their growing resentment and, ultimately, she loses her grip on them. She is as captivated by Miles as she is by the ghosts, virtually possessed by his beauty and all the more by his apparent innocence:

I remember feeling with Miles in especial as if he had had, as if it were, nothing to call even an infinitesimal history. We expect of a small child scant enough 'antecedents,' but there was in this beautiful little boy something extraordinarily sensitive, yet extraordinarily happy, that, more than in any creature of his age I have seen, struck me as beginning anew each day. He had never for a second suffered. (19)

Just as she does with the ghosts and Mrs. Grose, she assigns signification to Miles's manner. When the boy seems to have behaved badly at school and gotten himself expelled, she demands no proof before exonerating him: "Without a word—he himself had cleared it up" (18). She suspects that young Miles is capable of no harm, if only because, with his rosy cheeks, "he was only too fine and fair" (18) to be guilty of any wrongdoing; it is the school, which is out there *in* the world, outside of *her* domain, that is "horrid." In fact, she seems to equate Miles with Bly itself. Despite the innuendo concerning Quint's and Jessel's sexual indiscretions, the governess remarks, "but there was everything...in the lucky fact that no discomfortable legend, no perturbation of scullions, had ever, within anyone's memory, attached to the kind of place. It had neither bad name nor ill fame"

(26), just as she admits of no “grey” in her prose and no guile in Miles or Flora even before meeting them. Of course, Miles’s relationships with the former servants, whatever they have been, do represent Bly’s past, which she is determined to ignore. In attempting to understand Miles’s indiscretions at school, of which he never spoke, she says she is too “disgusted to allude to them” because she is “under the spell,” and the “wonderful part” is that she is aware of her self-delusion, but is happy to be “dazzled by their loveliness” (19).

Compared to her, the children are worldly, while the governess retains a child-like innocence, feeling that her “equilibrium depended on the success of [her] rigid will, the will to shut [her] eyes as tight as possible to the truth” (77). In considering herself a “screen” that is to stand between them and the ghosts, the governess resolves that Miles and Flora should know nothing of the harm that might befall them: “The more I saw the less they would” (27). She feels that for them “everything, to be right, would have to be fenced about and ordered and arranged.” Assuming absolute authority, she acts upon her own sense of “right” and wrong, while the “only” possible life she envisions for them is admittedly “romantic” and a “royal extension of the garden and the park” (14) that would restrict their freedom, preserving their innocence within the bounds of childhood.

Whether or not the ghosts exist only in the mind of the governess, she nonetheless considers herself the protector of the children, as well as of the sacred harmony of Bly. As far as she is concerned, she is a “remarkable” heroine opposed to the supernatural forces which might prey upon their innocence. She utterly believes that by “offering” herself “bravely,” she will “serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquility of the rest of the household. The children in especial I should thus fence about and absolutely save” (25). Seen from another perspective, the supposed ghosts of Jessel and Quint threaten her claim on the interests of both the children and Bly, and so

she conjures up something fantastically horrible from which to “save” them all. Despite her “whimsical” flights of the mind, she says, “I walked in a world of their invention” (28), as if she has no imagination of her own. They, of course, also walk in a world of her imagination, whether she knows it or not. The governess can see the situation only from her singular perspective, as if she were both victim and hero: savior to the innocent children, victim to the conniving children, although they are one and the same. James builds these dichotomies so that each character inhabits the same space of hesitation as the ghosts do, signifying neither one thing nor the other and yet both at once; the children are both innocent and conniving, Mrs. Grose both innocent and complicit, and the governess is both hero and victim.

Her rising sense of authority almost immediately creates an abstract enemy, at first in the form of a phantom and then in the form of the children themselves, who have become allied with the ghosts. In contrast to that “charm of stillness” provided by her resolve, she instantaneously comprehends “that hush in which something gathers or crouches. The change was actually like the spring of a beast” (14). It is change, above all, that she fears—the attitude or feeling that everything is so perfect that it must surely change for the worse (a sentiment likewise expressed by Ricky Hawthorne in *Ghost Story*). The “hush” is that space of hesitation that can be filled with any assortment of opposing forces. She uses similar phrasing later when she feels that the crouched “something” has already pitched; in the midst of “palpable hushes” and “into a stillness, a pause of all life” enters the ghostly enemy, for “then it was that the others, the outsiders, were there” (51). From start to finish, she constantly fills the gaps and silences with the intrusion of others, and yet it is quite obvious that, at Bly, she herself is the other who has merely filled a void left by the former governess. This isolation is clearest when Jessel’s ghost seemingly appears to her while seated at the table and with an “extraordinary chill” she comes to feel that “it was I who was the intruder”

(57), particularly, as she sees it, with the “return of the others,” the ghosts of Jessel and Quint. As far as the housekeeper and children are concerned, the governess is the enemy conjured by her own delusions of authority.

Despite her original impressions concerning their innocence, the governess gradually senses that the ghosts have gained a malevolent hold on her two young charges and thus begins to interpret their words and manner in a more sinister light. She assumes that they have been abused by the former servants, Quint and Jessel, but it is the children’s show of knowing nothing that makes them seem complicit. It is not necessarily the sex scandal that occurred long before her arrival, but the *effects* of the repressed past on her present situation that concern her, and these are embodied by the alleged ghosts. She suspects that they are having her on, denying knowledge, not of the scandal, but of the ghosts. “I would have been ready to swear that, literally, in my presence, but with my direct sense of it closed, they had visitors who were known and were welcome” (50-51), she says, willing herself to see only that which she already knows, and what she perceives is that they are loyal to the old servants, rather than the new governess.

While the perceived ghosts are, in some way, responsible for the governess’s “turn” of mind, the children, by mocking her seriousness, are also partly culpable. Still, it must be remembered that James is never explicit in showing that there are any ghosts; furthermore, we have only the governess’s interpretations of the children’s character to guide our own impressions. What we might see for ourselves, however, is the governess’s earnestness and her gradual descent into ultra-seriousness, which could also bear some responsibility for the narrative’s ponderous tone and outcome. “Levity was not our note,” she says, upon claiming to have asked “a straight question,” presumably instead of a “queer” one (34). It is not a straight question, and she seems wholly incapable of asking one, fearing the answer, not needing the details, for they might spoil the

“truth” that her imagination has conjured. She says of Miles that “it would have been impossible to carry a bad name with a greater sweetness of innocence” (13). But it is also by virtue of this “innocence” that he is able to mock the adults, especially the governess. He does not even need to say anything, merely to stand about with his “little air of knowing nothing but love.” She is affronted by this demeanor, even while she adores it. Similarly, she is affronted by the “ghosts,” even while she adores the idea of there being any.

The child-ghost-governess triangle contains a hint of “mad laughter,” for they seem to smirk at, if only by their refusal to comply with, the governess’s seemingly wild avowals. She makes mention of the “serious” quality of their search, for she and Mrs. Grose seem “fearful” of the ghosts. The children play around her, meanwhile, possibly having sport with her, as when Miles and Flora play their midnight game of Miles standing ghost-like in the garden while Flora looks on. He makes a “spectacle” of himself for his sister and for the governess, which is fair considering she has made one of herself. Miles says that he hopes to be thought of henceforth as “bad” (45) for a change, and she still refuses to see it, thinking him full of “sweetness and gaiety” in how he says the word “bad.” His kiss is playful (45), possibly, or it might even signify the end of his innocence, having just come in from the garden.¹³ “It was practically the end of everything,” she says and she “met his kiss” and has to make “the most stupendous effort not to cry” (45). When his playful kiss meets her serious one, his innocence certainly is lost, just as his play at ghosts meets her serious search and her quest to protect at all costs.

Thus, far from being the irreproachable creatures that she conceives them to be, Flora and Miles represent both innocence and knowingness, which happens to be a way of making sense of the sexual readings of this tale. Lloyd-Smith suggests how “the implications of child sexual abuse

¹³ My reference, obviously, is to the biblical Garden of Eden imagery, particularly poignant in light of the boy having just made a spectacle of himself, as Adam does in the garden before his expulsion. Genesis: 2.

can become subtly apparent...but are completely missed by the governess" (147). One such example occurs just before the appearance of Miss Jessel one afternoon while Flora and the governess are playing pretend. The governess feigns being "something very important" (28), a fantasy that she gets to act out more realistically when the ghost appears: "There was no ambiguity in anything; none whatever at least in the conviction I from one moment to another found myself forming as to what I should see...as a consequence of raising my eyes" (28). It seems that simply by shifting her gaze (as before with Quint standing in the window), she is able to gain complete confidence about the "alien object in view" (28). But, as many critics point out, just before seeing the apparition the governess observes Flora as she picks up a piece of "flat" wood with a hole in it and attempts to "tighten it in its place" (29).¹⁴ Given the use of similar language much later when the governess says, "it was a tighter place still than I had yet turned round in" (76), James seems to intend an illumination of his "turn of the screw" metaphor in both scenes. In the first reference, Flora's gesture signifies that the governess is attempting to tighten everything into its place at Bly, so that she feels in control of her world, with all details seen, all meanings assigned, everything ordered and she with a firm grip on it all, particularly the children and herself. She does not wish to relinquish them to the loss of innocence implied by the spectres of the past, present or future, but the later feeling of tightening (76) suggests that she inadvertently has caught herself in her own trap. From Flora's possibly innocent play she deduces, "'They *know*—it's too monstrous: they know, they know!'" (29), as she tells Mrs. Grose. This in itself is a moment of lost innocence, both for the children (in her view) and for the governess: they know "all that *we* know," meaning the information that adults have and keep secret from children. Of course, the garden, symbolically, is a place of safety and innocence before knowledge brings exile from the time-space of childhood

¹⁴Lloyd-Smith, for one, presents a great deal of evidence, much of it convincing. But while the argument seems valid, to say that it is decisive seems counter-productive, even though James himself invites such interpretations.

play. It is the governess who decides which details to impart and, if they have a sexual overtone, it is coming not from anyone else but her; she sees many evil spirits, and so why not child sexual abuse as well?

The children, indeed, seem to know much more about sexuality and scandals than the governess, or nineteenth-century society, would think normal. Perhaps, as is often surmised by critics, it is because they have surrendered their sexual innocence to Quint when he was the master's valet. There are many spaces, or gaps, within the text to suggest this possibility, including the fact that Mrs. Grose appears to insinuate just that, while never coming out and calling the scandal what it is. Her hesitation alone, as well as the governess's own reluctance (despite that fact that she has no problem with certainty, as a rule) to identify sexual abuse leaves an ambiguous gap which the reader seems quite able to fill in, as if falling into James's trap. Following her discussion with Mrs. Grose regarding Mile's time mysteriously spent with Quint when the latter was alive, the governess's observations take on the added texture of an investigation; whereas she has been watching for signs of the ghost before, now she begins to scrutinize the children for signs that they have been sexually abused. She is, as Baudrillard might say, "proving the real through the imaginary, proving truth through scandal, proving law through transgression" (Baudrillard 19), ultimately striking a "balance of terror" (33). In fact, the phantoms take on extra signification as the spectre of child molestation, instantly rendering the children "immensely more interesting" (37). It is easy to see the connection between the two phenomena, as the mere insinuation of either one causes its partial materialization. The spectre of child molestation, indeed, haunts most societies and, once implicated, is not easily removed, for "molestation" is a word that resonates.

But this is just one more manner in which history is made material through the supposed ghost, shown not as truth but as a series of unrelated signifiers, "telling" a tale that must not be

told,” and yet must be told. It is by no means clear that the children have been abused, any more than it is clear that they see Quint’s or Jessel’s ghosts; the governess laments, “I had restlessly read into the facts before us almost all the meaning they were to receive from subsequent and more cruel occurrences” (27). Again, she admits her propensity for interpretation of signifiers, as well as the realization that sometimes “truth” is a process whose finality is reached only “afterwards.”¹⁵ James himself expressed the philosophy that truth is a process only recognized when it has aged and thereby gained the advantage of historical perspective: “‘Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is *made* true by events” (qtd. in Deledalle-Rhodes 216),¹⁶ much in the way that Lacan suggests the materiality of language. Whether the governess consciously verbalizes such a notion of truth, admittedly, is conjecture, based on her rather vague reference to “subsequent and more cruel occurrences” which supposedly will take place later in the narrative. Whether or not the innuendo is to be taken as sexual seems largely a matter of perspective since James’s text compels the reader to be complicit in a judgmental activity, to play the role of disapproving spectator or to simply shrug off the innuendo as mere talk, casting us as signifiers of nothing but authorial flotsam and jetsam, floating past the reader’s critical gaze.¹⁷ Such is the effect, perhaps, when the governess finds herself finally alone with the ten-year-old boy near the climax of the novella, and she fancies the two of them to be as awkwardly self-conscious as a young married couple in the presence of a waiter (78).

While Flora seems not to have seen the phantoms, the governess is convinced that she has, and her lack of corroboration is a key point in James’s extended hesitation to nominate. Because

¹⁵ “Afterwards” is the title of Edith Wharton’s most famous ghost story. In it, the truth about the ghost is only seen “afterwards.”

¹⁶ Henry James’s brother William wrote this account of truth, but according to Deledalle-Rhodes, this serves also as an eloquent summation of Henry’s “closely linked” thoughts on the matter. The line appears in *Pragmatism* by William James (1907) in John McDermott, ed. *The Writings of William James*, New York: Random House, 1967.

¹⁷ Of course, as this chapter argues, that is precisely the manner in which James presents the ghosts, as a series of images.

Flora could have substantiated the governess's claims at several points, but does not, we instead have further reason to doubt the existence of any 'real' ghosts:

My heart had stood still for an instant with the wonder and terror of the question whether she too would see; and I held my breath while I waited for what a cry from her, *what some sudden innocent sign either of interest or of alarm, would tell me*. I waited, but nothing came; then in the first place—and there is something more dire in this, I feel, than in anything I have to relate. (James 29; italics added)

Awaiting an "innocent sign" that might tell her what she expects to hear, but never comes from Flora, the governess, as always, takes that *lack* of a sign to have meaning in itself. The children's refusal to play along does not induce doubt, but merely makes her assume that they are lying. Flora asks that Mrs. Grose "take me away from her!" and in the estimation of the governess, the little girl "turned common and almost ugly" (70) for having spoken up so clearly. There is little that is ambiguous in her claim that, "I see nobody. I see nothing. I never have. I think you're cruel; I don't like you!" During this outburst of honesty, the governess's isolation is completed, the housekeeper and little girl becoming "united, as it were, in shocked opposition to me" (70). To say that the ghosts have caused this would be stating the matter too simply, for more properly, it is the *naming* of the ghost or, in Flora's case, the "not-ghost" that puts an end to things, placing closure upon the governess's adventure and story for the moment. Up until then, like the housekeeper, Flora has spoken "not a word" and "that's the horror" as far as the governess is concerned (29).

In the much debated final scene, in which Miles dies mysteriously and suddenly, it is likely quite significant that the boy, under extreme duress from the aggressive governess, utters "his supreme surrender of the name and his tribute to my devotion" (85), practically with his last breath. He has been looking out the window for quite some time, his back turned to the governess, and she

takes the turn of his back as a sign of hope: “Wasn’t he looking through the haunted pane for something he couldn’t see?” Only an imagination so turned as hers could interpret a turned back as a sign of allegiance. She takes even the final utterance, for all its ambiguity, that what he supposedly sees is “Peter Quint—you devil!” to mean the boy is now “my own” (85). The only thing clear is that the boy has been forced to utter a dreaded name. Whether the “devil” he refers to is Quint or the governess, or whether his speech truly indicates that he has seen a ghost or, like Mrs. Grose, is merely repeating what he has been urged so often to say, is not known. The knowledge, or the lie (whichever), literally signifies the end of innocence and, perhaps symbolically, the dispossession of his life. He might pass into ghostliness himself, but that is not even hinted at, only that “his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped” (85). The governess then, having been given what she wants and could not get from Flora or Mrs. Grose, “began to feel what it truly was that [she] held”: a corpse. Upon the naming, what she holds is something dead, which, as the saying goes, can tell no tales. Once “ghost” is uttered, once truth is supposedly laid bare and literal, it would appear that nothing more of any use can be said, which might well be the beauty of a tale that does not represent the unrepresentable, whatever it might be.

2.1.4 Summary

As several critics point out, the academic debate over the origin of the ghost in *The Turn of the Screw*, whether supernatural or psychological, has grown stale and unproductive. The identification of a ghost becomes less important than the haunting of the governess, for truly it is she who is haunted and not necessarily the whole estate of Bly, as the key point would seem to be that only the governess sees the ghost, or admits to seeing it. On the other hand, textual ghosts fill a space much larger than simply the one person they seem to be targeting; if one person is haunted,

they all seem to be haunted, and so too the larger space, in this case Bly. To paraphrase Lustig, James seems more concerned with the lack of referents and what the absences signify in a landscape mapped by definitive lines. Declarations of “ghost” or “not-ghost” do not concern him as much as the space between the two nominations. That space, of course, might be called “uncertainty,” “silence” or “hesitation.” But what we call it is less important than how it performs and how we react.

Reflecting upon the ghost of James’s novella is like trying to decide whether the governess is deluded or not, or whether the children or Mrs. Grose see anything supernatural, or, indeed, whether anything much really has happened at all; the task is impossible. As James himself points out, the reader or critic will see what they are prone to see. While Poe, Hawthorne, and Irving all wrote similarly ambiguous finales, James is the one who never tips his hand, never offering the reader an overt clue as to the “truth” of the events. The story is what it is, bringing the reader into a world without referents, without any basis for a judgment about the ghost or its presumed beholder. The result, as in many ghost stories, is that the one who sees finds herself experiencing a loss of self, unable to get her bearings. James ostensibly ensnares the reader in a similar situation.

But it all comes back to what the ghost is and what it signifies, whether it exists on its own or is merely a figment of the governess’s imagination. That, of course, raises the question of whether something imagined can be made material through language—territory covered in detail by many thinkers, particularly Lacan. However, thanks to James’s refusal to represent truth in any direct way, we do not have to make that decision as it pertains to *The Turn of the Screw* wherein the ghosts of Bly gain materiality through the governess’s descriptions. Beyond that, there is no way for us to know what the governess saw, for we have only her word, and name, for it.

2.2 Death by Nomination: The Contest for Authority in *The Haunting of Hill House*

Generally regarded a Gothic touchstone of the twentieth century, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) typifies the process of postmodernizing the ghost figure, beginning with identity-confusion arising from a lack of referents or solid truths and the protracted hesitation to label that follows. As *The Turn of the Screw* indicates, literary depictions of phantoms have been shifting away from traditional, fixed notions of otherness and towards a more variable entity with inherent, normalized differences. *Hill House* sustains the uncertainty about what to call an apparition (whether external or internal to the beholder), ultimately withholding the decision, even as the spectre's otherness declines. As a result, traditional boundaries of body, mind, time, and space become mere symptoms of a desire for a normalcy that has been upheld by regulations and labels. Increasingly, such normalcy is recognized as chimerical, while chaos becomes the new normal.

With its prevailing chaos and ambiguity, Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* is so postmodern in spirit that, like *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), it seems to have required the word "without knowing it" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* xiii). In the example of Henry James, Jackson constructs a ghost born of insinuation, composed of blanks and gaps, depicting a dissolution of virtually every referent. While there is uncertainty about the presence (and absence) of a "real" ghost, there is no doubt that the protagonist, Eleanor Vance, is haunted. If there is a ghost, it probably exists before Eleanor arrives, but its identity gains signification with the young woman's arrival. Exiled and disenfranchised, Eleanor's intended journey towards meaning, individuation, and belonging finds an end at Hill House where the ghost supposedly resides. Ultimately, the spectator becomes the spectre, moving towards death, straddling the psychological and physical boundaries between human and other. Chaos is normal at Hill House; nonetheless, Eleanor begets

much confusion, as well, being confused about where her imagination and body begin and end. The result is much like that of Henry James's novella's refusal to disclose the truth of whether there is a ghost, whether Eleanor is mad, or both. In lieu of certainty, we have the author's prolonged hesitation, represented by certain characters, each one bringing his or her own perspective to the signifiers. Jackson invites the reader to complete the tale, but slyly yanks away the power to do so. Asked to supply meaning, we can only do so by admitting inability to do so. To name the ghost would limit its scope and propensity for terror; thus, like James, Jackson refrains from "weak specifications" (Beidler, *Ghosts* 226), choosing instead to allow the reader his or her monster of choice, while, of course, nudging us towards the ghost. At the same time, however, as the author moves away from representation, the haunting overflows the text, on its way towards us, an event that the unsuspecting reader might recognize too late.

Jackson's novel is one of those postmodernist fictions that refrains from answering the questions it poses, except by posing more questions, and ultimately, the text becomes the haunting and the haunted because of the embedded absence and binary presence of a phantom. As with James's novella, the text of *Hill House* represents nothing so much as the fact that it represents nothing. Hill House becomes rather like a hall of mirrors, its reflections unending, and while we might see ourselves in both the ghost and Hill House, we see each of them through Eleanor; but our perspectives of them all are influenced by the manipulative Montague, the skeptical Theodora and Luke, and the trickster author. Little wonder, then, that readers stare into the text and seem confused as to what stares back. Like Eleanor, we might see something of ourselves looking back at us (or being looked at by us), but the difficulty increasingly lies in extricating ourselves from the others, of telling where our selves (and our ghosts) end and our others begin, perhaps even convincing ourselves that the boundaries we look for exist.

This reaction might simply be seen as a manifestation of Eleanor's need for belonging and individuation, which, as Baudrillard points out, is a natural inclination when one is faced with a loss of referents, including a history. Or, as Montague, suggests, it might be seen as insanity. Or it might be mere pranksterism on her part. It still is what it is, regardless of who views it; interpretations vary, but the details remain the same. Eleanor sees her fellow humans in this rather destabilizing, postmodern world in much the same way: all is merely an accumulation of details, signifying no real connection, only coincidental and surface relationships. The ghost, as she sees it, is her only true family member, but there is no ghost represented materially in the text. In the end, all speculation is a matter of perspective, of supplying signification for the signifiers, even while aware that the meanings are both multiple and transmutable; in response to such suspicions, we might be horrified, ironic, or detached; or we might, like Eleanor, embrace the uncertainty and become as one with it. The postmodern acknowledges the legitimacy of each response without granting primacy to any particular one.

Similar to *The Turn of the Screw*, *Hill House* defies attempts to label it as either a ghosted or nonghosted text; its resulting specular nature imbues it at once full and empty of meaning. The result is a blurring of boundaries between real and imagined, self and other, text and reader, ghost and beholder. In essence, all three of *Hill House*, its ghost, and the text of Jackson's novel represent the progressively normalized chaos that accompanies the inability to nominate (and thus make meaningful distinctions) in the postmodern era. Increasingly, in twentieth-century ghost stories, the admission of uncertainty is the most (if not the only) significant and practical response to apparently supernatural events. Eleanor's nervous query, "Whose hand was I holding?" (Jackson 116) is virtually unanswerable, merely begetting still more questions: particularly, what,

if anything, is to be made of such perpetual hesitation? “Whose hand” she (or the reader) holds, whether ghost or human, largely depends on perspective.

By making it impossible for the reader to know precisely whether there is a ghost at Hill House, Jackson has invoked a perpetual state of hesitation. There are many phenomena described within the text that feel ghostly. Many, particularly the knocking on walls and the constant, loud pounding, are experienced by more than one character: signs that the ghosts might be real. But even these are rendered ambiguous by the propensity, as in *The Turn of the Screw*, for talking *around*, rather than directly *about*, what they have seen and felt, suggesting the unrepresentability of the ghost or what its absence/presence signifies. Although they all experience “something” similar, the extent to which the events are either real or imaginary is dubious, and so the ghost is constructed of gaps and blanks, inhabiting the space of hesitation: Hill House itself.

Because we view the haunting exclusively through Eleanor’s eyes, most critics are unable to ascertain whether or not a ghost walks in Hill House, but they most often see the Hill House phantom as a specular, derived from the narcissistic fears and desires of the protagonist who, by story’s end, stands completely alone. Lecroy asserts that Jackson’s work in general “does not permit classification, unless in a superficial way” (62). Other critics, like King, reiterate that Hill House offers up no “real” ghosts, only imaginary ones that reflect the characters’ psychological baggage (*Danse* 112). “Hill House’s ghosts come not with the face of the unknown, but with that of each character’s most intimate fears,” Lootens asserts (166), to which Oppenheimer adds, “the effects [of the ghost] in *Hill House* are offstage, indirect, unexplained, elusive; not just the characters but the readers too are not sure what they have or have not experienced” (227). Furthermore, she says, “Whether the ghostly effects are caused by the unconscious workings of Eleanor’s mind or by some strange combination of the two is never known” (227).

Somewhat overlooked in the landscape of American Gothic literature, Jackson's work is gaining respect as Americans' perceptions of their own precarious place in a global community broadens. Lecroy writes in 1985 that she can find little critical material on Jackson, citing others who make the same observation (63); many critical anthologies still neglect to discuss her work at length. Most analyses of *Hill House* recognize that all of Eleanor's boundaries dissolve as a result of her confusion about the world and its inherent chaos and, as such, *Hill House* speaks to the "schizophrenic" nature of the postmodern era. Parks explains that most of Jackson's fiction is concerned with revealing the "outrage, at times tempered with laughter, stemming from the violation of the self by a broken world"; she employs Gothic conventions to explore "the contours of human madness and loneliness in a disintegrating world generally bereft of...love and forgiveness" (15). Lifton indicates a "breakdown of fundamental human boundaries" because of "a loss of a vital and nourishing connection with the cultural past, the flooding of imagery produced by mass media, and the threat of nuclear disaster" in what he calls the "Age of Numbing" (Parks 15), all of which could be said to affect Eleanor's self-annihilation. Meanwhile, Vernon argues that "schizophrenia is the defining characteristic of Western culture—it is a culture which polarizes and compartmentalizes reality (through the psychoanalytical application of labels), fragments experience into opposites, thus repressing the possibilities of unity between self and world" (Parks 16). This schizophrenia, as Jameson also describes late American culture, is illustrated in Eleanor, who experiences a schism between expectation and "reality"; more than anything else, regardless of its "realness," the ghost is an extension of her fractured existence and identity. Eleanor comes to a house "that functions figuratively as the externalized maternal body, simultaneously seductive and threatening" (Rubenstein 317). The result is that Jackson "dislocates" readers by "locating" us in Eleanor's perspective, thereby "confusing outside and inside, reality and illusion, so that [we]

cannot clearly discern the acts of the house—the supernatural—from Eleanor’s disordered acts—the natural” (Kahane 341; qtd. in Rubenstein 317). The further outcome is a “breakdown” in, potentially, all relationships where previously Eleanor, or the reader, might have drawn a natural signifier-signified relationship (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 26-7).

Not only does King include Eleanor Vance in the narcissistic category, but he also suggests that *Hill House* itself heralded a new age of the “symbolic mirror” in American Gothic (*Danse* 281). Bruhm points out that, since at least the eighteenth century, the Narcissus myth “has been not simply a case history for normalizing and transgressing politically invested discourses; he has been the *metalanguage* for those discourses, the underlying figure for how they are produced” (*Narcissus* 145), and so it is not unusual that many haunted characters find individuation in ghosts of their own design. As Rubenstein suggests, Eleanor finds her mirror image in a maternal ghost who fulfills her need for a mother. Rubenstein makes the connection between the “young child’s ambivalent desires and fears: both to remain merged with the mother (who becomes emotionally identified with ‘home’) and to separate from her, with the attendant fear of being ‘lost’” (309). The mother’s absence “becomes a haunting presence that bears directly on the daughter’s difficult struggle to achieve selfhood as well as to express her unacknowledged rage of her sense of precariousness in the world” (311). In the Gothic, such real-life trauma can conjure a “signifying” ghost (312) and an accompanying “imprisonment in a house that, mirroring her disturbed imaginings, expresses her ambivalent experience of entrapment and longing for protection” (312).

Since the reader never sees any ghosts in the text, King declares that “the one thing we can be sure of is that there are no actual ghosts in Hill House” (*Danse* 288), implying a rather narrow, image-based definition of the words “ghost” and “actual.” “Actual” apparently means that the ghost must project a visual image, which, admittedly the Hill house spectre does not. If “reality”

includes only phenomena that can be quantified with visual, empirical evidence then an abstract haunting such as Eleanor's might not be considered real. Jackson does not show a ghost, but she does insinuate one. The events of the tale, as Lootens suggests, "signify a process, not merely a 'sighting'; a haunting not merely a ghost" (167). Granted, the line between what Eleanor perceives and what actually occurs is thin and, perhaps, irrelevant because for her the ghost is real. Tellingly, King complains about writers like Jackson who leave certain doors closed instead of opening them for the reader; as a storyteller, he prefers the doors to be opened fully. Since Jackson, like Eleanor herself, leaves them closed, King assumes that there is no ghost pounding on the door, suggesting, again, that what cannot be seen does not exist. However, as this entire thesis illustrates, and Jackson's novel emphasizes, that which is real cannot necessarily be seen, for we have other senses besides sight to feed both our fears and our desires, while the line between them is indiscernible. He is right in pointing out Eleanor's narcissism, but her egocentricity does not necessarily mean there is no ghost. Even King admits that the novel is so "submerged" in "twin ambiguities" that it "can be read in many different ways...[that] suggest...almost endless paths and a wide range of conclusions" (*Danse* 292). Jackson, he concludes, "would like us to come away from her novel with the ultimate belief that it was Hill House all along," as Eleanor is killed by being drawn back "home" (164) into her own mirror of brick and glass that is Hill House (294). Thus, even those who "see" no ghost in *Hill House* admit to the text's resistance to closure.

2.2.1 Eleanor's Search For Individuation

While the haunting at Hill House appears to be both personal and specular to Eleanor Vance, both the ghost and the house are texts upon which she reads herself. But the house is also yet another signifier that gives up no signified beyond that assigned to it. In the absence of a ghost,

there is an unrepresented ghost, making the text an open question, spreading the haunting beyond textual boundaries. King not only includes Eleanor in his idea of the “narcissistic” protagonist, but he also suggests that *Hill House* itself heralded this new age of the “symbolic mirror” in American Gothic (*Danse* 281).¹⁸ Eleanor Vance is rootless, centerless, without boundaries of self and other, dream and reality, and lacks a sense of her own history; as a result she is all too ready to adopt Hill House as her home and the ghost as her only kin. She sees both the meaning and lack of meaning inherent in every sign, obeys no prescribed boundaries, and her chosen status as an outsider allows her the benefit of ironic laughter towards her fellow inhabitants. Eleanor’s origin story is incomplete, despite Dr. Montague’s attempt to fill in the blanks with images of his own; still, what she does not *know* about the past, she is certain she *does* know. With a past and future that are equally unstable, her present is also under inherently uncertain. In almost all ways, she is a postmodern child, fraught with hesitancy and constant flux, lacking any sense of reality. Hill House, with its own fractured history, both attracts and repels Eleanor, possessing her by slow turns because she is who she is. She thinks herself unlike everybody in the *real* world, but identifies herself with the spectral realm of Hill House. Exiled when we meet her, Eleanor ultimately switches allegiances from the dubiety of the human landscape to the supposed certainty of the world of ghosts because in her mind, she always *has* been part of it, and vice-versa.

Eleanor’s sense of self is destabilized as she is unsure of what to trust in a world without referents, including a history. She sees herself as alienated, much like Hill House, even though she and it reside in the same world, alongside each other and everyone else. Eleanor’s haunting is a reflection—a specular—of her desire for comfort and kinship through the return of a past that she only wishes had existed; with the death of her overbearing mother after a long illness, Eleanor has

¹⁸ As this chapter shows, James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, published in 1898, also presents the ghost as a mirror to the heroine’s psychology, among other things.

repressed her true history. At thirty-two, she is a solitary soul, despite her admission that she is ““always afraid of being alone”” (Jackson 113). We are told, “The only person in the world she genuinely hated, now that her mother was dead, was her sister” (7), with whom she now lived. She “had no friends” and an aversion to sunlight (7), and her personal haunting certainly will be authored in part by her deceased mother. Rubenstein explains that “the mother’s death precipitates the daughter’s existential homelessness and her literally annihilating experience of being lost: the loss of the self as she is consumed by the house” (317). Most of her relationships are defined in terms of hatred, rather than love, and so she already walks in a rather ghostly exile from humanity before ever entering Hill House, as her life has been one of “unending despair,” having been alone for so long that it was “difficult to talk, even casually, to another person without self-consciousness and an awkward inability to find words” (7). Not coincidentally, “despair” is a word she also relates to Hill House (26), which she comes to think of as her family.

Eleanor’s biggest fears—of being “trapped” into commonness, realizing that she is neither unique nor important, and discovering that her ugly childhood was not just a bad dream—propel her towards Hill House in search of an adventure and a home. In this way, she resembles the governess of *The Turn of the Screw*: both young women, being dispossessed, so fervently quest to possess something that they end up being possessed by the *something* they find, unable to extricate the holder from the beholder. As Wain explains, in the postmodern text, “non-representation signals absence,” while the absence itself “perpetuates the desire (itself an event) for something, that other thing, which is not yet unrepresented” (365). Eleanor hopes to find a new and better life for herself at Hill House, even though she is only a temporary visitor, and in the seemingly solid and permanent nature of Hill House, she seeks a purpose for her meaningless existence: “Why am I here? She thought helplessly and at once; why am I here?” (Jackson 22). Simply by moving

towards “something,” she is being adventurous, becoming “a new person, very far from home” (22). She implies that there is nothing to root her, no reason to carry on, when she asks the apathetic waitress at a roadside diner, ““Why don’t *you* run away?”” (21)—likely reflecting her own quest for meaning; she wants whatever the waitress can offer her in terms of insight. At another diner, she psychically urges a little girl to “insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again” (18). Eleanor’s need for individuation, thus, depends upon her protracted naiveté, yearning to be unique while realizing that she is not. Further along the highway, headed for her own “cup of stars” (Hill House), Eleanor sees some signs in front of a former fairgrounds, which

still carried fragments of words. DARE, one of them read, and another EVIL, and she laughed at her self, perceiving how she sought out omens everywhere; the word is DAREDEVIL, Eleanor, daredevil drivers, and she slowed her car because...she might reach Hill House too soon. (15-16)

Her self-awareness is astounding for, indeed, the “signs” are everywhere and if one insists upon seeing the “evil” signs, one is likely to land at the “not sane” Hill House sooner than one would like. Eleanor recognizes that these signs are not necessarily omens and yet she seems to think, like the ghost she encounters later, they speak directly to her. They are, like the writing she encounters on the wall in the hallway (“HELP ELEANOR COME HOME”), corrupted texts that invite interpretation and yet resist it at the same time, denying an individuation that it simultaneously offers; it is, after all, just a broken sign that used to mean something, but now means nothing specific while yet retaining its former significance in ghostly form.

Seeking individuation through alienation (both of which are myths, according to the postmodern) and, ultimately, through death, Eleanor finds her self-construct progressively

dissolving as she supposedly releases herself from the constrictions of being human. She experiences a sudden, and deepening, loss of bearings and familial ties, increasingly unable to distinguish between her interior and exterior landscapes, or between herself and the ghostly other. With the perceived loss of a distinctive self, Eleanor lapses “into boundless difference” as she gives up “on the confusing task of making partial, real connection” (Haraway 161) and begins to substitute “the signs of the real for the real” (Baudrillard 2), leaving her without without referents or any sense of reality. Increasingly, she becomes a “floating signifier” (Haraway 153), seeking a story that will define her and distinguish her from others, all the while dreading the possibility that she is common, vulgar and plain. Eleanor has romantic expectations of the world, and at the end of the journey she gets what she has insisted on: *something* or *some one* upon whom to cast her romantic hopes and Gothic fears, even if it is all an illusion. As Lootens points out, while the others “cherish the illusion of belonging together, Eleanor cannot even pretend to herself that she belongs anywhere else” as “the haunting increasingly singles her out” (167). Feeling alien within her species, Eleanor occupies her strange corner of Hill House, like the others, as if contained within her own “concentric circle” such as those which form the house’s interior; they are “four *separated* people, and looking trustingly at one another” (42), but still knowing little about the others beyond the superficial. In her seclusion, Eleanor encounters a ghost, her isolation enhanced by mounting suspicions about the phantom’s identity and demands from her; in a short time, she even begins to identify herself with the spirit. Her desperation “separates her from the others even as it seduces her into believing that Hill House, and Hill House alone, wants and needs her” (Lootens 167). Hill House appears solid and permanent, qualities that appeal to a rootless Eleanor. In it, she finds a “home” and “mother” that need her and single her out, offering her an identity, a

sisterhood, and even a new chance at a mother-daughter relationship, granting her an origin story. Of course, it is all an illusion, but Eleanor seems unable to tell the difference.

She finds individuation both in telling and *becoming* her very own ghost story. While she yearns to be unique and free, her “others” whom she finds “ugly” tend to all look alike. Same deserves same, she thinks, as if deserving had anything to do with endings: as like deserves like, purpose elicits form, desire brings completion, and imagining conjures reality. Her constant refrain, “Journeys end in lovers meeting,” suggests a happily ever after, the kind of story in which the traveler gets his or her just reward and the questing for identity ends. Therefore, she divides the world into self and other on her journey towards a like-minded soul, expecting to find that which she seeks, rejecting that which does not meet her criteria. Interestingly, while Luke confers the status of “a congenial little group.... Destined to be inseparable friends,” he adds that “Hill House has surely never seen our like.” Theodora concurs: “I will give the honor to Hill House,” Theodora said. ‘I have never seen *its* like’” (45). As the narrative progresses, Eleanor becomes more *its* like than theirs, at least in her own mind.

Eleanor essentially experiences what Jameson calls a “breakdown of the signifying chain” as she is “reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or... a series of pure and unrelated presents in time” (*Postmodernism* 27). Disconnected from the present, she realizes that those with whom she finds herself becoming intimate could have been anyone and the details that she receives and offers are superficial and useless, applicable to nearly anyone in any circumstance. In her discussion in the garden with Theodora, they “discover” the many coincidences that they share in their lives—the aunt, the uncle, the parents—common experiences, culled down to a few seemingly important details. Theodora, in the spirit of the sisterliness, playfully suggests that they must, “Share a room and share our clothes.... ‘We’re going to be practically twins.’” But Eleanor

corrects her: "Cousins...but no one heard her," a mysterious utterance to herself, possibly inferring a more distant relationship, as is her wont. To Eleanor, they can be related only circumstantially, insofar as they share a few common details that are mostly meaningless and depthless; they just happen to share a space in which they comprise fifty per cent of the population. Seen another way, of course, the insinuation of family ties could be a negative; "twins" does suggest a commonalty, while "cousins" implies kinship but with deeper distance (relatively speaking) and thus the even greater opportunity for closeness of a different, more friendly, sort. As Montague informs them, the inhabitants of Hill House, in a reverse Darwinian approach, have been chosen somewhat randomly, albeit with certain criteria in mind: the vast majority of applicants are rejected, but those who are chosen seem to have been the weakest, psychologically and psychically, for he selects only those with no real life, having crossed out the names of those who have a "clear tendency to take centre stage" (Jackson 6).

Eleanor is profoundly haunted by a debilitating "loss of historicity" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* x), resulting in a nostalgia for a past she never knew; the ghost, as such, seems to emanate from her own past as much as from Hill House's history, since she refers to it as her "mother." Furthermore, all of their talk about the shiftability of names, labels, and details, including the revisionary quality of their individual histories, only serves to emphasize the tentative nature of their existence there. In this sense, they are the perfect inhabitants of a postmodern world, only playfully concerned with establishing identities, rules of engagement, and individuation. They decide who they are, albeit in a laughing manner, by first pointing out the traits of who and what they are not, defining the self in terms of its binary opposite: Eleanor's red sweater means that Theodora wears yellow; the doctor has a beard, making him distinct from the beardless Luke, and Eleanor triumphantly declares herself "an Eleanor" who "belongs." But she

identifies Theodora by the fact that she herself is Eleanor (Jackson 44). She still seems stuck in Lacan's childhood "mirror-stage," identifying herself only by her distinction from the other in the mirror. Details are meaningless, as Eleanor is perpetually pointing out. They banter ironically, lying freely, inventing a reality that might as well exist as not: "'Now that I know which of us is me,' Luke said, 'let me`identify myself further. I am, in private life—assuming that this is public life and the rest of the world *is* actually private—let me see, a bullfighter'" (44). Luke, upon realizing that there might not be a discernible difference between public and private life once certain details are known, lies about who he is. But the lies are meant to have fun with the supposed facts of who he is. His falsehoods are blatant and obvious, but they throw everything else known about him into question, for Luke is a known liar and thief, one who knows that the details, the labels, like material possessions and money and all the rest of it, are not fixed, but shifting and shiftable, depending on who claims ownership of them. "I fell down during the graduation procession," admits Eleanor, prompting Theodora to disclose, "I forgot my lines in the operetta." These empty details *can* be seen as meaningful, as with Theodora's playful insistence that "I'm positive we're cousins" (39). Theodora insists that "we must be related," and they are: binary opposites of each other, but only within the context of Hill House, for Eleanor is very much "a sentence in free-standing isolation" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 28), with no "real" attachments.

Much as "no one but the governess" experiences what the governess does, no one seems to experience what Eleanor does, mostly because she is uniquely (ironically) Eleanor. She is constantly trying to sort out the difference between herself and Theodora or herself and Luke. She tries to figure out where she ends and they begin, quite in keeping with Haraway's notion that our bodies do not end at the skins (178), cataloguing details as if they are what makes up her self. Eleanor is unexpectedly admiring her own feet and thinks

what a complete and separate thing I am..., individually an I, possessed of attributes belonging only to me....I dislike lobster and sleep on my left side and crack my knuckles when I am nervous and save buttons...I have a place in this room. I have red shoes and tomorrow I will wake up and I will still be here. (Jackson 59)

These details have no meaning and yet are laden with meaning. If suddenly Eleanor woke up and found she relished lobster, she would not be somebody else; admittedly, she would probably be challenging her own self-construct, which is what these narcissistic musings over details are about. When Montague asks if everyone plays bridge, Eleanor responds in the affirmative, thinking, "I play bridge...I used to have a cat named Dancer; I can swim" (60). The details accumulate, but amount to nothing, except the potential for disintegration inherent in any information overload; the more she learns and becomes conscious of—the more "facts" and details she gleans about herself, her world and her place (or perceived lack of place) in that world—the greater shift she feels towards becoming less like Eleanor and more like the Hill House ghost.

In truth, though, it is her new knowledge about the triviality of details, rules, boundaries, and identities that seals her exile, even before Montague expels her. She identifies herself with the house and, at the end, believes that to change that one detail about her, such as removing herself from the house, is to destroy Eleanor. Whether the banishment precipitates her suicide is almost irrelevant since, in her own mind, Eleanor is already dead—as dead as the two little girls of Hill House, as dead as her mother, and as dead as her own past. Because of her fragility and self-confessed madness, having a center is paramount to Eleanor. Yet, even as she lies about her own reality, it does somehow exist in conceptual form. "'Luke,' she asked, going slowly for fear of ridicule, 'why do people want to talk to each other? I mean, what are the things people always want to find out about other people?'" (117). "'What do you want to know about me, for

instance?' He laughed. She thought, But why not ask what *he* wants to know about *me*; he is so extremely vain—and laughed in turn and said, 'What can I *ever* know about you, beyond what I see?'" (117). This is an expression of postmodern anxiety, the fear that nothing matters, that context is the only thing that matters, that nothing is real, that only that which we can experience presently is worth believing, and after the moment of connection there is only disconnection. She wants something to grasp onto, to hold for her own, which is what possession is all about: ownership, something by which to identify oneself and one's other. As Eleanor says, "I live a mad, abandoned life" (45), and it is true, but once she rationalizes for herself that life is meaningless, she is banished by the "militant rationalist" Dr. Montague (Parks 25) who forms and controls the master narrative.

Eleanor is the return of the repressed personified, a "small narrative," aware of her own fears, and of being laughed at; she is also cognizant of her own seriousness, the ghosts that haunt her, and that hers is a voice that has been shut out for a long time, first by her mother, then her sister who tells her she cannot borrow the car to go to Hill House, and now the learned Montague. Part of her quest, even before her arrival at Hill House, is to free herself from the "truth" provided by others. From the beginning, we see her obedience to one master or another: "I will have to drink this coffee because I said I was going to, Eleanor told herself sternly, but next time I will listen to Dr. Montague" (Jackson 19). Earlier, en route to the house, she follows the road's middle line and adheres to Montague's "rule" about not stopping because she fears she will be "punished" (14). And yet, once at Hill House, Eleanor revolts against the doctor's attempts at control, feeling that, "the conversation was being skillfully guided away from the thought of fear" (70). Even Hill House itself has a patriarch at the helm in the person of Hugh Crain, whose history is that of the estate: they are one and the same, represented by the scrapbook he has assembled for his

daughters, a foundational text that has fallen to dust and decay. Even the old woman whom she nearly knocks down in the driveway sets a curse upon her, yelling “Damn you, damn you!” as Eleanor tries to “get away” (11). Because she believes in such pronouncements, Eleanor seems doomed, like one who has killed an albatross before the journey even begins.

2.2.2 Whatever Walks in Hill House

Like most supposedly haunted domiciles, Hill House is a Gothic space where rational expectation meets insane reality. In some ways “the chief character” of the novel, it is a dwelling where Eleanor’s “loneliness and schizophrenia find a welcome in the chaos,” a paradigm of a postmodern world into which her “fragile self” dissolves and coalesces (Parks 24). Its history, like Eleanor’s, is shadowy at best: a matter for speculation, nostalgia, and curiosity. Like most Gothic houses (Bly, the Overlook Hotel, and 124), there is a “perfectly splendid scandal” associated with the haunted space, this one having “a suicide and madness and lawsuits” and “the local people [who] had no doubts about the house...[though] it is really *unbelievably* difficult to get accurate information about a haunted house,” says Montague (52). Similarly, there is the story about a day when Eleanor was twelve years old and “showers of stones had fallen” on the family house. The stoning lasted for three days, witnessed by “neighbours and sight-seers,” and continued until Eleanor and her sister had left the house (7). While Eleanor cannot recall the event, the controlling and “pompous” Montague (Parks 25) reads her the account, filling in gaps in (and creating) her history.

A gothicized, exiled, and alienating space, Hill House is, by design, a monument to uncertainty: spatially, temporally, and psychologically illogical. The house’s architecture is pure metaphor, reminding us of Todorov’s “fantastic mid-point” between certainty and uncertainty, as

Montague's description of the house draws an invisible connection between human expectations of rationality and the debilitating, bewildered reaction of encountering something other. According to Montague, Hugh Crain (the original owner) was disdainful of people and their "sensible squared-away houses" since, for all its upright walls and firm floors, Hill House is a "masterpiece of architectural misdirection," a structure whose proportions deliberately undermine one's sense of balance and reason" (Lootens 107). Laid out as a "concentric circles of rooms" (Jackson 72), the "crazy" part is that every angle is "slightly wrong," leading to a perpetual feeling of imbalance (76). With its very floors imbued with "uncertainty" (78), the house's construction runs counter to society's norms and standards. Somehow, society sees it as evil because it is different, and yet it also has a built-in "cold spot" at its "heart" (85), suggesting an emotional indifference or malignancy to all who enter.

To the inhabitants of Hill House, it is a place of horrors, a labyrinth where human 'rats' are tested for signs of fear in a "house arrogant and hating... [that] can only be evil" (26). For Eleanor, it is one giant signifier, merely "some chance meeting of roof and sky, [that] turned Hill House into a place of despair" (26), much the same as her own "chance meeting" with the house underscores her own desperation. She reads the structure as if it were a text, every word and sign encoded just for her. From her first glimpse of it, she imagines that the house "reared its great head back against the sky without concession to humanity" (26) as she "looked along the lines of its roofs, fruitlessly endeavoring to locate the badness" (26). We are told early on that "Eleanor had been waiting for *something* like Hill House.... [She] had held fast to the belief that someday *something* would happen" (8; italics added). So Hill House becomes the expected "something," its signification and moral timbre seemingly dependent upon Eleanor, at least according to Eleanor. Shortly after the "rootless," exiled traveler labels the gatekeeper, Mr. Dudley, "ugly," she scolds herself that her vile

reaction emanates from a combination of conditions: “partly because everything seems so dark around here, and partly because I expected that man’s wife to be ugly” (28); her expectations collide with the surreal quality of the house to elicit her own dark side.

While Hill House appears romantically autonomous, its isolation is a myth, just as Eleanor’s is. Despite being a detached, grotesquely-constructed piece of architecture, Hill House does represent a sort of “heaven” for Eleanor (23). Upon first entering, she thinks that, “Except for the wires which ran to the house from a spot among the trees, there was no evidence that Hill House belonged in any way to the rest of the world” (36). But of course, as the wires themselves attest, it *is* of this world, even if separate from it; just like Eleanor, it is rather a genre unto itself, even while it is also of the genre of “haunted houses.” After all, despite its propensity for terror, there is also “a place for picnics, with lunch beside the brook” right outside (38). Hill House *is* the world to her, a place where “civilization seems so far away” (108) that she is unable to “picture any world but Hill House” (107). Indeed, as Lootens suggests, “the haunting is personally designed for the haunted” (167) for, just as Eleanor herself stands alone and “mad,” Hill House itself was “not sane” (5). It is an eighty-year-old house in which “walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut” and, in a reflection between subject and object, we are told that “whatever walked there, walked alone” (5). Despite Eleanor’s affinity for Hill House, Lootens considers it a Darwinian predator that “sets out to separate its guests,” and “locates Eleanor as the weak link” (167), implying that the house has a will of its own and is at least animate, if not partly human. But even if we take Hill House to be inanimate and indifferent, what is most significant about Lootens’ assertion is that these four “separate” people each react differently to the signifier: the house. Eleanor’s reaction is the most extreme, singling her out and

deepening her exile from reasonable society because she does not see what everyone else sees and flaunts her non-compliance to Montague's authority.

Regardless of Jackson's extended hesitation in labelling the events of the text, Hill House's supposed ghost is emblematic of all that haunts Eleanor, even if it exists independent of her at the same time. As the boundaries between her and the ghosts dissipate, the one between herself and humanity is strengthened. "Shuddering" at the very thought of connection with a "real" world that repeatedly shuns her, Eleanor identifies herself with the spirits of Hill House who are (likewise) petulant, childish, pitiful, invisible, trapped, exiled, and egocentric. While Jackson shows us no ghosts, there is compelling evidence for both a ghost and a not-ghost response, and it is into that space of hesitation where Eleanor inserts the spectre, and vice-versa: the gradual dissolution of her already-tenuous identity culminates in a ghost-like status of her own and eliminates any boundaries between her perceived world and the "real" one.

The more fully integrated Eleanor becomes with the ghost of Hill House, the more disconnected and individual she perceives herself to be; in essence, by becoming more ghostly she becomes less human, and yet she is somehow both at once. When Montague muses, "'Doesn't it begin to seem that the intention is, somehow, to separate us?'" (96), the "it" might be anything (including himself, the house, and/or the ghost), for they all will respond, as the doctor says, "in their own way." When she bolts up in bed, thinking to stop "them" from hurting the child/ghost, she awakens to find the lights on and Theodora sitting up in bed with a startled expression. Then she flings herself out of bed and across the room, exclaiming aloud, "'Good God—whose hand was I holding?'" (115-16). As she leaps to the corner, where she stands "shuddering," it seems to be not just the ghost with whom she fears melding, but Theodora, as well. One might well look back on Eleanor's early fearful impressions about "what nightmares are waiting, shadowed, in those

corners” (30), for she obviously carries her fear of (shadowed) space within her own mind (her personal space of fear), but finds a perfect outlet for it at Hill House. Ironically, her fear of whatever awaits in the corner turn to the chilling reality that *she* is that “nightmare”; furthermore, it is Theodora who fears Eleanor’s burgeoning penchant for chaos, while Eleanor fears the touch of humanity represented by her friend. “We have a connecting bathroom,” Eleanor said absurdly. The rooms are exactly alike” (33). But, in keeping with Hill Houses’ *oeuvre*, Eleanor’s separateness seems fitting.

Eleanor’s quandary—a simultaneous desire and repulsion for separation—manifests itself in an initial reluctance to claim her own rising singularity and its accompanying potential for power through the naming of her own experience. She wants to belong and yet fears losing her identity, such as it is: claiming the new narrative might mean destruction of the old one. While the ghost presents an opportunity to possess something that no one else has, she is claimed by it as much as the other way around. Despite her desire for individuation, the concept is too large for her to grasp, likely because of the disjunction between her “normal” reality and her new “not sane” reality. When the presumed ghost writes her name in “shaky red letters” on a wall, Eleanor thinks, “it was incredibly real...almost too large to read,” even though the inscription fulfills her own taboo desire to be the “center of attention” (114). The ghost’s actions and words invite interpretation, but it is questionable whether the words—“HELP ELEANOR COME HOME”—are “messages” at all. The lack of punctuation in the inscription both lessens its specificity and broadens the possibilities for meaning; is it for Eleanor, about her, or even *by* her? Similar to “REDRUM,” scrawled on the walls of The Overlook, it is a deceptively private message whose meaning appears to depend largely on the reader, rather than just on the medium. While the house has commodified her by appropriating her name, the word is only a word, equal to the other three words beside it

until Eleanor assigns more importance to that particular one. The name “Eleanor” is meaningless, as we see when Mrs. Montague brings it up after her psychic reading; she does not seem to know there is a “Nell” in the house, despite having been introduced to her, and, to her, the name might be as generic as those on monogrammed key chains in department stores. Still, the implied familiarity of the inscription on the wall frightens Eleanor because her concept of a contained, solid self has supposedly been weakened with the use of her name by her presumed other. In effect, her deepest desires and fears have fused together, just as the usual demarcations of body, time, space, and (ultimately) identity no longer apply, assuming they ever did:

‘Those letters spelled out *my* name, and none of you know what that feels like—it’s so *familiar*.... It’s my own dear name, and it belongs to me, and something is using it and writing and calling me with it and my *name*.... There’s only one of me, and it’s all I’ve got. I *hate* seeing myself dissolve and slip and separate...but I know I’m not really going to be hurt and yet time is so long and even a second goes on and on.’ (113-114)

Eleanor is unable to rationalize either her sudden individuation or the supposed evidence of a ghost at Hill House: “it’s *crazy*.... It knows my name... ‘I am outside, she thought madly, I am the one chosen.’” Theodora responds, “‘Crazy is the word, all right,’” even as she urges Eleanor to “‘Come back inside’” and re-join the group (104). Eleanor’s naming of the ghost and her alliance with it, and now its naming of *her*, all coincide to cast her in the role of insane outsider, like Hill House itself, even though she still retains a feeble hold on the human world.

Symptomatic of a growing “schizophrenia,” as Eleanor becomes increasingly “bereft of spatial [and temporal] coordinates and practically...incapable of distantiation,” she is also becoming both “postmodern” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 48) and ghostly. Eleanor’s doubts about what to call the ghost reflect back on her in a specular manner, as she decides on its identity and,

furthermore, has it single her out as being most worthy of haunting. She wakes up in the night, muttering, ““Coming mother, coming”” and then she explains to Theodora that “my mother is knocking on the wall,” although Theodora hears nothing of the sort. “Eleanor thought, and said, ‘I’m here, what *is* it?’—and then heard, clearly for the first time, although she had been hearing it ever since she was awakened. ‘What is it?’ she whispered” (Jackson 90), a question later echoed by Luke (110). And so the reluctance to label begins, even though she has already named it “mother”; since her mother is dead, she obviously means the *ghost* of her mother. But she then reasons that “it is only a noise down the hall and *not* my mother knocking on the wall” (91), indicating her hesitation, being hung between “ghost” and “not-ghost.”

There is seemingly explicit evidence of a “real” ghost in *The Haunting of Hill House*, but the uncertainty remains, especially for the reader since there is equal evidence to the contrary. It is significant, particularly in light of the governess’s lack of corroborating witnesses in *The Turn of the Screw*, that Theodora hears the noise too: ““Something is knocking on the doors,’ Theodora said in a tone of pure rationality” (91). They describe it as “just a noise,” but cannot explain what causes it without having seen its source. We are told that, amid the “little pappings [that] came from around the doorframe, small seeking sounds, feeling the edge of the door, trying to sneak a way in,” “Theodora gasped and cried out” (93). Furthermore, when an “iron crash” hits the door “both of them lifted their eyes in horror.” The normal doubts about naming are present, as the ghost is identified as “whatever was outside the door” (93), but there seems no escaping the fact that “it” can reach preternaturally high on the door that Theodora gasps and lifts her eyes “in horror.” Eleanor (like the governess) believes they are sharing the experience, but we realize gradually that their personal accounts differ. In fact, we have already been told that “Eleanor thought that the oddest part of this indescribable experience was that Theodora should be having it too. ‘No,’

Theodora said, and they heard the crash against the door across the hall” (93). The word “no” is as elusive in meaning as any exchange between the governess and Mrs. Grose, and the gap is filled by different interpretations from both women. While she admits to hearing the knocking, Theodora will not assert that the noise is a ghost, not without empirical evidence. Certainly, she would not think that the noise is Eleanor’s mother, since she does not even know Eleanor’s mother. Furthermore, Theodora is the first inhabitant to suggest that Eleanor should leave, suggesting at the very least that there is some specific quality about Eleanor that renders her unfit for Hill House’s special effects.

Eleanor certainly carries an air of anti-foundationalism, rejecting paternal authority and science, mostly because they retain the right to name, and therefore limit, her experience and identity. We see a keen distinction between Eleanor and Montague in the former’s desire to remain ignorant, thereby retaining a state of belief. She is aware that the “intelligent thing to do, perhaps, was to walk over and open the door,” but “that, perhaps, would belong with the doctor’s views of pure scientific inquiry” (93). Figuratively speaking, he wishes to close doors by opening them, while she wishes to leave them open by leaving them closed. This is where King also suggests that Jackson is cheating her readers, “playing to tie rather than to win” (*Danse* 113). But revealing “something” and naming it are very closely related acts, and Eleanor wants no unveiling. In fact, she muses to herself that to name something (such as happiness) is to deplete its potency, and so she would prefer to remain “ignorant and receptive.” After all, in her own mind, “intelligence and understanding are really no protection at all” against unhappiness or fear (Jackson 109).

Considering Eleanor’s unreliable state of mind, it is difficult to ascertain the ghost’s realness. But a case could be made, based on the scene in which all five inhabitants discuss the ghost without naming it, while they all appear to be hearing the same sounds repeatedly. Doors

swing wide and crash shut while even Montague “grimaced.” They all glance nervously at one another, try to smile and “look courageous under the slow coming of the unreal cold and then, through the noise of wind, the knocking on the doors downstairs” (140). While Eleanor gives herself over “willingly” (144) to the house, the others merely share a nervous laugh at her expense in the end. “Hill House went for a fling,” Theodora tamely sums up the chaotic, shared experience. One other possible proof of the haunting’s realness is the fact that two outside individuals are shown to feel unsettled even at a distance. As the inhabitants feel that “around them the house brooded, settling and stirring with a movement that was almost like a shudder.... Six miles away Mrs. Dudley awakened, looked at her house, thought of Hill House, and shut her eyes quickly” (66). Mrs. Sanderson, too, shows evidence of being haunted from three hundred miles away (66). These cumulative suggestions credit Hill House with an influence even at a distance (which is also true of Eleanor’s dead mother) in spite of the final ambiguity regarding the ghost’s textual veracity.

In lieu of a sighting, though, we are likely to scrutinize the ghost’s symbolic function, as Eleanor and the phantom share some traits that facilitate their bonding; thus, as with James’s novella, the text becomes the haunting—the unanswered, unanswerable question that provokes more questions. According to Montague, the estate is haunted by two little girls who were sisters and were “left behind” when their father, Hugh Crain, went globe-trotting (55). There had been a question of ownership of the house when “it was apparently agreed between the two sisters that Hill House should become the property of the older” (55), which is not so different from Eleanor’s own lack of property and dispossession, as she lives in her sister’s house and has to “steal” the car because she is forbidden to “borrow” it from her sister (11). This so-called theft reflects her dispossession, lacking prestige, solidity, and identity, and a sense of place. Eleanor and her soul-mate dead “sister,” the older Crain girl’s companion, have this feeling of dispossession and exile in

common, perhaps explaining why they both cling to Hill House and, ultimately, each other. “The older sister died of pneumonia here in the house” (56) and, Montague says, “The companion [of the older sister] swore in court...that the younger sister came into the house at night and stole things” (57). But, similar to how Eleanor cannot recall parts of her own history that are given to her by Montague, he quickly points out that “there is no record whatever” (57) of most of these events. A further similarity between Eleanor and the companion, of course, is that they both kill themselves rather than leave Hill House.

Eleanor clearly empathizes with the supposed ghost, which reflects her own feelings of childishness, innocence, isolation, and loss of self. She identifies the ghost as a child who is screaming to be heard when she hears “a little soft cry which broke her heart,” followed by a

wild shrieking voice she had never heard before and yet she knew she had heard it always in her nightmares. ‘Go away!’ it screamed. ‘Go away, go away, don’t hurt me,’ and, after sobbing, ‘Please don’t hurt me. Please let me go home,’ and then the little sad crying again...I can’t stand it, Eleanor thought concretely. (115)

Even more significantly, the child, while seemingly banished and yearning for “home,” still insists on being left alone—even though it is crying and shrieking for attention and, later, even laughing. Furthermore, like the governess’s strange insistence at Bly that she encounters a “new” face that she has seen before, Eleanor experiences a new voice that she has nonetheless heard before in her head, suggesting that, regardless of its origin, it is a return of the repressed, for nothing, “even one’s childhood,” is wasted (13) if it is useful in the present to create an identity.

Despite signs of ghostly activity—the writing on the wall, the noises late at night—we are never sure whether or not Eleanor has fabricated this ghost. In fact, there are subtle hints mostly by virtue of omission that Eleanor is at least alone in her interpretation of events, believing that

“nobody heard it but me” (160). On the night of the writing on walls, only Theodora and Eleanor, sitting up in bed, hear the sounds of rising laughter and “a voice babbling too low for words to be understood” while they holding each other’s hands tightly (114-115). Notably, they are together and yet separate, typifying the postmodern human condition. Panicking, Eleanor thinks, “Why is it dark? *Why is it dark?*” (115). “We left the light on..., so why is it dark?” Although the light is on and she is holding someone’s hand, she cannot be sure how to interpret what she is experiencing. The sounds seem recognizable as words, but they defy her attempts to draw meaning from them or from the ghost itself, while the laughter seems to mock those same attempts to understand that which defies nomination. Such defiance invites uncertainty and its partner, fear. Just as when Luke tells her that he has had no mother, and she wonders, “will he exert himself to seem unique?”, Eleanor’s response in kind is: “How am I to receive this?” (118), thus recognizing that the interpretation of signs depends on her. Theo hears the same signs as Eleanor does, but she interprets them differently; in effect, while she does not corroborate Eleanor’s suspicions, neither does she negate them. The two theories, like the two women, must lie together, at once conjoined and separate.

Eleanor’s naming of the ghost simultaneously becomes a naming of herself, as well, but really she has only assumed the identity of a seemingly different other. Rejecting humanity and embracing ghostliness, she reifies and revivifies herself at the same time. Lootens is right in suggesting that Eleanor has become a haunting for the other guests, for she can be heard “pounding their doors at night” (188). She not only mimics the ghost, but literally and metaphorically places herself outside the closed doors, knocking on them—supposedly for entry, but not necessarily. It might well be knocking that signifies nothing, being mere play for its own sake. And yet, like her suicide and the haunting, the very acts of becoming and naming place Eleanor at the centre of her

story so that the discovery of the ghost becomes the telling of her and the ghost's story. Montague, meanwhile, dismisses her individualism, for he tells her to ““stop trying to be the center of attention’” (114), even though, from her perspective, the writing is specifically addressed to her fears and desires. She might be no different from Theodora or Luke, but Eleanor insists on the individuality that her name, written on a wall, affords her.

One subtle sign that Eleanor is becoming increasingly ghost-like is her growing sense of ebullience. As her search for meaning meets a resistant meaninglessness (which is a pronouncement of meaning in itself), Eleanor, like the ghost and the house that contains it, laughs more freely in the face of Montague's logic (100), even as he claims to be “quite serious” (101). As Haraway says, blasphemy requires “taking things very seriously” (149); what the others see as insane might otherwise be viewed as revolutionary behaviour on Eleanor's part, since she is constantly (and earnestly) challenging Montague's earnestness whenever he attempts to prescribe the boundaries of their behaviour and situation. The ghost's laughter is akin to Eleanor's, for they are complicit with one another, like sisters who mock attempts to impose rules of conduct upon the inhabitants and the house. When the others seems grave, Eleanor finds that she is smiling (110). Nothing has concrete consequences for her, since she has no grounding, no sense of herself, partly because nothing “of the least importance” has ever belonged to her (117). Gradually, she transforms from being a serious person to one who gradually loses her ability to be frightened or to regard any threat to her person or sanity seriously. She not only loses any sense of her body while her feet carry her “unfeeling” (168) through Hill House at night, her skin growing “white” (166), but she places herself in danger (164-67), and, once rescued, finds herself separate from the others, unable to look at them (168). In the end, she has dissolved the distinction between herself and the ghost, at least in her mind.

Perpetually an outsider at the walls of respectable society, Eleanor sees Hill House as foreboding and impenetrable from the beginning, designed to keep her at a distance, catching only half-glimpses of secrets behind a padlocked and chained gate, beyond which she can see only shadows (22). Like the signs she observes along the highway, the rules she obeys out of a sense of duty, and the jingles that run through her head (“Present mirth hath present laughter” and “Journeys end in lovers meeting”), nearly everything that Eleanor encounters is empty of meaning and yet she applies meaning to it, suggesting that it is somehow significant to her survival, her maintenance of order and sanity.¹⁹ Desperate to change herself and her routine, to make her life mean something by giving herself an adventure and a unique story, Eleanor realizes “that she must really make an effort to think of something else” (25). She adheres to rules and guidelines, willing herself to block out the words that are “unsuitable,” which is why they “hide so stubbornly from memory” (25). She suspects herself of being aware but conveniently forgetting, since the darker side of such lines are committed to rote memory only.

Although her protagonist is chaos incarnate, Jackson clearly wants us to empathize with Eleanor. The ghost of her own past haunts Eleanor. She is unable to relinquish either the horrible childhood memories she has or the feeling of guilt for having let her mother die. Like the supposed ghosts of Hill House, she is trapped in a bad history which is better left forgotten and yet which asserts itself, regardless. Like Sethe in *Beloved*, she feeds off of it as a perverse form of nostalgia and allows it to inform her self-construct, just as the history of Hill House informs the personality of Hill House. Earlier, as she finally drives away from her childhood home, the clear sky reminds her of the “aching memories of her early childhood, when it had seemed to be summer all the time.” She is constantly concerned with how quickly time is passing, but now that she is “grown

¹⁹ Both lines are from *Twelfth Night* (II. iii. 44–45), sung by Feste the Clown, and might even have meaning for Eleanor. But since she only keeps repeating as if by rote, it is up to the reader to contextualize and decipher them.

up and know[s] the value of things,” she understands that nothing, “even one’s childhood,” is wasted (13). Even then, she is aware of the rootless, fractured, and chaotic state of her life and yearns not to waste any more valuable time, explaining how she is able to commit suicide rather than face exile, particularly when she believes that “journeys end in lovers meeting.” That is to say, her suicide is a leap towards a union with her “home”; to her, such a hasty decision is preferable to further exile and more wasted time away from her true kindred. In her final triumphant act, she melds with Hill House and embraces her ghostly “sister” in an attempt to render herself distinct from all others who are *not* of the sisterhood.

2.2.3 Montague and Eleanor: The Contest For Authority

Jackson’s novel perfectly illustrates the significance of nomination in the preservation of order against chaos and, simultaneously, the futility in the exercise of labeling. The battle over what to call whatever haunts Hill House, whether “ghost” or “not-ghost,” largely comprises a struggle to maintain one’s current reality. At the same time, Hill House is a space of hesitation where certainty about anything seems artificial, if not impossible. Montague is the paternal voice of reason, sanity, seriousness and self-possession; Eleanor, on the other hand, grows more like the ghost—increasingly illogical, playful, and insane—with every moment she stays at Hill House. The doctor presents the master narrative aimed at allaying fear of all things Gothic (that which threatens rules and order), governing the flow of information about Hill House’s history, and guiding reactions to it. Because Montague possesses most of the power, he likely feels just as threatened by the ghost as Eleanor does because an outbreak of chaos would contaminate his authority. He and Eleanor conjure the phantom together, he by refusing to name the ghost (even while facilitating the conditions conducive to a haunting), she by naming (and being named by) it.

In *Hill House*, the power of nomination supposedly belongs to Montague, while the fear of such authority belongs to Eleanor, ultimately causing her to grasp that same power for herself.

However, freedom from the master narrative is virtually impossible without an act of belligerence (Cixous 316), and so Eleanor's suicide is an act of rebellion and transcendence, somewhat akin to Sethe's infanticide in *Beloved* in that respect. One might even suggest that Jack's self-destruction with the roque mallet in *The Shining* is a similarly rebellious act, as is Charis's apparent destruction of Zenia in *The Robber Bride*. Each of these characters commit acts of extreme, personal violence in order to escape a repressive, returned history and an oppressive, single-minded authoritarian who would deny them each a voice.

Representing scientific and patriarchal dominance of "truth" and history—both of which the postmodern makes provisional—Montague presumes to govern the ungovernable, including both the inhabitants and the ghost, by imposing the form the latter ought to take. It is on his bidding that the "skeptics and believers" (Jackson 6) arrive at the haunted house with their expectations toted like luggage. Montague sets the tone and parameters of the experiment, for he alone knows the background of every group member; he assumes an authorial seat while they "obediently" settle on the stairs, looking up at him as he takes on "his lecturing stance" (75). "I see no need for locking doors," he says (64) in assuring them that "Hill House will be quiet tonight. There is a pattern to these things, as though psychic phenomena were subject to laws of a very particular sort" (48)—as the scientist, naturally, these are laws to which only he would be privy. His declaration that ghosts are benign and produced only by the "victim" in her own mind is suspiciously heavy-handed, as well, implying that, by naming the ghost, Eleanor merely relents to her fears, which will take her far from the notions of reality he knows and upholds:

“No physical dangers exists,” the doctor said positively. “No ghost in all the long histories of ghosts has ever hurt anyone physically. The only damage done is by the victim to himself...in all our conscious minds,...there is not one iota of belief in ghosts.” (99)

Still, for one who professes no “iota” of belief in ghosts, it is curious to imagine what Montague means by the word “ghost,” for, regardless, even his use of it invokes the hesitation into which the phantom slips and takes form in the minds of his listeners. When Theodora playfully asserts, ““What a time for a ghost story”” (49), his reaction is serious and unyielding, for such a tale would threaten his mastery:

The doctor was stiff. “Let us,” the doctor said, “exercise great caution in our language...our purpose here, since it is of a scientific and exploratory nature, ought not to be affected...by half-remembered spooky stories.... Ideally, of course, you ought not to know anything about Hill House. You should be ignorant and receptive.” (50)

Because of their ready-made notions of hauntings and/or haunted spaces, it is likely that simply the sight of Hill House has already unsettled them and created a prolonged sense of anticipation about what lurks in the shadows. Notably, the introduction of the word “ghost” threatens the doctor’s attempts at controlling their reactions, as his “stiffening” suggests when Theodora asks jokingly that ““no one makes any puns about spirits”” (43). The doctor responds in his typical, dogmatic manner: “He hesitated, frowning. ‘Certainly not,’ he said and took three quick agitated sips at his cocktail”” (43). His agitation might have any number of reasons, but there is no mistaking that the very mention of ghosts compromises his provisional authority. Of course, he is right to feel threatened, since his rational interpretation of events seems somewhat ridiculous to the less somber characters; even the child-like Eleanor thinks, “How simple he is, how transparent; he believes every silly thing he has ever heard” (105).

Montague's own need for certainty is evident in the line he draws between the "real" and the "imaginary," even as he admits (like a good Freudian) that the imagination can be very real.²⁰ Faced with contradictions to his expectations, he encounters the problem of "nomination" or what to call the phenomena at Hill House. Rationalization is usually the first response to the realization that one might have seen a spirit, and so, after a tumultuous episode, he cautions his charges:

Not one of us thinks *rationally* that what ran through the garden last night was a ghost, and what knocked on the door was a ghost, and yet there was certainly *something* going on in Hill House last night, and the mind's instinctive refuge—self-doubt—is eliminated. We cannot say, 'It was my imagination,' because three other people were there too. (99)

Like Mrs. Grose at Bly, he refuses to call the apparent "something" a ghost despite the circumstantial evidence and a lack of obvious alternatives. As far as he is concerned, if it behaves like a ghost, that is no reason to call it one. He admits that several people have experienced the same thing and he is forced to call it "something," for to name it would be to assign meaning and predict behaviour that might actually be neither meaningful nor predictable.

While withholding precise nomination, the doctor insinuates that the house is not normal, probably as a way of eliciting various reactions from the four participants in his experiment on fear. He concurs with Eleanor that the house just seems to be "waiting" and that "the evil is the house itself" for it is "a place of contained ill will" (59). He could easily be describing the Overlook Hotel, the house in *Beloved*, or any haunted house: not "a *real* house," as Eleanor refers to it, implying that Hill House, perhaps like herself, does not abide by the usual standards of behaviour (76). The house is whimsical and yet seems malevolent, or as Theodora says, "It's the crazy house

²⁰ Jackson biographer Judy Oppenheimer frequently mentions that Jackson's husband, Stanley, was a "devout Freudian" (165). Jackson herself says, "I read Freud. But there has got to be a point where I dig in my heels and decide who is going to be the master, me or the word" (233). She is reacting to an Oxford scholar's suggestion that her fiction contains hints of lesbianism.

at the carnival, [wherein there is] something that comes out of a dark passage and laughs in your face” (71). Despite the conjecture, however, Montague will not identify Hill House’s particular “evil.” Thus, in spite of Montague’s speech that “every tenant who has left Hill House hastily has made an effort to supply a rational reason for leaving” and yet none “could bring himself to admit that Hill House was haunted” (52), the historical narrative he provides is intended to keep the current inhabitants fearful through ignorance. When Theodora questions “What really frightens people so?” Montague responds, “I will not put a name to what has no name...I don’t know” (53). The problem, of course, is that they have already given it names, such as “ghost” and “poltergeist” and implied that the house may be “haunted” and “evil.” They are talking around the possibility, but the ghost has already been introduced and therefore breeds uncertainty and a subsequent fear of an encounter with the phantom.

Indeed, by setting up Montague as the manipulative, science faction, Jackson appears to set up her novel as a running dialogue on the very concept of labeling and genre-building: the manner in which something gets nominated as evil by accepting inherited judgments of “otherness.” Montague, in fact, stands firm against casual nomination and cataloguing, preferring a causal, logical relationship between signifiers, causing Eleanor to note, “He does not name it” (88). Hill House might well be a lot of different things, and the application of words like “bad” and “haunted” might well do it an injustice, but according to Montague, “Certainly there are spots which inevitably attach to themselves an atmosphere of holiness and goodness; it might not then be too fanciful to say that some houses are born bad” (50-1). Regarding the suggestion that it might be called “haunted,” Luke demands: “What else *could* you call Hill House?” (51). Intriguingly, the doctor responds that people “are always so anxious to get things out into the open where they can put a name to them, even a meaningless name, so long as it has something of a

scientific ring.... A haunted house,' he said. 'Everyone laughs'" (51). When Luke proclaims, "What we all want is facts. Something we can understand and put together" (53), he is expressing the human craving for something solid or sane, something useful, familiar and identifiable through logic. His is a nostalgic response to a haunting uncertainty: the craving for a stability that never really existed; we tell ourselves what we need to, but all it takes is a trip to the local Hill House—or a ghostly visitation—to challenge our previous convictions.²¹ Montague takes notes in order to comprehend patterns, but he understands the fragility of the human psyche and dependence upon instinct: "We have grown to trust blindly in our sense of balance and reason... where the mind might fight wildly to preserve its own familiar stable patterns against all evidence" (77). Earlier, when Luke complains of constantly skidding on the uneven floors (45) and Theodora confesses an inability to find the dining room (46), the doctor chuckles at their destabilization and announces that he has "studied a map" of the house: "I believe that we have only to go through the door here," he says.

Of course, Hill House proves that even maps and notes are useless in the presence of fearful stimulus; the possibility of a ghost disrupts all such attempts at control. While the scientist cannot control the ghost, he does reserve the right supposedly to control reactions to it, including whether or not one chooses to believe in one, which naming it would imply. When Eleanor playfully suggests that "all three of you are in my imagination; none of this is real," the doctor is appalled at her implied questioning of boundaries and "truths," and so he threatens to banish her: "If I thought you could really believe that,' the doctor said gravely, 'I would turn you out of Hill House this morning'" (99). Theodora's added insinuation that the doctor thinks she is "batty" indicates

²¹ Of course, every ghost story has its nostalgia for the better, supposedly safer past: that is what the ghost often represents, even if it also brings with it the reality that nothing is sacred or as perfect as it is remembered. The ghosts of *Beloved* and *Shoeless Joe*, for example, are conjured by a longing for the past; but their very apparition shows how nothing is as the beholder has believed up until then.

Jackson's sub-text; to see a different reality or no reality at all, as Eleanor does, is to be labeled "batty" and to be cast out or exiled for the protection of self and everyone else.

Eleanor shows her own preoccupation with the act of nomination and awareness of its delimiting power. At one point, she looks at herself in the mirror, "[a]bandoning a lifelong belief that to name happiness is to dissipate it" (97). While bothered by naming, she is particularly disturbed by Theodora's pretense at familiarity with the house and its ghost; that would disrupt Eleanor's own growing sense of individuation through kinship with the spirits:

It's as though she were saying it deliberately, Eleanor thought, telling the house she knows its name, calling the house to tell it where we are; is it bravado? 'Hill House, Hill House, Hill House,' Theodora said softly, and smiled across at Eleanor. (88)

She alone reserves to right to name Hill House, and she does: "'How do you gentlemen like living in a haunted house?'" she asks the two males. Notably, she applies the label "haunted" without ever having actually opened the door to see the "ghost" for herself, thus showing a propensity to name without evidence. Living in a "haunted" house and being the only one to see the ghost makes her doubly distinguished, as if the label "haunted" has a savory ring to it that renders the one who names it different and, by implication, better than anyone else in the room.

Because Eleanor's self-construct is that of the perpetual outsider, it is not surprising that her destiny is rejection of humanity and a simultaneous alliance with the ghost. Her suicidal act signifies a reclamation for Eleanor, a sort of self-possession which comes from the (mutual) possession of Hill House, her very own "cup of stars." In her paranoia, she thinks that they are sending her away so that they can claim Hill House and its experience, its history, and the power to name and control all that happens to it. But she claims final victory, singing to herself that "*they* don't make the rules around *here*. They can't turn me out or shut me out or laugh at me or hide

from me; I won't go, and Hill House belongs to me'" (173). As Oppenheimer says, Eleanor's suicide is far from being a defeat, for "Eleanor is more blazingly alive [at that moment] than she has ever been in her life" (227). Like the governess of Bly, she wants only to belong and to control her own narrative, rules and all, and so Hill House has become the frontier where she plants her foot, refusing to leave simply because she has been ordered to "go away." Mrs. Grose's edict to the governess represents the same idea: the ghost is truth, the rise of the Gothic and the unheard self, a possession of *something* through the ownership of a story. Eleanor's death is a way of controlling her own destiny and the rules governing her life, for when she is banished, she rides away from them all in her car, the freedom machine. Even at the end, we see no ghost; we see only Eleanor killing herself in the hope of belonging, finally, to Hill House, to *something*. The reader is left to ponder even whether Eleanor's final act of freedom has any meaning at all. But, as King points out, in fact, if Hill House was not haunted before, it certainly is now (*Danse* 294).

This final, possibly revolutionary act signifies a leap towards freedom, whose degree of success nonetheless depends on one's perspective. As the "victim," beholder, and co-creator of the ghost, Eleanor plants her own feet firmly on the side of "ghost": stamping her brand upon the seemingly unknowable phenomenon. Parks, quoting Barbara Rigney, points out that Jackson's female protagonists "struggle desperately to overcome their estrangement and dislocation [because of male domination], and most of them fail"; it is a "relative liberty in the assertion of a self" and a "superior sanity" (Parks 16; see Rigney 7). The reader must decide, based on inconclusive evidence.

2.2.4 Summary

The Hill House ghost is by nature non-representational, anti-foundational, inclusive and yet frightening in its solitary nature, holding hands with humans while retaining its difference. In the end, the house, its proposed ghost, and the text itself stand as a question that begets more questions, rather than answers. Furthermore, while the ghost in *The Haunting of Hill House* is a postmodern one, Hill House itself stands as a paradigm of a postmodern world: uncertain, chaotic, anti-foundational, full of unknowable history and ever-shifting boundaries, and an overwhelming sense of confusion, lacking a feasible master narrative. Hill House has its origin story, supplied by Hugh Crain and filtered through and interpreted by Montague, rendering it incomplete and variable. There are several reactions to this inherited master narrative, as each of these characters projects his or her own psychological baggage. They each have a history of their own which collides with that of Hill House, like concentric circles within larger circles, very much resembling the internal architecture of the house itself. The result is instability and, inevitably, fear, for they can trust nothing, least of all themselves and each other, as well as the house.

Eleanor has always felt the lack of a family and, thus, a center. Because of her borderless inner space, she entertains many possibilities for what she might encounter at Hill House, and what she finds there reflects her deepest desires: a home, a mother, a sense of belonging and connection to the world, but most of all, a reason to keep living, to keep journeying. When she arrives, she says “‘I can’t believe that it’s real, and we’re here’” (Jackson 43), perhaps expressing the surreal quality of life and goals in the twentieth-century. She finds herself “wondering if she were really here at all, and not dreaming” (43), even as they all sit silently, gazing into the fire, “‘lazy after their several journeys, and Eleanor thought, I am the fourth person in this room; I am one of them; I belong’” (44). The words resonate, certainly. But “belonging” and being the “fourth person” in a

room resonate differently, the former suggesting a familiarity and individuation that the latter refuses. It is this dichotomous state of being, this arbitrary grouping and classification that Hill House most represents. Its ghost might be “real,” whatever that is, or it might not be; but its mere possibility is enough to flush out a heretic who does not truly belong in a space and a time where the ability to name and obey the name’s inherent rules is essential to survival. “Whose hand” Eleanor holds is no one’s, for in the end, she embraces no one, and is embraced by no one. She occupies middle ground, like a ghost, dispossessed and self-possessed. Although she chooses to join the house and the ghost in the end, we do not know what truly happens to her after she kills herself, for “whatever walks in Hill House walks alone.” We can surmise, but we cannot know, and so the text remains open, inviting us in.

Chapter 3:

Return of the Repressed in Stephen King's *The Shining* and Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*

For as much as *The Shining* (1977) and *Ghost Story* (1979) depict, respectively, the fictional hauntings of a hotel in Colorado and a small town in upstate New York, they also portray the return of repressed history for both their protagonists and twentieth-century America. Both of these Gothic novels illustrate that a spectre is haunting America: the parsimonious spirit of a misunderstood and over-appreciated past whose strength derives from a fear of future chaos. This reprisal of the forgotten (or, really, non-existent) past, according to Jameson, is a crucial element of the postmodern (*Postmodernism* x-xi): a “return of the repressed” that Clemens describes as “some entity, knowledge, emotion, or feeling” that, because it threatens “the established order,” builds an energy that causes it to assume material form (4). The ghosts in King's and Straub's novels behave in exactly this manner, gathering energy from the buried past of several characters, as well as the spectral spaces they inhabit, so that history rises up to be seen and felt in a variety of forms. Both novels also present the past and present in a swirl of intertextuality that expands the texts, creating the sense of a reality without border. As well, both novels are similar in their undercurrent of anti-foundationalism, particularly in the disruption of paternal law, leaving nothing solid in its place.

The Shining relates the story of a seemingly normal family with financial problems and a buried history, who moves out of their relatively safe, regulated environment and travel to an isolated hotel far beyond the reach of civilized society. Jack is an unemployed English teacher with a history of violence and alcoholism. He once twisted and broke his son's arm by accident and stills feels guilty; he also pummeled a student (George Hatfield) in a school parking lot and lost his teaching job. Having little choice, Jack accepts a job as winter caretaker of The Overlook,

a grand old hotel with a traumatic history and rumoured to have plenty of ghosts. Each family member takes along emotional baggage: his wife (Wendy) worries about Jack's temper and problems with her estranged mother; his son (Danny) fears his abusive father, his own propensity for telekinesis, and an ability to converse with a vaguely ominous "ghost" named Tony; and Jack dreads his own guilt and repressed fury. Jack is a failed playwright who merely plays caretaker while working on his ongoing masterpiece. Once they inhabit the hotel, its ghosts become a lightning rod for the family's psychological tensions and, instead of uniting against the phantasms, the family members turn against each other. Ultimately, Jack melds with the hotel spirit and self-destructs, while Danny and Wendy are clearly scarred, but survive with the help of a former Overlook employee, Dick Hallorann.

Ghost Story tells the tale of four men (Ricky Hawthorne, Sears James, John Jaffrey, and Lewis Benedikt) who have been friends for decades and have been gathering bi-weekly for nearly a year to tell ghost stories and to seek solace from an encroaching future, an unsettled present and, especially, a horrible past that now threatens to overtake them. Fifty years earlier, the four men, plus one (Edward Wanderley) who has already died, killed a beautiful young woman and dumped the car containing her body in a lake outside of Milburn. They have sworn never to speak of it, but they all are having nightmares about her. These nightmares coincide with the arrival in town of a woman named Anna Mostyn, whom we recognize immediately as the reincarnation of the murdered woman. With the death of Edward a year earlier, they now fear that they will begin to be killed off, one at a time, which is exactly what happens. Eva Galli has returned in the flesh, checking into a hotel room in the middle of town but also taking up part-time residence at an old house where she lures each man. Eva—who goes by an assortment of names, identities and forms—commands a werewolf-like spirit named Gregory Bates and his two younger siblings

(Fenny and Constance), as well as a host of other spirits; as each citizen dies, that person joins the ghostly forces against the surviving Chowder Society men. Her revenge is not just upon the Chowder Society, but on the calm, conservative haven of Milburn, bringing to it the very destruction of the “sacred” normal that they fear so much. In the end, Edward’s nephew, Don Wanderley, an author of ghost novels, is drawn into the plot, becomes a new member of the Chowder Society, and assumes the role of ghosthunter, determined to track down, and destroy, Eva. But Eva proves elusive and, as a shape-shifter, is reincarnated many times over and in many different forms. In the end, she becomes a little girl without familial connections, whom Don kidnaps and transports to the South, intent on drowning her. His plan appears to fail when she morphs into a wasp which stings him over and over while he holds it underwater in his hand.

As befits the postmodern, the phantoms of *The Shining* and *Ghost Story* are empty signifiers, existing independently of their beholders, and yet they simultaneously gain meaning from them. Offered a series of potentially meaningless images, various beholders project their own interpretations, derived from their individual repressed histories, fears, and desires onto the haunted space. Without a human beholder, the ghost still exists as a separate entity, but the haunting is specifically adapted to the beholder’s perspective, whether a member of the Torrance family or the Chowder Society; each quest for individuation results in a fractured, multiple sense of identity upon encountering and, more importantly, naming that which was regarded as lost. King’s and Straub’s ghost novels offer near-perfect examples of the “endless slide show” of temporal images associated with postmodernism, since their phantoms present a series of images connoting infinite display. In fact, *The Shining* exhibits a succession of phantom images from a past unassociated with various beholders, who, in turn, cannot decipher the veracity of either the image or its signification, if indeed, it holds any. *Ghost Story*’s spectres possess the same disconnected quality;

furthermore, the narrative features a local cinema that practically runs itself, displaying a non-stop series of images from old movies that are intertwined with images of the ghosts themselves.

Both the Overlook Hotel and the town of Milburn provide paradigms of this postmodern notion of history, as the Torrance family and the Chowder Society each come to see that “everything exists at once” (Warren 123), despite a series of ruptures and renewals. Time-space boundaries are irrelevant in these haunted spaces as a multitude of ghosts from various eras coexist within a single time-space dimension, rendering both the hotel and the small town akin to a genre built upon existing genres, producing a new text. Whether real, imagined, or symbolic, the ghosts represent an endless array of temporal images so that the past keeps replaying in the present, affecting both the current and future landscapes. Most often, the phantom represents that which is dead, whatever that means culturally, spiritually, and psychologically. The ghost always appears in the diegetic present, existing independent of, and throughout, all time. Nonetheless, the spirit is unable to “die,” and while it originates from both the past and present, as beholder meets ghost (or reader meets text) it is also portentous of the future. Both the Overlook and the town of Milburn, each including a ghost house, would qualify under Jameson’s idea of a “postmodern space,” in which “our new postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically...incapable of distantiation” (*Postmodernism* 48-49). The result, in the postmodern as well as in the Gothic space, is a sort of “schizophrenia,” as the mind copes with the newly perceived reality, which is nothing like it was, and yet derived from it, belonging to the past and yet outside it, to paraphrase Derrida (“Law” 59).

In both novels, it is difficult to say where humanity ends and ghostliness begins, and vice versa. Both *The Shining* and *Ghost Story* present various stages (even genres) of ghostliness and materiality, implying that, as in “Afterwards” and *Beloved*, becoming a spirit is a matter of natural

adaptation, that there is slow movement as we age or die, away from being human and towards being something not-human, though all originates from humanity. Jack Torrance's humanity and materiality ebb and flow throughout *The Shining* as he invests more of himself in the Overlook, becoming consumed by it; conversely, the phantom-woman in the tub, the ghostly guests in the barroom, and Tony the invisible playmate possess many *human* qualities and are even able to affect the material world. In *Ghost Story*, all of the humans, including Ricky Hawthorne and the Chowder Society, are aging, dying, and on their way to "the other side," which is actually in the same small town. Most notably, Ricky notices that his friend Jaffrey's skin "looked like you could push a pencil straight through it and draw no blood" (Straub 43). Jaffrey, like all of them, is dying, the veil between life and death having grown thin, judging by the opaqueness of his skin. The fear of mortality causes Ricky to look away and, in some ways, his aversion to his unwell friend is a postmodern reaction to nearly anything overtly emotional in the human physiology. "John is dying" (52), becoming more ghostly, on his way to transparency, as the ghost helps him along, gradually shifting towards the ghostly realm. In fact, by the end of the novel, the Society (like Milburn, a society reified by its faithfulness to tradition) itself has died and revived, with Don Wanderley, nephew of a founding member, becoming the "new" Society. As well, since the ghost (Eva Galli) is also a shape-shifter, it is nearly impossible to tell at what point she has become a ghost, if she has ever ceased to be human, or ever actually has been human at all. We do see her as ghost, but we also see her as human at the same time.

3.1 Shifting to Ghostliness: Stephen King's *The Shining*

As Gothic literature often is a study of a fall to innate human beastliness, *The Shining* is predominately a study of Jack Torrance's descent into a murderous maelstrom in which he

gradually succumbs to a loss of reason and order, manners and self-possession. The more he becomes immersed in, or writes himself into, the haunted space of *The Overlook*, the further it claims his body and mind, rendering him more ghostly, less human, and yet both at once. Like *Hill House* before it, *The Shining* features an insane protagonist meeting a deranged space, but one major difference is that Jack's insanity does not negate the ghosts' veracity. In James's and Jackson's novels, and in many Poe stories as well, the mental stability of the protagonists is dubious, and, because no other characters sees what they see, the reader is left in a state of irresolution with respect to the alleged haunting. Poe stories often present alternatives to naming the ghost. In "The Black Cat," "Ligeia," and "Berenice," the narrator's perspective is dubious because of sleeplessness, alcohol, darkness and/or insanity. Even in "The Fall of the House of Usher," the one character (Roderick) who might corroborate the narrator's tale is mad. One might argue that King follows Poe's tradition of unreliable narrators, but Jack Torrance is not the only one who sees ghosts at the Overlook; Danny, Dick, and Wendy see them, as well, and there have been other reported sightings, too. King's spectres mirror the neuroses of one man while also reflecting the fears and desires of humanity; King indicates not only that there are ghosts at the Overlook and that they sometimes are just waiting for us, but also that sometimes (as Straub shows) ghosts are coming after us.

Critics have been fairly unified on the significance of the ghosts of *The Shining*, as well as on the sub-text of the novel. While the phantoms of *The Overlook* are usually referred to as "evil," they tend to signify various meanings, depending on context. Warren and Russell both note that the hotel is "possessed by evil" (Warren 123), and Notkin agrees, while admitting that *The Shining* "may well be the only ghost story ever written where the ghosts could be entirely excised and the story not significantly altered" (Notkin 134). That may be true, and the reason possibly is that the

phantoms are mostly symbolic of the fact that, as King says, “Torrance is out of control of his own behaviour and fate. Whatever is going to happen to him, in a way, has already been decided” (Magistrale 18).

Clearly seeing that the ghosts are real and that the house is evil, Notkin explains that King’s “‘assembly of phantasms’ is played by the vast number of shades who have occupied its many rooms and left behind their evil essence” (165). The effect on the humans who encounter these ghosts while sharing their time-space is that “reality is unhinged and disbelief is challenged” in a manner that at times is “quite in the spirit” of Henry James in its subtlety and questionable veracity (Notkin 165). Russell, like Notkin and others, asserts that the ghosts in *The Shining* are evil. And, while it is hard to argue otherwise, such a monolithic view depends on whether the rather benevolent Tony, the apparent incarnation of Danny ten years later, is considered a ghost. He would seem to fit the criteria, except for the fact that he is a figure of the future, not the past. Certainly, the Ghost of Christmas Future in Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and the ghost of Caesar in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (IV. ii) are evidence enough that premonitory spirits in literature can qualify as ghosts. Thus, the fact that Tony’s “signs” foreshadow future events does not disqualify him. In fact, his presence not only predicts that Danny will have a future, but it also symbolizes that the future for all of us, but specifically Danny, is ghostdom, a predetermined existence based on our humanness. Notably, Tony does not frighten Danny, but the things he shows him do, even though Danny does not understand what they are. That is the same sense of unease the reader, and Danny’s parents, might feel on knowing that Tony exists; we may not know until late in the novel exactly what he is, but we feel apprehensive that he is there at all—a sign, perhaps, that we still carry the baggage of history, while, for young Danny, the ghost is normal.

King's novel, by its very nature, explores issues of fractured identity—a sort of schizophrenic reaction to the ghost-sighting. Thus, Bruhm's argument for a "queer" reading is easily justified by the peripheral quality of the effeminate or supposed gay voice in *The Shining*, particularly if "queerness" is viewed as an identity issue. Often in the Gothic, "encounters with strange peoples, with different customs, assumptions and attributes, open up singular notions of narrative, reality and identity to heterogeneous possibilities" (Botting, *Gothic* 170). Bruhm's vast accumulation of evidence, particularly as it applies to the ghost in Room 217, supports the postulate that such labels and their inherent rules and boundaries are unstable in the novel. In fact, King normalizes homosexuality by not presenting it as "somehow outside or above the cultural discourses that frame it" ("Queer" 279) and simply includes its subliminal nomination in the list of multiple possibilities, which collude to destabilize "the demands of coherent identity" and, hence, any single truth, name, or identity pertaining to the individual.

As some critics note, the Overlook Hotel is rather like the spirit of Western culture in its dual capacity for both dreams and nightmares. King always has been seen as a non-canonical writer, whose subject matter, like Jack and his proposed memoir, evoke "the less savory" account of American culture. "Whatever is going on in the Overlook...", King says, "is connected to a kind of capitalism run mad. It is the American dream run amok...[and] the hotel's whole history is evidence of this" (Magistrale 19). The Overlook is a Gothic Disneyland in which every room is a horrific ride, with pockets of supposed safety and spaces of sheer terror. The Torrances are the twentieth-century nuclear family, riding up the winding mountainside of Colorado, away from civilization and towards Pandemonium. Winter describes The Overlook as a "crossroads," "the house on the borderland of past and future," signifier of the modern American nightmare, "In grief and loss for the past, and terror of the future [12]" (49). Of course, the postmodern quality of

Disneyland is that it is not real, but “hyperreal,” as Baudrillard describes it, “a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a place of illusions and phantasms” (12). The Overlook is the dark underside of such a carnival, simulating not just the “miniaturized pleasure of real America,” but, rather, the miniaturized terror (which, of course, is sometimes the same thing). Baudrillard asserts that Disneyland’s imaginary appearance makes us “believe that the rest is real,” and so, too, does the Overlook make its inhabitants (probably even its summer tourists) believe that it is the world outside the hotel that is “real,” which is untrue, as all referents are equally emptied of meaning, equally full of returned meaning.

The Overlook becomes a space where all referents are lost, where there is no sense of reality except in the sense that reality has fled, completely destabilizing the Torrances from what they once believed about themselves, each other, and the world. As the father and son see ghosts everywhere, reflecting back their worst fears and darkest secrets, the hotel becomes a “specular,” even somewhat of a pastiche built over time. Magistrale points out that “the symbols and narrative structure of the fairy tales to which King alludes in *The Shining* fuse the personal relationships, behaviors, and individual histories of the members of the Torrance family with larger, a priori patterns of human behavior” (34-5). The intertextuality creates a swirl of narratives of humans and ghosts from various time-spaces, signifying the chaotic manner in which memory functions; as Jameson points out, postmodern individuals ingest a variety of “materials” which “they no longer simply ‘quote’...but incorporate into their very substance” (*Postmodernism* 3), as they fuse with their environment and vice-versa.

King’s narrative may not be “postmodern,” but he constantly draws on the post-World War Two Western collective memory, as much as one is possible, pointing out how the mass consciousness is composed of all the empty and full signifiers of a world of our own cultural

creation. The most haunted room, Room 217, represents forbidden space (although, truly, the entire hotel, if not the entire world, is such a space, which is sometimes part of the attraction); it is “curiosity” personified (King 215) as in Bluebeard’s treasure. In fact, in the paragraphs leading up to the apparition of the suicide phantom, King invokes the ghost of Bluebeard in Danny’s mind:

(What big teeth you have grandma and is that a wolf in a BLUEBEARD suit or a BLUEBEARD in a wolf suit and I’m so)

(glad you asked because curiosity killed that cat and it was the HOPE of satisfaction that brought him)

up the hall... (King 215; spacing and italics are in original)

As a child, Danny is largely ignorant about the meanings of these empty images and allusions. His stream-of-conscious intertextualizing does not distinguish between the myth of Bluebeard, the fairy tale of “Little Red Riding Hood,” and the folk tale of the curious cat. Furthermore, Danny occasionally is jolted by a “memory” of Alice in Wonderland when he thinks of the “white rabbit” (216). The amalgam of details and competing narratives forms a “master narrative” of a sort, but King also explodes myths and dredges up the past, presenting images long suppressed but in constant cultural circulation through media, literature, and oral culture. King essentially shows how master narratives are formed and thus how they gain meaning while simultaneously losing it, underscoring the fragility of any one version of truth, much as Jameson describes the postmodern pastiche. Magistrale says that these fairytales also “provide passkeys that open the doors to exotic and terrifying secret places,” invoke “altered states of being that border on the realm of madness” (such as Jack’s “slow transformation into Bluebeard”) and, “most of all, the process within which a child’s archetypal predispositions make him vulnerable to the personal flaws of his parents” (34). These “archetypal predispositions” act upon the mind of one so impressionable as Danny and form

a kind of master narrative that is slowly exploded and transformed, but they also, as Magistrale suggests, predispose him to certain fears and disappointments; not only “REDRUM,” but “suicide” and “divorce” are the words which cause him the most anxiety, even though he does not yet know what they mean. Each word, like “ghost” itself, is an imposition on the security and stability he clings to in the name of truth, until experience exposes them as incomplete narratives and personal perspectives. Like many characters in fairytales (“Hansel and Gretel,” for example) Danny “struggles against the parental authority that threatens to destroy him as he journeys toward individuation” (34).

Protracted hesitation, as we have seen in James’s novella and Jackson’s novel, can render the ghost both elusive and powerful, but King shows how nomination of the ghost destabilizes so-called reality and self-identity even farther. King ensures that Jack is not alone in seeing phantoms; Danny, Dick, and Wendy each behold spectral phenomena, leaving little doubt that real ghosts inhabit the novel. Like Eleanor Vance before him, Jack Torrance embraces the ghost and the confusion it represents, mostly because he cannot help himself: the ghost is chaos personified, but so is he and so is life in the late twentieth-century, the novel suggests. King’s portrayal of a nuclear family’s implosion at a vacation hotel comments that, whether or not we admit it, life is subject to an underlying chaos. In the end, the hesitation to nominate does not linger for the duration of *The Shining*; instead, King calls a ghost by its name and compels his characters, and his reader, to deal with it. This authorial boldness, combined with Straub’s and other works they have inspired, paves the way for a far less coy, more familiar, approach to the ghost figure with Morrison’s ghost story in 1988. With only two years between *The Shining* and *Ghost Story*, we can see a decrease in the hesitation to identify the ghost while the chaos it denotes becomes increasingly normalized.

While the protagonist of King's novel is the patriarch, Jack Torrance, each of the four main characters (Jack, Danny, Wendy, and Dick) has his or her own narrative by which we know their individual desires and fears. Like *Hill House* and *Bly*, *The Overlook* functions as a text upon which the fears and desires of its residents are written; depending on one's perspective, the "bad place" is not a blank slate, but a text upon which others have written already, re-interpreted by its latest inhabitants. The father is tormented by alcoholism and a propensity for violence, as well as by a terror-filled childhood, largely thanks to his own father, the "great ghost-god." Danny is haunted by fears of his father, divorce and suicide, as suggested to him by his personal ghost named Tony. Both father and son have personalized ghosts, each representative of their individual fears and wants; while Danny has Tony, who is his "mirror" image ten years in the future, and in fact occasionally communicates to Danny through a literal mirror, Jack has Lloyd the bartender. They also each have different reactions when they encounter the ghost of a woman in Room 217 who had committed suicide. Wendy has her own suppressed emotions about her mother, but her haunting is more material than supernatural. Even Dick Hallorann, the black cook who offers guidance and friendship to Danny, displays repressed feelings, from both his own childhood and the history of his race. The *Overlook's* ghosts manage to provoke all of these personal narratives, exposing myriad repressed histories that rise up to displace old identities in favor of new.

Despite the amalgam of perspectives and internal voices, however, the patriarchal voice dominates the novel's discourse while invoking the feminine by virtue of its peripheral, "small narrative," status. The *Overlook* itself, ostensibly through Jack, becomes the dominant narrator—the god-like entity that explains, contains and controls all histories, including suppressions and exposures. In the postmodern, everything is a text, and yet the boundaries of each text are largely undiscernable and fluctuating. Jack is an example of the body as text, the paternal law that exerts

itself by virtue of historical performance and his “natural” place as Father and therefore head of the household, master of the narrative, arbiter of the family’s fate, whether it lives or dies and whether there are ghosts are not. When he cannot assert his own conviction because of what Wendy and Danny have already seen, he seeks the opinions and pronouncements of another patriarchal stalworth, a doctor. Jack’s story, largely, is the Torrance story as well as his own personal narrative. And yet *The Shining* presents various small narratives: the young (Danny), the woman (Wendy), and the black (Dick)—three voices that not only clamor to be heard, but are heard; in fact, whether Jack hears them or not, they help to destabilize the Father’s notions, or aspirations, of being a paragon of stability. Jack attempts to write a play of his own, tries to assert discipline and rules, and tries to erase the signifiers of the past. But he has brought his family to a hotel that operates as a text divided and divisive, filled with so many “small narrative” ghosts asserting themselves, like George Hatfield, upon “Jack’s” page so that the self called “Jack” gradually loses a sense of himself; he gains identification through the ghost, but loses his identity as “Jack” the father, provider, and story-maker. When Jack oscillates between ghostdom and humanity, Danny is able to read both texts side by side, but reading is not the same as understanding. The same might be said of the postmodern text; signifiers (or even texts and genres) sit side by side, occupying the same plane, recognizable by their performance as questioning operatives, and yet undecipherable *because* of their very function and place. Neither Danny, Jack, nor Wendy has a reference for what is happening. With the dissolution of Jack—father, master narrator, center of the story—their own lives are suddenly thrown into chaos, changed irrevocably into something else. Largely haunted by the ghosts of George Hatfield, the “innocent” Danny (that is, before the breaking of his arm, when even Jack was a different self), and the play he cannot seem to write but which at the same time casts a material spectre upon the events of the novel, Jack is his ghosts and

they are him. Ultimately, he becomes one by crossing over and yet remaining—much as history has done in these postmodern times, being declared “dead” and yet present in its absence, bigger in death than in life.

At the outset, Jack believes in the Torrances as a happy, “normal,” family unit, but he comes to see that he has merely been suppressing the uglier version of the narrative for the sake of feeling secure. Typical of American Gothic, where the family is destroyed from within by secrecy and violence, as in *Wieland* (1798), Jack hears voices that provoke him into harming his family by offering an alternate perspective of them. In effect, he is “nostalgic” for a past that never existed; as a result, he experiences a “schizophrenic” rupture when the fictional past rises up and co-exists within the supposedly more factual present. This phenomenon, also seen in the governess and Eleanor Vance, casts Jack as the embodiment of Jameson’s observations concerning the prevailing cultural deafness to historicity. There are many historical narratives, he says, and occasionally, one or more of them arise to be heard above the others so that, while the “truth” broadens, a general mistrust of anything which has been held as “truth” ensues, heralding a coinciding destabilization and “schizophrenia” (*Postmodernism* 10). The ghosts that visit Jack (or vice-versa) are of a “bad place” and counter-act the “normal,” displacing the narrative about the fictional happy family, as well as the one about him being a screenwriter. The contented, stable family which Jack supposedly remembers never really existed, and he has never finished a screenplay. Many critics, including King, point out that, while there are “evil” forces at work at the Overlook, they merely prey on the pressures that already exist for the family and, specifically, Jack. Like Russell, Notkin asserts that “If the hotel were not malevolent, if the boy were not telepathic, Jack’s deterioration, loss of self-control and eventual destruction could still take place,” as the hotel “merely provides enticement and color for Jack’s descent into hell; the descent itself has been pre-figured” (135).

Unlike at Bly and Hill House, we know there are ghosts at the Overlook, but identifying them only brings greater chaos. The obliteration of boundaries, signified by the possible presence of a ghost at the “dark place,” mirrors the postmodern condition as the formerly stable, respectable “truth” gives way to the newly-discovered unstable, presumably darker narrative. As King says, “without a concept of normality, there is no horror” (*Danse* 7); Todorov concurs that “for there to be transgression, the norm must be apparent” (*Fantastic* 8). *The Shining* presents various stages of ghostliness, implying that, as in “Afterwards” and *Beloved*, becoming a spirit is a matter of natural adaptation, that there is slow movement as we age or die, away from being human and towards being something not-human, though all originates from humanity. When he invests more of himself in the Overlook, Jack becomes more spectral, his face actually appearing to Wendy as “ghost-white,” (229) echoing a reference to his now-deceased father who, in a certain light, looked “like some soft and flapping oversized ghost in hospital whites” (King 223). Jack’s own humanity, materiality, and sense of self ebb and flow throughout the book; similarly, the phantom-woman in the tub, the ghostly guests in the barroom and Tony the invisible playmate possess many *human* qualities and are able to affect the material world. In this novel, the boundary between humanity and ghostliness is nearly indistinguishable, perhaps even non-existent, for it is difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins. The relinquishing of the skin is the defining moment, but, even then, some elements of human physicality (an ability to interact or communicate, the appearance of skin and of body with arms, legs, a head, and two eyes, and so on) remain. Hurley might suggest that Jack, at least, is an “abhuman subject,” being “not-quite-human,” and “characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other,” moving away from itself (3-4) in a way that constitutes a loss (and simultaneous

gain) of identity. The same might be said of the ghosts, who find themselves in the ambiguous position of being not-human and yet once-human.

King expends relatively little debate on the question of whether or not there are “real” ghosts at the Overlook; instead, his characters overcome their initial hesitation relatively quickly (compared with James’s and Jackson’s heroines) and become concerned with what the ghosts want from them, signs of both a normalization and a symbiosis. King perceives a sharp divide between his ghosts and Jackson’s, for in discussing *Hill House* he (rightly) asserts that Jackson wants us to believe that it is Hill House “all along” that produces the ghost (*Danse* 294)²² while, in *The Shining*, the Torrance family’s fate is already sealed prior to taking up residence at the Overlook. Nonetheless, the pattern of narcissistic beholders in twentieth-century ghost novels continues with King, for ghosts of *The Shining* are both specular and independent at once, blank texts upon which various beholders, including the Torrances, write their own psychology. At the same time, however, we see a move towards both the friendliness (through Danny’s friendship with Tony) and all-pervasiveness predicated by a more inclusive, postmodern perspective of the ghost.

3.1.1 The Ghosts of *The Shining*

The Overlook Hotel is a haunted playground for a troubled family, and many of its phantoms signify the return of the repressed past of both the Overlook and the Torrance family. While the reader beholds the same ghosts that Danny and Jack see, and there is plenty of evidence to support either the ghost or the not-ghost supposition in the text, what the ghost *signifies* is at least just as important as its materiality. Its materiality, nonetheless, is significant insofar as it indicates a presence that can never be erased even in its absence. On a symbolic level, the novel’s ghosts embody specular reflections of the particular beholder, but they also physically embody

fears that are specific to that individual. While some characters—the hotel’s owners, Doctor Edmonds (who examines Danny), and even Jack for a time—attempt to draw a boundary between “real” and “imaginary,” the ghosts challenge the validity of that line, as literary ghosts have done virtually since the late eighteenth century (Castle, “Spectralization” 236). The ghosts of *The Overlook* seem fettered to a single “bad” space and time, but when a “bad” family comes to visit them, the phantoms put on an elaborate show of serious play that is almost matched by Jack Torrance himself. They seem made for each other, but, really, there is no such connection; likely, it is no coincidence that Jack finds his way to a hotel that appeals to his own Gothic sensibilities. Once there, he needs only to get over his initial hesitation about the nature of what he has seen and to “unmask” his violent nature. The phantoms encourage him to kill his family, perhaps merely granting him permission, reflecting back what he has long desired, and feared, to do: to kill the narrative of the old Jack and thereby, in fact, to kill “Jack.” For Jack, the question of “what is it?” becomes one of “what am I?” Multiple and shifting, he is the human equivalent of the hotel, equally haunted and dangerous because that is how his self sees itself. His wife and son are just visiting, surviving, and adapting to a new set of circumstances and the knowledge that nothing is what they had thought it was. In the beginning at least, it is Jack’s world and they are just living it in it, until they realize that not only have things changed, but they never were stable to begin with.

The Shining has three main ghosts: the woman in the bathtub; the ghost of the ballroom; and Danny’s invisible friend, Tony. The latter embodies an imminent, dire future while the former two represent a “return” of repressed history. As well, each one is able to transcend boundaries of time and space, transgress “rules” based on rationality, induce momentary “hesitation,” and insinuate mad laughter, or simply madness, in the face of seriousness. The bathtub ghost and ballroom ghost exist in both the present and past simultaneously, while Tony is both present and

²² I disagree, since Eleanor is clearly troubled before coming to Hill House, as the previous chapter argues.

future. Thus, the first two spirits each inhabit a single time-space that is both infinite and specific to their moment of rupture, when they died and became spirits while Tony inhabits a futuristic space that encompasses infinite possibilities; both past and future, particularly within the diegesis of *The Shining*, are equally unknowable despite the apparent “facts.” In effect, if the hotel is taken as a text then, collectively, they are the ghosts that exist diegetically within that text and ultimately breach its margins. Mostly, though, the time for all three phantoms is *future* in the sense that they want Danny and Jack for some purpose, outside the text’s supposed present limitations; since that purpose itself exists in some pre-imagined, pre-destined future possibility, the ghost is an augur of future, even as its desires and efforts also reflect and affect the Torrance family’s future.

3.1.1.1 The woman in the bathtub

Within the diegetic boundaries of the text, the ghostly woman in the bathtub is undoubtedly “real,” for she is observed on separate occasions by both Danny and Jack. Jack sees her not just in the bathroom, but also when she eventually joins the other spirits at the party in the ballroom. She is a “return of the repressed” in many ways, for she represents a secret that the proprietors had long ago buried in the hope of retaining its wealthy clientele, who presumably would prefer a ghost-free vacation spot. She killed herself in the bathtub in Room 217 after being abandoned by her younger lover. As such, she represents the sort of potential for violence that haunts the Torrance family. She is, both literally and figuratively, the return of a buried secret between hotel and management, between son and father. In Clemens’ terms, she is symbolic of an entity which has been suppressed because she “threatens the established order of things” and has developed a “cumulative energy” that gains physical form, playing on the fears of its beholders and forcing itself upon landscape (4). Bruhm suggests that the female ghost in Room 217, as seen by Danny, is directly representative of

the mother and suggestive of Danny's need for security and comfort, as his "hallucination focuses on her prominent breasts and pubic hair; she approaches him 'grinning, her purple lips pulled back in a grimace'" (Bruhm, "Queer" 272). Bruhm also suggests that the ghost's attempt to strangle Danny is suggestive of maternal "smothering": the non-nurturing, Gothic side of maternity. Certainly, this argument supports the notion of multiple identities of mother figures in both Gothic and postmodern texts. Nonetheless, Bruhm's emphasis on the ghost's lack of a phallus by virtue of being female seems too narrow. True, an older woman with large breasts might, to a small boy, be considered a mother-figure. But, mostly, she is just scary to him because she is not supposed to be there, and Danny's reasons for being frightened are multiple and perhaps undecipherable. To say that they are based on a blooming homosexuality and mother-identification/fear is to limit the possibilities of what Danny is, and yet the suggestion does open up one more potentiality.

The Shining presents a postmodern view of history—particularly, the notion that images of the past are incomplete and inconsequential, but at the same time neither good nor evil, helpful nor harmful in and of themselves. Occasionally, the repressed past rises up from such a "historical deafness" and will occasionally have to be confronted or "told." Perhaps, then, the best defense for coping is to recognize that it is what it is and nothing more, or even something less than it appears to be. Danny is constantly seeing images/ghosts that are "like scary pictures, they can't hurt you, but oh my god" (King 215). These "scary pictures," like the folk tales referred to in *Hill House*, carry only the meaning that we assign to them. For Danny, however, exterior and interior are indistinguishable spatial-temporal landscapes, just as past and future assume a similar seamless quality. Hallorann recommends banishing the ghosts and scary images by closing his eyes (215), but denial is just a protective measure; such images, once invoked, never depart for good; we merely repress them or accept their eternal presence and presumable incapacity for harm. The only

defense against such chaos, brought on by the mere possibility of a ghost, is to rationalize and compartmentalize, which is precisely what Danny attempts to do:

What he had seen in the [Room 217] had gone away. And the snake had only been a fire hose that had fallen onto the rug. Yes, even the blood in the Presidential Sweet had been harmless, something old, something that had happened long before he was born or even thought of, something that he was done with. Like a movie that only he could see. There was nothing, really nothing, in this hotel that could hurt him.... (215)

This intellectualizing uses logic to deny and, in a sense, normalize, chaos on the assumption that intellect quashes imagination every time. But, as Punter points out, “the notion of haunting exists in this curious space between realisation and its opposition” (Kristeva 3) and what has occurred is a transgression of normalcy. Normalization comes about only through a process of nomination, confrontation, and acceptance; the result is still chaos, but one with which one can co-exist.

Despite the ambiguity with which King imbues his other phantoms, he gives us reason to think that the bathtub ghost is real and exists independently of beholders while gaining signification from both Jack and Danny. When Jack sees bruises on Danny’s neck and asks ““Who tried to strangle you?”” Danny claims it was the “dead lady” in Room 217. Jack refuses to acknowledge what Danny has seen (Notkin 165) and yet his lips “began to tremble,” suggesting that he at least knows to which “dead lady” his son is referring. Having quickly dismissed the possibility that Wendy might have hurt her own child (King 244), he does try to rationalize that Danny might have done it himself, implying a belief that sometimes it is a question of what the *person* brings to the “bad place,” but Jack does exhibit some doubt when he says, “I guess it was a dream, but it was so real” (230). Danny, on the other, suggests that the Overlook is haunted long before they arrive: “I knew it was bad here.... ‘Ever since we were in Boulder. Because Tony gave me dreams about

it.” He remembers also that Mr. Hallorann “said this was a bad place for people who shine” (247). However, the bruises seem like irrefutable proof, although the marks could have been self-inflicted. But, despite both Danny’s and Hallorann’s claims that the hotel has ghosts, Jack proclaims, ““Holy God.... You’re not making this up, are you, Dan?”” (248), implying that while the ghosts might not be real, Danny’s belief in them is. But the reader is privy to a secret: that, independently of Danny, Jack has already seen other apparitions for himself, particularly the “moving topiary” in the vast front gardens. His “trembling” lips are akin to Montague’s “stiffening” in *Hill House* (Jackson 43), for these men are suddenly faced with the insinuation of something that they cannot label.

Ghosts, like those contained within the isolated hotel, and specifically Room 217, are not “allowed” in reasonable society, and so doors must remain closed to them in order to contain them within the “other” room/realm of imagination and the Gothic. Punter is right when he says, “the law can have no cognizance of ghosts; it can exist and function only on a radically thinned terrain, where the deeps and crests of imaginary geographic have no being” (*Pathologies* 3). But even if they turn the handle and enter the “real” room of the occupant, there is a final defense against acceptance of their veracity: a plea of insanity—the very plea which the courts of law utilize to categorize seemingly illogical, beastly, or abnormal behaviour. That way, the law takes care of the aberrations, making sense of the senseless, labeling that which might otherwise either defy labelling or else require a readjustment of law. For both Jack and Dr. Montague, the response to the possibility of a “ghost” is the same: private hesitation, immediate rationalization, public denial and secret fear. While Jack feigns a “new sense of sureness” that is now “deserting” him (King 252), it is not clear that he has ever been certain of the ghosts. Even after seeing a ghost in the tub for himself (274), he tries to rationalize the apparition, thinking that perhaps it is a story Danny has made up. After all, the tub is bone dry to his touch, offering no sign of a dead lady having been in

it. There is a bathmat on the floor which ought not to have been there, but he reasons that Danny could have put it there. He continues to doubt even as he feels a “chilled finger pressed gently against the base of his spine, cooling him off ten degrees. It was joined by others and they suddenly rippled all the way up his back to his medulla oblongata, playing his spine like a jungle instrument” (252). Even when he smells a lady’s soap he tells himself: “It’s nothing. It’s your imagination,” as if to juxtapose the two possibilities of nothingness and imagination when perhaps they are naming the same thing: ghost. He hears, a “sudden rattling, metallic sound behind him,” just as he is choosing whether or not to punish his son for fabricating stories that Jack half-suspects might be true. He turns to see that the shower curtain “which he had pushed back to look into the tub, was now drawn,” implanting in his mind the suggestion that the metallic rattling sound had been the curtain rings moving on the shower rod. We catch an image then of Jack as he “stared at the curtain,” literally standing as the veil between innocence and experience, between being ghosted and nonghosted. Through the pink plastic shower curtain he sees “something” in the tub: “He could see it, ill defined and obscure through the plastic, a nearly amorphous shape. It could have been anything. A trick of the light. The shadow of the shower attachment. A woman long dead and reclining in her bath” (254). At the height of his uncertainty, which converges into both outright terror and denial, Jack tells himself “to step forward boldly and rake the shower curtain back. To expose whatever might be there. Instead he turned...and went back into the bed/sitting room” and shut the door, staring at it, “tasting his own terror” (254). Despite King’s assertion that a horror writer always ought to open the door (*Danse* 113), at that moment he leaves it closed, signifying Jack’s hesitation to relinquish his normal narrative for a foreign one.

Faced with an abnormal image, Jack reverts to a self-imposed ignorance, implying that both faith and the normal depend upon innocence for their preservation: “‘No,’ he whimpered, hardly

aware that he had been reduced to this, whimpering with his eyes shut like a child. ‘Oh no, God. Please, God, no’” in order not to hear “something fumble with the door knob on the other side, moving with “an odd wet thumping sound...as if something had just scrambled belatedly out of the tub” (254). This is the sort of “deafness to historicity” to which Jameson refers as a wilful tuning out of the disparaging or differing voices. Jack as much as names the “something” a ghost, but still rationalizes that, because the new information does not align with his personal reality, he might be insane: “cracking up not playing with a full deck lostya marbles guy just went loony tunes he went up and over the high side went bananas lost his football crackers nuts half a seabag...all meaning the same thing: *losing your mind*” (254). As Winter suggests, “The ‘shining’ is the flame lit beneath the Overlook—Danny’s inheritance from his father, who possesses the power but rejects it as a sign of madness” (51). Unlike Danny, with his burgeoning “shine,” Jack’s self-construct is less flexible and more likely to crack when confronted with illogical events. The possibility of the ghost causes him such uncertainty and dread that he is compelled to cling to the way things supposedly were. At the point of this rupture between supposed reality (the past) and newly-recognized reality (the present, which also signifies a new future), Jack denies what he has seen and heard rather than acknowledge and name it: “‘I didn’t see that at all,” he says, even while keeping his eyes shut in order to contain “his chaotic thoughts” for fear that “he would go mad” if he saw the doorknob moving (255). His feeble report to his wife and son is the pronouncement, “‘Nothing there.... Not a thing,’” as if trying to convince himself, for he is surprised by the conviction of his own voice (256). But, within the Overlook, the “nothing” takes on the “amorphous form” of not only “something,” but everything—every dark and unreasonable possibility. The answer that is meant to sound rational is actually a statement of what seems like truth, or even of promise, both of which are fallible. Even Danny’s thought that promises are “made to be broken,” as Hallorann has

told him, shows the fragility of so-called truth that the novel acknowledges. Uncertainty has crept in through the closed door of Jack's mind and right along with it comes the ghost. The door has been shut, but the ghost remains both behind it and outside it, for it has a name now: "nothing," "something" and "imagination."

While the mere possibility of a ghost induces uncertainty and fear, once the ghost actually appears, chaos ensues because normalcy has been breached, and the presumed rules of conduct are now seen to be vulnerable. In *The Shining*, normally private acts are taboo—codes of acceptable behaviour are transgressed, both by children and adults, illustrating how the crossing of one previously sacred boundary naturally leads to the transgression of others near to it. When Danny experiences the ghost in the bathtub, his innermost fears come to the surface, his emotions being manifest physically as, "at the same time his urine broke, spilling effortlessly out of him" (217). This image of urine "spilling out" is repeated in *Beloved* when the ghost appears, just as "pubic hair" is also exposed in that novel. It all seems to be a part of what Halberstam calls an "elaborate skin show," in which the skin is the "ultimate boundary" (3) between the insides and outsides of a person and, effectively, between people; when that boundary is transgressed, somehow the transgressor's humanity is weakened, particularly because his or her humanity is exposed and turns out to be the same as everyone else's. Danny's pulling back of the shower curtain is a recreation of what, in American cinema, has become, since Hitchcock's *Psycho*,²³ a staple dramatic moment recalling the opening of Bluebeard's closet, the willed exposure of and/or confrontation with that which we most fear. What he sees sitting up in the bathtub is obviously a ghost, and she is "grinning" at him, serving as another reminder that the "nothing" mocks the "something," for they are conjoined entities, even though the "grinning" is a kind of utterance which is in itself empty,

²³ A more recent ghost film, directed by Robert Zemeckis, *What Lies Beneath* (1999), re-creates King's and Kubrick's bathtub scene (1980) in *The Shining*, presenting us with a bloated female corpse to represent a return of the repressed.

but might be interpreted in any number of ways (Bakhtin 281). The bathroom is our most private, sacred, domestic space, where a person's insides come "spilling out," where we are (more often than not) alone; there, Danny is confronted with something he cannot explain, except to recall that he has seen it before, in his vision from Tony. With breasts that "swayed like ancient cracked punching bags," this phantasm is accompanied by the "minute sound of breaking ice shards." Danny begins hammering on the door, "far beyond realizing it was unlocked, and he had only to turn the knob to let himself out," much as Jack has only to keep the door closed from the other side to deny what he knows is there. The boy remembers Hallorann's rationalizing mantra that these images are "*like pictures in a book*" that "*can't hurt him*" because there is "NOTHING THERE THERE IS NOTHING!" (King 218). But these images, including those in books and stories, such as Indians and Bluebeard, are always there for Danny, sharing the same plane as humans, merely unseen most of the time. His mantra of "NOTHING THERE" and "THERE IS NOTHING" springs from a desire for, and perhaps even a realization of, the emptiness of images. In fact, the two phrases, presented without punctuation resemble the "message" on the walls at Hill House ("HELP ELEANOR COME HOME") and also similar to "REDRUM" (standing in for "murder") and the playful reading of words in backward fashion by Tony in *The Robber Bride* (perspective becomes "evitcepsrep," war becomes "raw," and mother becomes "rehtom"). In each case, language is viewed as if through a mirror, emptied of meaning by the signifier's inversion and/or corruption (as with Eleanor's road sign that says, "DARE EVIL"), but it is always a playful acknowledgement. Danny, like any of these characters, can choose to "turn the knob and let himself out" (218), literally and metaphorically, denying the images any signification. But, even then, he cannot deny, or forget what he has seen, for the "ghost" is now part of his vocabulary,

whatever the word means for him; even though corrupted, the repressed meaning always returns, assuming it has ever gone anywhere.

3.1.1.2 Personal Ghosts: Lloyd the bartender

There is, as Sharon Russell says, a great deal of evidence that the ghosts in *The Shining* are “real,” for some of them seem to exist independently of Jack, and yet gain their signification from him. At first, it is not clear to the reader whether these spirits are there, but in Jack’s mind, they are material, as well as contemptuous of him. Partly induced by drugs and the craving for drink, they also reflect Jack’s insecurities and, thus, are a part of him as well as separate from him. Like Bakhtin’s description of the word, they pre-exist his entrance into the Overlook Hotel and gain meaning for him alone, “as is the situation in any living dialogue” (280).

The Overlook becomes Jack’s “field of dreams,” a simulated past that he can visit any time he wishes, any time he wants to feel vital in a way that the “real” world denies him. His entry into the bar and its adjoining dining room resembles Shoeless Joe Jackson stepping out of the cornfield and onto his own private playground where the rules are recognizable and produce comfort.²⁴ The enchanted space becomes a neutral territory for meeting his taciturn father where the sins and shortcomings of the past can be either amended, blurred, or revised. Already “enchanted” (222) by the Overlook and pre-conditioned to invoke spirits of various kinds, Jack enters a fantasy land with the sense of having visited it before. The ballroom shelves have been stripped bare, and yet he sees “bottles twinkling mutedly behind the bar, and syphons, and even beer dripping from the spigots of all three highly polished taps. Yes, he could even *smell beer*” ingrained in the wood of the bar (238), an aroma he associates, not coincidentally, with his father (237-38) and nostalgia for a past

²⁴ In W. P. Kinsella’s *Shoeless Joe*, the protagonist, Ray Kinsella converses with his dead father in a magical space where he can revisit the past, confront regrets, and then “move on,” as Hallorann says Danny and Wendy must do.

era. All seems to be laid out in the dining room just as it might have been decades ago at a fancy feast (237) and Jack finds himself “trying to imagine how it must have been on that hot August night in 1945, the war won, the future stretching ahead so various and new, like a cord of dreams” (237). This time-space of dreams, like any such place, is a way of mentally escaping into the wallpaper—to be away from the horrible present and walk in the pleasant past where, from this safe, blurring distance of the present, everything seemed so much more certain and under control: wars are already won, tables are pre-set, and bartenders named Lloyd dispense drinks freely, without concern for unwritten rules of proprietorship or profit. The past offers an illusion of escape, but its allure would likely diminish if we could see it for real, with its inherent multiplicity. The present, except for the details (set tables, bartending, one war or another, and free drinks) is barely different from the past. The only variable, besides the beholder, is the passage of time, but the ghosts of *The Shining* bridge even that gap, as “all times are one.” Even a different space is irrelevant, for location is no hindrance to the nostalgic haunting. Furthermore, the monstrous side of “free drinks” becomes obvious when we consider that Jack is an alcoholic, prone to destructive, and self-destructive, behaviour when he imbibes. Free drinks suggests an unregulated, limitless scourge, and Lloyd the quiet bartender says nothing while he pours, for his pouring of the free drink says all there is to say.

Lloyd is the most prominent ballroom ghost and the one most reflective of this nostalgic view of history. While the other spirits seem to mock Jack, Lloyd is uncommunicative, perhaps mocking him with his silence, though perhaps not, as well. Jack assumes an inherent empathy in Lloyd’s demeanor, but there is something sinister in the bartender’s quiet servitude because we can only guess what he is thinking. His silence and blank exterior are gaps to be filled by the gaping consumer, who is concerned primarily with drinking his fill, fulfilling his needs and his function of

consuming the nostalgia offered up “freely” but with a built-in cost: consumer loyalty. Acting his part, like a mock pirate or Wild West bartender in a Disneyland attraction, Lloyd serves up exactly what Jack needs, capitalizing on Jack’s nostalgia for drink, which in turn produces his craving for the substance of it—the same way a ghost can spring from a hunger for a better, more certain time.

Of course, the past is, we think, unchanging and therein lies the reason for both its appeal and its haunting quality. This is a form of master-narrative thinking, for the past can be viewed from multiple perspectives; what the nostalgic really crave, perhaps, is that static perspective of the world that they might have possessed “once upon a time.” Jack’s drinking is old reliable, just as Lloyd the ghostly bartender is—he does his business, serves his customer, and keeps his mouth shut; he does not offer a dissenting perspective. Neither does alcohol. In most ways, Jack’s ghost *is* drink. Lloyd asks him “what it would be,” and “Lloyd sympathize[s]” with his complaints; Lloyd is not “too busy” for Jack; Lloyd says he is not “busy at all” and “turn[s] to do the job.” He gives Jack, the consumer, exactly what he wants to hear: that “his credit was fine” (239) and so he can buy whatever he wants, whenever he wants. What is “credit,” after all, but another phantom, a word for solvency without a tangible presence, yet invoked by thought and an affirmative word? If the right people assume you have “credit,” then you do. Appropriately, the ghost offers Jack what he can only dream of: solvency, good credit, a good name and, hence, a sense of belonging in his surroundings.²⁵

By entering the barroom and walking among the seemingly friendly ghosts, he is performing a nostalgic ritual not so different from the one that occurs daily in the everyday lives of ordinary people. He walks among the tables, “momentarily forgetting his wife and son upstairs, forgetting the dream [about his dead father], the smashed radio, the bruises” (237). Snow drifts

²⁵ Credit, in a very real sense, is individuation and power. There is a sense in which the ghost story always provides the beholder with “credit” of a sort: credit for being the one who has seen it, survived it, and has a story to relate.

glaze the landscape, offering the effect of a gauzy dream as he rambles away from the nightmarish present and into the vaunted past, which is effected through a blurry, half-hidden veil that “endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy image” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 21). In his nostalgic stroll, Jack encounters a much finer and richer past, just as he might have imagined: “men and women in costume, here a glittering princess, there a high-booted cavalier, flashing jewelry and flashing wit everywhere, dancing, liquor flowing freely” with gay conversation all around. In the midst of it all is the bandmaster, crying out ““Unmask! Unmask!”” while we are told that “the Red Death held sway.” With the unmasking, following this allusion to Poe’s sinister plague-figure from “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842), Jack finds himself “standing on the other side of the dining room, just outside the stylized batwing doors of the Colorado lounge where, on that night in 1945, all the booze would have been free” and he hears the command, “Belly up to the bar, pardner, the drinks’re on the house” (237). King writes this line as drawling dialect from a western movie, arguably the quintessential American nostalgia film, idealizing a distant, utopian past where even death is glorious in its bloodless, righteous violence, and remuneration is someone else’s responsibility.

The ghosts in the ballroom posit a cocktail of pure nostalgia, typifying the endless slide show of images suggested by Jameson as the postmodern pastiche, without any sense of a grounded, central time or space. “The ideal schizophrenic is easy enough to please provided only an eternal present is thrust before the eyes, which gaze with...fascination upon an old shoe,” he explains (*Postmodernism* 10). Texts and images of the past and present swirl perpetually about in Jack’s mind while he “realizes that ‘all the hotel’s eras were together now,’” that everything “exists at once, and the hotel is kind to those it kills” (Warren 123), keeping them around as ghosts in perpetuity. The hotel presents a seemingly endless array of once-human figures, served up on a

shining platter of faux 1920s glamour. Clearly, we are meant to see that the memory creates nostalgic longings and physical sensations that are materially real, just as the ghostly and yet seemingly authentic smell of alcohol is the return of repressed memories rising from the graveyard of Jack's mind. Jack's craving, in "a bitterly powerful wave of nostalgia," causes his entire being to "cry out for something wet and long and cold" (238). But the question of whether Jack's visions are "really" there remains: do Jack's imagination and repressed memory combine to conjure up the ghosts, smells, images, and all? "Reality" is hardly the issue, however, given his mental instability and the Overlook's insistence on its own reality, one that undermines the possibility of any stable reality. Regardless of the ghost's veracity, the effect on Jack's ensuing actions remains the same.

It appears, ultimately, that Jack conjures ghosts—and, hence, his own form of reality in which ghosts are normal—out of a need for self-amusement, coupled with a sense of paranoia and futility. Despite the accumulating evidence, Jack's reliance on pills and booze, as well as his penchant for both nostalgic and shameful flashbacks concerning his abusive father, makes him an unreliable witness regarding the veracity of ghosts. It is, as Todorov suggests, the reader who bears witness, hanging on clues from the text. When Jack turns on the lights he finds that the shelves are "empty" (238), and so we might assume that he has given meaning to them that is purely personal and contextual, having shed light on the previously obscured. The phantoms of the ballroom appear to him after he has flipped two Excedrin tablets into his mouth (239) and he has "a sudden sensation people were watching him, curiously and with some contempt..., all of them in costume, watching this sad exercise in the dramatic arts with cold amusement" (239). Much like the governess at Bly and Eleanor at Hill House, Jack feels perpetually on display, as if the ghost is the beholder, watching him and mocking his very humanity. Since we are told that Jack "tossed the imaginary glass over his shoulder" (240), King hints that the glass is not real to us, only to Jack.

Possibly, what follows—the image of ghostly people in the booths “studying him, laughing behind their hands” (240)—is imaginary also: “He could almost hear them smashing on the floor. And goddamn if he wasn’t starting to feel high. It was the Excedrin” (240-41). All the while, he rants about how “the wagon” is a “prison.” For Jack, sobriety is a life without creative imagination—a place with too many rules and no play.

It is ironic for a man craving a “centre” that the only certainty is insanity, suggesting that when nothing is stable, the only thing one can count on is instability. Jack feels with “a cold certainty” that he is losing his mind” (240). Most fictional ghost-seers resort to this self-absolving conclusion, as if it were the only alternative to accepting that ghosts exist. Finally, the scene shifts back to so-called “reality” in which Jack is forced to accept the probability that he is going insane, that Lloyd “had never been there. The drinks had never been there,” and all the other phantoms who had mocked him have disappeared, as well (241); even Wendy smells the beer despite knowing that there had been no liquor for him to start with (366). Warren might well be right, however, that the defining moment in the debate between “ghost” and “not-ghost” occurs when Jack is locked in the pantry by Wendy: “Jack Torrance in the film may actually be going crazy, but at the same time the ghosts are absolutely real: they unlock the pantry to free Jack” (Warren 123); in the novel, too, Grady pulls back the bolt of the pantry and sets Jack loose (King 382). There is no suggestion that any human has done this, and so the reader responds to “What is it?” with the nomination, “ghost.”

3.1.1.2 Tony, the “Invisible Friend”

The ghostly figure of Tony truly blurs lines between self and other, as well as temporal boundaries, since he appears to be “an older Danny” (Winter 52), ten years in the future. At the

same time, it is unclear whether Tony is a projection of Danny's present worries or if he is an independent entity. Tony communicates exclusively to him and shows him an endless slideshow of horrific images even before the family embarks on its journey. While Danny has "the shine," as Dick tells him, implying that he knows more than the average human, whether adult or child, most of the images he sees are beyond his present understanding. For the most part, then, they are empty images except insofar as they incite fear in the child. As Warren points out, "King makes it very clear...that the hotel's evil spirit is after Danny, to kill him, then retain his spirit and his powers for more mischief in the future" (121). It is Danny's knowledge and abilities that the hotel desires; their consummation would simply complete the process.

It is not clear exactly what kind of entity he is, but Tony does appear to be "spirit," and he is psychically connected to Danny. Warren points out that Tony, "Danny's repressed precognitive and telepathic self, is seen by Danny as a real boy, and he finally learns that Tony is himself several years later" (120). The notion of "real" is debatable, particularly since Tony defies all laws of physics in showing Danny both the future and hidden parts of the present. Suffice to say that, while Danny might see Tony as "real," he also sees him as distinct and separate from himself. At the same time, however, Tony might be seen as the mirror image of Danny, an abject subject of sorts, who "separates [him] from the mother and father" (Kristeva 3). Each time that Danny sees Tony, or receives another sign from him, he is indeed separate from the "real" world of his parents, if only momentarily, but also, with each visitation or sign, he becomes less who he "is" and continues in the process of taking "the place of the other" through his own abjection, or death (54). After all, he does seem to die a little each time, becoming completely unaware of his surroundings. As well, he certainly changes psychologically with every sign from Tony, becoming something other than what he is. In most ways, nonetheless, Danny has already normalized Tony simply by

naming him and accepting his presence, however uncomfortable the images are at times. No one else sees Tony, but Wendy purports to “believe” in him anyway. He is a prognosticator, but mostly he is a *sign* of the future and of the time continuum that does not just stretch from present to future, but also sits the present and future beside each other. He functions as a presenter of images, holding up one empty sign after another for the child to interpret. Danny’s fear is mostly instinctive, as he lacks a context for the signification of the signifiers and so is frightened of words and pictures for which he does not have a meaning (King 85) and which might not have any.

Like his father, Danny lives in a reality unknown to the other inhabitants and worries about losing his sense of self. Perpetually destabilized by the “shine” and the images it allows him to experience, Danny actively fears losing his marbles or being looked at as crazy because he sees ghosts (195). Knowing too much about the supernatural world, he has lost the calm certainty of childhood, for, among the words that Tony shows him are “suicide” and “divorce,” which he does not understand any more than the “REDRUM” that Tony shows him in the mirror. The fact that “REDRUM” is “murder” backwards is lost on Danny. He is unable to read and, confronted by a palindrome, he finds that the word bears no signification for him, except that it comes from Tony and it fills him with dread. The mirror, in effect, empties the word of its content. “Sometimes Tony shows me signs and I can hardly read any of them” (85), he explains. Nonetheless, he sees Tony in the mirror and, as far as he is concerned, follows him into it (127) so that he is able to, literally and metaphorically, cross over into Tony’s space. The mirror would seem useful for its distancing effect; Wendy thinks initially that Tony must have been simply reflecting his image into the mirror, but Tony actually resides *in* the mirror, suggesting simultaneously that he is an inverted extension or reflection of Danny in the future and that he exists external to Danny in the present. The question is never answered except with more questions. Regardless, for a time they occupy the

same space on the supposed “other” side of the mirror—except it is *not* the other side, but the “inside.” An obvious connection exists to Beloved’s request that Paul D touch her on the “insides,” suggesting a shared intimacy and commonalty through experience, signifying the lapse of the distinctions between them.

Part of innocence, for both Danny and Wendy, is the assumption and requirement that the universe is governed by order, that the world behaves according to certain rules, but it is the increasing number of questions like the one posed by Tony’s existence and his frequent undecipherable signs that undermines their sense of self and stability. Lying awake in his bedroom at the Overlook, he muses that there ought to be a “*place for everything and everything in its place*” as his mother has told him. However, “now things had been misplaced. Things were missing. Worse still, things had been added, things you couldn’t quite see...[but] if you strained and squinted, you could” (193). He recognizes all along that reality is a matter of perspective, or of being able to “see” what others, perhaps, miss. For Danny, things do not quite get lost: they go “missing” or get rearranged, which is traumatic for him. No different from the protagonists of many ghost stories, regardless of their time of publication, his assumption that rules and order beget certainty seems derived from a need to find stability in a chaotic universe. It is a world that includes the unseen as well as the seen and one that makes a mockery of assumptions about reality by churning up a ghost or a monster every now and then. The Overlook is such a place, for it does not permit order, preferring a fragmented reality, both for its ghosts and the family units who live there. He tries to rationalize his fear of insanity and the inevitable exile that would follow, but his constant anxiety prevents him from telling anyone about Tony and other strange occurrences:

It was this fear that had kept him silent. A year older, he was quite sure that his daddy and mommy wouldn’t let him be taken away for thinking that a fire hose was a snake, his

rational mind was sure of that, but still, when he thought of telling them, that old memory rose up like a stone filling his mouth and blocking his words. It wasn't like Tony. Tony had always seemed perfectly natural...but a fire hose that turned into a snake, or seeing blood and brains on the wall of the Presidential Sweet when no one else could, those things would not be natural...was it not reasonable to assume that THE MEN IN WHITE COATS might come next? (196; upper case text is in original)

Constantly asking himself the question “what does that mean?” and faced with interpreting the word “REDRUM” inscribed in blood on the walls, this six-year-old boy who is unable to read is an innocent in a world full of indecipherable signs. Most often, he is left to interpret loosely according to how the ghost performs; and Tony always seems to perform as a question.

The vacuous nature of “empty” signifiers usually invites interpretation, which is the primary role of doctors and scientists in a majority of ghost novels and films, to explain the signification of the ghost, even if the beholder is unable or unwilling to provide one. Such is the role of the paternalistic Dr. Edmonds when Jack and Wendy bring Danny to see him, seeking some explanation for Tony. A foil to Dick Hallorann who believes in the “shine,” Edmonds labels Tony a trick of the mind: an illusion whose origins reside in childish lunacy. All adults “have this unspoken agreement that children are lunatics” (149), Edmonds says. Appropriately, Jack later is described as looking “slightly lunatic” (214), suggesting that he and Danny tread upon similarly shaky territory. As Edmonds explains, “When an adult sees things that aren't there, we consider him ready for the rubber room. When a child says [similar things] we simply smile indulgently” (149) and assume that he will “grow out of it.” Edmonds is another paternal figure in the “real” world outside of the Overlook, a world that, to paraphrase Baudrillard, has places like the Overlook or even minds like Danny's to conceal the fact that the “bad place” is everywhere. Like the

Haunted House at Disneyland (or on any side street in any town), the ghosted place, like the Gothic text, is a simulation of a Gothic world that serves only to conceal the fact that all places are haunted, that ghosts are everywhere and not just contained within one designated space where people give themselves permission to be afraid. Edmonds attempts to label the ghost and the experience of it, to guide reactions of all involved and to impose closure. Anything that is “not there” to his eyes is non-existent; to see what is not there is “lunatic.” He is like Dr. Montague at Hill House, concerned about a patient whose narrative perspective differs from his own, presuming that the ability to distinguish clearly between “ghost” and “not-ghost” is the primary indicator of sanity: “‘I think the very fact that he is able to differentiate so sharply between Tony’s world and ‘real things’ says a lot about the fundamentally healthy state of his mind,’” he says (150).

Just as Montague asserts that ghosts act according to pre-ordained patterns, Edmonds explains that Tony is a figment of Danny’s imagination—a ghost with transparent motives and patterns, which are iron-clad rules for behaviour. Tony “is leaving,” he insists (150). As a master narrator—one who, because of his position, affluence, and knowledge, even Jack can look up to and trust—it is his obligation to normalize the ghost through rationalization, to fit the chaos into a pattern, even (and especially) if it shows signs of not being completely rational. “It’s not extrasensory, but good old human perception,” he explains (147). Then he applies an “irrefutable” label, which is precisely when the Gothic rears its head and throws up a ghost, as if in response to the maxim: “There ain’t no ghosts.” Edmonds has a “good, hearty laugh” at Wendy’s suggestion that Danny has “second sight” (147), explaining that Tony is a manifestation of Danny’s fear that his parents will separate, implying that the ghost is not real and simultaneously that it is conjured by fear. The underlying dictum is that there can be no other version of the normal beyond that which is prescribed by the “doctor”; rules laughs at the ghost, just as the ghost mocks the rules.

Edmonds is antithetical to subversion and, as such, becomes a lightning rod for rationalization. But he has already acknowledged the ghost's "real" quality by suggesting that Tony lives in a "world" of his own and might take Danny with him. "Instead of 'growing out of his childhood schizophrenia, he might well have grown into it,'" says Dr. Edmonds. "He might simply have entered Tony's world some day and never come back to what he calls 'real things'" (149). Although intent on maintaining order and firm boundaries between "real" and "not real," the doctor has inadvertently admitted the existing chaos. In referring to "oversimplified Freud" about "what we know of the mind's interaction with itself," he explains that there "seems to be a buffer somewhere between the conscious and the subconscious" which provides a "censor" that "only lets through a small amount, and often what does come through is only symbolic" (145). The implication is that Tony is an "invisible friend" that has slipped past Danny's internal censor and has become a "threatening figure." The "censor" is a built-in survival mechanism, suppressing anything that threatens order and rationality.

3.1.2 Jack Torrance: I am a Hotel

With its built-in defiance of management, the Overlook oversees the murder of not just a person or family member but commonly held concepts of reason and normalcy, as well. As Punter explains, "in order for the haunting to occur at all there must always have been something prior" (*Pathologies* 14). The anticipated "REDRUM" (65), foretold by Danny's invisible friend, is like Poe's "Red Death," another word for the Gothic, those actions and potentialities that run counter to civil, rational society. The Overlook is much like Hill House in its labyrinthine, anarchic quality, inducing sensations of lostness, uncertainty, and increasing insanity. Upon first wandering around the Overlook, Wendy, in an allusion to "Hansel and Gretel," comments that she'll "have to leave a

trail of breadcrumbs” just to navigate the vast, confusing estate. Like Hill House, Jack Torrance is “not sane” to begin with, as if he himself were built on a “bad” foundation. The hotel does not want him as it does Danny, simply because the house already *has* him. Winter says that the hotel is an “unexpiated sin: it is the house that Jack built,” as haunted as Jack’s own mind, particularly his “twisted, claustrophobic obsession with his haunted past. The haunter becomes the haunted and, in King’s words, ‘the Overlook Hotel becomes the microcosm where universal forces collide’ [15]” (Winter 50), much as Hill House is for its own visitants.

Blurring lines between self and other, both Jack and The Overlook are already monstrous in thought and deed; the hotel simply acts upon Jack’s feeble will and desperate need for individuation. Warren claims that the hotel “seizes” on the fact that Jack “was the weakest of the three” (123). “It’s not you they want. Me. Me. Me!” he tells Danny (426). Exiled within his own family, ostracized from society, Jack finds a kinship with the Overlook that is similar to Eleanor’s coupling with Hill House and the governess’s mutually inclusive affair with Bly. Magistrale asserts that, “King draws the interior of the Overlook Hotel, with its dark, twisting corridors and history of violence, to reflect Jack Torrance’s haunted psyche,” with the Colorado Lounge and Room 217 representing “special” spaces where the supernatural exerts an influence on the human world, essentially intersecting at those two planes of existence (38). The past, especially the dark past, is never far from Jack’s consciousness. The possibility of homelessness, poverty and disenfranchisement—so sharply in contrast with the opulence represented by the Overlook’s seasonal guests—is perpetual. The Overlook is Jack’s last chance at respectability and the survival of his family because his volatility threatens the family’s financial stability: “If he lost this job, what then? Off to California in that tired old VW with the disintegrating fuel pump like a family of dustbowl Okies?” (King 188). Jack’s allusion to *The Grapes of Wrath* reminds us that he is one of

America's disenfranchised. Outside the privileged gated communities, Disneylands and resort hotels reside the poor, the dispossessed, insane, murderous, criminal, and otherwise forgotten (though subliminally ever-present). Jack, who represents all of these, wants in—a place where he feels normal—and the Overlook *is* in. But once there, he finds no room for Jack Torrance, nor his innocent wife and special child. This family is American Gothic personified, the antithesis of the nativity scene of Christian iconography; at one point, Wendy enters with Danny “cradled in her arms like some waxen horror show dummy. The three of them made a tableau that Jack felt very strongly” (242), with his “ghost-god” father never far from Jack's mind and Lloyd the bartender acting as an all-knowing, benevolent holy spirit figure. Far from being the archetypal “good Christian,” Jack is the very Other to civilized society and archetypal “good” families, the Red Death to Prince Prospero's party in Poe's story “The Masque of the Red Death” (quoted in King's preface) that frightens bourgeois America. He takes a roque mallet to a party and wields it as a bludgeoning tool. Discovering a scrapbook, he opens it up to the ugly pages. He gets quality time with his family and then hunts them down in order to kill them. He betrays friends. In short, Jack Torrance not only has his own repressed past that rises up to swallow him whole, but he is the sort of repressed other whose very existence affronts privileged society.

Jack's ghosts, his attraction to the hotel, and his need to belong to it are all a part of his own repressed feelings regarding his own parents. Like Eleanor Vance, the governess of *The Turn of the Screw*, and others, he merely wishes for a centre, a home, a “truth” of his own in an uncertain world. The hotel, meanwhile, offers him a “foundation,” or so he believes, but having come to this “honeymoon” spot (66), the moments of rupture keep replaying as if they were still happening, for “all times were one” at the Overlook. Jack's guilt is like the wasps that he thought he had killed, but then come back to sting Danny while he is sleeping, the father's sins coming back to haunt the

child. The wasps “had come back” and the one thought “played over and over in his mind,” emphasizing the “frightening thought of spontaneous regeneration” (Winter 51). Jack’s disintegrating relationship with Danny is a recurring mirror image of his relationship with his own father, a half-remembered, mostly negative narrative in which even the word “play” carries malevolent connotations. He finds himself reflecting on a past in which he had “hated” his domineering father and long-suffering, silent and Catholic mother and thinking that “it had not seemed strange that his own love [for Danny and Wendy] should go hand-in-hand with his fear” (223). Jack hears his father as a ghost: “the voice of the Ghost God.... Coming dead at him out of the radio and... ‘No!’ he screamed back. ‘You’re *dead*, you’re in your *grave*, you’re not in me at all!’ Because he had cut all the father out of him and it was not right that he should come back” (227), any more than that the wasps should return when least expected and most dangerous. Furthermore, faced with an addendum to the familiar narrative, Jack represses that which might prove destabilizing, only to have it return, literally, with a vengeance.

Long before entering the Overlook, Jack shows the capacity for violence. He is an alcoholic who has not been drinking in over a year (9) and is haunted by a moment when he accidentally broke Danny’s arm after the child had poured a can of beer over the pages of his play manuscript. The snapping of the bone in Danny’s forearm inaugurates

the dark clouds of shame and remorse, the terror, the agonizing convulsion of the spirit. A clean sound with the past on one side of it and all the future on the other.... A moment of utter silence on the other side, in respect to the beginning future. (17)

Jack immediately wonders “is there a status quo in the house?” because such things do not occur in “a world of normal families” (17). The “dark place” (28) is the unforeseen, virtually unknown space where one goes and inherently blurs the line between normalcy and chaos. What lies ahead

of such a breach of family trust, as well as of child abuse laws and moral precepts, is a crossing over into a more chaotic time-space where ghosts are possible (though, really, as Tony's presence indicates, ghosts are always possible anywhere). The entrance to the Overlook represents another moment of rupture for this miserably in-denial family; they are not, and never were, a "happy" or "normal" family.

Jack's nostalgia, manifested as a disinterested objectification, acknowledgement, and cataloguing of the past, hardly restrains him from pushing the boundaries of decency. Having crossed that line, he continues to challenge the written and unwritten rules of civilized conduct. Gazing into the dark past, Jack dredges up a returned narrative in the form of a scrapbook—another veritable pastiche—that he finds in the basement, full of yellowing and forgotten newspaper clippings that offer a snapshot of rich America in the 1920s and 1930s. It is, says Winter, "an index of the post-World War Two American character.... He absorbs and is absorbed by the hotel, and the truths of the past, repressed in the dark basement of the unconscious, begin to emerge" (Winter 49). Just as the "others" (the proprietors, such as Ullman) are "enchanted" with the "traditional" Overlook, Jack becomes obsessed by an alternative, non-traditional, small-narrative perspective on the Overlook and resolves to write a book about it: "He would write it for the reason he felt that all great literature, fiction, and nonfiction, was written: truth comes out, in the end it always comes out" (King 222). Jack's intended revision of the hotel's history would be "truth," and he is contemptuously self-righteous in his quixotic gallop towards the it: "It was like getting a call from some twentieth-century Medici prince...no portraits of my family with their warts showing, please, or back to the rubble you'll go. I subsidize no pictures but pretty pictures...we are both civilized men, aren't we?" (189). Jack fantasizes himself as a crusader, but his proposed narrative is no more or less valid than Al's. One is suppressed, the other threatening

to “come out.” Al is “civilized”; Jack is “Gothic.” Al is friendship, trust, respectability, rules, authority and money, and the old boys’ club; in contrast, Jack is betrayal, selfishness, chaos, subordination, and poverty—but *both* are the Overlook, each representing different sides of the same narrative. Winter asserts that that the “‘unsavory history’ of the Overlook mirrors the equally ‘unsavory history’ of Jack Torrance,” revealing the true ghost of *The Shining* (50). As King writes in *Danse Macabre*: “The past is a ghost which haunts our present lives constantly” (13). In reviving the past, Jack mirrors the actions of the hotel’s operators; he neglects to realize that he is essentially *adding* to the truth—an unstable truth that is obviously subject to change. Doomed to half-remember the past from his own narrow perspective, Jack cannot bury his family history any more than Ullman can bury the history of his “beloved” hotel.

Understandably, Jack’s taste is for the non-canonical Gothic narrative; Ullman and Al Shockley prefer a sanctioned narrative and dread the rising of the repressed Gothic variant. Jack lies awake at night, pondering how the capitalists preserve the past and sell it to a nostalgic public under the guise of paying homage to an America that, as Jack discovers, never really existed. He tells his “friend,” Al, on the telephone:

[Ullman] loved the goddamn hotel so much. The beautiful Overlook. The traditional Overlook. The bloody sacred Overlook. Well, I found a scrapbook in the basement.

Somebody had put together all the less savory aspects of Ullman’s Cathedral, and it looked to me like a little black mass had been going on after hours. (King 186-187)

Al has nightmarish thoughts of a “*National Enquirer* feature on the Overlook,” but Jack’s vision is to turn all this “hotel’s history” into a book. “The thought of you doing some sort of a scum-job on my hotel and passing it off as a great piece of American writing, that makes me sick,” Al says (187), raising the ghost of American literature, that is, vulgar or popular writing. Jack’s dream is

that of many Americans, to get rich by exposing the secrets of the rich and famous, the Bluebeard's closet of American fame, fortune, culture, and literature, the spectre that haunts every "great" (187) or sanctioned narrative. For every authorized biography, an unauthorized version exists—an oppositional text, pointing to a more complex version of truth. Magistrale questions whether King's novel might be seen as a "parod[y] of the American dream" with Jack being "a negative portrait of the American success story, that he wants to write himself into fame and fortune at any cost." The Overlook, he suggests, might represent the large corporate organization that "asks Jack to sacrifice everything, including his family and soul, for the advancement of his career" (18). King resists this tidy, ideologically-based interpretation because he sees Jack as "a dysfunctional personality" with many other problems, including alcoholism, family problems, and a "fractured personality" (18). While King minimalizes Jack's anti-capitalist (or at least anti-corporate) tendencies, the point remains that Jack's psychological and behavioral problems have resulted in an anti-social, mistrustful stance towards both his family and a society that happens to be dominated by the capitalist monolith.

But there is also, to paraphrase Bakhtin, a playful side to Jack's serious effort to retrieve the past: that is, an "ostentatious show of serious play." Stanley Kubrick's film version (1980), with its running commentary that "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," perfectly captures Jack's gamesmanship. Warren sees this duality in Jack as well: "After Jack has a nightmare in which he cuts Danny and Wendy up into little pieces, we have a good idea what Jack's 'play' is going to be" (123). Al suggests this "fun" aspect of the research when he tells Jack: "At the worst, you're planning to smear my hotel by digging up bodies that were decently buried years ago... as part of some...stupid kid's game (188). Uncomfortable with frivolity, he demands Jack's word of honor: "No book about a famous Colorado mountain hotel with a history" (189). Intent on

having his ironic, monstrous fun, Jack recalls that as a child, he “had even been afraid that his father’s shadow might fall over him while he was at play” (225). In fact, Jack’s recovery operation regarding the Overlook’s history in newspaper clippings is an attempt to right wrongs—to expose evil and somehow re-write the past in his own manner. Ultimately, Jack’s threatened book about the hotel is merely a supplement to history rather than an obliteration of it. His father’s headstone reads “‘Mark Anthony Torrance, Loving Father.’ To that Jack would have added one line: *He Knew How To Play Elevator*” (206). His father’s idea of “play”—a game called elevator (223)—is deadly serious to the child. The headstone, like the one in *Beloved*, tells one story (of a loving father), while Jack has a more grim, even subversive recollection of events.

Both Jack and Al’s attempts to preserve the past indicate a concern with the nature of time, which the ghosts in *The Shining* embody, presenting the past in a series of images reminiscent of Jameson’s notion of the nostalgia film. Winter points out that the “violent elements of the Overlook’s past drone on like an eternal film loop” (50) where:

things just went on and on. Here in the Overlook all times were one. There was an endless night in August of 1945.... It was as if the whole place had been wound up with a silver key. The clock was running. The clock was running. (King 303)

As Winter suggests, the Overlook’s mystery is “one of time” (52) since the ghosts of various eras interact in the present time-space; Jack is haunted by the past and Danny is haunted by the future. While Danny is privy to “an uncertain future” (53), partly because he is unable to interpret Tony’s signs, the future is pre-determined, nonetheless, since Jack’s melding with the hotel seems to be more of a homecoming with kindred spirits: “like attracts like,” Eleanor Vance muses at Hill House, as if all past events have pointed to this inevitable event. Jack has “always been the caretaker,” Grady tells him (Warren 123), and Danny has always known his family’s fate; it was

just a matter of attaining a higher state of cognizance or “retroactivity” in which people “become aware of the dynamics of some new system, in which they are themselves seized, only later on and gradually” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* xix).

Danny comes to see behind the façade of meaning, origin stories and nostalgia, but the sudden meaninglessness of it all distresses him. After the ghosts begin appearing at The Overlook, and especially once his father changes irrevocably towards being one of them, and uniting with the hotel itself, Danny begins to see that nothing is as he had thought it was and, furthermore, that even the past is different from what he had believed. Jack had been Danny’s parent, provider, and nurturer, and now he is forced to see a different truth: “presents” become “empty boxes,” meaning becomes a “lie,” and the father becomes “other,” destabilizing their father-son relationship, as well as Danny’s self-concept. Danny tells him that he is “not my daddy.... Everything is a lie and a cheat...like the loaded dice..., like the presents they put in store windows...just empty boxes. Just for show, my daddy says. You’re it, not my daddy. You’re the hotel” (King 428). The “it” is empty, merely filled by the one who views it through the murky, untrustworthy mirror of the present.

The Shining perfectly illustrates how purposeful actions can be emptied of meaning. Seeing his father die, Danny witnesses the change that occurs in Jack as he reverts from being the new, monstrous Jack to being old, paternal Jack. There is a difference between the two, and yet they are the same subject, inviting private interpretation:

The face in front of him changed. It was hard to say how; there was no melting or merging of the features. The body trembled slightly, and then the bloody hands appeared like broken claws. The mallet fell from them and thumped to the rug. That was all. But

suddenly his daddy *was* there, looking at him in mortal agony... "Doc," Jack Torrance said.

"Run away. Quick. And remember how much I love you." (429)

It is debatable how accurately Danny will be able to remember that feeling of being loved, since the family of that particular dream has never truly existed for him; at the same time, Danny might well heed his father's wish, even if it is tinged (to put it mildly) by his father's attempt at killing him.

The father's command to "remember" his "love" is, in fact, based on a nostalgic wish to be *misremembered*: Jack might well love his son, but many of his actions suggest otherwise. The act of "remembering" might require a displacement of the bad memories, an active "recollection" of the supposed "good" images, and a "recognition" that his father's "bad" actions were the result of alcohol and psychological problems, which might nullify any intentions of the executor.

When Danny labels his father "It," Jack's objectification is complete. He is part of the hotel, which is destroying itself, including "the last of Jack Torrance's image" and "what remained of the face became a strange, shifting composite, many faces mixed imperfectly into one. Danny saw the woman in 217; the dog man; the hungry boy-thing" (429). The past rises up again, as "It" asks Danny if he would like to play a game of tag because, "All we have is time, you know. An eternity of *time*," even as it grins greedily (429). It is the boiler which destroys the Overlook, Jack, and ostensibly all of the ghosts: they are one and the same, all united like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a trinity of ghosts with no boundaries between them. It is as if "dream and reality had joined together without a seam" (426). "'You're a mask,' Danny said. 'Just a fake face...you aren't as dead as the others'" (426), suggesting that death is simply a matter of degrees. People and buildings wear masks, which do not change what they are, but simply alter how they are perceived. Danny still thinks that he is "in the world of real things, where the game was played for keeps" (422), explaining why, with obedience "strongly ingrained in him," he "actually took two

automatic steps toward the sound of that voice” (423) which belongs and yet does not belong to his father. Even Wendy mutters that “Jack’s dead” (432) even though he is still alive; possessing the multiple qualities all at once, while the master narrative called “Jack” still rules out of an “ingrained” obedience to it. Danny’s childhood has been ending even as the novel begins, which is why Edmonds predicts that “Tony is leaving.” Now, at the end of the novel, when his father “dies,” the boy’s innocence (if it ever existed) is gone for good, for he possesses more information.

3.1.3 Wendy and Dick: Subversive Naturalization of the Ghost

The key to naturalizing a ghost, or any event, would seem to be acceptance; if all or most who experience it agree about what it is, then it becomes “real” or material. But ghosts only become normalized if either they exist and persist as part of the human world and/or if humans partake in the ghost world; in a postmodern world, it is a matter of both transgressions occurring simultaneously, gradually becoming an allowable, expected event. On the other hand, such an event is normalized through a series of lapses in so-called reality. This naturalization, then, seems to make such entities less scary and less powerful. To acknowledge and identify, even normalize, a ghost is to start possessing it and, thus, to gain some measure of influence over it; of course, such possession is mutual, since nomination forms a psychological connection between the ghost and its beholder. While Jack and Edmonds are in complete agreement over the nature of Danny’s “visions” of Tony, Wendy finds herself on the side of Danny, Hallorann, and phantasms in general. Although arguably a victim for much of the novel, Wendy is subversive, nodding in feigned agreement with the doctor, while thinking his explanations to be glib (148). Wendy Torrance is forced to stand up to both her rampaging husband and an authoritative doctor who professes to know what is best for her child. She draws a distinction between that which is part of Danny and

that which is external to him, mostly because Tony does not appear to her, only to Danny. She says, regardless of the doctor's assessment, "I believe in Tony. I don't know what he is or who he is, if he's a part of you that's special or if he comes from... somewhere outside, but I do believe in him, Danny" (200). She is experiencing a moment of prolonged hesitation ("What is it?"), but she does show an acceptance of the ghosts, which naturalizes Tony. Wendy's accepting reaction to the ghost, with whom she and Danny seem to be in alliance, eventually frees her from the rules of the doctors and men in white coats who believe in no such thing and, in fact, disallow it.

Through Dick Hallorann, the black cook, we see that acceptance, rather than grieving, is the most helpful way to react to a new version of reality. His primary function is to teach Danny that the images shown to him by Tony and the hotel have no fixed meaning and cannot hurt him if he understands this. By the end of the novel, Danny and his mother are less innocent; the boy, in particular, knows better than before that there is plenty in the world that he cannot control and that might harm him. He sees that Wendy's battles with ghosts and a demonic husband have transformed her, making her a woman instead of a child. "You ain't what you were, you two," he says, "but that isn't necessarily bad" (443). In the end, they move to a stereotypical and ubiquitous "nice town to raise a kid in" (444), and that is the best anyone can do. Dick recommends finishing one summer before planning the next (446), offering Danny advice for coping with an uncertain future. He also recommends dealing with the past rather than repressing it—just "see that you get on," he says (444). Part of "getting on" is adapting to the new awareness of a fragmented, ambiguously-signifying world that differs from previously held notions. Hallorann thus sees in a transformation in Wendy, from being "mostly girl" only nine months earlier to becoming "a woman, a human being" who was just trying to "to put the pieces back together. But those pieces, Hallorann thought, they never fit just the same way again. Never in this

world” (443). As Hallorann implies, that ever-present threat is simply the Gothic, unruly, anarchic side of a world that also happens to offer a safe, viable, civilized present. As Notkin suggests, King takes fear out of the traditional, hidden castles of faraway lands where it can easily be avoided. In his fictional world, as in the postmodern era, “Fear has become a commonplace, no longer the evil dispensation of noble or supernatural villains. No one can be trusted.... It is a world with neither security nor stability” (Notkin 167). If there ever were a boundary between “us” and “them,” Jack breaches it when he breaks his son’s arm and then conveys his whole “happy” family up the Colorado mountainside to its terrifying rupture. Crossing that threshold, the boundary itself becomes then a ghost of our former conceptions of self and others, dead and yet existent still.

Hallorann suggests that we should accept the essential neutrality of the world, beyond judgments of good and evil. The change in the boy is complete with the next moment of rupture when, like the hotel itself, Jack becomes a “screaming, raving thing” (428) and Danny has an “adult thought, an adult feeling, the essence of his experience in this bad place” and the realization that “*Mommy and Daddy can’t help me and I’m alone*” (429). In that moment, Danny has “changed” physically (430) and shifted towards self-knowledge, independence of thought and action, detached from the world. While the novel’s epilogue offers a restoration of order, it is a tentative truce quite different from that of the Radcliffe’s nineteenth century Gothic in which order is normal and disorder is intrusive, however “spectralized.” In King’s fiction, no safe haven is possible: “The world’s a hard place, Danny. It don’t care. It don’t hate you and me, but it don’t love us, either” (446), Hallorann says to the young boy who knows far more about the world than he is able to handle psychologically. In most ways, his “shining”—an ability to see the shadows and hidden truths that remain hidden or unseen by most people—is a metaphor for our own innocence about “the reality principle” that has long since been displaced, according to Baudrillard

(13). As Winter says, in King's novels, "Life goes on—an uncertain future awaits; and even momentary triumphs are underscored with melancholy.... Our journey from innocence to experience will never be complete; for we cannot escape the past, just as we cannot forsake the future" (53). Gothic literature like King's illustrates that the more we know about the world, the more afraid we might be. This realization brings Danny into communion with Eleanor Vance and perhaps even with his own father, uncertain of his place in the world and ever-cognizant of the "bad" things in it, leading potentially to an early cynicism, or at least a knowledge of how the world operates, rather than remaining dependent upon some utopian, child-like vision of how he would like for it to be.

The destruction of the hotel, which occurs concurrent to the novel's closing act, can be seen as merely a physical obliteration whose emotional residue will continue to haunt the survivors. The Overlook, when it dies, becomes "voiceless" and "only screaming panic and doom and damnation in its own ear, dissolving, losing thought and will, the webbing falling apart, searching, not finding, going out, going out to, fleeing, going out to emptiness, notness, crumbling" (434). But, despite its dissolution, it remains alive in another form and only Hallorann sees it escaping from the window of the Presidential Suite as a massive dark entity that assumes the shape "of a huge, obscene manta," shredded and "fragmented" by the wind,

and a moment later it was gone as if it had never been. But in those few seconds as it whirled blackly, dancing like negative motes of light, he remembered something from his childhood... fifty years ago, or more. (437)

He recalls a nest of wasps he and his brother disturbed when they were kids. In the end, he seems unsure of what he has seen and, since it disappears from view, he is inclined to rationalize it as perhaps having been only "smoke a great flapping swatch of wallpaper after all" (438). The

Overlook, like *The Shining*, is the Gothic text that does not really end when it ends, for such dark places are everywhere and all pervasive, no longer ghettoized.

The final proof that it all probably happened, however, is that Hallorann—who has been a kind, helpful soul up until now—takes a sudden disliking to the boy’s “rather unpleasant” voice. He begins to experience a racial collective memory: “nigguh de massa callin you all” as if suddenly mentally displaced from the present and speak-thinking as a nineteenth-century slave. The former nice kid, Danny, becomes “that damn boy” who had committed “patricide” by leaving his father to burn (439) as Hallorann’s mind “seemed filled with an angry, weakly hectoring voices” which tell him “Do it! Do it, you weak-kneed no-balls nigger! Kill them! KILL THEM BOTH!” Then he throws the mallet away and becomes terrified of its “unspeakable invitation” from which he flees (439-40). And even though “the long darkness was over,” we get the sense from Hallorann’s speech that there has, indeed, been a rupture for those who have experienced the ghosts of the Overlook. There is an empty space now where Jack used to be—a space filled with love, nostalgia, and fear. The bad events are over, but they are never really gone, merely repressed, like Hallorann’s memories from childhood, similar to Jack’s and Danny’s recent episodes with wasps. As Winter asserts, “It is through Hallorann that we recognize that the destruction of the Overlook is not a triumph over evil. The stain remains, as we learn when he glances back at the burning structure to see the final image of the wasps’ nest...” (52). The “stain” could also describe the yoke of slavery alluded to, the past of Hallorann in which he refers to himself as a “nigger.” This is history returning, and it is certainly a “repressed” label with repressed connotations, as the descriptor is generally taboo because of the burden of dark history it carries. And, of course, the fact that the “dark shape” is compared to the wasps, “swirling together, breaking apart, looking for whatever enemy had done this to their home,” is significant. The darkness is merely fractured and

diffused, obviously not fixed in one “bad place”; it has merely nested at the Overlook, and now seeks a new host. Briefly, Hallorann becomes the new receptacle, and the ghost reflects his individual repressed narrative.²⁶

Merely by raising the ghosts, King assures that they will never truly be dead. The reassuring, calm center and the voice of reason, Hallorann calls the Overlook “a good place to be scared of...even if that place burns flat to the foundation, you’ll never get me within a hundred miles” of it again, he says. This rational pronouncement occurs only minutes before Danny screams in “hysterical triumph”: “Dead! They’re Dead!” The words are supposed to bring comfort, but this being a story of ghosts, we do not really believe them, largely thanks to Hallorann’s proclamation. Danny’s victory yell is reminiscent of Victor Frankenstein’s declaration, “Alive! It’s alive!” when the creature is really a living dead: a walking, talking, thinking being composed of the parts of dead people. The parts are dead, but are somehow reanimated. Similarly, the parts of the Overlook—even its very foundation—is “dead,” burned to cinders, but it remains very much alive in the reader’s, and America’s, psyche (similar to the hauntings of Amityville and Hill House). Once begun, a haunting knows no limitations, for it seems inconceivable that one could destroy an entity which thrives on chaos and for whom death is not an end, but a beginning. Ultimately, destruction of the ghost is both temporary and illusional, because exorcisms do not obliterate the ghost, but merely displace it.

3.1.4 Summary

With both harmony and chaos inherent in its definition, the Gothic illustrates a symbiotic relationship that forms a complete whole, encompassing all aspects of human existence. As a

²⁶ Significantly, the phantom, Eva Galli, in Peter Straub’s *Ghost Story* constantly shifts shape and hops from one host to another. In fact, at the novel’s climax, Eva morphs into a wasp, apparently as an allusion to *The Shining*.

typical Gothic novel, *The Shining* honors the beauty of peace, order, and reason, especially at the end of the novel, as well as in the conception of the restful vacation spot the Overlook *could* have been...if not for the fact that it is exactly the opposite. But at the same time, the Gothic acknowledges the antithesis of peace, order, and reason, for the crying, the violence, the shining all are unnatural, unsettling, and ever-threatening. As experience and information necessitate the loss of innocence, they replace such assuredness with nothing dependable, solid or indisputably “real,” either in a postmodern world or a Gothic one. In fact, the postmodern world *is* a Gothic world. The world always has been Gothic; but in the late twentieth-century (through 24-hour media, internet, e-mail, the satellites of the global village), the Gothic is less able to be suppressed or ignored. In our own living rooms and movie theatres, we are confronted with beheadings, suicide bombings, tsunamis and hurricanes, Colombine shootings, *Scream* 1 through 3, *Scary Movie* 1 through 3 (this being the age of ironic horror), Freddy versus Jason movies (featuring horrific deaths played out with a sense of humor), fairy tales made visual via movies, and reality television series (*Survivor* and *Fear Factor*). King’s novel predates, even influences, many of these later entertainment events. In fact, as much as *The Shining* is built upon a rampart of old Gothic bones, his novel represents a break from the past as well, one which authors like Straub willingly concede, influenced their own ghost stories. The major difference—and King’s ubiquitous novels are a part of this cultural phenomenon—is that we are so often confronted with the Gothic nowadays, that its chaotic presence has become rather normalized, part of our sense of being groundless and multiple.

3.2 Shape-shifting Ghosts in Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*

The “shape-shifter” ghost of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* (1979) might well be the quintessential postmodern spirit because its form is as characteristically unstable as its signification; furthermore, its appearance is not only as a monstrous other, but as a gradually normalized entity. Several phantoms inhabit the text, each signifying a return of the repressed past, fixing the beholder in a specular gaze. The phantoms of *Ghost Story* haunt more than simply an individual or a specific building, since the spirit of a murdered young woman named Eva Galli gradually consumes the entire population of small-town Milburn, New York, in the 1970s. The ghost of Eva consumes both the aging male members of the storytelling Chowder Society and the youth of Milburn until, one by one, they all become ghosts. Milburn, in effect, is becoming a “ghost town,” as teenager Jim Hardie already thinks of it: given over to old men and on its way to dying, filling its inhabitants with “uncertainty and ambiguity” (Straub 274-75). Both the haunting and the exorcism widen their scope, however, when the spectre is discovered to be limitless, unbound by a specific, narrow time or space; gradually, the exorcists of the Chowder Society, and particularly its new member, Don Wanderley, come to understand that the nature of their phantom is far more elusive and omnipresent than they have known. Part of Straub's agenda is to demonstrate the ghost story's lineage from James's final hesitation to King's candor regarding the existence of a spectre. Both *Ghost Story* and *The Turn of the Screw*, in their own way, retain a sort of final ambiguity. But in Straub's story, as in *The Shining*, once a ghost exists, the restoration of the old normal is unlikely.

Straub is largely concerned with the material presence of the traditional ghost story in its various forms as handed down through generations by subconscious re-telling. King notes that the

novel is “at first glance an extravagant mishmash of every horror and gothic convention” (*Danse* 258), including animal mutilations, demon possession, vampirism, ghoulishness, and “werewolvbery.” Nonetheless, King rightly points out that, of all these, “the Ghost is the most potent” (*Danse* 259). Indeed, while the Chowder Society represents a paradigm of the patriarchy, the novel does not rest on a single, dominant perspective, since it features several distinct narrative threads (notably, Ricky, Sears, and Don) each of whom also possesses a unique and specular relationship with the ghost. In contrast to the prevalence of a female ghost, patriarchal discourse dominates the novel, with the peripheral female perpetually seeking entry. Straub, in fact, voices this marginalization in *Ghost Story*, drawing attention to the text’s performance as a conglomerate of “small narratives” assuming the shape of a rather large, multiple, fragmented whole. The Chowder Society is obsessed with the long-dead past and, like Jack Torrance in *The Shining*, it embodies Jameson’s observation that the cultural deafness to historicity breeds nostalgia for a past that never existed. There are many historical narratives, he says, and occasionally, one or more of them arises to be heard above the others. Meanwhile, the “truth” broadens, creating a general mistrust of anything which has been held as “truth” and heralding a coinciding destabilization and “schizophrenia” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 10). In *Ghost Story*, protagonists are repeatedly confronted with new narratives because of freshly-retrieved information about the nature of the ghost they seek, and which, likewise, seeks them. It is a pattern that is becoming familiar, as the repressed story rises up to be heard in the form of a spectre.

Milburn is small-town, conservative America, initially poised against a threatening postmodernity as signified by the nightmares haunting the members of the Chowder Society and foreshadowing the coming of the shape-shifting ghost. By story’s end, Milburn has had no choice but to change how it looks at itself and its place in the broader landscape. *Ghost Story*, meanwhile,

constitutes an acknowledgement of the consistent loss of referents and foundational truths that even the main characters know never really existed in any irrefutable, stable way. Newly-confronted narratives in the present offer an addendum to the told, or sold, one(s), instigating a new era in which identities (of characters, histories, landscapes, and texts) are challenged, shifting, and reconstructed. The novel marks the twentieth-century descent into gross commercialization while generally suggesting that there is nothing to do but keep doing, or not, as the case may be. Straub's finale offers no solid ground whatsoever, and the instability wrought by the ghosts (which really had begun decades ago, if not earlier) is widespread and perhaps irreversible. Furthermore, the story illustrates not only the thinning of a veil between human and ghost, self and other, but also implies that there is no such veil and never has been; the veil itself was only one of those received "truths" that have been lately displaced. In Straub's novel, as in any ghost story, the question of whether one is haunted or whether one haunts oneself, persists. But *Ghost Story* goes further than simply questioning boundaries between the real and the imaginary; the narrative itself is self-referential and self-querying, asking of itself, "What is the nature of the ghost story and what is the place of this particular ghost story in the history of such narratives?" Straub's novel thus speaks to the time in which it is written, but it also acknowledges its own part in a much bigger, but potentially much smaller, performance.

Straub's "nightwatchers," including Eva Galli, are the most postmodern of ghosts, for the label assigned to them depends upon the beholder's perspective, while their form and meaning are constantly shifting. *Ghost Story* is populated with all kinds of ghosts, traditional and non-traditional. The once-human who have "passed on," including Lewis and Sears, and other dead-and-resurrected members of the Chowder Society and the Milburn community, are easily identified as postmodern. It is impossible to tell on what plane they dwell because, even after death, they talk

with Don and Ricky, perform physical actions, appear “real,” and *are* real, despite the fact that the survivors, Don and Ricky, question their “reality.” Eva returns to each of them in a different, apparently human, form: Anna Mostyn comes to work for the James, Hawthorne law agency; Alma Mobley haunts Don in the form of a young, desirable student while he teaches at a university; Lewis is haunted by his dead wife; Edward, Don’s uncle, is killed by an “ethereal” young actress named Ann-Veronica Moore (129); and John Jaffrey is lured into committing suicide by the ghost of Edward (119). It is understood that each of these beings owes its existence to Eva Galli.

Straub tells an American Gothic story that reflects a shifting twentieth-century landscape, built on previous Gothic narratives such as those of Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The author aspires to “something which would be *very* literary,²⁷ and at the same time take[s] on every kind of ghost situation [he] could think of” (*Danse* 262). By the beginning of the novel, both Milburn society and the Chowder Society signify decay of what once seemed solid and unchangeable. *Ghost Story* itself, the small town, and the patriarchal club of storytellers represent an American narrative which is dying, or has died, and is re-generated with each word, thought, and moment that passes. Thus, it is “a very American sort of story...[wherein] everyone is haunted” (Straub 339), as the ghost of Stringer Dedham tells Lewis. Stringer knows the same stories that Lewis’s father does, and when Lewis points out that fact, the spirit tells him “It’s all mixed up.” *Ghost Story* is an acknowledgement of a dead, safe past, for as Lewis’s father has told him:

‘[T]his is a coarsening era.... We are born into damnation, and for our children all is darkness. I wish that I could have reared you in more stable times—Lewis, once this country was a paradise!’ (350)

²⁷ Straub apparently means that he desired an overall “ambiguous and low key and restrained” effect, but ultimately realized upon reading King’s *Salem’s Lot*, such an idea is “self-defeating” in a “horror” story (*Danse* 262).

According to Lewis's father, the "Scripture" is the symbol of all that was once true and certain, but he notes that the railroad, along with the men it attracted in search of money, "spoiled" the paradise "like a stain" over the entire country (350). The death of Edward a year before the novel begins has already signalled "the last day of the golden age," but in the usual normalized fashion, for, as Ricky muses to himself, it is "always true in personal, if not historical, terms that a golden age's defining characteristic is its dailiness, its offered succession of the smallest satisfactions of daily living. If none of the Chowder Society but Ricky Hawthorne truly appreciated this, in time they would all know it" (123). Indeed, by novel's end, a new "dailiness" emerges—one marked by constant chaos and rupture, as well as a forced restoration of peace, if only in the imaginations of those who wish it were so. Don Wanderley's quest for that safety continues beyond the ending of the text (as if it ever really ended), beneath the radar of most people's consciousness, and indicates a never-ending search that could only lead to more quests. It is only a story, his presence reminds us, but what is a story? How big is it and where does it begin and end, if it does so at all?

Whether Milburn is haunted by the ghost of a murdered woman or whether its charter members merely remember the murder too well and too often is a matter of some circularity. The question is purely rhetorical, however, for to find oneself in a constant battle to distinguish oneself from one's other, to discern "what is it?" and to attempt to nominate and categorize with any degree of certainty, *is* to be haunted, to find oneself in a state of hesitation about the nature of one's haunting and, particularly, one's relationship to the past and present. King calls this "Straub's mirroring effect," similar to that of *The Haunting of Hill House* in that it is "impossible to discover exactly where that line is" between the haunting and the haunted: whether the text portrays an "inside evil" or "'outside' or predestinate evil" (Danse 262).

In fact, most of *Ghost Story*'s critics focus on the ambiguity of the haunting. From Stephen King to Hank Wagner and Tony Magistrale, the critical consensus is that Straub's ghost is clearly evil and yet shadowy in its origins, while the novel itself pays "homage" (Wagner 2) to its Gothic lineage. King sees an echo in *Ghost Story* of the "very Jamesian theme" that ghosts, "in the end, adopt the motivations and perhaps the very souls of those who behold them." Like King, Wagner considers the ghost's response to the question, "who are you?" to be "maddening and ambiguous" with the line between human and ghost indiscernible. While Murray asserts that the ghost is "a completely inhuman entity, which had malicious intent from the start" (1), Straub nonetheless throws the question of identity under scrutiny. While ghosts are ghosts and humans are humans, the phantoms originate in humanity just as the people are perpetually becoming spirits. The moment (or time-space) of transformation is unclear and, in fact, occurs off-stage, as it were, unable to be observed by other characters or the reader.²⁸ The transition into ghostdom, however, is a lifelong process²⁹ that is depicted only before death, but not after it. *After* death, they are ghosts always, albeit ghosts who—despite their in-between status—sometimes crave the kind of humanity they once possessed. In Straub's novel, the humans are already *becoming* ghosts (aging and dying) when we first meet them. The moment of transformation from human to ghost remains shadowy and hidden; we see them as mostly human and then suddenly, they re-appear as ghosts, as if they have disappeared into some sort of nebulous phone booth and re-emerged as supermen (ghosts). But it is not that they are too fast for the human eye to behold, for they have been making the transition all their lives, before our very eyes, just as when Milburn dies, it is merely a matter of

²⁸This technique is not unique to *Ghost Story*, since Beloved walks out of the river as a ghost eighteen years after her murder, Shoeless Joe steps out of the cornfields after decades of death, and the spirits in King's and Jackson's novels are never seen transforming; they are seen only as living or as ghosts, though occasionally they can be "seen" to die.

²⁹It must be granted that the word "lifelong" might connote a time-span defined by the number of years occurring between birth and death. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it should be noted that a "life"—in keeping with the subject matter of ghosts, shape-shifting, and boundless lives—might constitute illimitable time considerations. The process of becoming a ghost might have neither a beginning nor an end.

saying that it is so, for Milburn (like all Milburns) has always been changing, however stealthily. But, as Atwood's characters in *The Robber Bride* know, even saying that something is dead does not make it dead; it all depends upon what one means by the word "dead." In most cases, as with ghosts, "dead" simply means "changed." Straub's novel indicates—not just with ghosts, but with genres of storytelling and types of narratives—that we are always changing and always dying. The laws of genre do not allow us to say we are both dying and living at the same time, and yet the postmodern would insist that we do exactly that and so much more, with all shades of death and life in between.

The influence of Henry James and other Gothic predecessors is clear in *Ghost Story* and, in fact, is well-documented by both Straub and his critics. Bosky notes that Straub "plays with a number of styles" while citing James, Hawthorne, and King as "specific influences" (69-70), along with "his use of the Anglo-American nineteenth-century supernatural tradition" (70). Straub's literary career has seen him blend genres, she argues, using "similar source materials to achieve different thematic and literary effects," as the author has not strictly adhered to the Gothic. While all of his fiction "includes horror and Gothic conventions to some extent," the "proportion of these elements and the genre-expectations Straub plays upon...do change" (Bosky 70). As this chapter discusses, not only *Ghost Story* but the shape-shifting ghost herself, along with the nature of society and the patriarchal narrative, all serve to illustrate the blurring of genres and dissipation of boundaries, in part because of a process of supersession. Thus, in *Ghost Story*, authors and influences from the past intermingle with those of the present, ultimately giving way to the advent of one or more hybrid genres in which no single narrative holds sway. According to Bosky, Straub's purpose for this intermingling technique is multiple, but most significantly for my purposes it is to "provide a referential layering that draws attention to the relationship between fact

and fiction in a postmodern, metafictional way” (71). Certainly, Straub is aware of his Gothic and literary influences, somewhat famously³⁰ acknowledging that he took six months or so prior to beginning *Ghost Story* to read and reread the “classics” of the supernatural genre: Poe, Ambrose Bierce, Edith Wharton’s ghost stories, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, Mrs. Gaskell, Arthur Menchen, H.P. Lovecraft and “a number of continental supernatural books” (Bosky 73). This “strong awareness” of his “literary roots” allows Straub a rather jazz-like “metafictional play,” as this “associational and imagistic” narrative departs from the boundaries defined by a specific form (70) while “undermining a strictly linear sense of time” (71). As this chapter illustrates, Straub utilizes such temporal and spatial flow to enhance his notions of shape-shifting and genre-bending of which both the ghost and the ghost narrative are exemplary.

3.2.1 Eva Galli: The Ghost of *Ghost Story*

Straub’s ghosts are essentially postmodern, particularly in their shape-shifting, specular nature and accompanying propensity for chaos; in fact, the entire novel acknowledges the postmodern, depicting a society in dread of an inherently inconstant, yet monolithic, ghost world at least partly of their own creation. Furthermore, the main ghost, Eva Galli, is postmodern in her series of meaningless images that gain purpose and individuation only within the context of each different beholder. Even this spirit’s “otherness,” as seen in its propensity for “evil,” is in doubt as a result of Straub’s depiction of the ghost as being both external to, and a specular extension of, the beholder. Eva’s beginnings as human suggests that, while apparently different from her beholders, she is nonetheless merely a transmogrified species of human, as well as of ghost, for, if not exactly traditional, the “nightwatchers” are nonetheless a species of ghosts. The phantoms in *Ghost Story*,

³⁰ The anecdote is famous insofar as Straub’s critics (King, most notably) and Straub himself make reference to it in response to questions about the narrative methodology for *Ghost Story*.

as in Davies' *Murther and Walking Spirits*,³¹ present a lengthy series of images which, conceivably, could continue infinitely, making the characters feel as if they "have entered a horror story" (*Danse* 259) while Clark Mulligan's Rialto theatre runs a horror-movie festival akin to the one Straub himself is running.³² These are visions of the past, mostly, and sometimes of the future. Predominantly, though, they are of the presumed past—from a time when the spirit was human, before "it all changed" as the death-pause took hold of the subject.

These are not traditional ghosts, despite the fact that they are so obviously "evil," as King describes the spirits in most "horror stories" (*Danse* 260). And yet Straub's *modus operandus* is neo-traditional, with the apparent intent being to build a new genre of ghost and ghost story upon the layers of older types which, as Don explains, cast a nuance upon "every ghost story and supernatural tale ever written." He refers to them as "the originals of everything that frightens us in the supernatural," (Straub 379) but, of course, the postmodern asserts that they are all simulacrum, for there is no original. The "shape-shifting" phenomenon is "clearly connected with hallucination in morbid psychology" (379), and these "beings," which actually exist, "can convince you that you are losing your mind" (380). The same might be said for the ghosts of Bly and Hill House, with the difference being that it is not clear whether those spirits exist *only* in the mind. At the Overlook, 124, and Toxique³³ the ghost or human-ghost hybrid, regardless of how "ethereal" (381), is both real and capable of wreaking psychological chaos, even if not necessarily bent on doing so. Eva admits to leaving most of the work to the "imaginings" (421) of men and so even a novel which

³¹ In Davies' novel, Connor Gilmartin is a spirit-hero who watches not only the ongoing lives of those whom he has just left (particularly his adulterous wife and her lover who has recently murdered him), but also the lives on film of his ancestors. The novel, in fact, is largely made up of a series of images from the supposed past. The ghost of Christmas past, in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* might call these images "shadows of things that have been."

³² Conceivably, one might add that news networks of the twenty-first century, with their emphasis on crisis and warnings, are running a similar festival. King's point seems to be that "normal" twentieth-century life, particularly as depicted in Straub's *Milburn*, parallels a nonstop "creep show."

³³ These are settings in the works of King, Morrison, and Atwood, respectively.

blatantly presents us with ghosts intimates that it is our own minds which torture us, not just *this* time, but all times.

As James illustrates in *The Turn of the Screw*, when it is difficult to tell the difference between “real” and “imagination,” ghosts can make all havens, borders and boundaries appear unsolid; we, ourselves, become seen as unsolid. King suggest that if the ghosts are malevolent it is a reflection of the beholder since “even in their terror, Straub’s characters recognize the kinship...[and] only in their final exorcism do Straub’s ghosts become truly inhuman—emissaries from the world of ‘outside evil’” (*Danse* 257). The ghost’s (and beholder’s) intentions seem inconsequential, as seen in *The Robber Bride*, for the very existence of the spirit (or, as in *Hill House*, even the suspicion of its existence) is enough to achieve the effect.³⁴ In *Ghost Story*, there are the usual doubts, though minor, about the reality of the ghost, understandable considering the spirit’s shape-shifting abilities and the fact that this new young woman (who is Eva/Alma reincarnated) appears to Don as a young girl who knows an inordinate amount about Don’s past. While taking a shower at a roadside motel, he imagines being back “in his old life”; however, he quickly realizes that it is not possible to escape what has been glimpsed, for the mind is “a trap” (Straub 19). This is a significant insight in light of Jameson’s insistence that, culturally, we trick ourselves into recognizing a past that never existed (*Postmodernism* 96). Don, particularly as a writer, signifies the new narrative and new Gothic, and so recognizes this “trap” and, even while understanding its machinations, he also has difficulty escaping its nostalgic appeal, the pull towards a non-existent past. He is caught in the very postmodern trauma of “schizophrenia,” unable to distinguish between his old and his new self; as well, his experience with ghosts and his own creative attempts to tell “their” stories confuse him further. As with Tony in *The Robber Bride*,

³⁴ The effect is the inducement of hesitation between utterance (the apparition) and the response (the nomination of “ghost” or “not-ghost”). The result is a rip in the fabric of personal security, a hint of chaos.

Anil in *Anil's Ghost*, Eleanor in *Hill House*, or any of the other tellers of ghost tales, Don, as a horror author, realizes that he is writing his own story at the same time that he writes the stories of ghosts. Furthermore, he sees that the narrative overflows its boundaries—to Milburn, to his brother David, to the American South where he chases the nine-year-old version of his ghost, and to the Chowder Society itself. Like the wasp (a shape-shifted Ann Mostyn) he tries to drown at the end of the story, the ghost and its narratives are elusive and unstoppable. Even with the allusion to the wasp, a nod to King's *The Shining*, the insinuation is clear: this ghost defies attempts to control it and observes no boundaries, hopping not only from self to other, town to town, but also novel to novel, past to present and sideways, predicting future ghosts and ghost stories along the way. Even if Don (or Straub or the Chowder Society) could kill the ghost, it would metamorphose into something else more or less ghostly, more or less human, vaguely familiar and strikingly strange.

The ghost of Eva Galli plays with the minds of the surviving Chowder Society members, prolonging the haunting until they can trust no reality, including previously supposed boundaries of time, space, and self-construct. Bosky notes that Straub

explores questions of identity by presenting both different characters who somehow seem connected to one another or share some fundamental characteristic [such as being young, female, and mysterious or as having the same initials: A.M.], and single characters who seem to split into many apparitions or selves (comparable to what Todorov calls 'the multiplications of personality'). (77)

Even though they bear witness to history returning and Milburn rapidly decaying, the protagonists also suspect a psychological trick, for when they sleep and dream they also wonder if they are still wide awake. In emphasizing the psychological chaos created by Eva, Don explains that what makes these "new" ghosts different is that they "have wit. They love jokes, and they make long

term plans, and, like the Indians' Manitou, they love to flaunt themselves" (380). Reminiscent of the mobile topiary in *The Shining*, he emphasizes the "playfulness" of the "nightwatchers," their desire to have fun at the beholder's expense, wreaking chaos in the lives of the overly serious. It is, thus, important for Eva to be known, however subtly, to her intended victims, in order for the chaos to be more invasive and pervasive. Don's personal ghost, Alma Mobley, leaves obvious clues about her ghostly nature, which he is expected to pick up and interpret. She has named herself after a fictional painter named Robert Mobley, claiming him as her father when, in fact, she is not related to him. A search for facts about Robert Mobley leads Don to realize that in another, earlier incarnation as "Amy Monckton," Alma (or Amy) is responsible for the suicide death of Robert Mobley's wife. Significantly, she is described as a "child of enchantment," as "delicate as...Pansy Osmond, for whose sake Henry James's Isobel Archer sacrificed herself so willingly" (382). Furthermore, from Mobley's journal, Don finds that Miss Monckton's guardian also retained a "sinister" Latin servant named Gregorio, who is obviously Gregory Bates in an earlier incarnation. After Mobley's wife kills herself, Mobley describes Gregorio as looking down at him from a window and "sneering" at him, while Amy, with her feet "not touching the ground" as she appears to float, stares at him "with a calm, expressionless gaze" (383). Don insists that Alma "wanted me to read about it" and know that she has killed people, including his brother David.

Eva Galli personifies fear of the past, the female other who brings chaos to small-town Milburn and the ultra-conservative, rule-driven, and chauvinistic Chowder Society. For as much as the Chowder Society owes its shape to her, the monstrous female ghost owes hers to them. As they are law and order personified, Eva Galli transcends every rule and boundary imaginable of time, space, body and spirit; neither the Chowder Society's rules, nor Milburn's, apply to her. Like Zenia of *The Robber Bride*, she *is* the story: teller of the narrative, despite the efforts of fearful

men who gather in old libraries, surrounded by old texts, to legislate her to the outskirts of civilized society. Her return is as fierce and righteous as Cixous's Medusa snake-woman, Atwood's beautiful cancer-woman,³⁵ Shirley Jackson's desperate young female,³⁶ and even King's somewhat rebellious housewife figure:³⁷ too long legislated silent, she roars with a voice both destructive and self-destructive, yearning to be heard, fearful of nothing, disdainful of men. The men, meanwhile, are fearful of losing position and power, the right to tell and to nominate and thereby to shape. The shape-shifter defies all of their expectations and makes them quake in their comfortable leather chairs, knowing that she is coming for them, one story at a time.

Eva denies the importance of an origin story, much as Haraway suggests (150), at the same time that she repudiates the significance of names. At the beginning of the novel (part of a framing effect which is brought to a sort of closure at the novel's end), the ghost has returned in the form of a nine-year-old girl who hungers, sleeps, walks, holds solid objects, and is wise beyond her years. Imbued with a ghost's immortal perspective, she also considers all details meaningless. When asked who her caretakers used to be, she responds: "It doesn't matter... They aren't important. They were just people," and adds, "They were just people named Mitchell. That's all" (Straub 30). In fact, she changes her surname from "Maule" to "Mitchell" as if such details are negotiable, signifying that, in the face of unresolved hesitation, nomination—or at least certainty—itsself becomes less important. This objectification has an unsettling effect on Don, as well as the reader, much as in *Hill House* and *Beloved*, *Turn of the Screw*, and others. "'And you changed your name yourself?'" asks Don. When she responds, "'So what?'" he can only surrender the point that she is right and that names are meaningless: "'I don't know.' That was true," he says (30).

³⁵ Zenia, in *The Robber Bride*, both has cancer and is depicted as a cancer.

³⁶ The protagonist, Eleanor Vance.

³⁷ Critics usually doubt Wendy Torrance's "rebellious" quality, but in my chapter on *The Shining*, I have argued for her subversive and self-empowering actions.

The difficulty inherent in nomination, particularly in the face of dubious origins, furthermore implies a similar incapacity to draw lines, at least in any satisfying way, between self and other. When Don queries, ““Okay...what are you?”” the girl-ghost mocks his attempts at delineation, definition, and the kind of safety that genre-identification might normally bring:

For the first time..., she really smiled. It was a transformation, but not of a kind to make him feel easier: she did not look any less adult. “You know,” she said.

He insisted. “What are you?”

She smiled all through her amazing response. “I am you.”

“No. I am me. You are you.”

“I am you.” (30)

Faced with the chaos inherent in a loss of meaning and individuation, Don’s resolve weakens, and he begins to question the very notion of self, as well as normalcy. His own words, which initially mean one thing, now convey another signification when spoken aloud only seconds later:

“What are you?” It came out in despair, and it did not mean what he had meant the first time he asked it.... Then just for a second he was back on the street in New York, and the person before him was not the stylish suntanned anonymous woman, but his brother David, his face crumbled and his body dressed in the torn and rotting clothing of the grave. (31)

Just as his words shift meaning, Angie/Eva/Alma has morphed into Don’s dead brother in dilapidated form as if to suggest not only the interchangeability of parts, names, details, and identities, but also the decay congenital to being human. The ghost herself is an empty signifier, having no fixed identity or meaning that Don does not assign to her. The same is true of Eva in all her incarnations: there is no Eva, and yet they are all Eva, just as they are all “evil” and all reflections of the beholder, regardless of which member of the Chowder Society views her.

Ultimately, the society of men set upon the monstrous female in order to preserve the patriarchy. What they seek to destroy, at the mocking behest of their subjects, is the part of themselves that she emphasizes: the staid, repressive, lying, conniving narrative that they wish to extricate from themselves.³⁸ What remains clear is that they have changed by initially killing her, then in hiding the body, repressing the secret from Millburn society, and now have altered again with her reappearance and their own renewed desire to kill and repress. She truly *is* Don (and Ricky, Sears, and the others), his inherited past, his returned lineage, and his present, as well as his future. As Jameson, Haraway, and many other postmodern observers might suggest, they are conjoined, symbiotic parts of one another, and there is no clear dividing line between them, even though they are obviously different: he is “human” and she is “ghost.” It takes the ghost to confront Don and the Chowder Society with this self-knowledge, through a “glass darkly,” as Atwood points out, for the ghost is always us: not just speculars of our selves, but extensions of ourselves, sharing in the world we have both created and been created by.

When Anna Mostyn—who is Eva in other form—arrives in Milburn, rents a hotel and gets a job at the Hawthorne, James law firm, her entry is literally a return, though she has never truly been “dead” in the traditional sense. Her arrival alone is pure chaos; the fact that she goes to work for the men who murdered her is playfully ironic; and her occupation in a law firm, where she proves to be most efficient as a legal secretary, is doubly ironic, for she is the antithesis to law and order. Jim Hardie asks rhetorically, ““Do you get the feeling that our lady friend worries about

³⁸ Their quest is no different from the hunting down of newly-morphed vampiress Lucy Seward in *Dracula*, lying in her crypt, awaiting the group of men with a smile on her beautiful, ghastly visage, mocking their attempts—or even just the fact that they are compelled to seek out that which they so obviously deplore and desire—to destroy her. As in Stoker’s novel, the Chowder Society men cannot bear to look upon the female other, and yet they must confront what they have created and yet feared. Meanwhile, Eva, like Lucy, remains playfully, monstrously flirtatious, even in death, especially in the eyes of such serious men: “She seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there; the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth—which it made one shudder to see—the whole carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucky’s sweet purity” (Stoker 220). The description is vastly similar to that of Eva Galli when she attempts to seduce young Lewis Benedikt and thereby steal his innocence in a vampiric manner.

what's legal and what isn't?...[or that she is] worried about the damned law...for Chrissake?"

(280) She defies law and logic, rendering it as laughably inept as the Society's attempts to kill her or ignore her. Anna is a "striking young woman" who has the air of a "successful woman returning for a nostalgic look at her home town" (61); only the men of the Chowder Society know that her coming is actually a return and that her re-entry has meaning for themselves, if not for her.

A strict adherence to tradition, as with the Chowder Society in the safe town of Milburn, also renders one monstrous to some extent. When Eva, or Anna, comes along (in both incarnations) she threatens their inherited notions of youth, entitlement, morality, and gender roles, for they have murdered and she (ironically) is the proof, the only "living" entity capable of refuting their own civility. Such a "scandal," as Sears puts it (367)—a word that keeps asserting itself in ghost stories and always suggests the illusion that hides a deeper illusion upon which "reality" is founded—would, in itself, release chaos because these five exemplary souls are the foundation upon which Milburn rests. If they are capable of such acts—including the accidental killing of a young woman and their fifty-year-old deception of the entire town, as well as deviance from the very law which they represent—then chaos reigns, even without the ghost. To borrow from Baudrillard once again, it is not that these men have falsely represented reality, but that have willingly concealed the fact that "the real is no longer real," thereby "saving the reality principle" (Baudrillard 13). Simply by appearing, Anna/Eva further threatens their bursting-at-the-seams and crumbling patriarchal decadence, exposing the reality myth. She politely agrees to live by their rules about discos and men, and curfews placed on her time and space, but she is far from being "old-fashioned" as she claims to be (Straub 63). She abides by no rules, but transcends all "natural" laws of time and space, personifying the notion of "supersession." She is a species of ghost that is perpetually renewing, transforming, and surviving. She resembles her old self, but she

really is both an accumulation of her past incarnations and an original each time: born of the past, yet belonging to the present, while promising more incarnations to come. Her intention is to seduce all of Milburn, to destroy what they hold sacred, one empty corpse at a time, turning each of them into ghosts. Men seem not only affronted but virtually emasculated, by such power, fearing that which they both lack and desire. Jim Hardie thinks of her presence as “a blast of pure sensuality” like an “assault” by a “wave of pure and cold sensuality which dwindled him” (64), as if she is an object that does not merely reflect, but is reflected upon equally, depending on the observer.

In the climactic scene at Eva’s house, as in the Overlook ballroom, ghosts intermingle in a succession of appearances, invoking themselves for the benefit of the beholding humans, who enter a confounding space “bereft of spatial coordinates” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 48-49). Just prior to entering Eva’s bedroom, Don hears “the noises of an invisible crowd” and, stepping deeper inside, he is no longer able to see the walls, and he finds himself disoriented by a room containing a swirl of all times and spaces: “Don felt that he was in a much larger room—the walls and ceiling had flown out, expanded, leaving him in a psychic space he did not know how to leave” (Straub 398). He encounters ghosts of the past, including Robert Mobley, newly-deceased Lewis Benedict in a khaki jacket and “carrying a bottle of beer,” and also Dr. John Jaffrey. As testament to the flowing, meaningless quality of the space, Robert Mobley’s ghost points out that the space contains nothing inherently harmful: “It’s all entertainment. You see—mere shadows and pictures. Only that.” When Don physically reaches out to strike a phantom, his fist “met air” only and then “playfully” someone trips him, making it obvious that this is no ordinary space, but one of serious play and playful seriousness, conjuring a perpetual sort of normalized chaos. In light of the town’s history and present circumstance of multiple deaths and ghostly occurrences, the moment is far from

extraordinary. Certainly, in *Beloved*, the spirit becomes more fully human, almost completely obliterating that dividing line (although the line still exists, at least in memory), but Straub's ghosts still have one foot in the past (where they are considered frightful), while normalizing the chaos that they represent. Unlike Hill House, which has never been "normal" (in that descriptor's usual sense of safety and security), Milburn begins as the epitome of assuredness, at least on the surface. By the time Don and Ricky step into Eva Galli's house, anarchy has sprung and flourished, and it is they who are the strangers, they who have not been normalized, for, in this space, it is more normal to be ghost than to be human. One senses that all of the humans are ghosts-in-waiting, simply biding time in the human sphere, waiting to be called over. Once crossed over, however, they do not remit their humanity but merely acquire an additional ghostly quality.

Concurrent with the infinitely-running movie theatre, this chaotic scene at Eva's house constitutes Straub's "continuous flow" of images perpetuated by the ghosts, who are themselves the show, for we catch glimpses of them, one after another, as if performing cameos that in themselves have no meaning (such as fear or nostalgia) independent of the beholder. Peter Barnes has said, "They can make you see things," and Don realizes, "that's what they're doing now." The Chowder Society hears Eva's voice on tape recorder as she greets them: "Are my old friends listening to me?" she asks, implying that such electronic devices are conductors of spirit activity, as well as conveying a ghostliness all their own through the looping of words and pictures carrying no particular meaning without the listener's projections. Sears feels "anger," while Ricky's cold gets suddenly worse (418). She greets them individually and promises to "visit each of you" in turn. She speaks to Don in the voice of Alma Mobley, asking him to remember what she herself remembers so that he can "see everything" and have his mind "open up to all the possibilities we represent" (419)—meaning her multiple nature, as well as her transcendence of temporal and

spatial solids, or any boundaries at all. When they all leave, Don thinks of the tape recorder's capacity for simulation: "Alma Mobley lay within it, trapped in a few spools of coated amber stuff (421). She refers to herself as having lived a long time, since "your continent" was very young and primitive. "We abhor you because we find you boring," she says: "We chose to live in your dreams and imaginations because only there are you interesting" (421). "But," she says, "we are implacably real, as real as bullets and knives—for aren't they too tools of the imagination?" (421). The assortment of "dead" creatures—Eva, Gregory, Jaffrey (404), Edward, Robert Mobley (398), Elmer Scales (402), Lewis's wife (402)—meet and meld with each other in "unrecognizable forms" (402), presenting themselves to the humans individually. The beholders (Don, Ricky, and Sears) become characters on a television set showing their approach to the house in the middle of Montgomery Street (400); it is reality entertainment, framed to appear scripted and artistically cut when it is also happening naturally, with an "exterior camera" watching them and a "third camera" focussed on Ricky's "civilized face." Inside the house and alone in Eva's bedroom, Don realizes he is watching a real-time show as the camera follows Ricky like a "hidden assailant" which "began to creep toward him," having become a representation of a malevolent "creature." Then it reaches out and grips his neck, "choking him": "The hands tightened, and Ricky began to die: not clearly, as on the television programs this 'commercial' imitated, but messily" (401).

Although they most often signify chaos for their human beholders, the ghosts also crave a return to the status quo, and so they are rather conservative in their desires; this desire, too, marks them as human. Ricky sees a naked woman standing in front of Lewis and recognizes that this woman who "was not living, nor was she beautiful," is Lewis's wife, and in her "dead face" he sees "the lineaments of returned desire" (402). Likewise, Sears meets the ghost of his "old friend" John Jaffrey who explains with a "ghostly smile" that he "went over." Similar to the craving Ricky sees

in the “dead face” of Lewis’s wife, Jaffrey’s ghost has been trying to get into his old house, now occupied by Milly Sheehan, and he wants to know if Sears can “help” him get there (404). While the ghost expresses gratitude for Sears’s return to the place where it all began, Sears feels “more pity than fear” for the phantom (404)—another sign of the increased empathy and lack of distinction between them. Intriguingly, Jaffrey’s ghost is an outsider—or so he portrays himself—referring to the other ghosts as “they,” as in “they made me come here—[to] wait for you,” for he seemingly occupies some sort of nether-space, unable to feel human flesh; when Sears attempts to touch his hand, he experiences only a “tingling sensation” as the ghost disappears. The past and present thus commingle with a slight sensation of etherealness, suggesting that “time is not truly linear and that isolation of an event in the past or future is no barrier, for good or ill, from its effects” (Bosky 79). Furthermore, with the postmodernization of the space that is Eva’s bedroom, Straub presents “a spatial metaphor that completely abandons sequence” (80) and meaning. The images glimpsed by Ricky, Sears, and Don are only that: surface objects reflecting back only momentary interpretations based on responses to stimuli that might as easily be false as true; without a central, grounding time, space, or context, the ghosts provide a flow of images every bit as infinite and trivial as the endless loop of horror films playing at the Rialto while the bodies pile up outside in an equally illimitable manner.

3.2.2 The Chowder Society: The Dying Breath of Old Narratives

With its march towards extinction, the Chowder Society signifies the mutability of master narratives, the decay of the past, and the desire to retain the old while grudgingly acknowledging both the coming of the new and the return of the past in barely recognizable form. Even before the novel begins, one of the Society’s members, Edward Wanderley, is already dead; three more

(Ricky Hawthorne, Sears James, and John Jaffrey) are old men pre-occupied with the past; a fourth (Lewis Benedikt) has been fading since the suicide-death of his wife. A sixth member, Edward's nephew, Don, is a young author of horror fiction, who represents regeneration and continuance, as well as a move away from the past. Until Don arrives late upon being summoned, the Chowder Society, particularly Ricky and Sears, bearing the surnames of American ghost-novels of bygone eras, indicate a conservative desire for the good old days of innocence, before "it all changed." King says that the novel's "politics" are those of these old men; Sears and John are "staunch Republicans," Lewis owns "a medieval fiefdom in the woods," and while Ricky was once a socialist, "he may be the only socialist in history who is so entranced by new ties that he feels an urge...to wear them to bed" (*Danse* 261). While Don is a newcomer, whose ghost stories are a shift from those of the past in that they are "more literary," he does make love to a ghost from the past (Alma) and spend his days chasing one from Milburn to Florida. As a writer and wounded lover, he seeks to destroy the bad past, but he is nonetheless obsessed with it in some form, suggesting a self that at least partially depends on the ghost's continuance.

Whatever power a vengeful ghost might have over a group of young men, it must be assumed that the power of a vengeful *female* ghost is greater. This fear proves justified after the accidental murder and secret burial of the "real Jezebel," as their innocent idealism and sense of security have "died." Sprung from the same event, the birth of the so-called Chowder Society occurs simultaneously with that of its nemesis, the ghost of Eva Galli. The Society begins, not coincidentally, in October 1929, shortly after the stock market crash and the death of Eva's fiancée, Stringer Dedham, on Black Monday. For the young men, she constitutes the American dream girl, "sort of a cross between the Statue of Liberty and Mary Pickford" (371). But she shows herself as a male's nightmare, a fatal attraction come to life, after Stringer dies mysteriously and Eva

becomes “an emblem of grief,” shunned by the five young men because they lack the confidence in their words to comfort her. Existing up until now in a “sexless, pre-Freudian paradise,” their friendship with the beautiful young woman has been “conducted in the light of an ideal.” After Stringer’s death, however, she interprets their silence as condemnation; with “iron-bound social connection” already setting her “apart” from them, Eva embarks on a night of revenge against a town that has shunned her, dancing lewdly, and making sexual advances towards the young men, ultimately raping the youngest, Lewis Benedikt. As Sears describes the chaotic scene fifty years later, ““She was frightening. She came in like a typhoon”” (371). Most telling is his admission that Eva “was our unattainable goddess,” who was now “acting like a whore,” meaning that they had “never seen any woman act that way” (372). Eva’s behaviour towards them is “horrifying,” as their “paradise was crumbling” around them: ““You know when a woman gets angry, really angry, she can reach way back into herself and find rage enough to blow any man to pieces,”” says Ricky (372), displaying more gender bias than he probably knows.

In *Ghost Story*, each member of the Society shares a “worst thing” with the others, giving it even greater power than normal so that it gradually consumes the entire town and threatens it with extinction, or at the very least, regeneration in a form that is inherently chaotic. While they tell stories whose authenticity is beyond verbal questioning, they are haunted by the one story they do not tell, for their anxious silence begets a ghost, the deliberate exclusion of Eva’s story signaling a binary presence. As young Milburn elite, lawyers and doctors at the beginning of their careers, they fear the scandal that would have arisen if the secret got out: ““And we couldn’t face that,”” Sears admits (367); thus the untold narrative—unrepresented except by its unrepresentability—gains form as a potentially ruinous scandal, similar to the one that Jack threatens to expose at the Overlook. In effect, Eva Galli “returns” (though, again, she has never really been gone) to remind

the Society (and all societies) that the told narrative is a theater anyway—a simulation of a reality that never existed. Her material ghost is an attempt to “regenerate a moribund principle through simulated scandal, phantasm, and murder—a sort of hormonal treatment through negativity and crisis. It is always a question of proving the real through the imaginary, proving truth through scandal, proving the law through transgression” (Baudrillard 18-19). The perceived scandal is “metamorphosed into its opposite to perpetuate itself in its expurgated form” (19) but as *Ghost Story* implies, the old men only *believe* the fairytale that Eva is their opposite. Ultimately, some of them, particularly Ricky and Sears, will come to see that she, in short, is them and always has been.

Because of the impending crisis, the Society gradually sees that “illusion is no longer possible,” that their charade of reality is about to be unveiled. Despite their wish for secrecy, at certain moments, each member thinks of an episode “fifty years in the past” that none of them has mentioned since it happened. Attempting to think up a story, Ricky goes directly to “the past,” which “suddenly shifted and delivered a moment as fresh and complete that he knew he had his story, although he’d planned nothing” (47). As a conservative, all of his (and the Chowder Society’s) stories emanate from the past and from “old movies” (363), offering nothing fresh or unique. Bosky points out that Straub’s novel, like so many others of its kind, examines “personal consciousness and our awareness of reality as altered by movies, fiction-reading, trances, hallucinations, dreams, magic and pathological symptoms such as depersonalization and mood disorders.... The characters’ inability to tell what is real and what is not...[dissolves the] usual boundaries between reality and illusion” (Bosky 78). The result is an “introspective, literary novel” which simultaneously provides “a Gothic excitement” (78). Straub admits, likewise, that he attempts to “play around with reality, to make the characters confused about what was actually real”; towards achieving that effect, he depicts various reality-bending scenes in which characters

are: “1.) acting out roles in a book; 2.) watching a film; 3.) hallucinating; 4.) dreaming; 5.) transported into a private fantasy” (*Danse* 262). To double the effect, he says, the novel is “self-referring, which always pleases me very deeply in novels. If the structure had a relationship to the events, the book has more resonance” (263). The strategy here is to “confuse” not only the characters but the reader as well, making reference to popular culture and broad cultural experiences such as dreaming, fantasizing, and watching movies in order to create a sense not only of verisimilitude, but also of a text without borders. Thus, while Straub does not indulge in a “Jamesian” ambiguity regarding the nature of the spectre, he does attempt to draw the reader into the novel’s events, as well as to spread the haunting beyond its diegetic boundaries: to make us question what is real, what is imagined, and what is possible. In essence, through the simulated materiality of the ghost he achieves a materiality of the text in which the text becomes the ghost, and vice versa, making the phantom come alive in the form of a story that overflows its presumed boundaries. The result is a further loss of referents and grounding for the reader. James, Jackson, and King manage this same effect in different ways; Straub’s ghosts deepen the self-referentiality that is inherent in the ghost story and take the spread of the “stain” even further and deeper into society “outside” of the text, making an indelible mark. Ultimately, he implies that there is no “outside,” that the text is no Disneyland, to use Baudrillard’s example. The world is not just haunted in contained spaces; it is haunted everywhere; furthermore, it is haunted by the presence of an absence (and vice versa) that is the untold, forbidden narrative.

As charter members of bourgeois Milburn society, their purpose is not only to tell stories, but to keep threats on the periphery: outsiders who watch from the sidelines, knock on the doors, and metaphorically wedge their fingers into the cracks from the outer walls. The Chowder Society is an exclusive club, not unlike the group in *The Turn of the Screw*, in which male storytellers—the

“old boys club” of literature—tell their tales amid the backdrop of the collected literary volumes of the past. The symbolic library—like the one in *The Haunting of Hill House* and similar to the scrapbook in *The Shining*—contains the accumulated truth inherited from past generations, held for posterity and signifying the supersession of knowledge over decades of time. In effect, the Society has quarantined themselves within the past, wary of letting the monstrous feminine, or any other contamination, in with them. There are men such as young Freddy Robinson, who craves the company of these respected, story-making, history-making men. He fears that the Chowder Society “was disintegrating before he had even had a chance to prove his worthiness,” as if the club itself were “heaven” and he must find “a way into the gracious company of friends he needed” (242); he never does join them, since he does not share their story (of Eva Galli, particularly) but gets killed by the ghost and becomes a spectre himself. Unofficially, women are barred from the club, particularly Ricky’s wife, Stella, who has given the group its name (42), and Milly Sheehan, who is “preferable to Stella Hawthorne—less demanding, less driven,” as John Jaffrey’s housekeeper. She is “like Ricky’s wife” in that she resents being “excluded” and “unlike Stella Hawthorne, she perpetually hovered at the edges of the meetings” (53). Despite the peripheral position of women, the beautiful Stella had caused a stir twelve years earlier by bursting in and demanding they release her husband; that was the night she named them “the Chowder Society,” almost as an act of rebellion—the beautiful female casting a nomination over the men, just as she has always cast an enchantment over them.

To such serious men, play is the ultimate chaos, particularly when the narrative obeys no rule and the act of narration is appropriated by the female other. Thus, it is appropriately ironic revenge that, by their inward obsession with the past, combined with a conspiracy of silence, the Chowder Society and its new recruit invite that which they most desire to suppress; furthermore,

the ghost is a “shape-shifter” who enjoys toying with them before devouring them. At various times, the ghost assumes the form of Eva Galli, Alma Mobley, Anna Mostyn, Amy Monckton, and other beautiful women, “hungry” (27) for power, revenge and, most of all, play. Jaffrey accuses his friends of sitting around and talking “like a bunch of ghouls” (44), implying not only that they are becoming more ghostly by the moment, but also that they have become too earnest: “We weren’t always like this—we used to talk about all sorts of things. We used to have fun—there used to *be* fun” (44). Jaffrey, himself, is dying and so are the fun times. What remains seems more serious to them, mostly because of the return of their own repressed “worst thing” as they mourn a time and space that no longer exists, assuming it ever did.

The emphasis on “fun” is significant, for that is what their stories are supposed to be: a relief from daily pressures and seriousness of the law practice; in effect, though, they have become their own “emblem of grief.” In order to retain what they have built, they have “rules” to which they adhere out of a sense of tradition, if not outright habit or curmudgeonliness. Regarding tradition as somewhat of a master to which they are slavish, they wear evening clothes, refrain from drinking “too much,” and tell their stories “in rotation,” without pressuring anyone. Most telling, however, is this one rule: that they are forbidden to ask whether or not the story is true (43). In this way, “truth” is inconsequential, as all stories might be equally true or false, as well as existing for their own sake, and for the sake of mere entertainment value. Of course, for the teller (as perhaps any—though not every—author), they might have more meaning. But much time has passed, and the details are less accessible, more negotiable. Thus, one thematic current of *Ghost Story* and the Chowder Society stories is that tales are neither truthful nor untruthful, neither useful nor useless, and neither significant nor unimportant, except to the beholder. And even their value to the listener is not necessarily an indication of any universal or more widespread value.

The traditional “ghost story” is dead, but renewed, in *Ghost Story*. Considering Sears James’s and Ricky Hawthorne’s namesakes, the dreadful nightmares, the memories of Eva Galli that haunt their stories, as well as the fact that Don is an author of “new” ghost stories that supposedly spring from research, ingenuity, and new experiences, it seems obvious that Straub is paying homage to ghost stories of the past, while attempting to offer a new perspective on ghosts. King believes that Straub’s work is distinguished by a “refusal to view the gothic conventions as static ones” (*Danse* 255). Straub, indeed, admits to having “read all the American supernatural fiction” he could, to “find out what my tradition was”; he proceeds, then, to “cannibalize” the “old classic stories” by plugging them into the Chowder Society (*Danse* 255). Through various characters, he invokes the long lineage of human fear and the tradition of framing those fears as ghost stories, while forming societies and invoking rules designed to normalize and keep the chaotic “other” at bay. As Ricky says, “I want things to just keep on going” (50), which is exactly what institutions such as the law and the Chowder Society are designed to do, to perpetuate the past. Then, however, they invite Don, the next generation of Chowder men and a writer to boot, and, subconsciously, Anna Mostyn, who *is* the story they are determined not to tell, admit, or remember. The outcome seems inevitable: a showdown between, not only chaos and conservatism, but also the old master voice and the newer, unheard voice of the fearful, female other. Against the objections of Ricky, with the inclusion of Don, the ghost writer, whose book is described as a “nice exercise in genre writing” and “more literary than most” (50), particularly for a ghost story, the Chowder Society marks the passing of an older form of storytelling. Even their names (James and Hawthorne), suggest old narratives told in an old way, dredging up the spectres of old ghost stories and their authors, and “talking to themselves for too long” (183).

Straub himself is like Nathaniel Hawthorne and that nineteenth-century novelist's characters in *The House of Seven Gables*, painfully, self-destructively aware of his own heritage, how the Gothic house is inhabited by the ghosts and the nearly invisible foundation left by his Gothic ancestors. His protagonist, Eva Galli, "had all this exciting modernity about her, what was modernity for Milburn at any rate," (368) according to Sears, suggesting a change within the structure of the house. Ricky describes her as being "like a nineteen-twenties Claire Bloom" (368). Not only does Ricky describe everyone as being like some movie star, as being a type, really, but it is interesting to note that Claire Bloom co-starred as Theodora in a 1950s film version of *The House on Haunted Hill*. Straub deftly weaves popular horror culture into his own characters' self-constructs and ideologies. Ricky, of course, being in his seventies and a movie buff in the 1970s, would be aware of the significance of his allusion to Claire Bloom,³⁹ drawing a direct connection to Shirley Jackson's novel and thereby pointing to his own literary heritage.

Straub thus illustrates the ever-changing machinery of the ghost narrative, and perhaps of all narratives, building new stories and genres upon old ones, forming at once something new and old. The Chowder Society is a storytelling society that is both dying and changing, being reborn even as the story opens. Don's inclusion by invitation, despite Ricky's reluctance to change—all change being bad, in his opinion—signals this regeneration and simultaneous death. He brings with him a newness, a new kind of ghost story, several ghosts of his own, and a lineage that belongs to the Chowder Society and yet lies outside of it, having a dead uncle who was one of the founding members of the society, having experienced his own ghost who happens to be the same one (in different form) that haunts the aging society, and having published and been constantly writing himself into his own ghost stories, much as the Chowder Society members do in their own

³⁹ Interestingly, Ricky also makes reference to Fred Astaire, who ultimately plays the role of Ricky Hawthorne in the film version of *Ghost Story*.

tales. Don, too, brings his own kind of chaos and chases his own brand of ghost until he can nearly grasp it. But, like the wasp he holds in his hand and tries to drown at the end of the story, he cannot truly feel it, hold it, or kill it. It escapes him, and yet it is his.

3.2.2.1 Ricky Hawthorne

Wary of all things new, Ricky Hawthorne is the epitome of a conservative, bourgeois group made up of lawyers, teachers, doctors, and old money, whose lives have “settled” into a “comfortable routine” (49). Ricky fears dissolution of the town he has inhabited for nearly all of his life (37), as well as the loss of both his wife and, especially, the Chowder Society. Even though his marriage is perpetually under siege, partly from the fact that his highly-prized and lusted-for wife has taken various lovers while he spends all of his time with the coveted Chowder Society, Ricky is a “born gentleman,” always “charming to women” and is practically married to his bow tie. He particularly fears the encroachment of New York, appreciates the “civility” of sidewalks (39), laments the passing of old cinema into a newer “blood-streaked” type (38) and, sitting in his favorite chair in his favorite room, he “fervently wished that nothing would change” (47). Sears chides him that his paranoia is “spoken like a true lawyer” (47), for the law is designed to protect the civilized from the unknown that change precipitates and signifies. Despite being fearful of the world outside Milburn, he also “knows” that “something” bad is going to happen to the whole town (82) and that “whatever was coming was going to come from inside, not out there”(85). He is referring to the dreams he has had and the stories they all tell, which influence each other and stir up a concoction of anxiety, causing even more horrific nightmares and begetting terrifying ghost tales, each one feeding the others and worsening them. The cycle is no different from that seen at Bly, Hill House, the Overlook, or Toxique, where ghosts are conjured either by naming or the

refusal to nominate, creating an uncertainty which, in turn, creates more anxiety, as chaos feeds off chaos. While ghost are bred in chaos, they also fuel it.

In the appropriately-titled first chapter, "Milburn Observed Through Nostalgia," we can see that Ricky craves a simpler time before the need for secrets which could rise up in the form of shape-shifting ghosts. He lacks humor, relying on sincerity as his only redeemable social skill, for he "couldn't tell if Sears were being ironic or not. He touched his bow tie. Bow ties were a part of his life, like the Chowder Society." To Ricky, it is "incomprehensible" that anyone could find his hometown "boring" because, to him, Milburn's narrative is that of the American century, for

if you watched it closely, for seventy years, you saw the century at work. Ricky imagined that if you watched New York for the same period, what you saw would be mainly New York at work. Buildings went up and down too fast there for Ricky's taste, everything moved too quickly, wrapped in a self-absorbed cocoon of energy, whirling too fast. (37)

Walking downtown, Ricky sees a movie theatre with posters on the front, featuring "the blood-streaked face of a girl. The kind of movies Ricky liked could now be seen only on television; for Ricky, the film industry had lost its bearings about the time William Powell had retired" (38).⁴⁰ He finds that "many modern films were like his dreams, which had become particularly vivid during the last year" (38), as his world is in transition, as seen in the weather and landscape (38), the movies, and the size of cities, which were vast and self-involved. When young Peter Barnes approaches, he says, "I was just thinking that sidewalks changed the world. They made everything much more civilized" (39). To Ricky, lawyer and storyteller, civilization and order are of primary importance, and *all* is a sign to him of either civilization or the erosion of it. There is no in-

⁴⁰ Powell (1892-1984) was considered an "old Hollywood" actor. Notably, Powell had a son from whom he was estranged and who was often depressed, ultimately committing suicide at 42. Ricky Hawthorne also appears to be estranged from his own children, suggesting perhaps that Ricky shared a common bond with the actor whom he emulated.

between. But that, too, is a reflection of his inner self since the murder of Eva Galli. The world is a specular to such a man, for he sees himself, his own hunger, and a morbid sense of loss and dread in every detail. "It just seemed to him at times that life had darkened since that night: that a wheel had turned" (40), signaling a rupture in Milburn life for Ricky: a moment when it all changed, as if by evolution rather than by revolution, as Jameson describes postmodernism at work.⁴¹ Most recently, though, it is the death of Edward Wanderley, signaling the return of Eva Galli's ghost, that has caused Ricky to lose his "high spirits." Chaos ultimately descends upon Milburn, which, under the accumulated weight of much fallen snow and its many returned ghosts, is "frozen" and "immobilised." Meanwhile, cars are sliding off roads and getting buried, bodies are piling up (410) and Clark Mulligan, the theatre owner, puts on a reel of *Night of the Living Dead* in the projector just before finding Penny's body (410), all on the day before Christmas, perhaps in a subtle allusion to Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

Among other things, Ricky is a precursor to Don Wanderley; in fact, he had been stolidly opposed to inviting this new-style storyteller, despite Don's connection to a former Society member. It is as if Ricky sees the future in Don, who, in turn, sees the past reflected in Ricky and the Society. While he feels a strong nostalgia for the solid, central space of Milburn, Ricky recognizes the need to change, however reluctantly, in order to preserve his traditional values. His desire is conservative and staid; he himself personifies stability—even to the point that he maintains a marriage with a woman who brings chaos to his life through her extra-marital

⁴¹ Jameson, like most other critics, repeatedly insists that the postmodern was at work decades before it was recognized as postmodern: "The postmodern looks for breaks, for events rather than new worlds, for the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same; for the 'when-it-all-changed,' as Gibson puts it, or, better still, for shifts and irrevocable changes in the *representation* of things and of the way they change" (*Postmodernism* ix).

affairs⁴²—but, though he fears change, he may *have* to change and embrace change in order to ensure his survival and that of *his* Milburn:

Sitting as he had at least once a month for more than twenty years in a coveted chair in the best room he knew, Ricky fervently wished that nothing would change—that they would be allowed to continue, and that they would simply tease out their anxieties in bad dreams and stories...he wished nothing more than that: to continue. (47)

While he and his cohorts believe in “the efficacy of knowledge,” he freely admits to himself that “there is a kind of knowledge they have never confronted, despite the stories they tell” (47), a truth that is heralded by the postmodern ghost of Eva Galli. He reluctantly agrees to invite Don, with his new ways, and ultimately to embrace him as the “new generation” of the Chowder Society. In the end, Ricky (and his marriage and the Chowder Society) survives by allowing regeneration. After so long, with the deaths of so many of his friends and the acceptance of Eva Galli as a shape-shifting ghost, and the introduction of new members into the Society, chaos has become normalized. Nothing can ever be same for Ricky or the Society, as he simply gives in to the spirit of the age: change is not necessarily good or bad; it just is what it is.

3.2.2.2 Sears James

Through Sears James’s ghost story, Straub self-consciously emphasizes the thin line between truth and belief, offering a paradigm of how master narratives, like the ghost story, are formed, passed on, and regenerated. While he, too, is haunted by the murder of Eva Galli, Sears is plagued by yet another ghost of his own, named Gregory Bates, who is connected with Eva. Although long dead, Gregory haunts Sears nearly all of his adult life, as evidenced by Sears’s tale

⁴² Notably, his hero, the actor William Powell, had three marriages and was hardly the epitome of stability in such matters. Ricky seems more set on ignoring reality—or keeping it at bay—than on upholding any sort of truth.

about a past incident that keeps repeating itself. Sears narrates a story of two ghostly children he once encountered in an isolated, backwards American village filled with illiterate, God-fearing people (including one family named Mather,⁴³ with whom he boards). His tale is a transparent blend of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*⁴⁴ and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, as a young schoolmaster enters a "bestial" society, becomes intent on "saving" the children, and encounters the ghost of a troubled past. Sears (the schoolmaster in his own story, about a younger version of himself) tries to save the children, Fenny and Constance Bates, from the supposedly "evil" clutches of their dead guardian and brother, Gregory, whom they had killed a year earlier in an attempt to escape his "tyranny." The entire episode resembles the governess's experience at Bly in that the young schoolteacher is the only one who sees the ghost of Gregory and yet there are several conversations filled with gaps, hints, and ambiguous phrases. Neither the Mrs. Grose-like figure (a minister named Dr. Gruber) who fills in historical background while occupying neutral territory in the ghost versus not-ghost debate, the townspeople, nor the children themselves can see him, but they do nothing to dissuade Sears from his belief in the apparitions, including one "white face" he sees at the window just before young Fenny dies in his arms. "His heart stopped, and I was holding a dispossessed body," recounts Sears James, right after he, like the governess clutching young Miles in his arms, thinks, "I felt triumphant—I had won."⁴⁵

⁴³ Ruland and Bradbury suggest that the Mather family was "the embodiment of American Puritanism" (14). This, along with Cotton Mather's authorship of many books, essays, sermons, and religious treatises in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is the popular knowledge upon which Straub's allusion depends. The connection of the Mather surname to Gothicism in America include the Salem witch trials that also have an association with the Hawthorne family. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote of both Salem and the witch trials in his fiction, while his great-great grandfather John Hathorne was one of the judges at those trials in 1692. Again, Straub points to an American Gothic lineage, showing his own protagonist, Sears James, as one who abides by no rules as laid down by the Mathers.

⁴⁴ Bosky, likewise, notes that Straub includes a "retelling" of *The Turn of the Screw*, although I do not see the passage as a strict retelling so much as a blending of James and Straub so that the newer tale of the Bates siblings provides a fairly snug fit and a greater purpose beyond itself within *Ghost Story*.

⁴⁵ Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* ends with the governess seeing a face at the window as she holds the boy, Miles in her arms, to keep him from the clutches of the former servant, Peter Quint. She, likewise, feels victorious at first, but ultimately realizes that she has truly lost Miles forever as well for she finds "his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped" (James 85).

It is clear that Eva's henchman, Gregory Bates, is a shape-shifting werewolf and that, in present-day Milburn—like Eva Galli—Gregory has returned, at least in James's subconscious, to dredge up old memories for Sears James. One of those memories is the "shameful" incident of having masturbated, as a young man, into the blouse of a desirable woman whose children he was babysitting. As usual, no one speaks of the incident, just as by "unspoken common agreement, none of them had alluded" to Edward Wanderley's death on the anniversary of that event. And yet, on the same day, Anna Mostyn checks into a Milburn Hotel and Sears remembers the old, repressed shame: "you old fool, you still guilty about that blouse," he thinks (55). Even as Ricky touches his bow tie, he asks Sears, "'Where do these stories come from?'" Sears truthfully responds, "'From our memories...our doubtless Freudian unconsciousness'" (51). Freud considers the immortal soul, which he regards as primitive and childlike, to have its origins in "unbounded self-love."⁴⁶ More significantly, Freud also suggests that all repression is sexual in nature. Whether true or not, the repression and its violent return is undoubtedly sexual in nature, given that Eva Galli's death occurs as a result of a reprehensible sexual act that causes guilt. Even Sears's guilt about the blouse has a touch of both the reprehensible and sexual in it, and he associates that memory with the one of Eva because he connects her with sexual repression.

There is in Straub and in many other postmodern ghost tales, something of a reclamation, as women not only do the naming and supposedly cause the chaos, but come to be seen less as other and more as a repressed narrative re-asserting itself. Both Bosky and King suggest that Straub's use of the ghost as a mirror image of the beholder is an intentional echo of the Narcissus myth:

"What is the ghost, after all, that it should frighten us so, but our own face? When we observe it

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. Xvii. London: Hogarth, 1953: 219-252. More fully, Freud says: "Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man."

we become like Narcissus,” which is largely where the ghost’s power resides (*Danse* 246-48; qtd. in Bosky 79). Bruhm, in fact, explores *Ghost Story* as “an archetypal narcissistic narrative” (146) that, among other things is “about storytelling” and, particularly, “the generating of narratives” (*Narcissus* 145) that are self-reflective in nature, as well as being “typical of America generally” (148). Kristeva points to this Narcissistic quality as a major factor in the “power of horror,” since “what is called ‘narcissim,’ without always or necessarily being conservative, becomes the unleashing of drive, as such, without object, threatening all identity, including that of the subject itself. We are then in the presence of psychosis” (44). Her theory is borne out in *Ghost Story* wherein The Chowder Society strikes out aggressively at the object of fear while expressing grave doubt (and simultaneously signifying awareness) about the complete “otherness” of the ghost they seek to kill. What they suspect is that they have created her by killing her, and by reviving herself she is killing them. But it is all for nought, perhaps, as The Chowder Society is already dying, maybe even dead, too much in love with the images and stories of themselves to the exclusion of all others.

3.2.2.3 Don Wanderley

Postmodern theorists such as Haraway and Jameson claim that nostalgia is a passé emotional connection with a common, binding origin story that was fictional to begin with, and yet Straub uses horror author Don Wanderley to express a commonality of experience, a love for the sanctity of humanity by virtue of a single unifying trait: mortality. In truth, Don represents, if anything, the lack of meaning inherent in humanity; his gradual loss of innocence is replaced by a nostalgia for something he comes to wholly mistrust. No character in the novel undergoes such a radical removal from reality as Don, who finds himself “wandering,” as his name suggests, and

without a fixed center.⁴⁷ Even in his academic days, just prior to his affair with Alma Mobley (Eva Galli in another form), he is a novelist somewhat out of his element as a visiting lecturer in American literature. With the disintegration of his relationship with Alma—who has a friend named Gregory (the same one Sears James had known to be the living dead a couple decades earlier)—followed by the mysterious death of his brother, David, who is engaged to Alma, and the subsequent loss of his job and academic credibility, Don finds himself summoned by the Chowder Society. To both Milburn and the Society, he is an outsider. By the end of the novel, he leaves Milburn—the newer, more mobile, far-reaching branch of the Chowder Society—that no longer just tells ghost stories but actively pursues the destruction of its subject. Having waited for Eva Galli/Alma Mobley to reappear, Don finally encounters her in the form of a nine-year old girl with no apparent connections. After several days of watching her, he kidnaps her, and together they travel through the backroads of the American South: a shadowy older man and a beguiling young girl, in a scenario just as creepy and taboo as it sounds. His intention is to kill her and, seemingly, he is successful. But such assurance seems elusive even then, for she shape-shifts into a wasp, which he tries to crush and drown but finds difficult to grasp, and, ultimately, she seems to vanish; no “security” guard can save him or us from the encroaching, invisible future.

As signified by the inclusion of a horror novelist among its characters, Straub concerns himself with the notion that an author can create ghosts simply by writing about them, acting as a veritable midwife by bringing them into the world. On the suggestion that “events in this town are occurrences from an unwritten book,” one character suggests, “That’s sheer poppycock” (288).

⁴⁷ His name also bears striking similarity to “Don Juan,” the legendary “free-thinking nobleman, who seduced women recklessly and dared to insult the dead before finally being condemned to hell” (Lisa Kramer Reichel, *Don Juan: A Modern Myth*, <<http://www.clevelandopera.org/tour/educational/dongiov/donjuan.html>>. Considering his trysts (another kind of wandering) while a visiting lecturer, as well as his hellish fate, the name is doubly appropriate.

Nonetheless, Straub raises that particular ghost and, therefore, the possibility will not easily go away, if at all. Ricky says of the ghosts,

“we invoked them. We by our stories, Don in his book and in his imagination. We see things, but we don’t believe them; we feel things—people watching us, sinister things following us—but we dismiss them as fantasies. We dream horror, but try to forget them. And in the meantime, three people have died.” (289)

With this bit of self-reference Straub implies that we are our own ghosts, for who better to know what we fear than ourselves? Furthermore, while Sears regards Fenny Bates as his intellectual inferior for not believing in things for which he has seen no proof (58), the entire Chowder Society seems incapable of believing that which they have seen; three people have died at the hands of a creature that is first imagined, and perhaps thereby conjured, as befitting Clemens’ “return of the repressed” concept. In fact, Milly Sheehan confronts them with the materiality of their own stories, and, with Stella rushing in “too late to stop her,” she accuses them of killing John Jaffrey through their “terrible stories” (181). After a year of telling ghoulish stories, the Society has become “Murder Incorporated,” now having murdered one of their own, or so she believes.

The ghost story reinforces the double myth of individuation and healing (or healing through individuation, really) for the narrator, as Don remembers how the telling of his own history has resurrected him once already and brought him to Milburn and the Chowder Society: “Only writing had brought him back up unto the world; only writing about *it*, the horrid complicated mess of himself and Alma and David, writing about it as a ghost story, had released him from it” (26). Like Sears, Don has his own version of the ghost that is Eva Galli from the past; she is Alma Mobley, a student in his American literature class, in which he teaches Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* and a novel by Henry James, among others. He and Alma embark on a sexual and

emotional affair, which ends badly; Alma leaves and, several weeks later, Don finds out that she is engaged to be married to his brother, David. Not long after, David turns up dead, and Don suspects Alma of destroying his brother in order to wreak revenge on Don himself. The Chowder Society calls him in because he is an “expert” (183) in the supernatural, but also because he is the nephew of their lost member, Edward Wanderley. In effect, he represents the new Chowder Society, as well as its metamorphosis; through the dying and aging of founding members, and the introduction of new ones, the society has become a bit of a shape-shifter itself. Before that, however, Don bases his “fictional” characters on his memories of Alma Mobley, no different from Sears’s story about Gregory and Fenny, or Ricky’s tale about Eva.

The novel begins, and ends, with a parody of the Great American Road Trip, with the question “what is it?” forming the basis of a search for the supposedly lost self that likely never existed. Don is travelling south on the “anonymous freeways,” with a “sameness” that “both comfort[s] and stimulate[s] him” (11). His companion is a nine-year-old girl whom we later discover is the reincarnation of Alma Mobley. As in *Beloved*—wherein the title character represents a return of the repressed; a ghost in human form—a child that does not behave as a child provides the mirror into which the protagonist gazes. In her visage, Don supposedly sees himself, the things he has done and lived through, and what he must do, though really she is a blank slate upon which he casts his own thoughts. He also catches glimpses of an alternate America—the kind in which he might be perceived as some sort of American Southern Gothic killer, chaos on wheels, a child molester, keeping to the “anonymous freeways which were like a separate country,” even though he perceives himself differently. This is America and not-America, but it is all included in the label “America,” both halves of the binary opposite; similarly, this is Don and not-Don; child and not-child; ghost and not-ghost, all wrapped up in one label, one image. When Don

asks her to define herself, the girl says, “I am you.” Forced to look inward, Don sees the past, as well as another identity, as (not for the last time) he confuses himself for his brother, as if the boundary between them rates no consideration, perhaps because they bear the same blood and have loved the same woman (Alma Mobley). This glimpse of “reality” or some possible truth is “the most dreadful thing” he can imagine: that there is no other and therefore no self. It is no surprise, then, that not only has the ghost killed his brother, but that David turns up as a ghost himself to haunt Don. Given Don’s inability to distinguish between himself and his brother at times, as well as Alma’s insistence that she “is” Don, all details of individuation, or distinction, become seen as variable, and reality is exposed as a fairy tale. That is what this ghost-girl means to him: the loss of a belief in truth, a fixed centre, and an impermeable past, present, and future.

Don is distinguished by his quest for truth and normalization of the ghost, as well as his love of the human, but he also self-reflexively exhibits the writer’s sensibility inherent. His “reporter’s” cynical sensibility towards ghosts and devotion to truth lend credibility to his discovery and belief that the ghost is real. The ghostly experience has fully disrupted, if not exploded Don’s entire world. His knowledge of the truth—*his* truth, that ghosts exist and are watching us—means that nothing is, was, or ever will be certain. Just before supposedly destroying the ghost-wasp, Don experiences “a wave of love for everything mortal, for everything with a brief *definite* life span—a tenderness for all that could give birth and would die, everything that could live, like these men, in sunshine” (507). His encounter with the immortal has rendered him nostalgic for that which is human, including boundaries and limits. He is a natural for membership in the Chowder Society, for he thinks of this nostalgia as a “sacred emotion,” a feeling of kinship with “dear humankind” (507). He is a wanderer through the American landscape, self-

exiled by his recognition of a ghost, ready to settle and call just about anywhere that seems safe “home.”

Don also reminds us of the function of stories, of just how real and present in the “outside” world they can be. He points out that there is a difference between his novels and the real world in that, in *The Nightwatcher* “everything was solved; in life nothing came out even and nothing was solved” (191). With that rumination, Straub himself is gently shaking the reader by the shoulder, reminding him/her that *Ghost Story* is a novel, but it is no *Nightwatcher*. Don’s novels might work out fine in the end, but Straub tells us that he (both Straub and Don) is keenly aware of such trickery in novels. Ultimately, then, it is no surprise that nothing comes out “even” or solved at the end of Straub’s novel. Straub could be seen as pulling off some trickery of his own, pulling the reader into the story by thinning the text’s boundaries and showing them as illusions; but he might also be seen simply as telling it as it is. Perhaps, trickery is truth and vice-versa. Either way, the text has become about the text, showing that stories and ghosts do not confine themselves to the text and calling into the question the very nature of “text” and whether it has any borders other than its ghostly ones.

Therein lies the difference in this new breed of Chowder men: Don already knows there are ghosts and, because of it, he is destabilized; for him, there is no Milburn and, thus, no stable reality. There is only open road and perpetual chaos. As a writer, Don’s imagination transgresses boundaries, as does all fiction, and, particularly, ghost fiction. He even experiences his fictional character, Dr. Rabbitfoot, side by side and “face to face” with Alma Mobley, his ghostly nemesis and other, who has come to life, representing complete chaos. Rabbitfoot authoritatively tells him, “our way. That’s the only way you got” (503), which would seem to be an attempt to override other perspectives, rules, ways of conducting oneself, very much in keeping with the Chowder

Society's self-perceived mandate, at least according to outsiders such as Freddy Robinson and even in the way in which they set rules for themselves, as well as the nature of their social and professional positions. While Rabbitfoot may be Don's creation, he is very much the antithesis of the Society as well as its specular image, for chaos is itself a rule, while rules invite chaos. Don's salvation—and presumably that of humankind—is in understanding that there are *many* other ways, including Rabbitfoot's: a version of reality that is rather Gothic in its multi-faceted sensibility.

Ultimately, Don has encountered a reality that will not be vanquished simply by wishing it away now that it has received life in an eternal form by virtue of its having been named. ““That thing ain't *ever* gonna give up the ghost,”” the guard tells him as they watch the wasp's pieces roll around in the sand, (506) implying that “the ghost” (like the one in *The Shining*) is persistent and ever-present no matter how far away, or how fragmented, it might seem to be. There is difficulty in discerning the difference between dreams and reality, film and reality, ghosts and reality. Don wonders: “Could you talk to the people you met in hallucinations, and would they answer back?” (18). By virtue of their utterance, such questions invoke, sustain, and acknowledge the naturally chaotic state of one who knows what he does: that ghosts surround us, that the past is a ghost, that we all are becoming ghosts.

As a horror author, Don's presence signifies a nod to Straub's own spirit-lineage and acknowledges that the ghost always is us and we always are the ghost, each haunted by our particular fear and desires, separated by our skins and labels. Don remembers a particularly vivid image of Alma, “looking out of a black window and pronouncing words he only now understands: ‘You are a ghost.’ You, Donald. You. It was the unhappy perception at the center of every ghost story” (383). While Don's realization is startlingly lucid for a man merely watching his girlfriend peer out a window, the assertion that self-reflexiveness lies at the heart of “every ghost story”

reveals much about Straub's agenda. Becoming evermore ghostly himself, it does not matter to Don what state he *is* in, only what state he thinks he is in, similar to the war doctor, Gamini, in *Anil's Ghost*. Time and space are borderless as he drives onward, changing landscapes against a backdrop of sameness, pushing the illusion that as long as you did not question the superficial details of your surroundings, wherever you went in America you were home: "He was no longer sure what state he was in, South Carolina or Georgia: it was as though these states were fluid, as if they—and all the rest of them—could leak over into one another, pushing forward like the highways" (16). Driving south for hours, "through the songs and rhythms of country music," everything is "banal," with "no phrase that was not a cliché," while the child remained "satisfied and passive, dozing off to Willie Nelson and waking up to Loretta Lynn, and the man just drove, distracted by this endless soap opera of America's bottom dogs" (14-15). They eat at McDonald's and at root beer stands (11), sleep in fabricated, nostalgic "Pioneer Villages" (11), rest in empty parking lots of square brick factories, particularly one which "manufactured plastic animal replicas for display—for Golden Chicken trucks," and he drove, "knowing that a drive-in was never more than ten or twenty miles away," where they could gnaw at their hamburgers or chili dogs (11). The purposeless journey through a bleak, meaningless landscape is mindful of a Flannery O'Connor story like "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," for it is a side of America that requires an effort—a destabilization and a journey into the known unknown that is the American South. It also feels like Eleanor Vance's journey at the beginning of *Hill House* ("journeys end in lovers meeting") or the Torrance family's drive up into the mountains of Colorado. It is an escape from one home in an attempt to find another (but finding an other), not merely destabilizing in itself, but a sign of the always-already destabilized and perpetual homelessness. But leaving might only be a returning when the landscape is built to all look alike and every journey feels like a re-discovery of a lost

origin story or personal, constructed history. Entering “the Friendliest City in the South,” they find that “it look[s] like any southern town” (18), a cliché at every turn, down every road a few miles. In a sense, they have found that “every other looks like every other other,” as Castle says.

3.2.3 Summary

Largely ignored by literary critics until recently, the publication of *Ghost Story* in 1979 marks a significant shift in the depictions of ghosts in literature. Straub’s self-proclaimed attempt to write a “literary” ghost story that pays homage to a Gothic lineage has produced a relatively new kind of ghost and ghost narrative. First, by his pastiche of sampled Gothic authors and styles, Straub creates a new sort of super-ghost, which is not only “evil” in its intention towards humanity, but is also quite specific and specular in its manner of haunting. In fact, its “evil” might even be seen as a “good,” from the ghost’s perspective, just as Straub’s homage, or pastiche, might be seen as copying. In essence, both Straub’s method and the ghost’s are beyond matters of “good” and “evil”; in the spirit of postmodernism, intentions are beside the point. Straub adds to the genre of the ghost tale by combining tales with which he, and presumably his reader, are already familiar.

Straub also contributes to the ghost genre by presenting a ghost that is more than just a ghost: a “shape-shifter” that takes on the identity and properties that the beholder would expect. To the Chowder Society, the ghost is Eva Galli, spirit of the return, repressed past: a “worst thing” that has never truly died and, thus, retains the ability to consume the Society from within. To individual members of the Society, the ghost appears in slightly different form, with slightly different connotations: to Ricky Hawthorne, she is the end of a “golden” age of youthful innocence (one which never truly existed except in concept); to Sears James, she is the inevitable return of the repressed that was only half-buried, but never forgotten; and, to Don Wanderley, she is the

story of the self (just as she is to the Chowder Society), the narrative that he has been telling and will tell infinitely, perhaps. To each of them, she is a “worst thing,” the destabilization that they most fear, a horrific episode being replayed in the present. To Milburn’s citizens, generally, the ghost is largely unknown until she arrives in the form of Anna Mostyn and begins to transform their calm haven into chaos incarnate.

Ultimately, Eva Galli is the spirit of perpetual change, renewal, and destruction. She seeks revenge, certainly, but mostly she comes to play: to disturb the comfortable by her presence, by pushing the proverbial buttons that she knows will set off psychological bombs in the minds of those who have been sitting on them for years. Eva merely lights the fuse of an explosive device that has already been built. Straub, meanwhile, sheds light on just how many weapons of self-destruction we have built, and buried, over the centuries. *Ghost Story* not only takes stock of them, but tells us where they are. They are everywhere.

Chapter 4:

Nothing to Fear: The Everyday Ghost of *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988) demonstrates a deepening diminution of the moment of hesitation as the confusion about what to call the spectre quickly gives way to normalization. The ghost of *Beloved* is made material in the text, and the phantom, though retaining its difference, is promptly incorporated into human culture despite its penchant for bringing reality into question simply by its presence, as well as through its absence. The moment of hesitation is shorter than in previous ghost novels discussed in this thesis because of a general acceptance that, within the spectral space, "the law is mad" (Derrida 81), that anarchy rules, that boundaries are negotiable, that reality is a naturalized narrative. Spectral spaces like 124 thus become examples of the postmodern space: the new reality marked by variable rules, revised and multiple narratives, a flattened continuum of past and present, a serious sense of play, and a playful approach to the serious. *Beloved* illustrates this new reality, using a Gothic trope within a "literary" narrative, transcending the usual demarcations of genre, refusing labels of either Gothic or literary, while inviting both. As Edwards points out, Morrison shows "daring indifference to the rules of realistic fiction" in her portrayal of a "historyless young woman" who is "unquestionably the dead daughter's spirit in human form" (80). Blurring genres and calling into question the concepts of history and reality, *Beloved* exemplifies the advancing difficulty inherent in the act of nomination.

In *Beloved*, the newly-realized, malleable reality of a transformed space signifies an amendment to what was once perceived as solid, real, truthful, or normal. Within the enchanted space of 124, the rules appear to differ from those of the outside world since, in this new, postmodern space, ghosts are normal. Humans and ghosts hold each other's hands, converse freely, and choke one another with "real" hands upon "real" necks. What sets *Beloved* apart from

earlier ghost novels is that its phantom is indisputably material to the characters and able to interact with humans on the same plane. In a postmodern space, boundaries are increasingly recognized as fictions that no longer necessarily describe either a collective or individual experience. There is virtually no hesitation about whether one beholds a ghost or not; it is nominated, accepted, and normalized almost instantly, despite the fact that the spirit looks, feels, and speaks exactly like us and yet is somehow different. The main deviation from previous ghosts is in what this newer spirit signifies: not just difference, but sameness as well, and a certain self-referentiality regarding the nature of texts and history. But signification might not be a dividing line either, considering that what it wants from us is usually the same thing we want from it: individuation and self-explanation, but sometimes just play for its own sake.

In *Beloved*, a young and pregnant slave woman has run away from the Sweet Home slave plantation in Kentucky after she has been horribly whipped and dehumanized by the slave master, Schoolteacher. En route to her new home at 124 Bluestone Road where her mother-in-law (Baby Suggs) waits for her, she is discovered by a young white woman (Amy) who helps deliver Sethe's baby in the woods. 124 Bluestone Road is a stop on the Underground Railroad, and after she reaches there, Sethe has a blessed twenty-eight days of freedom before Schoolteacher comes to retrieve her and the children. Desperate to spare her children from a life of slavery, she attempts to kill them all, but succeeds in killing only one, a baby, by slashing her throat. Sethe is imprisoned, along with her daughter, Denver, and Schoolteacher gives her up as "damaged." Upon her release, however, Sethe finds that 124 is haunted by a noisy "baby ghost."

As the story opens, a man from Sethe's Sweet Home days, Paul D—the only one left besides her—turns up after many years and tries to kindle a romance with her. He drives the ghost away, but it soon returns in the form of a beautiful young woman who has simply stepped out of

the river. Assuming the name “Beloved,” she proceeds to ask questions about Sethe and that day in the yard, raising images that Sethe has never spoken about to anyone. Paul D, similarly, conjures memories of Sweet Home and slavery that she would rather forget, but Beloved eventually scares him off for a while. Denver, meanwhile, has grown up and is restless to throw off the shackles of the past and the haunted house and begin life anew. In the end, Denver manages to get a new job and also bring the whole community together to help banish the ghost.

Ghosts and humans share a common agenda of salvation and transcendence in *Beloved*. As a postmodern construct, the relationship between ghost and human is accentuated by mutual craving and mutual fear as the one recognizes a commonality with the other. In such novels, “a visitation from the other world which might be terrifying in its otherness, finally reveals not distance and strangeness but closeness and familiarity” (Leder 28), as ghost and human feed (from) one another, drinking from different sides of the same narrative bowl. Despite their autonomy, ghosts are also our constructs, reflecting our needs, our wishes for ourselves; they signify, as well, human fears of dying and/or existing in limbo. The sight or mention of ghosts casts us in our own sort of purgatory, or permanent hesitation about what to call ourselves rather than merely what to call others. Traditionally, phantasms have been seen as hesitation incarnate, as entities in limbo, needing us either to keep them connected or to sever them from the earth. But that which is perceived initially by Sethe as other is actually a part of her personal narrative (as she is a part of Beloved’s narrative) and the slave culture in which she has been raised, liberated and enslaved again; at 124, she is enslaved as much by her reality myth as by any external entity. What Sethe really fears is the unknown, her inability to move on after a trauma, unsure of the nature of death. To the ghost, death is just another lifetime, a lateral shift from the previously-known to the newly-

known, territory discovered by the human characters via the phantom that appears and renders the space spectral, its old narratives in need of revision and re-telling.

While written in a “realistic,” or literary, style and not strictly Gothic, *Beloved* fits the criteria for postmodern Gothic which is increasingly “marked by a doubleness of space created violently by the destruction of boundaries” (Halberstam 27). A new narrative is layered upon the old one at 124, where the ghost of a young woman supplants the ghost of a baby and yet is at once human and ghost, present and past. Because of historical conditioning, Halberstam says, we still point out monsters, but are more inclined to search for similarities as well as differences (27). The ghost in *Beloved* signifies that our monsters emanate from a fake struggle over a power that is not even real; we create a phantom “menace” (Baudrillard 19) to conceal the fantastical nature of our self-constructs. The deception, as Baudrillard indicates, “is no longer possible,” for neither the self, the battle, nor the reality is authentic, but simulated. Traditional Gothic, such as Radcliffe’s and Poe’s (while different from each other) depict a power struggle between opposing entities over a solid territory. Postmodern Gothic, however, nods to the falseness of the oppositional stance, more often telling us to “move on” or to “lay it all down.” While something of a mystery in *Beloved*, the ghost is not other. She is not fearsome or evil like the phantoms of *Ghost Story*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” or “Ligeia,” but a hungry ghost in search of the narrative that will explain herself to herself. When those older ghosts “unmask,” we can see that; but in the newer gothicised tales, like *Beloved* or *Shoeless Joe* (1982), unmasking is often unnecessary. There is still the moment of “revealing” when *Beloved* is seen fully to be the return of the dead baby, but the revelation is anti-climatic. The question all along has not been “what is it?” but “what does it want?” and “how does it perform?” and “how does this affect what I am?” Even the responses to these questions are foregone conclusions; increasingly, the ghost is both

utterance and response (the question that answers a question), emanating as much from the beholder as from the phantom, as the line between real and imaginary exists only in ghostly form.

The dispossessed in *Beloved* are, indeed, possessed in multiple ways, emphasizing inclusion and normalization above estrangement, a new kind of “possession” that invites society into a previously alienated space. The ghost that arises from the infanticidal act assumes control of the house formerly belonging to Sethe, Denver, and mother-in-law Baby Suggs, and is the spirit of a baby murdered by her mother in order to keep it from the clutches of the white schoolmaster, slave law incarnate. Into the daily routine of 124, *Beloved* invokes a normalcy that destabilizes Sethe’s and Denver’s established notions of reality and self. The past rises up from the presumed dead to assume material form, offering both protagonists a new way to read themselves and history. But, with such powers of inclusion and self-understanding, as well as by its newfound physicality, it is the ghost whose configuration has changed most dramatically.

The ghostly presence at 124 represents a sort of chaotic realm in which rules are arbitrary, subject to change and interpretation. As a result, boundaries between the natural and supernatural, self and other, one space and another, are weakened or reconfigured. The phantom of *Beloved* is both natural and supernatural within the setting of 124, but she also transgresses boundaries of time and space, originating at the time of a traumatic event eighteen years earlier, dead and yet living, growing and maturing, and existing in the present. *Beloved* is both child and woman, death and life, hated and beloved, other and self; and, as many critics point out, she is also the ghost of slaves and slavery. Nonetheless, the female ghost espouses an inclusiveness that runs counter to the autonomy that Sethe and Denver have long accepted as their necessary condition as exiled authors of the narrative of self. By their presence, *Beloved* indicates the naturalized quality that such self-

constructs signify, disrupting foundational notions of otherness, and revealing history to be as malleable as the self.

In the spectral space, where ghosts dwell alongside humans, normal is not what we might think. Beloved returns from death (the nature of which is murky, since she does not remain there), has aged, occupies the house of the living, befriends her mother and sister, seduces the male visitant Paul D, and dominates her mother. At 124, death plays tyrant as the “rememory” of past transgressions renders Sethe captive to herself until the next generation (represented by her daughter, Denver) throws off the oppressor and seeks freedom, without the imaginary shackles of guilt and oppression. Having crossed that boundary into the unknown realm, there is, for her, no more other—only that which is not yet discovered by oneself. Beloved has become humanized while retaining her Gothic self, while Sethe and Denver become gothicised and see Beloved for what she is. Their relationships signify a normalization of the ghost through words and actions, with the self being merely an other in waiting, each further transgression announcing a new normal. Presenting phantoms on the same plane as humans, Morrison offers a freed-slave narrative, redressing the dominant historical record of official American history and literature. *Beloved* also depicts the ghost as a figure whose meanings are multiple, for each character experiences Beloved in different ways, with little hesitation regarding her veracity. In this way, new narratives are layered upon old ones, creating a revitalized sense of self and history.

4.1 Without Hesitation

Although set in the late nineteenth-century American South, *Beloved* exemplifies ghost literature of the postmodern age wherein history is under constant scrutiny. Beloved’s very presence, as well as the absence that both precedes and ensues her materiality, poses a challenge to

spatial, temporal, moral, and legal boundaries, as well as notions of self. Beloved is chaos incarnate, exploiting and exploding unstable constructs, revealing their precariousness while her meaning is at once obvious and elusive. Her signification seems indisputable to some, but she has so many potential meanings that hers is diffused and ungraspable, perhaps non-existent and illusionary. Darling notes, "Morrison asks us to recognize that death is an event along an individual and communal continuum...[and] is an integral part of living consciousness in African religious understanding. And in *Beloved* we are close to Death" (87). For Sethe, infanticide and slavery take on a body and spirit that wholly consume her and cause a realignment of her personal construct. To Denver, Beloved is a sister who exists solely for her and provides her with an identity and a narrative of her own. To Paul D, the ghost is an antagonistic female other. For Stamp Paid, this new girl shuts doors between him and the residents of 124; he sees her as "other" because of his narrow notions of uprightness. Finally, all along Bluestone Road, Beloved is the flesh-and-blood return of a trauma that has haunted them for eighteen years. People on Bluestone talk about the inhabitants of that house as if they were other, but the ghost overflows its boundaries, for all—the residents of 124, the entire community on Bluestone Road, both the black and white races, and the American nation—are infected by a traumatic past that originates in the slave economy. For blacks, that history includes the repressed shame of having been subjugated and owned; for whites, it is the shame of having perpetuated, tolerated or been a part of such a history.

There has been some debate, though not much, over whether Beloved is a "real" ghost or not. There are numerous and varied interpretations of Beloved, as Solomon states, and it might be best simply to concede the "value of widely differing perceptions" of this "multi-faceted" novel (22). Most critics agree that Morrison does not present Beloved in an ambiguous Jamesian sort of way, for Beloved might be seen as either strictly human or strictly ghost, but she is truly both.

Horvitz highlights Beloved's multiple nature, as well as the fact that she not only resists polarizing, but actually blurs boundaries between traditional binary opposites. That she is "symbolic," as Horvitz argues (93), seems beyond doubt, but Morrison does not

use Beloved as a symbol in a way that either traps the reader in polemics or detaches one from the character who is [multi-dimensional].... Nor is Beloved so universalized that her many meanings lose specificity.... Beloved is the haunting presence who becomes the spirit of the women from the other side. As Sethe's mother she comes from the geographic other side of the world, Africa; as Sethe's daughter, she comes from the physical other side of life, death. (Horvitz 93-4)

Like others, Horvitz asserts that there is a "fluidity of identity among Sethe's mother, Sethe's grandmother, and the murdered two-year-old, so that Beloved is both an individual and a collective being" (100). Heinze likewise sees Beloved as "unambiguous" in her supernatural quality as "a memory come to life" and even "Sethe's alter-ego." In fact, she is a trinity and a resurrection: a multi-dimensional entity with many possible significations, the religious or spiritual among them.⁴⁸

Most critics argue for both the supernatural and human qualities of the ghost because, given the multiplicity and transgressional qualities of Beloved, Morrison clearly invites interpretation. Nonetheless, House sees her as "not a supernatural being of any kind but simply a young woman" (117) who happens to have escaped from an abusive situation at a nearby estate, stumbled her way out of the river and onto 124—a report insinuated by Stamp Paid at one point. Despite the fact that neither Morrison nor her characters (including Stamp) are able, or willing, to pin Beloved down as *one* thing—particularly a solid, human entity—House does exactly that. Her arguments are compelling and poignant, but they also limit Beloved. For example, she posits that "the scar under

⁴⁸ Although further discussion of religious imagery in *Beloved* is superfluous to my purposes here, Rodrigues does elaborate on the subject.

Beloved's chin could be explained by such an owner's ill-treatment of her" (120). This dubious attempt at humanizing the ghost assigns her a history that is nothing but cloudy. She has unblemished "new skin" when she first appears, House asserts, because she has been locked away by a white man for a long time (120); and so, presumably, House means that Beloved's skin overall would be spared, without blemish, while only her throat would be scarred from "abuse"—coincidentally the same sort of scar that the dead baby would bear from having her throat slashed. The girl just happens to have the same wound, just happens to call herself "Beloved" after the writing on the tombstone where the baby is buried, just happens to want Sethe to tell her stories about herself, and so on. There are many other holes in House's argument for Beloved's "not-ghost" status, but one other stands out particularly when she interprets the word "beloved" in the biblical epigraph; she confines the reference to include only the ghost, Beloved: "'I will call...her beloved, which was not beloved,' suggest[s] that the mysterious girl is not really Sethe's murdered daughter." But she leaves out the rest of the allusion, which continues, "I will call them my people which were not my people" (Romans 9:25). The word "beloved" relates to so many and so much in this novel that it is remiss to focus solely on this girl's blood-tie (or lack thereof) to Sethe as the reason for Morrison's epigraph, particularly when she also dedicates the book to the "Sixty Million and More" (Clemons, "Sixty" 46). Meanwhile, Morrison does call *Beloved* a "ghost story" and Beloved a "ghost," suggesting that a) Beloved might be a ghost and b) it does not matter what she is so much as what she means—and what she "means" is multiple and ungraspable: "more" (Morrison 266). Whether human or ghost, or both, she carries some similar and some different significations for each beholder. House chooses, of all characters, to believe in Stamp Paid's surmising, but even Stamp professes a belief in ghosts while hesitating to say she is one. Literary

characters, like critics and general readers, will see significations where they will—as Ella will see ghosts “everywhere” (187) because she is bent that way. House seems bent on not seeing them.

With general acceptance that *Beloved* is a ghost, or a ghost-human hybrid, most critics skip the hesitation and simply look for clues as to her origins and purpose; but they also concede the human quality of the visitant. This dual citizenship, as it were, in the countries of both ghost and human allows the character to become more than simply one or the other, as she signifies much while retaining her specificity. Atwood describes *Beloved* as a “ghost story” featuring a “sad, malicious and angry ghost” (“Haunted” 39); since all the main characters believe in ghosts, she says, “it’s merely natural for this one to be there.” Darling calls *Beloved* a “spirit or ‘haint’” which “hints at some unfinished business around personal justice” while also in search of “kindness and love denied throughout years of suffering” (84). As Darling asserts, we “feel the baby’s spirit urging us to ask: Do good intentions and destructive acts amount to injustice?” (86). But Morrison does not answer that question; she merely asks it—to open what has been closed, to “suture”⁴⁹ what has been scarred, to add an asterisk to the judgment and to throw a little doubt into the court of public opinion. As Darling suggests, the author seems mostly to make readers ask themselves not only what they would have done, but what they *could* have done under such circumstances as Sethe’s. Furthermore, she demands, what could you live with? Such perpetual questioning opens up the text, offering no easy answers, but certainly providing some Gothic ones that inevitably give rise to more questions. The text, in a very real sense, becomes a question.

As an open text in the form of a ghost, *Beloved* is more than the sum of her parts and more than just a ghost or a human; she crosses all boundaries of time and space through decades and generations, across oceans, through lives and deaths. But, mostly, as Snitow sums up, she is

⁴⁹ A word borrowed for my own purposes from semiotics, generally, and, specifically, from Solomon’s discussion of Andrew Schopp’s article (Solomon 10).

“memory” incarnate: “The return of the dreadful past” (49). She concludes that “Morrison blurs the distinctions” between “symbolic thinking” and “magical thinking” in making Beloved a “flesh-and-bone character” who is also a metaphor. Clemons, in pointing to Denver’s admission that Beloved was “more” than a sister at times, argues that Beloved recalls passage on a slave ship, “which Sethe’s murdered baby could not have. Though Sethe and Denver have accepted Beloved as the reincarnation of the dead baby, grown up into a young woman with a baby’s insatiable demands...Beloved is also a ghost from the slave ships of Sethe’s ancestry” (“Gravestone” 45). Clemons and others make this connection mainly because Morrison herself does. The dedication to the “Sixty Million and More” is her “best educated guess at the number of black Africans who never even made it into slavery—those who died either as captives in Africa or on slave ships” (46). And so the author states that Beloved represents more than simply the ghost of a dead baby; she is also the ghosts of many dead and of slavery itself.

One could argue that the symbolic quality that attends to Beloved is true of nearly every “flesh-and-bone” character in literature, from Hamlet (or his father’s ghost) to Holden Caulfield (or his ghostly dead brother). Nonetheless, Morrison does blur such lines, choosing a ghost-made-human to represent a crossing of boundaries and the ensuing confusion about the validity of labels or narratives of otherness and alienation. In such a novel, simply calling something “ghost” or “human,” “black” or “white,” “self” or “other” is to place expectations of behavior upon it which might not be obeyed for long, if ever. “I decided she would be two things,” says Morrison. “For the characters in the book, she would be the character returned. I decided for the reader she would be a real person, a real character with a life elsewhere. But their desires mesh. Her needs blend with theirs” (Kastor 55-6). Claiming that the figure is unique in American fiction, Brown says, “Beloved is a ghost and yet she has a body; she has fears, which we see from within. But she also

has needs too voracious to be borne" (60). Even Crouch, who accuses Morrison's novel of attempting to "enter slavery into the big-time martyr ratings contests" and being "designed to placate sentimental feminist ideology" readily concurs that *Beloved* is, indeed, a "house ghost" who is "the reincarnated force of the malevolent ghost that was chased from the house" (71).

Edwards also points to *Beloved*'s solidity and human-like vulnerability, suggesting that the ghost is "partly humanized"—a testament to how Morrison tests such boundaries, as this chapter similarly argues that the human characters are partly dehumanized and made more ghostly (80). As Heinze says, "the mystery or enigma in the novel does not reside in the origin of the ghostly presence but in the purpose of its manifestation" (206). Wyatt likewise agrees that *Beloved* is both unique and multiple, both personal and public, both present and past, and even deeper past, for

on the personal level, *Beloved* is the nursing baby that Sethe killed. But in the social dimension that always doubles the personal in *Beloved*, the ghost represents—as the generic name *Beloved* suggests—all the loved ones lost through slavery. (218)

It seems impossible and unnecessary, even wasteful and neglectful to limit the identity of an entity (or text) which potentially signifies so much, for her body and soul expand to encompass a universe and simultaneously dissolve into air with attempts to grasp her identity and source.

Since *Beloved* challenges foundational truths and boundaries of all kinds, the fact that *Beloved* is a female ghost in a female-dominated narrative is also a matter for discussion among critics. Harris interprets *Beloved* as a feminist symbol—an other. Similar to one argument of this thesis chapter, Harris sees an underlying "basic clash" between genders in *Beloved*, "those who have power and voice" versus "those who are acquiescent and silent but potentially destructive" (127). Like Cixous, Harris takes the female body to be represented in the novel as "a source of fear, both an attraction and a repulsion" (128), all of which amounts to a ghost with multiple

identities and significations, standing on the bounding line between binary opposites, confounding the observer's attempts to choose between them while Morrison herself "has drawn no final lines between the planes of life and death" (129). Bernard Bell calls *Beloved* a "womanist neo-slave narrative of double consciousness, a postmodern romance that speaks in many compelling voices and on several time levels of the historical rape of black American women and of the resilient black spirit of blacks in surviving as a people" (68). Rigney equates the "black feminine discourse" of *Beloved* with a language of chaos, in the sense that

there are no polarities between logic and mysticism, between real and fantastic. Rather, experience for Morrison's characters is the acceptance of a continuum, as recognition that the mind is not separate from the body nor the real separate from that which the imagination can conceive. ("Breaking" 12)

The ghost, in fact, is chaos incarnate, disrupting, even "reversing" our normal expectations of time, space, and even the dead, death being just another grand narrative. As Solomon emphasizes, "to write history as ghost story, to cast the past as a longing for *us*...is to inscribe a reversal of desire that informs this text's structure—and the structure of all ghost tales—on a deep level" (24). This thesis goes further and suggests that ghosts and humans long for and need each other, to explain themselves to the point of obfuscating most, if not all, distinctions of otherness. Similarly, Schapiro argues for not just a "fluidity of boundaries," but an "utter breakdown of the border between self and other" (27). If we want the same things, come from similar origins (humanity), fear the same things, and share a common, if shaky, narrative, that might well be sufficient basis for sameness and binariness, despite differences. It is not just grief and loss that bind ghosts to humans and vice versa. Desire, need, and fear bind them as well, nearly dissolving the fictional line that both separates and connects them.

While slavery and ghosts are potentially more powerful when they create fear in their (potential) victims, the strength of these creaking monstrosities dissipates when they become shared narratives, and therein lies one of the main themes of *Beloved*: the possibility, and perhaps the necessity, of transcendence through confronting and “forgetting” the past while holding firmly with the present. The ghost in the novel is a returned narrative that must not be told and yet must be told, having been repressed and mostly forgotten, except in a minimal form. Its return signifies the potential for unification among African-Americans along certain narrative lines, both within *Beloved* and beyond it. *Beloved* is a ghost story that lies dormant until disturbed and then threatens to overturn the dominant narrative, consume it, and choke history until it no longer can breathe or move. We can become so unsure, or so sure, of the “real” story as to throw our hands in the air and surrender—in either case, history will run us over.

All of these individual narratives, or “isolated stories,” as Ledbetter calls them, are re-connected through *Beloved*; literally (and ironically, too, since she is also quite divisive by her presence and absence), *Beloved* is the unifying force of the novel and, thematically and functionally, the ghost is where the stories intersect, as each character’s fears, desires and aspirations find body. Ledbetter observes that each story lays claim “to what it means to be black and/or woman in a white and male world. There is power in the stories’ isolation” (80) as they are “connected by ‘rememory,’ the word Sethe uses to describe ‘the things that never die’” (81). Malmgren describes it as “a novel that straddles generic forms,” an “unusually hybridized text—part ghost story, part historical novel, part slave narrative, part love story.” The ghost requires suspension of disbelief, history requires respect for “reality,” while the slave narrative is “the thematic glue that unifies the multifaceted text” (96). She is right, for *Beloved* is, in part, the ghost of slavery; if she is the unifying center, then so too is slavery.

4.1.1 The Ghost of Beloved: Normalized Chaos

Because we see the ghost full on and not just shadowy possibilities or unsubstantiated half-glimpses, whether Beloved exists or not is hardly the question; the question is what the ghost ultimately signifies—an issue that remains unanswered and renders the text itself an open question. Diegetically, the ghost is real and present as an invisible entity that signifies its presence in material ways. With the “baby ghost” wreaking havoc and affecting the human field for eighteen years, 124 Bluestone Road is a space in which supernatural occurrences have become normal, and so, too, has Sethe’s (and the ghost’s) history become naturalized even in the absence of its telling. Sethe’s circumstance as a runaway slave-woman in 1873 renders ghosts natural, but this one also makes noises, crawls up the stairs, bounces a ball, shatters mirrors, and places “two tiny handprints” in a cake. The baby’s “spirit” also picks up the dog and slams him into a wall hard “enough to break two of his legs and dislocate his eye, so hard he went into convulsions and chewed up his tongue, still her mother had not looked away” (Morrison 12). The ghost’s level of normalization is such that Sethe merely fixes up the dog, resets its bones, and pushes its eye back into its head (12).

Ultimately, such actions signify nothing in particular; the family responds with acceptance and normalization. Sethe even shows signs of sympathizing with the ghost, describing it to Paul D as “just sad,” much like herself. Denver likewise describes it as “lonely and rebuked” (8), similar to how she feels in her isolation at 124. Even Baby Suggs has seen the presence as just a “baby” (5) and therefore relatively harmless. For Sethe’s sons, Howard and Buglar, the response is to run away, not from fear of the ghost, but of their infanticidal mother, of which the ghost reminds them. While Sethe and Denver, meanwhile, try to “reason with the baby ghost,” after years of waging a “perfunctory battle,” there is no doubt about either “the source of outrage” or “the source of light” (4); the ghost’s origin, and multiple nature, is assumed. When Paul D enters 124 and reacts angrily

to the ghost, “screaming back at the screaming house,” a table “rushed towards him” as the house pitches itself and causes the floorboards to groan and shake. These would all appear to be symptoms of a real ghost, for they all see it and believe it. As such, “Morrison excludes any tricky indeterminacies about the supernatural,” says Edwards, as the ghost is “no projection of a neurotic observer, no superstitious mass delusion. Various sensible characters witness its manifestations and accept their reality” (79). Edwards specifically mentions a dissimilarity from Dickens, Collins, James and others in that Morrison “provides us no cozy corner of skepticism” (79).

The women have long since accepted the new normal and sympathized with the ghost’s plight because it is similar, and binary, to their own. Sethe’s belief in an after-life is clear in her declaration that, “‘I’ll protect [Denver] while I’m live and I’ll protect her when I ain’t,’” implying that her duty as a mother does not end with such a trivial event as death (45). As Smith-Wright points out, such normalization largely depends on culture since, “[for Africans,] deceased family members are considered part of the present family unit” (144). When Baby Suggs proclaims, “‘Not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief’” (5), she reminds us that ghosts are the manifestation of sorrow and secret shame of the many and not just the individual. “In African traditions regarding the supernatural,” says Smith-Wright, “the living and the dead are intimately connected” (144). And so it is at 124, where Sethe experiences the physical ghost of her murdered child, the abstract spirit of her deceased ancestor, and the memory of her departed sons and husband on the same plane, all present to her in the current time and space. Throughout this novel, the dead past lingers, rises up and assumes a voice that will be heard by the living, “most of whom are black” and for whom history “is the reality of slavery” (Rigney, “Story” 229). Sethe tells Denver, “If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world” (Morrison 36). But the past is a

forbidden place, as she continues, “You can’t never got there. Never. Because even though it’s all over...it’s going to always be there waiting for you,” which is why she kills the baby (36), attempting to end the old, known narrative. But Denver replies, “‘If it’s still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies,’” to which Sethe responds, “Nothing ever does” (36). In all, Morrison’s historic world is so unnatural that, as Rigney says, the only “natural element is the supernatural” because the spirit world is omnipresent and “represents, finally, ultimate Black revolution against slavery: the insistence on the link with Africa, the insistence on *a myth beyond history* and on an identity that is both racial and individual” (“Story” 229).

The physical appearance of Beloved as a beautiful young woman represents yet another rupture at 124, requiring the recognition of a new, unfixed reality after eighteen years of abnormal normalcy. In spite of being dead, this ghost changes and, as such, behaves more human than the relatively stagnant phantoms of *Hill House* or *The Shining* which simply repeat themselves while ignoring temporal boundaries. Fully dressed, Beloved walks out of the water (her first truly supernatural act as an adult ghost) as material history, much as the uniformed Kinsella’s ghost of Shoeless Joe steps out of the cornfields, implying that the line between dead and living, as well as past and present, is so thin, if existent at all, that a spirit needs only to step out of one element and into another in order to be seen as human. In *Beloved*, it is the ghost who hesitates, uncertain of her place or identity at first or what stepping on “dry” land means, but she seems vaguely aware of having survived something traumatic and perhaps even having cheated traditional notions of mortality, for despite being wet, cold and extremely tired upon re-entry, “she was smiling.” Her otherness is apparent at first, as her appearance is “not like that” of other women, for she has “new skin, lineless and smooth” (Morrison 50), conveying a re-birth of innocence and borderlessness which has evolved from the old trauma. House suggests that Beloved has probably been confined

and abused sexually by a white man who recently has died, and her “new skin” comes from having been indoors for so long (120). This is a plausible idea, but Morrison seems insistent on presenting the young woman as ghostly, for she must learn to adapt to the new air and her new skin, and she finds that her lungs hurt most of all while she must also “negotiate the weight of her eyelids.” Furthermore, her new neck, bearing its scar from eighteen years earlier, keeps “bending” as she walks (Morrison 50). She is, indeed, child-like and yet she conveys an aura of mystery. The scene is not unlike Denver’s re-entry into the world later in the novel, as she must negotiate her own weights, adjust to a new skin and a new self, even as her old scars are still visible to all who meet her; they are still fresh because, having been hidden, they are not normalized, any more than Denver is. Hidden from sight, *Beloved* has grown like a living organism would, and she continues to grow, feeding off the self-loathing and fear of all. But because ghosts are already normalized at 124, the space of hesitation is relatively small when *Beloved* arrives.

4.1.2 The New Normal of the Spectral Space

The act that spawns the ghost is not necessarily intended as a speech against white man’s law, but it turns out to be exactly that, specific and subversive, but universal and radical in its declaration of independence. Morally reprehensible and illegal as it might be, the killing of her baby is an act of self-reclamation by an oppressed black woman who is finding her voice, for it is a “daring” feat and a “great transgression...for [any] woman to speak—even just open her mouth—in public” (Cixous 313). Schoolteacher’s demand that she hand over her children to him elicits a defiant response from Sethe, as she slaughters her own child in a momentous act that marks “her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression” (Cixous 312). In defying Schoolteacher, Sethe embodies Cixous’s declaration of war against man-made rules:

“Now, I-woman am going to blow up the law: an explosion henceforth possible and ineluctable; let it be done, right now, *in language*” (316). Deborah Ayer (Sitter) points out that Sethe acts in a masculine manner, wielding her hacksaw “with all the ferocity of a man” when cornered by Schoolteacher, and, when Paul D finds out, his “manhood is threatened” (198). Harris likewise suggests that Sethe’s “rugged individualism is more characteristic of males than females of her time” (133), rendering her a “thing, unhuman, unfeeling, uncaring” in the eyes of society.

Masculine or feminine, Sethe’s public killing of her child as all await her response to Schoolteacher’s demand is an undeniably forceful act. The crime, for which she is jailed along with her daughter, Denver, is seen as all the more heinous for the fact that she is a woman and mother who murders her own child. She is a black woman who not only resists white man’s law, but she also negates it since, under slave law, she and her children belong to Schoolteacher. By killing one, and attempting to kill two others, she flaunts her freedom to choose. She speaks through her actions, and so it is her soul that the legal system punishes as much as her body.

The origin of the “baby ghost” undoubtedly lies, at least in part, in Sethe’s personal emancipation act, but her condemnation lasts for much longer than her jail-time, thus giving the ghost and its accompanying narrative eighteen years in which to grow in size and fury. While her judgment is quite public—Paul D uncovers it years later through a newspaper article, for it is through such texts, which expand the borders of history, when history is often re-discovered—Sethe continues her self-imposed imprisonment at 124 where “no one visits” and drivers on horses rush past for fear of contamination. Her punishment continues privately, and yet her absence is public, creating a much more profound effect than simply isolating her physically. As Foucault would suggest, the punishment is designed to temper her soul, and in Sethe’s case, it affects her social status and self-construct, destabilizing her sense of entitlement to dwell in the larger space of

community, nation, and humanity. As in many ghost stories, *Beloved*'s *raison d'être*, insofar as it affects both Sethe and Denver, is "a socially acceptable constitution of the properly integrated subject" (Bernstein 155). Similar to Clemens' notion of a "return of the repressed," Bernstein explains that neuroses in the Gothic narrative often demand "a rectified personal history, guaranteeing social integration only at the point when the skeletons are, indeed, out of the closet [and]...the offensive stain on the past will be made public" for fear of befalling "the anonymous gaze" (155). Like the Misfit in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," Sethe spends a great deal—if not all (considering the injustices of slavery)—of her life trying to reconcile her own sense of justice with the amount of punishment already afflicted upon her. In this effort, she fails because her "offensive stain" is indelibly etched upon her soul, as deep and inescapable as the "chokecherry tree" whipped onto her back by Schoolteacher at Sweet Home.

The all-consuming sense of guilt enforced upon Sethe by the legal system of discipline, punishment and surveillance knows no boundaries and allows no escape. Beginning as a baby ghost, *Beloved* is the sum of all her feelings of guilt and shame which have accumulated to take a bodily form (Clemens 4-5). Her grief and shame cause her to love the dead baby and hate herself, as it is, in part, her self-abhorrence that produces the spirit. Ironically, the ghost and the guilt collectively grow so big that the "closet" door bursts wide open (Bernstein 155), overflows its boundaries and resists a return to closure, ultimately leaving Denver and Sethe with nowhere, and nothing, to hide. Their greatest shame, laid public, becomes as normalized on Bluestone as the ghost has been at 124, a story that everybody knows but is forbidden to tell.

Beloved effectively represents Sethe's attempted killing of her slave-self, for the murder of her child is a symbolic act of self-emancipation and a severing of the past—a past and a self which remain with her, regardless, in the form of a haunting. Sethe herself embodies Cixous' edict that

women “must kill the fake woman who is preventing the live one from breathing” (312), for such a clearing out is what *Beloved* is about. It is not just an anti-slave narrative, but an anti-apartheid, anti-repression, and anti-history narrative. Ultimately, the act of infanticide that produces the baby ghost is so ugly that Sethe refuses to speak of it, and so her self-repression and self-flagellation create the spirit of Beloved, even in its absence, who simultaneously signifies yet another rupture and a new normal. It is her reason, or perceived lack of reason, for the violent act that eludes the understanding of the law and Bluestone Road neighbours. Throughout her self-imposed exile, Sethe’s “truth” never wavers; although she has transgressed moral and social law, she presumes to stand upon a higher moral ground. In a struggle for self-determination, Sethe and Schoolteacher are binary opposites, as he is set on retaining the status quo that allows him the privilege of keeping slaves and the children of former slaves; even the idea of a “former” slave must be an affront to him. While Beloved is the soul of taboo and chaos, Schoolteacher embodies social law and order. For him, any breach of discipline would be chaos and so his mandate is to mete out public judgement and punishment of transgressors. As one of the “four horsemen” (148) who come for Sethe and her children, he represents a religious-based judgement of apocalyptic proportions, for the rupture that comes is wide, deep, ugly and irreversible. Maker of rules, keeper of words and a false sense of order, the “educationalist,” as Foucault says, is one of a “series of subsidiary authority” figures with “the legal power to punish.” Also represented in *Ghost Story*, *The Shining*, *The Robber Bride* and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” schoolteachers usually signify order that relies on rationality and a strict observance of the “meaning” and inherent value of words while making a fearful other of that which does not meet the ordained standards or perform to his logic. Faced with the illogical or with silence, the validity of his rules being challenged, he hesitates. It is into this hesitation between the status quo (the known and normal) and the new (the previously

unknown and abnormal), where the ghost insinuates itself, for the phantom embodies the “soul” of insanity and chaos. Significantly, Denver possesses little detail about that traumatic moment, except that her mother was whipped while pregnant and then she had run away. ““Nothing to tell except Schoolteacher””(36), Sethe responds—nothing to tell but the rules and oppression, the big, overriding narrative about the way things supposedly were.

At 124, social law is as omnipresent as the ghost, for Sethe’s “training” in self-repression under slave law is so effective that she places herself in isolation upon leaving prison, so that she and Denver do only “what the house permitted” (11). Such “training,” says Bernstein, is “a vital concept” in the distribution of the exercise of power in the Foucauldian “society of surveillance” wherein so-called criminals police and incarcerate themselves, feeling naturally guilty of a perceived transgression. Under such a system, “privacy is never complete” (11)—a notion illustrated in *Beloved* and symbolized by 124 and its ostracized position on Bluestone Road. Within 124, the “baby ghost” reflects the panopticism discussed by Foucault; removing herself from the spectacle of public life, Sethe locks herself in, within her own mind, where the ghost of the baby—emblematic of her sense of guilt—watches her every move.⁵⁰ Her punishment is consistently both public and private, both of the body and of the soul, both external and internal; likewise, her oppressor is both self and other. Sethe’s body and spirit are punished because of the presumed right of society to punish the unsanctioned act for fear of chaos. But her punishment goes deeper than mere incarceration or whipping, for the legal system does not just “lay hold” of the body, but affects the soul as well: “the expiation that once rained down upon the body must be

⁵⁰ Foucault explains that the soul “has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished...it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power.” He adds, “the soul is the prison of the body” (29). It would be difficult to argue that Sethe’s “soul” is not affected by the laws, disciplines, and methods of punishment of the day, and there can be no doubt that her soul (which assumes the guise of, first, the “baby ghost” and then *Beloved*) is a prison for her body, as well as her mind.

replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations” (Foucault 16). Sethe bears the “chokecherry tree” (a beautiful name assigned by Amy to her ugly scars) scars of a whipping on her back as a permanent reminder of her judgement and divided soul; as well, she suffers being held down and “milked” by the plantation owner’s boys and later serves time in jail and is pronounced too “damaged” to be of use and regarded as insane—all because of her transgressions against privileged white society. Such public judgment and punishment has normalization as its primary goal, according to Foucault, as it “bears within it an assessment of normality and a technical prescription for a possible normalization” (20-1). The punishment is a sanctioned embarrassment of the Negro race and, like the chokecherry tree engraved on her back, the debilitating effects are etched on her soul and give rise to a ghost. That scar is a story made material, just as *Beloved* herself is; both the baby ghost and the scar scream silently, as even Denver seems to do, the loudest story never told, until *Beloved* appears to present them with their own history in inescapably solid form, right in front of them instead of just inside or behind them.

4.1.3 Clearing Boundaries in the Spectral Space

Insofar as *Beloved* is an African-American narrative written for and about African-Americans, 124 is also the narrative of the American South, with its own standards and ideas of normalcy; to those outside it, it is not normal at all, but to those within, it is run-of-the-mill. Goddu points out that the American Gothic is mostly associated with the South, which “serves as the nation’s ‘other,’” and a “repository for everything from which the nation wants to disassociate itself.” The “benighted South,” she argues, “is able to support the irrational impulses of the Gothic that the nation as a whole, born of the Enlightenment ideals, cannot. America’s self-mythologization as a nation of hope and harmony directly contradicts the Gothic’s most basic

impulses" (265). 124 and its residents are "haunted" because of their relationship to the community. In a world abhorrent of ghosts, "haunted" signifies otherness, drawing a line between sane and not sane, normal and abnormal.

Formerly a community gathering place, 124 has been contaminated by infanticide, a story too painful to remember or tell. Sethe recalls that, "before it had become the plaything of spirits and the home of the chafed, 124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised, and soothed" (87). She barely remembers what her home used to be like before it was haunted, when it was not considered "other" and she had women friends. Following her baby's death, Sethe begins to be treated as other and, in turn, begins to respond as other, gradually forgetting that any other relationship could have existed. When the "baby ghost" arrives, they stop coming around, offering her "disapproval" instead, which she repays with "the potent pride of the mistreated" (96), thus solidifying the imaginary and real dividing line between herself and her former friends. It is a matter of language creating "reality," history overtaking and reifying the present so that there is no present and not even a history, let alone a future. Beloved's re-entry is hard, but necessary, because she shakes things up, re-shuffling the reality deck, causing Sethe, Denver, and Paul D to see their situations, their histories, and themselves differently.

The front porch of 124 becomes the perceived boundary between Sethe and the "real" world, between presence and absence, a woman's space that is haunted by the taboo narrative. When Stamp Paid peers through the window, the people of Bluestone Road cannot truly see into 124 and therefore have no real knowledge of the "insides" of 124 or the details of their lives; normalization is impossible without personal information, daily encounters, intimacy, or "touching on the insides." Stamp's fondness for Sethe has ceased from the moment of her public transgression, trial, judgement and incarceration; they are friends "until she show[s] herself" (187).

When he and Ella discuss Sethe's history, Ella says, "Who can tell what all went on in there? Look here, I don't know who Sethe is or none of her people'" (187). Denver confirms their alienation when she tells Paul D, "'Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by'" (14). Sethe and her daughter are condemned, isolated, and punished—body and soul—from the moment she kills, but also from the moment she is born black and female in a white man's world. It is significant, later, that Beloved demands of Paul D, "Touch me on my insides" (116), for that is where Sethe herself longs to be "touched," known and understood. Although "every house wasn't like the one on Bluestone Road," potentially, every house is exactly the same as 124, just as every former slave and mother might see sameness, instead of difference, between themselves and Sethe. The ghost of 124 is a taboo narrative waiting to be told and thereby made material through language, by telling and remembering, setting it in stone like the word "Beloved" etched on a tombstone in her front yard. Beloved reminds them of a shame that they have buried deep, because, while the gravestone serves as a public declaration of both love and grief, it is also a millstone to a town that has grown accustomed to its own secret.

By her very presence and signification of a past marked by slavery and infanticide, the ghost distinguishes 124 from the world outside; however, as Denver and Sethe come to understand through Beloved, the usual boundaries are neither as impenetrable nor as enduring as Sethe perceives them. As in Hill House, the willful structure itself possesses a "lively spite" for its inhabitants, showing a plethora of human-like emotions. To Denver, it is a "person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits" (29). The house entraps the characters, "an insidious Home Sweet Home that will not allow its victims to belong or to be happy, but will not let them go" (Ledbetter 175). It is a purgatory, or transitional space, to each of its dwellers. Prior to death, Baby Suggs is "suspended between the nastiness of life and the

meanness of the dead, [and] couldn't get interested in leaving life or living it" because she knows that "death was anything but forgetfulness" (Morrison 4). Likewise, Sethe and Denver appear alive, but act as if they were dead. The haunted house comprises a psychological and physical space in which Sethe has imprisoned herself, but feels restrained by others. While slavery in the South and her public incarceration have ended, Sethe's enslavement has not, for she has lived there so long that she does not know how to leave it, or even that she can. Her willful "deafness to history" demands a return of the murdered narrative, which takes on a physical form and demands acknowledgement (Clemens 4); at the same time, the old narrative, once returned, must be murdered yet again—only to linger in the form of a ghost that is present in its absence.

Beloved is, in some ways, an overstepped boundary, the ghost of excess, the Gothic sublime, as yearning and grieving go too far. Largely, the distinctions between people in *Beloved* are illusionary—matters of ownership, property, and the observance of proper, traditional boundaries. *Beloved*, after all, represents all that Sethe owns, including her guilt-ridden history, which robs her of ownership of herself, much in the tradition of flesh-thievery begun by the economy of slavery. Sethe's murder of her baby is an attempt both to rob the white man of his supposed due and to free her daughter from such a complete loss of self. Paul D accuses her of loving her children "too much," a "dangerous" proposition for any former slave who is not "allowed" to love anything so much. Even the space she occupies is not her own, but is rented from a white man named Bodwin with a nostalgia for the old days. But even before the baby's death, the "the smell of disapproval was sharp" (138), as Baby Suggs senses a "free-floating repulsion" emanating from her friends and neighbors "because she had overstepped, given too much, offered them excess" (138). The people of Bluestone Road are angry at Baby Suggs both for having been bought out of slavery by her son and for having been so generous in feeding them,

materially and spiritually. “It made them mad,” she thinks, as she displays “powers” of self-sufficiency that “did not belong to an ex-slave” (137). She is acutely aware of having overstepped her boundaries in the eyes of the community, who are still slave to the old narrative of white man’s rule, which clearly forbids a black person from owning anything, but especially the self.

Ultimately, Sethe rises up to action against the perceived return of the past, of slavery, of losing her “best thing” to a white man, though Paul D reminds her later that she, and not a dead baby or any other possession, is her own “best thing.” This is one narrative in which the self has been destabilized for so long, that destabilization, or loss of the self, has become the norm rather than the exception. Whereas Eleanor Vance’s revolutionary act is to kill herself and thus gain a sense of family and self-possession, Sethe manages the same effect by simply choosing to join the human race. However, when self-possession occurs, it is surprising to her, for she had always identified herself as “nothing.” For Sethe, the infanticide is justified, and that is what she needs for Beloved, her “best thing,” to see, hear, and understand. “You’re your own best thing,” Paul D tells her (273), meaning that she must “own” her actions, her history, and herself instead of being possessed by ghosts, slave-owners, landlords, and a town that considers her an insane other. Through Beloved, the mother comes to see herself as belonging to herself and not to someone else; but at the same time, she sees herself as belonging to an entire society from which she had excluded herself. She comes to see that while the taboo story is her own it is also the story of many other people from whom she has alienated herself. For Sethe, “free ground” (141), not unlike “dry land” for Beloved, simply means the old narrative of normal does not apply. Initially, she trades one set of rules for another self-imposed variety of slavery. The hand she is holding is her own: “But suddenly she saw her hands and thought with clarity as simple as it was dazzling, ‘These hands belong to me. These *my* hands’” (141). She says, “I don’t call myself nothing” (142). In

this novel, the foundational self is defined by where one stands in relation to society, as if to say, “I am an individual; I am not you.” In *Beloved*, such constructs are challenged, adding the corollary, “I am also you, and you are also me.” Ultimately, Sethe begins to disappear while Beloved grows bloated; the mother becomes helpless and dependent on the ghost-daughter, who takes on the aspects of motherhood, even becoming pregnant by her mother’s lover. Thus, lines of identity are blurred despite what these characters call themselves.

“Clearing” becomes a dominant metaphor in a novel where all boundaries are transgressed, dispensed with, and obliterated. Sethe’s narrative of otherness is an acquired self-construct; her identity lies in a half-forgotten, half-remembered history haunted by guilt and shame, and she needs to recall the lost narrative as the foundation for building a new one. Grandma Baby offered “grace” to all who came to visit, both at 124 and at a sacred space called “The Clearing” where she would preach to those in need of emotional healing. Much like the “field of dreams” in *Shoeless Joe*, The Clearing is a space where the past is both honored and confronted, where she can “listen to the space that the long-ago singing left behind” (89) and feel a communion much stronger than that alliance formed merely by holding hands with the ghost of one’s past transgressions. Baby Suggs tells the congregation of black men and women that it is there that they can, and must, cry “for the living and the dead. Just cry.” It is a place just for them, away from the place “yonder” where they do not love your flesh,” where a person can experience the holding of hands with one’s past, present and future (88). Significantly, it is at The Clearing where Beloved wraps her hands around Sethe’s throat and tries to choke her; just as when Sethe goes out to the carnival with Denver and Paul D, every time she tries to connect with the past and rise from her reverie, the past rises up to choke her again. Denver is the one who saves her mother (96), while Beloved later defends herself by saying that she “kissed her neck” after choking it, showing love for that which she has tried to

kill, which might also describe her relationship to both her mother and the story that must be told; the loved story will assert itself, but the story dies at the moment it is uttered, rendered lifeless in the moment of telling.

At the end of the novel, thirty women of Bluestone Road stand outside 124 and sing together in a single voice, investing Sethe with the grace and power to transcend history through its telling and to join them: "For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her... where all the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the backs of words" (261). Those women represent the future and a present that is at least as tangible as the past. They see Sethe and Beloved holding hands in the doorway together, with a surprising "absence of fear," and "Sethe feels her eyes burn and it may have been to keep them *clear* that she looks up. The sky is blue and *clear*" (261; italics added). And, yet again, when clarity, freedom and grace threaten to outstrip her guilt, Sethe sees the landowner, Bodwin, "coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing" (262). While he is only there to pick up Denver for work at his estate, Sethe is intent on not repeating the same old story, determined to protect another daughter from another white man, and so she leaves the yard to attack him. Finney astutely points out that Sethe is not merely repeating the past, but actually breaking the cycle of self-destruction: "This time round she does not try to sacrifice those nearest to her heart. The past is repeated but left behind" (115). She thus joins the others and leaves Beloved "alone" to feel "the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding." She becomes aware of the "hill of black people, falling" and "above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without a skin" (262). In this story it is the "man without a skin" who is more other than the ghost; in *Beloved*, the ghost has a skin and has held hands with the present and with a human; the white man holds a whip and stands "above" the hill of fallen black people. A "clearing" from that image of the men "without a

skin”—the ghosts of slavery—is what Sethe needs: “Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (95). With the past still alive within her, she is experiencing a “rememory” of the day when Schoolteacher tried to take what was hers and drag it back to Sweet Home. This time, she chooses to lash outward, rather than to kill her “beloved,” choosing to tell her own story rather than have one forced upon her. Beloved disappears at the same moment when Sethe lets go of her and signals the intention to move forward, telling a different story from now on, for Beloved is the old story of other, one that needs to be told, dragged into daylight, and normalized. But, at the same time of the telling, Sethe has murdered once again—this time eliminating not only Beloved, but the foundational story itself. The story that is too painful to tell has been told publicly and nakedly, reducing its power and force, letting it go. And yet it remains in its absence, an abject sort of story, carrying “a weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes” the one who has forcefully expelled it before it “annihilates” her sense of self (Kristeva 2).

4.1.4 The Destabilized Self: Laying it all Down

Beloved, then, becomes a different kind of ghost story, one that focuses on transcendence of static concepts of self through the discovery of commonality, while yet retaining a crucial distinction between ghosts and humans. The postmodern is concerned with identity insofar as it relates to the “deconstruction of concepts of inner or underlying essence” as “the idea of a stable core of self (like a soul) which is present throughout an individual’s life and which constitutes their true being” is undermined, along with a stable sense of identity (Gregson 41). Ultimately, postmodernism “depicts the self as a social and ideological construct which is endlessly in process,

and identity as being constituted performatively, by what the self does,” specifically, when it comes to gender and race theories, by questioning conventional categorization (41). As a narrative of identity-seeking for African-Americans, but especially for black women, *Beloved* explores the possibility of self-reclamation, or rather, self-reconstitution, through words and actions that uncover commonality rather than segregation. Ultimately, according to the postmodern, the self shifts “in dialogue with dominant American culture and other American ethnicities” (Gregson 42). As a result of the injection of a ghost in their midsts, both Sethe and Denver, as well as Paul D, experience an identity shift, in large part because of a confrontation with a buried past, but also because of the weakening of boundaries that leaves no moral or spiritual center at 124.

Through the ghost who names herself Beloved, Morrison’s novel illustrates the challenging of boundaries and divisions that inform self-identity. Rigney points out that “*Beloved* is not an ordinary ghost story, certainly not the Henry James kind of psychological thriller that depends upon psychopathology of the protagonist” (“Story” 234). Unlike in *The Turn of The Screw*, the ghost in *Beloved* is as real as any character; for Sethe, Denver and Paul D, there is no hesitation about what the spectre is, only about what it wants. As Rigney explains, “the spirits they see are as real as the history they endure” and “the spirit world is part of that form of Grace that Baby Suggs promises her followers” (“Story” 234). That “grace” might come less from a religious sort of after-life than from a realization that a negative, damaging agenda—the need to consume and totalize—is dispensable; functionality of the self requires telling the story of both past and present, thereby loosening its power over one’s self-construct and, in effect, murdering one’s stable self. Both Sethe and Denver recognize the past and present as narrow, confining, fictional and selective, and they allow the new information—the new referents—to affect how they perform in the world.

In the course of the novel, Sethe becomes ghostly as Beloved becomes human, imprisoning and torturing herself; she needs neither ghost nor social law to imprison her, for Beloved stands as a mirror of her mother's self-flagellation, at once consuming her and being consumed by her—and she exists because of one traumatic act followed by eighteen years of silence and deafness. An act that once ended her slavery days has since begun a new era of slavery that, eighteen years later, has spawned yet another era of slavery, with each era marked by a different, distinct rupture: slavery, followed by twenty-eight days of freedom, followed by slavery of another kind. Rigney points out Beloved's multiplicity, saying, "Beloved is a ghost, but she is also a part of Sethe's lost Africa self and that African view of nature as imbued with spirits and life" and, as such, Sethe spends her present "beating back the past" ("Story" 230). More significantly, Rigney asserts that "the theft of identity, the inflicted loss of a name and of a culture" is one of slavery's "crimes" (230). Through Beloved, both Sethe and Denver seek self-reclamation through a ghost that is "more" than other or "sister"; the spirit is somehow bigger than any individual as the lines between self and other blur with new awareness displacing previous "truths." "Our bodies do not end at our skins," says Haraway (178), and Morrison's characters recognize this lack of distinction between self and other, ghost and human, natural and supernatural. The lack of such distinctions are the norm at 124 as characters react without much hesitation towards the ghost, for what they see, increasingly, is more like themselves, a spirit that emanates from their own desires and fears, assuming solid form as a result of their beliefs about their historical reality. Beloved is conjured by women and embraced by women; Sethe wants only to know that her "baby" is taken care of and that she knows the narrative behind the infanticide, to know that she is, indeed, beloved. Likewise, Denver wants only a friend and "sister," someone to sympathize with, which is *her* reason for summoning the ghost. What the ghost wants mostly, however, is to be told.

The “lone male voice,” Paul D is a human figure from the past who enters the text as rather ghostly and becomes even more phantom-like in response to Beloved’s charm. His immediate thought concerning Sethe is that this is “not a normal woman in a normal house” (40-41). Up until Paul D and Beloved come along, she is the sum of the parts experienced by her neighbors; still, she has a history at Sweet Home and a present at 124—hidden layers to which no one else is privy. While she clings to a past that consumes and constitutes her being, Paul D posits an alternate past that brings with it a potential future. But first she has to take a step back in time with him in order to move forward (or simply move at all). Beloved helps her do the same thing, but the ghost is hungry and would retain what it has consumed, while Paul D is as ready to “lay it all down” as Sethe is. Sethe fears what he signifies, both a return of the past that “comes back whether we want it to or not” (14) and a revision of the narrative that has defined her. The past is not what it appears, he reminds her, for Sweet Home “wasn’t sweet, and it sure wasn’t home” (14). He digs it all up for her and “[gives] her back her body, kisse[s] her divided back, stir[s] her rememory” (189).

Sethe’s closeting of history lends itself to a refusal to name and to recognize, causing her to treat Paul D as a spirit of less substance than Beloved. She views the future as “a matter of keeping the past at bay,” particularly so that it does not taint Denver. It is her “job” and “all that mattered” (42) to keep Denver from knowing all the details of the Sweet Home slave plantation, where Paul D comes from, as well as how her baby sister died. Upon unexpectedly encountering him sitting on the front porch, after eighteen years he is less normal to her than the dead child. Although she “could never mistake his face for another’s,” Sethe greets him with hesitation, asking, “Is that you?” His response, “What’s left” (6), implies that only partial humanness remains within him.

The slavery days, the nomadic eighteen years since then, and the natural aging process all are responsible for his enhanced ghostliness; regardless, he is even more ghostly than Beloved.

While Sethe has always been rooted, Paul D has always been rootless—a trait that he considers essential in combating the past, for he tells Sethe it is dangerous for a former slave to love anything too much—an old narrative that shapes his old identity. When he first hears of the ghost, his immediate reaction is to suggest they should leave, but Sethe responds coolly: “No more running—from nothing,” she says. The shape of a tree whipped into her back partially represents her roots in slavery, which she cannot escape but takes with her perpetually. Ultimately unable to settle with the ghost, Paul D moves out and takes up sleeping in the church, despite invitations to stay with other people. With his “immobile face” that “produced the feeling you were feeling” (7-8), he is like Beloved in his ability to mirror women’s feelings: “Emotions sped to the surface in his company. Things became what they were: drabness looked drab; heat was hot” (39). Being male, it is as if he is viewed not as truth, but as a thing which reflects truth, for “windows suddenly had view” (39), causing a woman to see what she really is and the world to look bigger, giving history a materiality, just as Beloved does.

Men seem fearful of Beloved and ghosts in general, adding credence to Carpenter’s suggestion that women are more sympathetic, generally, at least in ghost literature. Already, Sethe’s two boys “[grow] furious at the company of the women in the house” and, in a vague re-enactment of the escape from Sweet Home, Paul D eventually runs off too, moved by the ghost. Stamp Paid, as well, stands on the front porch and wonders at the “kind of people” who inhabit the house that do not invite him in. Furthermore, it “took a man, Paul D, to shout it off, beat it off and take its place for himself” (104), at least temporarily; really, he has been “lulled into a false sense of victory” (Harris 130), because the ghost returns with a vengeance. 124 is a woman’s space, but

Paul D is similar to Beloved in that he inspires raw emotion that comes from the “insides.” His very presence is enough to make women cry, as they see something of their innermost emotions reflected in his gentle demeanor. To Paul D, the ghost is a “kind of evil” because it represents an obstacle and a threat to him, and he is fearful that the folks at 124 do not see the spirit’s malevolent intent. What initially appears threatening, however, comes to be seen as sad, harmless and upon closer scrutiny, something that one has to go through in order to reclaim a more comforting “normal.” Upon closer inspection, Paul D realizes that Sethe is right, that the ghost is “sad” and as he walks through it, he feels a “wave of grief” that makes him want to cry, for it “seemed a long way to the normal light surrounding the table, but he made it” (9). Critics have referred to Beloved as “vengeful” and malevolent, but as Amy reminds Sethe, “Can’t nothing heal without pain.” More to the point, Sethe recounts Amy’s “truth” that “anything dead coming back to life hurts” (35). She normalizes the pain, which is essentially what Beloved is, a painful story that must be told out loud in order to reach the promised “normal,” however unstable.

As the only male in a decidedly female house and narrative, Paul D reaches for the “normal” he has known, beyond the new normal, fearful of its unknown quality, just wanting to get past it and move away from it. In fact, the past, and all that he is running from, calls to him through Beloved: ““I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name,”” she says, looking at him with “empty eyes” (116). What she means by her command is both enigmatic and multiple. She might mean sexual or emotional touching, or both or neither. She might mean herself, or woman, or both. Paul D serves only the sexual part, for it is a healing of other kinds that Beloved seeks, the same kind which they *all* seek and find in the ghost. He refuses at first until she promises to “go” if he calls her name (117). When he finally relents, he has acknowledged her subversive essence, possessed her and been possessed by her. Paul D now knows a new/old shame,

and he becomes even more shiftless, sleeping all around the house. Ultimately, Beloved displaces him from the house, giving her full sway over Sethe and 124 (114), while Paul D himself has become a “shadow of his former self” (Harris 132).

Beloved is a response to the question of nomination—a filling of the gap (though not a closure) between other and self, between the question “What is it?” and the new response “What does it want from me?” Suggesting a divide between the male and female perspectives, Stamp Paid accuses his wife, Ella, of possessing a mind that is “loaded with spirits. Everywhere you look you see one.” Her response indicates a serious degree of belief in ghosts: “You know as well as I do that people who die bad don’t stay in the ground,” she says. Still, Stamp considers ghosts to be the enemy, declaring, “Anything white floating around in the woods—if it ain’t got a shotgun, it’s something I don’t want *no* part of” (Morrison 187). Apparently, Stamp would rather face an armed white man than an unarmed ghost, but his analogy indicates a fear and hatred directed at the very concept of whiteness and the metaphorical ghost of slavery that still permeates the South. Stamp Paid keeps the ribbon of a girl he once helped rescue, even though “the skin smell nagged him” (181). When he steps onto the porch of 124, he hears words that he is unable to understand, but he identifies the sound as coming from “the people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who lost their ribbons. ‘What a roaring,’” he thinks (181), as he considers the ghosts of both slavery and freedom and recalls the “stench” of “human blood cooked in a lynch fire” (180). Stamp equates whiteness with negativity, and his fearfulness is echoed in Baby Suggs’s consideration of white folks as the only “bad luck” in the world (89). Peering in through the window of 124 and seeing Beloved, Stamp is confounded about the injustice that allows the existence of an other (as he sees her) which essentially runs counter to a need for some normal. When the three inhabitants of 124 first see Beloved, Denver asks, “‘What is it?’” (51); in contrast,

Stamp wonders, “‘What *are* these people?’” and thus lumps them all together as a family unit, similar to each other and different from him, mostly because they are exclusively female.

Sethe’s demons, too, are more likely to be bound up in white folks rather than spirits of the dead, as she recounts all the evil they have caused her. The “ghost” story is a “whitefolks” narrative, the physical manifestation of what is really to be feared, a story that is the “told story.” Sethe has devoted her life to keeping the past in its place, but fully expects “that at any moment they could rock her, rip her from her moorings” (188). White people have already drained the mother’s milk from her breasts, whipped her back to a pulp, “divided her back into plant life” and caused her to run away when she was pregnant, in addition to numerous other atrocities against her, everyone she knew and against black people in general, including hanging her own mother. By the time Paul D comes along, she “didn’t want any more news about whitefolks; didn’t want to know what Ella knew...and Stamp Paid, about the world done up the way whitefolks loved it” (188).

Ghosts such as *Beloved* are not only normal in this environment, but they help bring the past into the present, embodying transcendence itself. In this light, *Beloved* is a narrative of empowerment-by-ghost, as a tale of revolution for slaves, women, and their offspring: the ascendancy of the “small narrative.” Smith-Wright asserts, “in the American setting for these narratives, ghosts offer the proposition that African Americans can achieve justice, autonomy, and racial pride in an environment that from the era of slavery exacted their submission and fear” (64); more specifically, Morrison’s novels suggest that such “empowerment” depends on the “sense of connection with their rich African past” (164). That past is manifest in ghostly apparitions as well as memory of both traumatic and harmonious events, both shared and individual experiences; thus, while Sethe and Denver empower themselves, their “autonomy” is balanced with a “racial pride.”

For as much as she embodies her own story and those of Sethe and Denver, *Beloved* personifies the institution of slavery and all of those who died in its name. As mentioned, Morrison dedicates *Beloved* to the “sixty million and more” who died outside of the told narrative of American slavery; the novel seems at least partly intended to raise the ghost of those sixty million. As Heinze notes, most Americans would like to bury slavery, or so Morrison suggests, “since it is the historical reminder of a national disgrace” (Heinze 205). Those who have died are beloved because remembered, because the present holds hands with them, beloved because self, and because present and purposeful, for if self-enslavement remains and those lives are forgotten, those deaths have been useless. Sethe’s disconnection derives from a loss of self whereby she represses the past and even forgets the wisdom offered by her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, for she “worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe” (Morrison 6). But she is unable to control her “devious” brain, as her memory returns to her misnamed, and misremembered, Sweet Home,

rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. (6)

Sweet Home should be the antithesis of 124 since the former was a place of horror and enslavement. But 124 is just as hellish and yet, seen in the right light, they are both heavenly. Nonetheless, Sethe is nostalgic for the place where her lack of freedom was someone else’s responsibility other than her own. Her imprisonment is a state of her own mind, for even of her long-gone husband, Halle, she says, ““I think he’s dead. It’s not being sure that keeps him alive”” (8). The suggestion is that *Beloved*, too, (and the story she embodies) is alive because Sethe is not ready to let her go, being unsure as to what happened to her (or her own) soul when she died. The horrors of Sweet Home and slavery are buried until Paul D uncovers them. Likewise, the stories of

Denver's birth, Beloved's death go untold, buried in the Sethe's subconscious until manifest in poltergeist activity and, finally, a physical presence.

Sethe's sense of shame runs so deep that she suffers a split in her very being, a rupture that allows her other (the guilt and shame) to consume her self (the proud, black, female survivor); the good mother is gradually subsumed by the hungry child who will take as much as she will give up. The baby's hunger is not for food, however, but for an origin story and a sense of self, a renewed wholeness and connection with the present, a rememory of lost years. Sethe's reaction is to have her "filled to capacity," as if suddenly she is pregnant again, the sight of the ghost of her child filling her completely: "there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now" (51). By the time she returns from emptying her bladder, Paul D and Denver are "standing before the stranger, watching her drink cup after cup of water" while Paul D exclaims that she looks "mighty thirsty" (51). It is a metaphorical thirst which has brought her back in solid form to ask questions, but also to fill a need within Sethe, who can only look at the girl and think she is "poorly fed" and that her skin, significantly, is "flawless except for three vertical scratches on her forehead" (51). But it is the scar on Beloved's throat, originally hidden by a lace collar, that grabs Sethe and will not let go: "But once Sethe had seen the scar, the tip of which Denver had been looking at whenever Beloved undressed—the little curved shadow of a smile in the kootchy-kootchy-coo place under her chin—once Sethe saw it, fingered it and closed her eyes for a long time, the two of them cut Denver out of the games" (239). That is because it is Sethe's scar, too, for Beloved is her, as far as she is concerned, and even Denver finds it difficult to tell them apart (241)—and when Sethe tries to assert herself as the "unquestioned mother whose word was Law," Beloved becomes "wild game" (242) and the song becomes just for Beloved.

Sethe's, Denver's and Baby Suggs's own sub-conscious needs—or rather, the absence of communication of those needs—*appear* to be manifest in both the “baby ghost” and its later incarnation as Beloved. It is even possible that, for Sethe, such spirits are so normalized as to be indistinguishable from the self, for it becomes impossible to tell one's own expectations apart from those of the ghost. In her desperation to explain herself, Sethe becomes a slave to her own trauma. The murdered baby, less than two years old when it died, was “too little to understand,” Sethe tells Denver, ““But if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her”” (4). However, Denver points out the ghost's detachment from such human desires, saying, ““Maybe she don't want to understand.”” The “understanding” is what Sethe needs from the ghost, rather than what the ghost needs. Perhaps, Denver seems to suggest, ghosts are impervious to human desires and perhaps they even have wants of their own.

Increasingly unsure of what (including her sense of identity) is real or true, Sethe exemplifies the notion of the “postmodern incoherent self” (Gregson 57), as Sethe's and Beloved's combined performances challenge all notions of text and narrative, signaling no clear distinctions between teller, listener, and story. Edwards might be right in saying that “Beloved is all memory” (83), for her existence and identity are determined by the re-telling of the past, and a constant need to hear the narrative that is her only connection to Sethe and to the present; Sethe's only concept of who she is, and who Beloved is, comes from that re-told narrative. She is the author of her self, the author of her other; in the same way, Beloved re-writes them both. In contrast to Denver's refusal to hear any stories that did not involve her birth, the new girl keeps asking questions, and so “Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling” even though “every mention of her past life hurt,” having become “unspeakable” (58) as far as Sethe and Baby are concerned. Regardless, Sethe pours herself into Beloved through words, and Beloved consumes her every

breath until they are indistinguishable from one another. This is the narrator becoming entranced by the story, the audience partaking in its telling until both are complicit in the storytelling, two sides of a question; the story is Sethe's, but it is also Beloved's. Denver notices that "Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur" (250). Furthermore, Denver understands the connection: "Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it" (250). But, as Edwards notes, Beloved's ultimate desire "is not to exist as a separate, integral self, but to fuse with her mother," to "be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too" (83). He calls it "the terrible paradox of memory, of history itself, the hopeless yet necessary wish still to be a part of what we can understand only because it and we no longer are what we were" (82).

Just as Hill House ultimately "seduces" a desperate young woman into thinking that only Hill House understands and needs her (Lootens 167), Beloved performs the same function for Sethe, separating her from the others, seducing her into believing that Beloved is hers and hers alone. Essentially, Sethe needs the ghost as much as it seems to need her, for she feels unity with Beloved and is unconcerned with any dividing lines between them: "I am Beloved and she is mine...I am not separate from her," she says (210). Having her "baby" back makes Sethe feel beloved; in her own mind, she becomes a good mother, with a place in the community—no longer the self-exiled author of her own misery, but the author and teller of a new, inclusive story, however miserable it has been and might be. Just like the image seen by Denver of the wedding dress standing beside Sethe with its arm wrapped around her waist, or like the shadows on the ground when she, Paul D and Denver are walking home from carnival: their shared experience connects them like the song that Sethe has made up to sing to her children that Beloved should not

know (176), makes them hold hands with each other and against the world, but without Eleanor Vance's horror of sharing space and skin with a supposed other.

4.1.5 Denver: Leaving Normal

For Denver, the ghost's presence becomes a re-connecting force as she begins her re-entry into the world, transgresses old boundaries and grasps her new identity. While she wants self-explanation from Beloved, it turns out that the ghost wants the same thing from her. Like Beloved, Denver readies herself for a re-entry by accumulating a will and substance over time, fueled at first by the absence of an origin narrative and then by its return. Through Beloved, Denver frees herself from the recurring narrative that enslaves her mother by confronting a past that affects her, despite her inability to remember it.

Still in her mother's womb when Sethe runs away from Sweet Home, Denver barely escapes a life of slavery but still shares the shame of her ancestors, mostly because of Sethe's self-enslavement at 124. Despite her isolation, Denver's great yearning is for connection with the world outside through a knowledge of it: "Once upon a time she had known more and wanted to. Had walked the path leading to a real other house" (101), meaning the schoolhouse, where such things as history and culture are learned as much through osmosis, by contact with teachers and other children, as through sanctioned texts and dialogue. After a schoolmate embarrasses her by mentioning Sethe's infanticide, Denver removes herself from the schoolhouse, likewise from her history and culture. Her complete withdrawal from both the exterior and interior worlds signifies not only the return of the repressed but the wilful "deafness" to history, as well. A schoolmate prompts her about the murder her mother was locked away for, asking, "Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" and Denver "went deaf rather than hear the answer"; after that, she "kept

watch for the baby and withdrew from everything else” (105). Denver responds to her self-imposed exile with two years of “silence too solid for penetration but which gave her eyes a power” (103); having shut out the “real” world, she gains sight of a supernatural one, which to her is almost immediately normalized, considering the African influences upon the household. Her new vision allows her to see the ghost of the dead baby girl crawling up the stairs, even though no one else can perceive it at first. In fact, it is when she identifies the sound as “baby ghost” that she shows evidence of hearing and speaking for the first time in two years. Denver’s potential for freedom from her metaphorical “Sweet Home” lies in the ghost, through her ability to “see” a breach in the norm.

As a result of the ghost—a constant reminder of a horrific past—Denver grows up with the narrative of being different, an unsanctioned member of Bluestone society, both other and yet one of. After 124 has driven away her two brothers, killed her baby sister, sucked the life out of her grandmother and transformed her mother into a hermit, Denver finds herself “lonely” while disinterest from her mother makes her “long, for a sign of spite from the baby ghost” (12), for the “baby ghost” has become her sister and friend in the absence of either. Like her mother, she shuts the world outside and embraces an alternative space defined by a history and chaotic truth of its own. She had found it “impossible” (104) to ask her mother about the murder of her baby, and her fears and hopes gradually assume material form as “monstrous dreams about Sethe found release in the concentration Denver began to fix on the baby ghost” (103).

The repressed past becomes a series of misremembrances for Denver, for she “had never been there herself to remember it. 124 and the field behind it were all the world she knew or wanted” (101). Ignored by her mother, she is nearly devoured by her need for individuation, which is accompanied by the fear of cataloguing a thing to the point of dissolution. Much like “not

knowing” keeps Halle alive for Sethe, it is a lack of solid information that keeps Denver interested and keeps Beloved alive. “The present alone interested Denver,” and so when Beloved arrives, she is “careful to appear uninquisitive about the things she was dying to ask Beloved, for if she pressed too hard, she might lose the penny that the held-out palm wanted, and lose, therefore, the place beyond appetite” (119). All she wants from Beloved is “something” to love and be loved by in return. Beloved’s gaze makes her feels special, singled out for love, possessing that which no one else has, for “to be looked at [by Beloved] was beyond appetite; it was breaking through her own skin to a place where hunger hadn’t been discovered” (118).

For Denver, “ghost” is a story of burgeoning empowerment and 124 is a narrative with only one way in (that is, through Sethe) until Beloved and Paul D appear. Having lived all her life in “a house peopled by the living activity of the dead,” she finds herself easily stepping into “the told story.” But there is “only one door to the house,” “to get to the part of the story she liked best, she had to step way back” (29). Denver clings to her sorrow much as her mother does, wearing it like a cloak. She possesses the ghost—the “somebody” (104) that makes her a “somebody” and supposedly gives her an identity—as much as the ghost possesses her and all of 124. The possessiveness, probably even the very existence of Beloved, comes from an unrestricted “need to love another” (104) so powerful that Denver chooses the ghost over anyone “real.” Paul D has noticed that Denver has “a waiting way about her” and expecting “something.” What Denver is waiting for is the chance to crash through the boundaries posed by 124, to redefine her self: “I don’t know where to go or what to do, but I can’t live here” (14), she tells Paul D, sounding a cry for freedom and receiving a response that is Beloved, a ghostly challenge to the told narrative.

She summons the spirit out of loneliness, wanting a playmate sibling who will share experiences with her. Like Beloved, she wants attention and company: she “wished for the baby

ghost—its anger thrilling her” because it is what she feels and wishes to express. When Paul D comes between Denver and her mother, she tells him about the baby ghost in order to feel special, but also to reduce his power over Sethe: “‘We have a ghost here,’ she said, and it worked. They [her mother and Paul D] were not a twosome anymore.” The blatant, purposeful use of the word “ghost” disrupts their conversation, and later their sex, and insinuates itself, breaking down the barrier set up by the “twosome” of Sethe and Paul D to exclude her. Furthermore, when Beloved attempts to choke her mother at the Clearing, Denver is conflicted by her own neediness: “alarmed by the harm she thought Beloved planned for Sethe, but felt helpless to thwart it, so unrestricted was her need to love another” (104).

Denver feels the (t)old past rising up, but it is a past that she could neither own nor be a part of; the ghost is a past she can own, a narrative of her self. Because she is a “charmed child” (41), she understands where the enslavement and powerlessness come from and, in effect, where the ghost comes from. When Sethe claims “it’s the house,” Denver rebuts, “It’s not! It’s not the house. It’s us! And it’s you!” (14). She understands her own powers of imagination and creativity, her own ability to throw off the shackles of otherness and self-oppression, thereby dissolving the contemptuous image her mother’s actions had earned them in the community and rendering those opinions powerless. To one who is so starved for truth, Denver uses Beloved as medium for questioning received truths and a tool to be used for renewal by breaking down preconceived boundaries. Denver chooses a rebellious narrative, having “taught herself to take pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped on them” and challenging “the assumption that the haunting was done by an evil thing looking for more.” She alone knows the “downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but *knowing* the things behind things.... None could appreciate the

safety of ghost company” (37). “My sister,” she calls it (13) giving her a story, new a sense of identity that connects her with family, past and self.

Because of her unique vision, Denver is a postmodern subject, equally certain and uncertain of, and unconcerned with the boundaries, especially of her own skin, which no longer separate her from her surroundings. Beloved rarely looks at her, but when she does, it is “lovely” for Denver being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other.... Denver’s skin dissolved under that gaze and became soft and bright.... She floated near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what there was. (118)

Trying to feel solid in the presence of the ghost, Denver is ghost-like and abject because she is a combination of both, with no discernible line demarcating where one ends and the other begins. As she becomes more ghostly and Beloved’s ghostly nature becomes apparent, the divisions between selves and others start to weaken. Denver increasingly cannot discern where her body (or, increasingly, her own story) begins and ends:

If she stumbles, she is not aware of it because she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee. She feels like an ice cake torn away from the solid surface of the stream, floating on darkness, thick and crashing against the edges of things around it. Breakable, meltable and cold. (123)

In light of Beloved’s consuming presence, Denver experiences the radical new thought of having “a self to preserve,” becoming as big and ethereal as to be losing her center, her old narrative about herself, who she is, and where she lives. As Beloved’s ethereal nature becomes more real to her, she feels herself dissolving. The ghost and Denver meld into each other, starving for each other,

skipping the void (the skipped meal) and coming together. When Denver cannot see Beloved anywhere, but continues to hear her voice, she begins to cry

because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing. She grabs the hair at her temples to get enough to uproot it and halt the melting for a while.... She doesn't move to open the door because there is no world out there. (123)

As the boundaries between ghost and human disappear, it becomes clear that Beloved is at least in part a manifestation of Denver's hunger for self-identification and self-worth in an ever-dissolving reality which starves her spirit, even if the ghost does have another agenda.

In contrast to her mother, who is consumed by the ghost, Denver gains substance through her friendship with Beloved, especially in comparison to the increasingly withdrawn spirit, who supplants Denver and surpasses her in their mother's affection. According to Stamp Paid, "Denver needed somebody normal in her life" (170), which is partly why she conjures the ghost—though having called it forth, she is unable to control it. *Beloved* is only partly about raising the ghosts of dead babies; it is also about the "other" life that goes unlived—the "free" life, the one that sanctions a "natural" relationship between mother and child, the one that Denver represents, grasps and shows how it is to be done—through learning the words, claiming history for herself, normalizing herself by entering the social sphere, exposing ghosts and exorcising them through saying, confronting, and possessing. Denver eventually decides "to do the necessary" (252) and takes to the street in search of meaningful employment on Bluestone Road; like her mother so many years earlier, she seizes the opportunity to speak and what emerges is not an apology, but a clear declaration of who she is, including her wants and needs now that Beloved has consumed her mother and her whole past identity as "the hysterical offspring of a bad mother" (Cixous 312).

As a result of Denver's desire for a "sister," the town is realigned, boundaries dissolved, truths uncovered and seen in the light of day where they dissipate like handfuls of water. She begins to assert herself and ultimately she unhinges her old notions of self, as well as those on Bluestone Road. She extricates herself from her mother and sister-ghost, even though she feeds them both. She re-emphasizes the importance of narrative and shared details when she realizes, "Nobody was going to help her unless she told it—told it all" (253). Moved by the ghost, and the absence its presence signifies, she makes her life bigger and brings the whole town to the front porch of 124. With their voices, they bring the past forward and confront the ghost with their own sense of community and history.

In the end, Denver breaks all preconceived notions of boundaries, not only those of race but of gender, recognizing that Paul D has attempted to usurp her place at 124, just as Beloved had done with her mother. Denver says that at times she is "sure" that Beloved was her sister, but at times she thinks, "she was—more" (266). But when Paul D offers an opinion, Denver shows her maturity—her own bigness—in saying she does not want his when she has her own. The "white schoolteacher," a different kind, Miss Bodwin, has taught her some "stuff" (266), indicating once again that women can help women to help themselves, just as not everything white is "bad luck" and "schoolteacher" is not always a threat. Having learned and wanting to learn so much, it is not a coincidence that she returns to school with a new white teacher. After a rupture of eighteen years, her life now continues as beloved, by others and, especially, by herself. This is the "stuff" she learns through "ghost company."

The merging consciousness of the three women reaches an apex in a series of four internal monologues, in succession near (or at) the climax of the novel (pp. 200-217). Each of them speaks, at first in a voice emanating from the self but directed outward, until finally these three voices

blend so that it is difficult (and, at times, unnecessary) to tell who is “speaking.” This chain of monologues is striking, in part, because of its abrupt placement in the text, when all that precedes it has been written in a relatively more detached, external, third-person voice. On the previous page (before Sethe’s monologue), we see Stamp Paid on the outside of 124, having failed to gain entry and frustrated that the women are alone and “free at last” to speak their own minds, their voices blending, recognizable but “undecipherable (199), “the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (199). Many of these thoughts are of men while most are of the other women (Sethe, Beloved, Denver, and Baby Suggs); some are of the present while most are of the past—a past that manifests itself in present hunger for a better past and a better present. The better present is one in which Sethe has her daughter “She mine.... I’ll tell Beloved” (209); Denver has her sister—“She’s mine, Beloved. She’s mine” (209); and Beloved has her self, someone to “Say me my name” (212). They each desire the completion that a telling and an understanding would bring, as well as, a restitution of the perfect tableau of a unified family that each is clinging to before the baby was killed by the mother: “When I tell you mine, I also mean I’m yours,” says Sethe (203) to underscore her willing loss, sharing, and renewal of self through Beloved. Her words also suggest that it is indeed the sharing of what has not been and should not be told that intertwines their spirits, filling the gap between them and in their own sense of selves individually, both as women and as black women.

Each voice speak-thinks of history, keeping it to themselves, but needing to share. Sethe thinks of the infanticidal event and the various atrocities at Sweet Home, the loss of her husband, and her relationships with Mrs. Garner and Baby Suggs, including the things that she wondered about and went unsaid, particularly when the latter was dying. Denver thinks of her early years of silence, the years with the baby ghost, the fear of her mother, and her own loneliness. But they

both consider Paul D's banishment of the ghost and Beloved's subsequent banishment of Paul D, as the paternal figure who attempted to usurp Sethe's position as head of the household, Denver's place as her mother's only companion, and Beloved's place as the new, rising voice at 124.

Beloved thinks in a disjointed manner that is composed of phrases with spaces (instead of punctuation) between them. At times she appears to be thinking of her own death, in seeing the living, particularly Sethe, hovering over her face; at other times, she seems to be remembering a life on a slave ship, which is not possible, since she was born to Sethe en route to 124. More likely, either she is recounting a past life or she is speaking vicariously for the "sixty million and more" who died on slave ships without reaching America. Either way, her think-speech invokes the concept of sharing and empathy, as well as the flattened-out continuum of time in which nothing really dies and history presents itself as a chain of separate, yet related, events.

The voices culminate in near-unison in the fourth internal monologue, the way the voices of the women of Bluestone Road converge at the end of the novel. It is as if they all (because women and because black) speak to each other on an unconscious, structured plane where sometimes the thoughts will have meaning only to the speaker and listener, on the one hand, and to the attentive reader, on the other. In particular, the repetition of "You are mine You are mine You are mine" (216), written without punctuation or attribution (as much of the latter part of the fourth monologue is) creates a sense that it does not matter who is speaking, since they all (or possibly just Beloved, since the section begins in her voice) think the same words and thoughts. Ultimately, it is history, as a series of arbitrarily related signifiers in a continuum of words and images, that these monologues evoke. All three voices concern themselves with it, expressing not regret so much as the need to tell and be told, and therefore emptied and fulfilled, dead and re-born.

4.1.6 Summary

Beloved differs from its predecessors in that the ghost is “real”: there is no doubt of what the “something” is that inhabits 124; furthermore, its motives and reasons for existing are transparent and multiple. The “hungry” ghost is the grown up, physical manifestation of a child that was killed by its mother eighteen years earlier. Mostly, though, *Beloved* is a history made material, the tale that should not be told, but must be told, thereby unsettling foundational notions of taboo subjects and moral transgression. *Beloved* represents so much that she represents nothing in particular, except a haunting. The ghost is, after all, a “meaning machine” (Halberstam 26)⁵¹ that depends on race, class, gender, sexuality and other qualifiers for its interpretation; the lines that normally delineate genres, spaces, and nomination are nebulous. The line between loving and loathing, self-love and self-loathing is a fairytale, and somehow *Beloved* is a specular for all of these various thoughts and labels. *Beloved* is not only resurrection, daughter, sister, lover, friend, enemy, and “something”; she is also murder, mother, ancestor, sin, law, outlaw, doubt, repression, friend, self, and nothing; she is both beloved and hated, a “best thing” and a worst thing; a symbol of a national shame that is slavery and a national pride that is emancipation: a lost narrative and a new narrative. The ghost comes forth to split a family apart and then bring it together, to exploit its internal differences and reinforce its similarities. Whether she comes from Sethe’s mind or Denver’s, or whether she simply comes from, and returns to, the metaphorical river is unclear. Ultimately, the origin story is a moot point because the nature of origin stories is that they are unavailable, except in fictions like the one Sethe has told herself and her daughter. *Beloved*

⁵¹ Halberstam says that “monsters are meaning machines;” traditionally, ghosts have been considered monstrous. But reduction of the “otherness” does not reduce the myriad possibilities for interpretation; such identification with self likely increases the number of potential meanings, making it impossible to choose just one to which all observers can adhere. Essentially, Halberstam is pointing out that the relationship between beholder and object depends upon circumstance and perspective, as this thesis emphasizes.

signifies the intrinsic difficulty in applying labels. Either way, Beloved is as Beloved seems: interpretable, mutable, material and ghost.

Chapter 5:

Symbolic Ghosts in *The Robber Bride* and *Anil's Ghost*

By the beginning of the third millenium, ghosts in Western literature increasingly reflect the normalized chaos inherent in the postmodern age. To depict characters as ghosts is to gothicize a text, for such figures carry gothic baggage and suggest a shift in artistic depictions as ghosts are increasingly portrayed by authors as human. Halberstam might be right in suggesting that “the novel is always Gothic” (11). As this thesis argues, the postmodernization of the ghost constitutes an acknowledgement, in art, of the disappearance of a loss of referents and a subsequent blurring of boundaries that ultimately destabilizes identities of both self and other. There is, as Punter describes it, a decreasing “appreciation of limits” and a “marked thinning of the notion of the real” despite the omnipresence of social law (*Pathologies* 13). Evermore, commodification and normalization of the ghost cause it to become ubiquitous. Likewise, the Gothic is “all around us,” occasionally erupting, causing an abhorrent “mayhem” and yet turning out “to have done little real damage to the social fabric” (11). With such normalized chaos wrought by everyday gothic, we now encounter ghosts everywhere and barely hesitate when we do so.

Neither *The Robber Bride* (1993) nor *Anil's Ghost* (2000) contains ghosts in the traditional sense—that is, of an abstract entity emanating from a dead person—but both novels conjure that gothic trope, appropriating its symbolic implications to create a fearful atmosphere and the triple theme of lost referents, contested boundaries, and identity confusion. Atwood depicts a female other who is not exclusively a villain, but is a mirror of the three female protagonists (Tony, Charis, and Roz); they are so much like the ghost figure, Zenia, that it is difficult to tell if there is any dividing line between them, and yet we know there is one, if only because she is Zenia, defined by

her performance in their lives, as well as by their own performances within her life. They view her as a monster, one whom they presume dead but who seems to return, haunting them until they are forced to consider destroying her again. But Zenia (like her spectral counterpart in *Ghost Story*) cannot be destroyed, for she is both ghost and human. Immortal and vaguely threatening for what she might signify, she is nonetheless specular and elusive, appearing and disappearing at will, being dead and alive, strange and familiar, destroyer and teacher all at once. Zenia cannot die because she is already dead, officially speaking; but she cannot be revived because she has never really died. To say she is not truly a ghost is to miss an obvious point in *The Robber Bride*, that the dividing line between human and ghost is invisible, if existing at all. There are differences between them, but there are also counter-balancing similarities. As Halberstam suggests, such monsters as Zenia are not only “meaning machines,” multiple in their significations, but monstrous only according to our own projections and the labels we place upon them.

It is also true that, in *Anil's Ghost*, a reader will not find a traditional kind of ghost, and yet some meanings of the novel's title are clearly derivative of, and dependent upon, our expectations of what constitutes such a creature. The idea of the ghostly other haunts the entire novel, particularly the journey of the protagonist, Anil, towards some sort of compromised reconciliation with herself and her history. That history is both personal and cultural, as well as both materially present and absent. Given the ubiquitousness of the ghost in the postmodern age, it is likely that Ondaatje depends upon our postmodern sensibilities, including the expectation that ghosts most often are, among its other qualities, reflections of the self, derived from the self and from a schism of identity. Ondaatje's notion of the ghost suggests the weakened boundaries between self and other, between that which chases and that which is being chased. After all, what the postmodern ghost-hunter seeks is not just the ghostly other, but the ghostly self, as well. Anil, a forensic

pathologist, seeks to heal the dead by affixing an irrefutable identification to a skeleton she has named "Sailor," but her quest for information derives from a personal hunger for individuation, rather than from any yearning felt by the skeleton itself. As is often the case in these most recent ghost novels, "individuation" turns out to be somewhat of a myth, as the self is not an autonomous subject, but, equally, is one that creates itself through associations within the social whole. As Atwood says, Ondaatje's novel extends an "old and persistent" tradition that thrives "because it's so elemental, interbound as it is with the desire for justice and the longing for revenge" and based on the premise "that dead bodies can talk if you know how to listen to them, and they *want* to talk, and they want us to sit down beside them and hear their sad stories" (*Negotiating* 163). But Anil's "ghost" is not necessarily, or exclusively, the one she thinks she is chasing. The skeleton is, in large part, a mirror for what is lacking or merely hidden or repressed in herself. After all, knowing "how to listen" has as much to do with the self as the other, for the human-ghost discussion is a symbiotic one. In the postmodern age, everything is a mirror for the subject. Whether the "dead" Zenia or a Sri Lankan skeleton, the beholder breathes life into them because of what they themselves feel is missing not just in the other but in the self.

In both *The Robber Bride* and *Anil's Ghost*, the authors place ghosts in front of their stories, encouraging the reader to recognize, and react to, the presence of a spectre immediately. That response is rendered more complex when the reader encounters neither a strictly gothic nor a strictly literary novel but the hybridized genre of a gothicized literary novel in which the typical encounters the atypical without surrendering a shred of normalcy. This is the apex of postmodernism where the old narrative confronts a new one and, without significant hesitation, melds with this potential other to create a new, hybrid genre, the postmodern Gothic, featuring humanized ghosts and gothicized reality. With the normalization of chaos, the schism between self

and other is lessened, while a schism between the known self and the unknown or newly-known self appears. Paranoia—a chief goal of the Gothic—becomes more acceptable, and the rift between normal and chaos dissipates. As Halberstam says, the fear emanating from the perceived “monstrosity” of an other is historically conditioned rather than a psychological universal, and so postmodern paranoia is a result of a state of mind, as both Atwood’s and Ondaatje’s protagonists discover. So it is that without clear referents or solid grounding, the potential for both chaos and paranoia is greater, as is the potential for complete freedom from traditional restraints.

These are symbolic ghosts in that they are not, ultimately, made out to be “real,” and yet they signify as much, and as little, as any spirit could. In *The Robber Bride*, Zenia is presumed dead from the start, but we gradually discover that she has been alive all along. To the three female characters (Tony, Charis, and Roz), she is dead, and when they see her in a downtown restaurant, each of them realizes that they have been expecting her ghost to show up, which is exactly what happens. Zenia is an other who becomes normalized and humanized, as each woman comes to realize that Zenia is, at least in part, a reflection of themselves, their deepest and darkest fears and desires. She begins the story as a ghost, but never recovers from that early nomination: while we recognize her humanity, we never forget her Gothic beginnings, especially because she remains monstrous throughout and simultaneously gains humanity. In the end, she is only marginally less monstrous and yet more ghostly because she is dead.

The spectre in *Anil’s Ghost* is not a “real” ghost at all, but a symbolic one. The title character, Anil Tissera, is alive, but the spirit she pursues is that of a dead man she calls “Sailor”; as the title suggests, however, the spirit’s identity is doubled, for Anil is pursuing her self, as well as her other: the ghost of Sailor and the spirit of Anil. There is no boundary between them, just as there is none between Zenia and her supposed victims. This is the nature of the postmodern ghost,

for even if we are able to point to it, show its substance and its boundaries, unveil it as other, we immediately recognize the futility of nomination, for the ghost disappears, reveals its protraction beyond mere borders and bodies, and unveils itself as part of its beholder. Ultimately, as Tony suggests in *Robber Bride*, when the ghost's significations are so multiple and its meaning so elusive, reasons and motives cease to matter.

5.1 Commonality with the Ghost Woman in *The Robber Bride*

Despite the identification of Zenia as both human and alive, critics of *The Robber Bride* are mostly united in their nomination of it as a ghost novel. It prominently features a phantom-like female character who, on the one hand, terrorizes the everyday lives of three women in 1990s Toronto and, on the other, plays a pivotal, positive role in these women's spiritual, psychological, and emotional growth. While Zenia is not the clear-cut gothic villain that the women initially make her out to be, neither is she a benevolent figure. Regardless of interpretations, Zenia is power incarnate. But she is also a specular in that she is many things, depending on the beholder, as multiple as Zenia herself.

Donna Bontatibus sees *The Robber Bride* as a ghost tale in which the spectral figure is both multiple and specular in its significations. The novel is a "contemporary ghost story," she says, which draws on folkloric tradition and narrative strategy for "added meaning and depth" beyond the "multiplicity of layers, ranging from the biblical and the folkloric to the metaphysical, psychological, and the Eastern philosophical" with which Atwood imbues it. Bontatibus cites the influences of Jungian psychology and dream symbolism represented by the protagonists' various relationships with the ghost figure herself, Zenia. *The Robber Bride*, she says, draws on these various "traditions and perspectives" to create or recreate "a ghost story in which the three central

protagonists—Roz, Tony, and Charis—unconsciously summon through their ‘passions’ a trickster-like-woman from their past back into their lives” (1). She sees Zenia as a spirit who appears when called upon to wreak havoc on the lives of the three women, but who is neither completely harmless, nor totally harmful. Zenia is, in effect, largely a reflection of each woman who conjures her, for “Atwood admits that she is particularly intrigued with tales in which ‘the ghost that one sees is in fact a fragment of one’s own self which has split off’” (Gibson 29; qtd in Bontatibus 1).

While not specifically referring to Zenia as a ghost figure, it is clear that Maggie Gallagher considers her both surreal and specular. In labeling the novel “a feminist fairy tale” in which men are “sad-sacks,” Gallagher notes that Zenia is a “very odd sort of villain” who “pains her women friends” by “forcing them to face what Miss Atwood considers truths—truths about men—they would rather avoid” (2). Zenia is, thus, neither a complete villain, nor an outright friend, but a conglomerate of both. In some ways, Atwood plays the role of Zenia, telling women what is good for them while also exposing them to their worst nightmares in various forms. Mostly, that “nightmare” is simply the reality that chaos rules, that nothing is trustworthy or stable, except possibly the self, and even that concept is open to destabilization and/or (re)interpretation.

Jennifer Murray argues that Atwood limits the potentiality for the novel’s significations by imposing the “Triple Goddess” myth, among others, on its narrative structure. That is, by framing the novel in recognizable intertextual terms, such as Grimm’s *Fairy Tales* (particularly “The Three Little Pigs”) and, especially, the myth of the goddesses, Atwood has prevented the novel “from opening up to the reader a range of potentially radical positions.” She refers to the Triple Goddesses (with Tony, Roz and Charis being roughly representative of maiden, mother, crone, respectively) and “The Three Little Pigs” as a myth and a fairy tale which are ready-made history in that they have a “presence which is constructed so as to appear, at one and the same time, to

precede those who received it, and to live on beyond those who reactivate it through their storytelling" (2). They are "eternal" prescriptions for behaviour and morality which, in this case, tell "women what their experience of themselves should be, notably, that their sexuality involves a fall, and that sexual reproduction is the appropriate form of redemption from this fall" (2).

Appropriately, Murray points out that the Triple Goddesses belong to "the semiotic sphere of the mysterious" and like "all trinities," the goddess is "both one and several. She is three, in her three phases: maiden, matron and crone, and yet, unified as the muse, she is at once creator and destroyer" (4)—a description which suits Zenia perfectly if she is to be taken as a muse figure.

Nonetheless, as it is the "structure of immortality which serves as the basis for the construction" of the novel (4), Murray's assertion that this intertextuality is unnecessarily limiting seems to miss the mirror-like quality of both Zenia and *The Robber Bride*. The structure of the novel, like any form, is a specular reflection of the reader, persuasively providing an illusion of the solid, built from words and significations. The text, like Zenia herself, is boundless and open to multiple interpretations. The fairy tale allusions and the triple-based structure might appear to close the book until one considers how much more Atwood's novel signifies. Murray's own arguments are perceptive, but they offer boundaries that do not exist, except in theory. Jackson, King, and Straub also evoke fairytale and pop culture allusions, while the folk tales and cultural references in Morrison's fiction serve similar purposes of expanding the narrative by alluding to an external touchstone of morality or self-identification. Evidently, there is more to the text than meets the eye/I.

Zenia's brand of terrorism, including her return from death, amounts to a gothicization of the everyday present. When the dead are presumed more powerful than the living and the presumption pervades that the dead will return, or have returned, and when humans share as many

traits with ghosts as with most other humans, then ghosts have become reality, and reality has become chaotic and gothicized. In *The Robber Bride* and *Anil's Ghost*, death is the new normal, whether in present-day Toronto or war-torn Sri Lanka. The battle is no longer against death—for we have seen death in all of these novels—and time and again, we see that it is no guard against the return, continuance, or omnipresence of that which we would bury. Nothing dead stays buried, we are told repeatedly. The war in *Anil's Ghost* is against fear of loss, but, even more, it is against the self and one's own fears. When ghosts, death, and fear are normal, they are part of the accepted chaos of a world in which the only possible surprise is that there are no surprises. Postmodern literature increasingly reflects and acknowledges this shift towards the pervasive certainty of uncertainty, as ghosts appear in the so-called normal landscape of the literary novel to destabilize identities and assumptions of all kinds.

5.1.1 The Ghost of Zenia

Zenia fits the definition of the postmodern ghost in most ways, existing without tangible history and creating one as she goes, emptied of meaning, possessed of a similar capacity for transgressing boundaries of time and space, appearing and re-appearing suddenly, returning the repressed past, providing a specular to her various beholders, and posing an ethereal threat without any apparent motive except hunger. With her pale, translucent skin and penchant for sudden, mysterious, and chaotic returns and departures, she is unbounded to the human plane, uncommitted to death. But, in accordance with the postmodern, it hardly matters that Zenia is not really dead. As Gelder explains, Gothic's critics, such as Todorov, have shown "the world and the otherworldly—the real and the imagination—to be inextricably intertwined," as the "inexplicable and terrifying visions" have entered the "very midst of ordinary life"; when the boundaries dissipate and the self

doubts its own autonomy, “one ‘hesitates’ to choose between them simply because they so completely inhabit each other” (“Part One” 12). Even the definition of “death” is destabilized when the dead return after all normal, cultural rites have been observed; by their very nature, ghosts are not dead and yet they must have been dead once. It follows, then, that the concept of “being alive” is unfixed, considering that, five years after Zenia has been pronounced legally dead, had a funeral, and been mourned, she comes back in physical form. Once the rites of death have been administered, there remains, around and within the “departed” and returned body, an aura of death and resurrection, of the walking dead or the ghostly human. We do not see the moment of transition from ghost-to-human, or vice versa, because the author has practiced sleight of hand, providing historical anecdote (as in *Beloved*) to normalize the ghost, smooth the way for our suspension of disbelief, and minimize the hesitation to name the ghost. At the same time, Atwood’s use of fairytales makes the text material (ghost and all), while overspilling its boundaries and opening itself up to other texts.

Zenia enters the text as a ghostly figure and never really sheds that particular nomination, despite subsequent flashbacks of her when she was alive. Atwood convinces us that Zenia “is really dead” (Atwood 11) in order to underscore the shocked responses of the three friends when they encounter her alive. Furthermore, she wants us to see Zenia as a ghost from the outset, regardless of how we deal with that original nomination later on, as we find out she has never been dead to begin with. Having already experienced her as a ghost, we need not shift our thinking of her at all when she “really” does die. Despite the passing of five years since Zenia’s supposed demise, Tony “keeps expecting her to turn up,” for, it “seems improbable that she would simply have evaporated, with nothing left over. There was too much of her: all that malign vitality must have gone somewhere” (11). In fact, despite the time that has passed since Zenia’s memorial

service, Tony “frequently thinks of Zenia, more frequently than when Zenia was alive” and still “finds it hard to believe that Zenia is really dead” (11). She still feels the dead woman’s residual energy because it was so powerful and so negative in Tony’s experience.

Labelling their friendship an “*esprit de corps*” (31), it is Zenia, ironically, who has brought these three women together, united because of a common enemy and sense of victimhood while, in fact, they “don’t have much in common except the catastrophe” that is Zenia. Although a lawyer has told them at the interment service that Zenia is “present only in spirit” (13), her death has never been real for the three women, and so they expect her to make a return. With their various “battle scars,” including the shared one, “there are more people present around the table than can be accounted for.” But they leave Zenia out of their conversations, thereby unintentionally deepening the void that is simultaneously filled by her absence. Charis says, “talking about her might hold her on this earth” (32), but Tony feels that “She’s here, we’re holding her, we’re giving her air time. We can’t let her go,” and in the very act of acknowledging it, she creates the very thing she fears, that Zenia remains with them, a part of them.

While fearful talk of Zenia enables the reader to suspend disbelief and to see her as a spectre, the friends’ avoidance of saying her name does nothing to dissolve her power, as they suppose, but merely enhances it. The three women accept neither her death nor her humanity, nor the fact that her power over them is granted, rather than won; they are neither victims nor conquests, but self-sacrifices. They seem unaware, as yet, that “power itself has for a long time produced nothing but the signs of its resemblance. And at the same time, another figure of power comes into play: that of a collective demand for signs of power—a holy union that is reconstructed around its disappearance” (Baudrillard 23). They form “a tacit agreement never to mention Zenia” and, at the funeral service, there are “no final words said, no words of dismissal,” thus giving Tony

“the uneasy feeling that we’ve left something out” even as they walk away (Atwood 14). Roz implies her own sense of victimhood and Zenia’s status as monstrous other when she half-jokes that they should have driven a stake through her heart. She thus displays an “obsession with power—obsession with its death, obsession with its survival, which increases as it disappears” (Baudrillard 23). When Charis uneasily admits that Zenia was “a fellow human *being*” (Atwood 14), Roz denies the possibility: “If she was a fellow human being, I’m the Queen of England” (14). But Tony feels “less than benevolent,” thinking only that they should have done something to keep her in the ground as people have done during wartime throughout history: they would “slit the throats of their best horses,” spill some blood or some other seemingly primitive ritual as a matter of “appeasement” rather than mourning because “the spirit of the dead one would be envious of them for still being alive” (14). To recognize Zenia’s envy of their lives would, of course, be to humanize her, which they are reluctant to do. Regardless, Tony’s thoughts of appeasing her ghost out of fear, rather than love, already normalize the return and restore the lost referent that is Zenia, for she is concerned that Zenia “stay buried” (15) and clearly expects a ghost. Thus, while she never has been dead or buried physically, neither has she been dead or buried in *words* or *thoughts*. The lack of departing words—which could have indicated forgiveness, kinship, and moving on—is an absence which is quickly filled by the (apparently) vengeful return of Zenia. Even in death, Zenia is able to consume her victims because, like Sethe, they never say the words that will neutralize her power; instead, they keep her memory alive, incomplete and, therefore, hungry. In her premature burial, she is an hallucinated absence: “a haunting memory that is already in evidence everywhere, expressing at once the compulsion to get rid of it (no one wants it anymore, everyone unloads it on everyone else) and the panicked nostalgia over its loss” (Baudrillard 23).

Thus normalized, anticipated, and even conjured, when Zenia re-enters their world, she is immediately recognized, without hesitation. “It’s not a hallucination,” Tony thinks, particularly because the waitress “has seen her too” (34). Just prior to having seen her, though, Tony has felt “a chill” as if experiencing a premonition and then, looking up into the mirror, she sees Zenia “standing here, behind her, in the smoke, in the glass, in this room. Not someone who looks like Zenia: Zenia herself” (34). Roz immediately recognizes and names Zenia as the apparition, but Charis counters, “Zenia’s dead,” thereby holding onto Zenia’s death, as well as her ghost. Charis, meanwhile, is so intent on denial that she refuses to “*think* about her” because “I don’t want her messing up my head” (36) by blurring the boundaries between life and death, past and present. “Zenia is history,” Tony declares, but she is also the chaotic present and uncertain future incarnate. As Baudrillard explains, it is all a question of power, for “it is now the era of murder by simulation, . . . the allegorical resurrection of death, which is only there to sanction the institution of power, without which it no longer has any substance or an autonomous reality” (24). “Don’t let her frighten you,” Tony says as much to herself as to Charis, but Charis implies that Zenia’s power, at least in part, derives from her specular nature, when she responds, “It’s not fear. . . . She makes me sick of myself.” Roz echoes the sentiment: “She does have that effect” (36).

When Zenia finally re-appears she is more alluring, hungry, and potent than before—a lost referent in full resurrection because she is “mourned” (Baudrillard 23). She is made real through a series of flashbacks, each major female character recounting her own history with her, with the narrative of Zenia’s differing each time, depending on who tells it. Although each woman has a history before meeting her, it is as if each narrative of childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood has been leading up to the initial, and subsequent, encounters with Zenia. Furthermore, we are made to feel that these women’s lives since Zenia’s faked death have revolved around her,

and there is every reason to believe that their life-narratives will always focus on the ghost of Zenia. Like *Beloved*, she is the ghost of both enslavement and emancipation, one-half of every relationship she touches.

Ultimately, Zenia is chaos incarnate, signifying, as she does, a breach of normalcy, a return of the repressed and oppressive past. She exemplifies the impermanent quality of life in the latter part of the century: “There’s just no base, there’s no permanence,” she tells Roz, explaining what it has been like for her to be “out there so long,” without any “solid ground,” and having “never fitted in” in a way that Roz does (411). In this novel, the ordinary is horrifying and “normal” situations are viewed “through a glass, darkly” (36). In *Zenia*, the strange becomes common, as the man-eating, black widow, beautiful woman of mystery and enchantment insinuates herself inextricably into the lives of Tony and her two female friends, consuming their male counterparts as if they were bon-bons. Atwood, like Ondaatje in his concern with warfare, presents the everyday as gothicised, for threats abound in the common as well as the strange. As Atwood tells us when we first see the war-obsessed Tony looking at a print, with Zenia’s return, “something ordinary but horrifying is taking place” (3). In the same way, as if trying to convince herself that Zenia is human, Roz focuses on the Zenia’s flawed skin which has a “dullness” and “a slight contracting of pores, a shrinkage,” which she finds “reassuring because “Zenia is mortal after all, like the rest of them” (36). In fact, as a spectral figure and “history” incarnate—an unsolid, imperfect and abstract reflection of the present—Zenia’s mysterious origins, appearances and disappearances, are normal for a spectral figure.

5.1.2 Zenia is History

Atwood mythologizes Zenia, normalizing the idea of a ghost and making her substantial and real, much as Toni Morrison does in *Beloved* before the ghost appears. Then, after she returns in shadowy form, she comes fully alive for the reader in flashback. The three main narratives that comprise the whole of *The Robber Bride* are threads woven into a single narrative, but in the end we clearly can see the individual threads which might be pulled, causing the rest to unravel. We are left not with a ghost, but with many strands of something not wholly identifiable. But when the three stories are intertwined, each giving a little more flesh and substance to Zenia, she comes alive and yet remains impalpable, just as she is to Tony, Charis, and Roz. The thin line between human and ghost, or fabrication and truth, gives the illusion of ghostliness and perhaps signifies that ghosts are like us because we are all like ghosts to begin with. Details are pieces to be assembled, dissembled, and reassembled at will, consciously or unconsciously, floating about our heads in perpetuity with only an air of truth about them, gaining meaning only fleetingly before losing it or giving over to another interpretation. Tony's penchant for speaking backwards is a part of this re-arranging and emptying out of signifiers, revealing a corruption of language and disallowing entry or meaning to the word through an attendant strangeness and gothicisation (a "defamiliarisation," as Becker calls it). In a sense, Zenia performs as a postmodern text. In fact, the story of Zenia itself is told backwards, beginning arbitrarily and proceeding with a certain emptiness as such. Postmodern literature does this, presenting images and texts in seemingly random order to bring attention to their structure or, rather, the process of structuring, but also to their function and dependence upon a system of other signs for meaning.

While Zenia's significations are various, Atwood presents her as History incarnate, a return of that part of themselves which the three protagonists would otherwise repress but that still holds

the illusion of power over them. As such, *The Robber Bride* presents itself as various narrative threads that make up a history—one that can never truly be complete, for something always will be missing and/or fabricated. “History is a construct,” Tony tells her students, “Any point of entry is possible and all choices are arbitrary” (4), just as “every ending is arbitrary” (522). Thus, Atwood presents no grand narrative as the definitive one, and yet the novel, with its three separate threads, somehow amounts to a single grand narrative, if one can ignore the threads (such as the untold story that is Zenia’s, which is appropriate, since she is a ghost and an absence) that are unknown, or unpulled. Despite the ingrained impulse for linear storytelling—“The story of Zenia ought to begin when Zenia began”—Tony finds such obedience difficult. Zenia’s origin story, like all histories, is unknown, possessing various threads, some of which might be true, some of which is not. She presents her as a mysterious phantom without origin, emanating not from any particular dark place, but from all dark, chaotic, and damaged spaces: “It must have been someplace long ago and distant in space, thinks Tony; someplace bruised, and very tangled” (3) like the beginning of life or the Earth itself. She does not, however, begin Zenia’s story when Zenia began because she simply does not have that information: “so much has been erased, so much has been bandaged over, so much deliberately snarled, that Tony isn’t sure any longer which of Zenia’s accounts of herself was true. She can hardly ask now, and even if she could, Zenia wouldn’t answer. Or she would lie” (3). Ultimately, it does not seem to matter: “Pick any strand and snip, and history comes unraveled,” Tony thinks. And so she starts *in media res*, just as most ghost novels do, for most stories truly begin before they begin and continue on long after their endings. Thus, the beginning of Zenia’s story is an “arbitrary choice, a definitive moment” of rupture when the dead is resurrected as Zenia walks into Toxique.

The futility in the reconstruction of any ghost, human, or history, pervades every postmodern ghost story, for the truth of *Beloved*, Eva Galli, and the ghost at Bly is as elusive and impermeable as that of the long-dead Sri Lankan citizen in *Anil's Ghost*. Tony has "attempted to trace" the "meaning" of Zenia's name and finds so many possibilities that she cannot choose only one. They are all Zenia, just as all interpretations of Sailor (and of Anil, Tony, and others) make up the object of study and speculation: "out of such hints and portents, Zenia devised herself. As for the truth about her, it lies out of reach, because—according to records, at any rate—she was never even born" (518). The obsession of the Moderns with truth and meaning finally has given way completely to a metaphorical shrug, as Atwood notes: "But why bother, in this day and age—Zenia herself would say—with such a quixotic notion as the truth? Every sober-sided history is at least half sleight-of-hand.... Tony is daunted by the impossibility of accurate reconstruction" (518). Truth may never be known, which might be why we have ghosts; the craving for truth, for completion, for a defined, set history is insatiable, for such completion is elusive. The ghost is practically raised and defined by its craving for that which cannot be found: the other consumes the self in search of the one slight sliver of truth, only to find that, in the precariously thin and intangible moment of discovery, there is—as Eleanor finds at Hill House—the simultaneous loss of it. Consumption—as in the Information Age—does not breed satisfaction; it engenders greed and hunger for more, perhaps a restless pause, but never a stopping point. History is ceaseless, as ghosts are relentless, as life is without pause; anything else is death, which quite possibly does not even exist, except in theory, much like ghosts themselves. The death-pause is included in the life-continuance, implied in its very definition of that which does not stop. Once a "substantial edifice," history looks "more and more like a pile of rubble," whereas once it had a "meaningful structure." In thinking such thoughts, Tony echoes Eleanor Vance, mourning the passing of

meaning and the loss of an old self. Like Tony, however, they plod onward, still weaving together “informed guesses and plausible assumptions” (518) on “the long march into chaos” (519), arranging bits of information and partially-remembered “history” into “patterns... they must have once made” (518).

Anil does this as well, “rearranging” (518) data into a body of information, something doubtfully representing and resembling something that once lived but is “ultimately an illusion” like evil itself (519), dependent upon the beholder for substance and form. Tony and Anil stand on *this* side of the history, their own side of the mirror, attempting to drag their ghosts with them, dead or alive, preferably both. Like the “rearranged” maps of Europe and the palindromes (“WAR” and “RAW,” “WEST” and “STEW,” for example) she plays with, Tony’s Zenia “continues to exist” even after her death, somewhere “in this infinitely receding headspace” (521). That is to say: Zenia is dead; but long live Zenia, bigger in death because she is without the boundaries of the physical to contain her spirit or her will. This is what Charis knows and what Tony suspects. It is what every ghost narrative pre-supposes.

Ultimately, Zenia dies again and is buried once more, this time by having the vase which contains her ashes discarded at sea, off the deck of a ferry; but Atwood hints that Zenia cannot truly die. At the moment of her dissolution and the scattering of her ashes, Zenia becomes “formless, a broken mosaic; the fragments of her are in Tony’s hands, because she is dead, and all of the dead are in the hands of the living” (517). Tony can make Zenia “History” if she “chooses to shape her into history”; the implication is that ghosts and people, and their narratives, gain solidity through speech and memory (however faulty, incomplete or malleable). To speak the word is to give substance to an idea; that is, to invoke the spirit by speaking its name is to make it live. This novel gives form to Zenia, fictional character though she is, as well as to Tony, Charis, Roz, and

myriad minor characters, but it is an elusive, ungrounded, all-pervasive form. Atwood writes:

“The story of Zenia is insubstantial, ownerless, a rumour only, drifting from mouth to mouth and changing as it goes. As with any magician, you saw what she wanted you to see; or else you saw what you yourself wanted to see. She did it with mirrors. The mirror was whoever was watching, but [in actuality] there was nothing behind the two-dimensional image but a thin layer of mercury” (517). Atwood thus empties the mirror and Zenia of meaning or intent, robbing them of any illusory power. Tony even enters a brief period of doubt regarding Zenia’s existence, but only after Zenia is already dead; however “insubstantial” Zenia was, no matter how dubious her birth, she has to have lived in order to have died; while living itself is predicated by eventually having to die. The paradox of life is that it depends on death.

Atwood could very well be speaking of all literary ghosts, from the ghosts at Bly and Hill House, to those of the Overlook, and 124; they, too, are ownerless and “insubstantial,” existing by “rumour” and changing with the perspective of each teller. The mirror reflects only what lies before it; but such a connection is merely physical, superficial and “two-dimensional.” It is through the emotions and intellect of the beholder that the third dimension, the “more” and multiple significations, is added and breathes life and deeper, tangible connection to *this* realm, the one on this side of the mirror. Indeed, the connection is so palpable that the glass is cracked, the surface shattered, the “other” side indistinguishable from the “self” side because neither exists; the other and the self are fairytales like those that permeate the entire novel.

Much like Anil’s conclusion regarding Sailor, there is an acknowledgement of universality and sameness between Roz and Zenia: “But this is death, and death is Death, capital D, never mind whose,” thinks Roz, implying that the ghost of one is the ghost of all, that what has died is human, above all, and if one can die, all can die. It is simply a matter of accepting, then burying, the

truthfulness of such chaos. But nothing stays buried forever, particularly such a horrifying thought. Even Zenia's vase splits in two as Charis is discarding it into the ocean, a rupture that frightens them all because they have already raised the ghost once. When the pieces of the vase "splash into the water" near the end of the novel, "Zenia trails off in a long wavering drift, like smoke" (526). While Roz wonders what did it and Tony rationalizes that the vase hit the railing, Charis says, "It cracked by itself. It was here.' Entities can cause things like that, they can affect physical objects: they do it to get your attention" (526). Thus, the ghost breaks through, for it "pleases" Charis that Zenia has offered them this "token of her continuation" (526).

No different from the Chowder Society of *Ghost Story*, wherein ghosts proliferate in the narrative, the last image we have from Atwood is that of the three women settling into the rest of their lives—post-Zenia—and telling stories about Zenia, which they will "increasingly" do. The imaginary lines between self and other further dissipate in light of Zenia's death: "Was she in any way like us? thinks Tony. Or, to put it the other way around: Are we in any way like her?" (528). Tony knows she is different from these other women, and from Zenia, and yet similar to them at once. Atwood raises the silent, signifying ghost once more in the end as, "Tony stares up at Zenia, cornered on the balcony" and "Zenia stares back down," still bearing secrets that she is "still not telling" (527). Zenia is human and ghost; alive and dead; other and self; disconnected and yet attached, standing on both sides of the mirror, her narrative untold and more powerfully materially than ever for that absence.

5.1.3 Zenia is a Specular: Martyred Women and their Lost Men

The Robber Bride, not unlike many ghost tales, constitutes an extended chase scene in which the protagonists spend the narrative searching for an elusive spirit. When they finally

encounter what they have been seeking, it evaporates into the atmosphere and into themselves; just when they think they have her cornered, Zenia confronts them with their own pre-conceptions, challenging their ideas of monstrosity with details that only humanize. Zenia, as Atwood says of any ghost story, “is a way of examining the self coming to terms with the self,” as she explains each woman to herself, seeing something of themselves explained by her presence as well as her absence. Zenia reflects their own fears and desires about themselves. Bontatibus points out that Zenia “not only represents repressed aspects of themselves, but also aspects that they must integrate into their beings in order to possess a more complete sense of wholeness,” which includes a greater sense of their own capabilities (6).

In her relentless terrorizing of men, Zenia is similar to the shape-shifting ghost in *Ghost Story*. The title, *The Robber Bride*, is an inversion of the Grimm Brothers fairytale about “The Robber Bridegroom” since, in Atwood’s version, it is the female who commits atrocities upon the men. Tony believes that men are just sport for Zenia because she “likes challenges” (317), while Zenia herself sees them as play: “God I’m tired of men! They’re so easy to amuse” (410). All three men (West, Billy, and Mitch) serve as prey for the hungry spirit, reminders of her omnipresence; through them, she is able to be present, threatening, and all-consuming even in her absence, wreaking havoc by the mere thought of her and the mere sight of them, her men. While West remains in his ghostly manner, Charis’s boyfriend, Billy, has run away, and Roz’s husband, Mitch, has killed himself. Confronted, Zenia explains that she has performed each woman a favor by ridding them of these men who have held them back from living full, independent lives. “Men don’t see you as a person,” she tells them, “they just see the body, and so that’s all you see yourself. You think of your body as a tool, something to use” (410). To the men, Zenia is both

fantasy and nightmare, a gorgeous woman who desires them, but devours their insides and leaves them emptied, unfit for any other woman's consumption when she is done with them.

Despite the suggestion that Zenia's ghost might envy the living, Tony actually envies Zenia's power and assertiveness, as well as her aloof position towards those she regards as beneath her. As Bontatibus asserts: "For Tony, as well as the other protagonists, the next stage of the individuation process involves realizing that she possesses 'another self, a more ruthless one'" (6; RB 401). She lives in a house that she considers a refuge and wishes had a moat and a drawbridge; as well, she locks her office door on campus to keep students from knowing she is in there. But what she really wishes for is a backbone like Zenia's: "I'm just a human being, Tony wants to say to them. But of course she isn't. She's a human being with power. There isn't much of it, but it's power all the same" (34). She fears the homeless men and "ragged figures" that populate the sidewalks of Queen Street because she sees them "in a sinister light" (28). Like Anil Tissera, Tony's interest in history, particularly warfare, allows her to "avoid the present, most of the time" (32), thereby exposing a weakness that Zenia eagerly exploits. When they first become friends in their college days, Zenia plies Tony with questions, and Tony responds generously. She has never talked to anyone about her past before, but, finding a greedy listener, she tells Zenia almost everything, thereby relinquishing more ground in the "lust for power" (33). Ultimately, Tony plays victim to Zenia, who steals West and returns him when she is done with him; Tony and West return to normalcy during the cease-fire years while Zenia is away, but her ghost haunts their marriage until Zenia finally returns to threaten their bliss.

West's role in *The Robber Bride* is to connect Zenia to Tony, and vice-versa, to be sexually consumed by the Gothic beauty of Zenia, to await her return like Dracula's Renfield, and to remind Tony of the omnipresent shadow she casts over their lives. West is, in part, a reflection of Zenia,

her handiwork, exemplary of her darkest deeds and potential for mindless destruction. Having surrendered a will of his own, he does not have to claim responsibility for a lack of one. In the end, West remains, but only as a shadow of his former self and as a daily reminder that Zenia really was there and might return.

When she finally returns, Zenia continues to act like a ghost, wreaking chaos even as she strides by their table “as if they aren’t there, as if nobody is,” floating on a separate plane of existence. To Tony, Zenia looks beautiful, as always, “like a photo, a high-fashion photo done with hot light so that all freckles and wrinkles are bleached out and only the basic features remain,” while “waves of ill will flow out of her like cosmic radiation” (36). Tony admits that this is only her perception, that perhaps it is “an exaggeration”; she also suggests that “these are the emotions that Zenia mostly inspires: overdone emotions” (36). Merely the sight of her as a potential ghost causes them to feel “caught out,” “trapped,” and “guilty,” the same feelings the Hill House spirit induces in Eleanor, *Beloved* induces in Sethe, and *The Overlook* induces in Jack. The implication is that the ghost they behold emanates from their own negative emotions as much as it instills them. They feed off each other, both ghost and human (that is, both once-human and becoming-ghost) exist because of a mutual need, but also because of the women’s fear of such power.

Tony finds comfort in the normalization of her enemy, seeing her as same rather than different, despite her apparent qualities of otherness. These latter traits, of course, are human as well and are very much qualities that Tony desires to have for herself. Tony wonders not only what Zenia wants from them, but also what she is “doing here, on this side of the mirror,” for, even in denying Zenia’s humanity, she recognizes something of herself in her other. Images in mirrors are most likely going to be those of the self, but in this mirror Tony sees both self and other, as if “through the looking glass, darkly” (36). In the end, she recognizes that Zenia’s monstrosity is, at

least in part, her own construction, as well as that of Charis and Roz, since it no longer matters what “side she was on,” for there “may not even have been a side. She may have been alone” (527).

There is a sense in which this is true. Zenia is on no one’s side but her own, much like Tony herself, who has no friends at the university, only colleagues, and she is aware of the differences between herself and other women: Roz has children and Charis is odd to her. In the end, though, she decides to “join the others” (527). Like Zenia, she is interested in warfare because she is interested in warfare; the reasons are both complex and simple and, ultimately, do not matter. The important fact is that her interests separate her from others, both in her field and outside it, as if, for all her understanding of human motivations, they do not “get” her any more than she gets them. She sees Zenia as “courageous” after she is truly dead, if only because she was a formidable foe “of equal rank” of whom she can say, “I am the enemy you killed, my friend” (526). Tony, at last, comes to recognize that Zenia, “on some level, mirrors a part” of them all: “values and aspects of their personalities that they preferred not to look at too closely” (Bontatibus 6).

Like Tony, Charis sees in the specular Zenia that which she perceives to be lacking in herself. While she barely knows Zenia in university, she recalls her only as a “beautiful and confident” member of the in-crowd, hanging around with “artistic, intelligent people” (Atwood 247). Zenia’s presence makes her feel so “inadequate” (250) that she is surprised Zenia even remembers her from those days when she was still “Karen”—a name Zenia insists on calling her even now. Back then, Charis was not “political” and had “stayed in the shadows,” making her all the more “touched” that Zenia had “considered her worthy of notice” (254). She thinks that this personal attention makes Zenia a “sensitive person; more sensitive than people gave her credit for,” a realization that appeals to Charis’s own need for individuation. She is, after all, more than people give her credit for being, and she likes to think that she sees the best in people and can see

in them what others miss; she likes to help other people become something more and to be “happy.”

When Charis re-encounters Zenia in a yoga class that Charis is teaching, Zenia is looking oh-so-ghostly. She is “tall” and “thin as a razor” with skin as “white as mushrooms, and a dark-light phosphorescence glimmers around her like the sheen on bad meat” (525). The ghostly appearance is, of course, consistent with nearly every physical description Atwood gives of Zenia. The reference to “bad meat” seems like an in-joke on the fact that Zenia does not just have cancer: she *is* a cancer—a “tumour” (525), a walking, rotting, infectious corpse that contaminates all who come into contact with her. Charis thinks, “A big hit of vitamin C and a dollop of sunlight would be a start, but they wouldn’t even begin to touch what’s wrong with her” (246).

While Zenia uses Charis’s “virtuous” energy against her, she is actually taking only what is given, providing the yin to Charis’s yang, the dark to her light. It is as if Zenia has studied the book of Charis and has come to implement her newfound knowledge by using it against her. She enters Charis by speaking her language—that is, the language of the born-again flower child, new-age feminist. She appears to believe in the evils of animal fats (249), while lauding the healing properties of orange juice and yoga, issues that are dear to Charis. Most of all, though, Zenia has changed, for she is “cowed” (248) in appearance, exactly the word Charis uses to describe her former self, Karen. Appealing to Charis’s need to be needed, Zenia claims to have cancer, knowing that Charis will offer her healing and shelter. Charis’s strong belief that all life is sacred and that everyone is connected to everyone, but especially to her, means that she lives to make others happy. Just as she and Billy both exist for “Billy to be happy” (235), she also feels responsible for making Zenia smile and feel well, for it “pleased her to give this [“virtuous” and “good”] energy to someone so obviously in need of it” (252). Just as Zenia takes what she needs

from Charis, Charis takes what she needs from Zenia: individuation, a sense of self, of happiness and completion, of being explained and understood, especially by oneself. Zenia obliges, but only insofar as it gets her what she wants: to consume and to destroy.

Zenia's infiltrates Charis's dailiness, introducing a new chaos into a life that has become comfortably normal, if a little strange by most conventions. But then Charis believes that the "mist is less threatening when you're actually in it," giving her "the illusion of being able to walk through a solid barrier" (231). Her live-in boyfriend, Billy, is a draft dodger who abuses Charis's good nature by using her as an escape from the American government. He lives in her house, but takes up an affair with Zenia when Charis takes her, to nurse her back to health from the cancer she supposedly has. Billy is as similar to Paul D as Zenia is to Beloved. He is the wanderer who comes to Charis as a lost spirit, having fought in a philosophical war and needing a place to lay low and recuperate. As Paul D is opposed to the spirit at 124, Billy is "hostile" to Zenia (253), "afraid" of her ability to see through him and to disturb his relationship to Charis. In a way, Billy's greedy consumption of Charis's goodness is no different from Zenia's. They both give her the feeling of being the needed, strong individual that she wants to be. Like Billy's "pacifism," Zenia's "illness" is probably fake but convenient for self-preservation. Both arrangements work out because Charis only wants to make people happy, and Zenia and Billy want to take her happiness for themselves.

Charis's normal has always been Gothic. She has always read auras in people's faces, had premonitions, and been largely sensitive to energies and light. As a general rule, she "wasn't sure where the edges of her body ended and the rest of the world began" (70). When she was a child, she found the Gothic in the everyday—that is, in her mother's beating and constant berating of her, in her father's death at war overseas before she was born, and on her grandmother's farm where a flock of geese, a skeleton on the property, and even her grandmother herself, are all threatening her.

She is constantly frightened by the normal that most people take for granted. As an adult, she no longer calls herself “Karen,” having “banished” that name and that person (260). With the first return of Zenia, however, she feels that

cowed, powerless face Charis used to see in the mirror looming up to her own face, blown towards her through the darkness like an ousted ghost, towards this house where she has been islanded, thinking herself safe; demanding to enter her, to rejoin her, to share in her body once again....Charis is not Karen. She has not been Karen for a long time, and she never wants to be Karen again. (260)

And yet, now that Zenia has caused that “ghost” to return from the land of the repressed, no matter how much Charis resists, she finds that her old self “wants to speak” (260). Zenia is the return of a disregarded past, which has never really gone away. Such returns as Zenia’s and “Karen’s” are always repressed for fear that they might bring chaos to the present, destabilizing the order and “safety” one has attempted to build with the construction of a new identity. Ghosts transgress their boundaries of otherness and “out there” and join us on “this side of the mirror” where they can harm us simply by reminding us not only of who they are but also of who we were and, perhaps, still are. All times, as Jack Torrance would know, are one.

Roz, likewise, sees in Zenia what she would like to be: a powerful, decisive woman who looks out for her own interests. A perpetually hungry ghost, Zenia’s “trick” is to present herself “as a vacancy, as starvation, as an empty beggar’s bowl” (419). Roz supposes that Mitch “got tired of being given to” and “being rescued” and simply saw in Zenia a chance to do a little giving and rescuing of his own, perhaps needing and loving the image of the “grateful beautiful woman on her knees.” Just as Zenia and Billy leave Charis empty and ghostly, Zenia and Mitch do the same to Roz. Significantly, Roz wonders if she has been “grateful enough” and concludes, “Apparently

not" (419). She answers her own question, instinctively knowing that the question begets the answer and that both question and response come from the same place: within herself. Having identified Zenia as "a hunger," she "gives in to her [own] gnawing hunger" for answers she already knows (419). She simply wants the details, for she too is a vacancy that is filled by both Mitch and Zenia. But neither of them fulfill her; they merely leave her even hungrier. Roz tells Harriett, her hired detective, to ascertain whether Zenia is "real" (420), suspecting her insubstantial nature, for Zenia "doesn't seem to have been born"—a notion implied by the police later when they cannot uncover evidence of her birth. Roz becomes more like Zenia when Mitch comes back to her: "she does want a little blood, just a drop or two, because she's thirsty" (423).

Mitch is a womanizer who is using Roz for her money; when he encounters Zenia, he has met more than his match: he has met his superior. Zenia lures him away from Roz and emasculates him, leading him to commit suicide—an act which Roz blames on Zenia, but which seems equally to stem from his own emotional instability. But she notes that "Zenia has stolen something from him [Mitch], the one thing he always kept safe before, from all women, even Roz. Call it his soul" (428). Zenia, she decides, "tells them they're unique, then reveals to them that they're not.... They want to believe" (429). But that is the same thing that she gives to each of Tony, Charis and Roz: a belief that they alone understand her, can take care of her, and be her friend where "the others" have failed. She provides them, at least momentarily, with individuation, a sense of being special and belonging, then shows them that they are not. Likewise, Roz feels that "she alone" has been "chosen, to understand" Zenia's story, "And she does, she does" (410)—partly because she unconsciously identifies with Zenia's outsider status. Ironically, Roz has always felt as if there was an "invisible barrier" between herself and the world, that she was "among" the others, but separate from them (366). In fact, each of the three women feels this sense of

individuation as she “robs” them of their men. They each want to be her, to see something of themselves in her; of course, it her *power*, as Charis recognizes it, that they want. It is easy to see what Tony admires in Zenia: “Zenia is pure freewheeling malevolence; she wants wreckage, she wants scorched earth, she wants broken glass,” while Tony understand that all her own wars “are hypothetical,” that she is “incapable of real action” (466). Like Roz, Tony wants to be Zenia, and ultimately does become her, or at least sees the similarities between them. Charis sees, likewise, that Zenia has an authenticity and a forcefulness that she herself lacks: “All Charis has on her side is a wish to be good, and goodness is an absence, it’s the absence of evil, whereas Zenia has the real story” (482). She might have gone further, as Tony and even Atwood have done, and admit that Zenia actually *is* the real story, one which they all have and share. They all admire her ability to walk through boundaries, to accept no limits of space, time, ownership, death, or gender and to simply take, and be, what she wants. Naturally, when Charis assumes Zenia’s perspective and sees out from the “smoked glass” through Zenia’s eyes, Charis notes that “they darken everything,” for such power comes at the price of gothicization and an inverted relationship with the everyday, a new normal. Roz admits that “she would like to be Zenia” (443); similarly, when Charis sees Zenia in the hotel mirror, alongside her own image, “Zenia’s edges dissolve...and Charis merges into her.... What she sees is herself, herself in the mirror, herself with power” (449).

They all underestimate Zenia, as they underestimate themselves, for her Gothic beauty is merely a “tool” for ridding themselves of the real cancer—not just men, but passivity. “How badly Roz has misjudged Zenia!” Roz thinks, but they all misjudge her. Even gentle, doting Charis remembers her “Karen” in time to, seemingly, murder Zenia, exorcising the cancer from her life. They misjudge her propensity for fiction, but also her potential for truth, the truth that they choose to ignore until the very end: that they are each responsible for the losses in their own lives.

5.2 Chasing *Anil's Ghost*

While Anil's "ghost" is embodied by the skeleton she names Sailor, the spirit invoked by the novel's title also represents her elapsed notions of self, country, and humanity. Anil Tissera, a forensic scientist, seeks recovery of Sailor's identity because, to her, this previously unnamed skeleton represents a far greater loss, that of the many nameless dead, killed senselessly and buried anonymously in unsanctioned graves all over Sri Lanka during and after a bloody civil war. At the same time, she also seeks a restored sense of meaning and self-individuation. In a causeless world, she clings to truth for its own sake and regards detail as a god that might give her meaning, as if meaning itself were all that mattered or were even possible. In the absence of solidity, the skeleton's bones appear to be something material, as Anil attempts to furnish them with flesh, by way of a spirit, which will make something—her job, her life, her history—have sense.

Anil's "ghost" has many faces, each explaining herself to herself: Sailor the skeleton, Sarath the archaeologist, Gamini the doctor, Palipana the epigraphist, Ananda the artist, her Alzheimer's-stricken friend Leaf, and, most of all, Anil herself. Each represents a fading, or dead, narrative that she wants to recover in an effort to restore herself to fully human status. Increasingly, she finds that history and truth are unstable and multi-dimensional, for there are no easy answers to the questions that motivate her; at best, there are only details, furnished and/or edited according to the teller. Like Anil and all of the other main characters, the nation of Sri Lanka is in conflict with itself, embroiled in a civil war in which the self appears fragmented, much like the two brothers (Sarath and Gamini), and like Anil and her former self. It is the ghost of the previous Anil, the one who has won swimming championships that made her a celebrity; the one who lived in Sri Lanka and was formerly at one with her compatriots; the one who had left to study in England and America to become a forensic pathologist and healer of the dead. Nothing,

she finds upon her return, is as she had thought it was. Ultimately, she can only accept the normalcy of such chaos, “get on the plane” at the end, like Americans in movies about foreign wars, strangers in strange lands, metaphorical ghosts who abhor and reject the foreign corpse.

Analyses of *Anil's Ghost* usually mention the “ghost” in passing, but usually focus on either the quest aspect of the novel and/or the politics of fear that permeates Ondaatje's fictionalized Sri Lanka. Hoffman alludes to the normalized chaos inherent in civil war, musing that “Fear is the law whenever distrust is the only prudent course,” while pointing out that Westerners “have certain expectations that simply don't hold up under the mean conditions prevailing in so much of the world.” Anil, he says, is a displaced Sri Lankan who finds that her belief in the “rules of engagement” do not apply in such a land where a “triptych of civil chaos is raging,” with Tamil separatists in the north, anti-government insurgents in the south and, “in the middle, a government at war against a citizenry whose loyalty it suspects” causing fear to “become law” (447). In this world, “there is no life raft, no sanctuary” because the violence is “ubiquitous,” and those who have “adapted to these circumstances are different from those of us who are safe.” Ondaatje, he says, is interested in “the culture of people who are sucked into this kind of world, where conflict becomes part of their everyday life—but they actually have a normal and everyday life simultaneously” (447).

While Hoffman's analysis focuses on the extra-textual world beyond the borders of *Anil's Ghost*, he illustrates how ghosts, once acknowledged, overspill their prescribed boundaries: “State borders and ethnic divisions are the most convenient preclusions to action,” he says. As Jameson, Botting, and others point out, neither rules nor amnesia provide guarantees of permanent burial of the repressed. The ghosts of Sri Lanka ought to haunt us, Hoffman suggests for, in sharing a world which holds such anarchic spaces, “How is it that our conscience isn't haunted by the ghosts? How

is it that we fail to see them?" But, inherent in Hoffman's nomination of ghosts, as in the title itself, *Anil's Ghost*, is the very answer to that question, that there *are* ghosts; they are hidden and elusive, fleshless, buried in mass graves, their truth and meaning along with them. Sometimes the "told" narrative, the monolith, is designed to suppress such ghosts and to keep us from seeing, or remembering them, but seen or unseen, they haunt, regardless.

As Spufford points out, it is by crossing boundaries that identities become "slippery." Anil tentatively re-enters the country of her lost past while Sailor, having already crossed over into the country of death—thereby losing his identity that is connected to the "country" of the living—is resurrected by Anil. Anil has entered into the anarchical underground and, in effect, has died; the old self-concept is killed off and replaced with a new one, despite her desire to remain "true" to that self. "Nothing could be more Ondaatjeesque," Spufford suggests, "than Anil's patient attention to the one particular skeleton that becomes the novel's focus. Identity, for him, is always slippery. People shed their names when they cross cultures or boundaries" (1), and Anil is now a "North American" who cannot be imagined there because she is "in her element" (Leith 1) in her native country of Sri Lanka. And yet, as each critic points out, it is precisely this hesitation between the expected (because "known") and the unexpected (because newly discovered) that unsettles the visiting forensic pathologist—herself "returned" and somewhat ghostly, despite her best efforts and a belief in "truth" and "meaning."

In Ondaatje's novel, Spufford says, we are "asked to be trustingly awestruck by something very ordinary" (2)—which, increasingly, is the nature of the postmodern ghost narrative, as well as the human one. Being ghostly means entering/being in a state of constant change, of being change incarnate. On those grounds, it is not only Sailor, but Anil herself and the whole of Sri Lanka and its supposed forces of social law, that are ghosts. Anil's "ambiguous" and tentative homecoming

raises a “full complement of ghosts,” for in this land the “greatest intimacy achievable” is “mutual recognition” (Spufford 2), a point illustrated similarly in *The Robber Bride*, as the three women recognize themselves in their former enemy and wind up both humanizing and materializing her through their storytelling.

5.2.1 The specular skeleton: Sailor is History

In this “unofficial war” where “every side was killing and hiding the evidence” (Ondaatje 17), and where “no one can tell” who the victims are, it seems perverse to crusade on behalf of one man who has been dead for five years. Indeed, as Baudrillard says, “it is the terrestrial principle of reality that becomes eccentric, hyperreal, and insignificant” (35) in the postmodern condition. And yet the most obvious of Anil’s ghosts is “Sailor,” the skeleton of a man named Ruwan Kumara. Anil reasons that he had died after being identified as a “rebel sympathizer” by a *billa*—a word meaning “a monster, a ghost” but, in fact, a private citizen in disguise (269). Kumara was evidently murdered by government officials and buried in a shallow grave, then moved to a mass grave. While the “truth” carries a “danger” in civil war, and some people disapprove of Anil’s digging, she thinks of the skeleton as “still someone” (13). With the bodies turning up weekly (17), wartime chaos has long been normalized, and yet Anil attempts to humanize “Sailor” by identifying him through the circumstances of his death. Identification of the dead is a peace-time activity for, in war-time, there is precious little time for such individuation. As Gamini tells Sarath, “It’s the wrong time for unburials” because the government is “fighting a war on two sides” (132) while the line between terrorists and those “who the Western press calls freedom fighters” (133) is indistinct. Her investigation of the government in such chaotic times seems counter-productive, he suggests, for (as in *The Robber Bride*), naming, blaming, and sorting out the dead and the reasons

for death are useless endeavors when there are no sides. Likewise, in a postmodern world, where war is based on the illusion of opposition, “one no longer fantasizes about the minutiae of a program” because “just watching it produces vertigo” (Baudrillard 34). Chaos runs deepest when even the law observes no law, for that is anarchy, a situation in which the law is merely a ghost—a concept, much like Palipana, thin and withdrawn, stalwart in thought, frail of body, and representing a shadowy truth. According to Hoffman, “some governments and security forces acknowledge no bounds governing what they can and cannot do” (448). While Baudrillard claims the law “no longer exists,” Sarath reminds Anil that, even in absence, the law retains an invisible grip: “‘You’re six hours away from Colombo and you’re whispering—think about that’” (Ondaatje 53).

Anil looks for identity in the physical remains of an ever-decaying corpse. She finds Sailor in a “timeless” region of Sri Lanka, along with three other skeletons from a previous era. The bones of this one special skeleton were “fresh,” still “held together by dried ligaments, partially burned” (Ondaatje 50) and notably different in this way from the others. Because of traces of lead in the skeleton, from elsewhere, she concludes that the skeleton had been moved and hidden to cover up a murder; she classifies the act as “no ordinary murder or burial,” indicating the degree to which killing has become normal. Assessing that either he was “barely dead” when they burned him or they had “tried to burn him alive” (51), her only “evidence” of Sailor’s ID is a summary of “the facts of his death so far, the permanent truths, the same for Colombo as for Troy” (64-65). Anil “could read Sailor’s actions by knowing the wounds on bone,” and thus focuses on the moment of death, as well as the “marks of occupation” as a way of re-creating Sailor’s ID, to complete him as a way of satisfying her own hunger, giving her own “coup de grace” (65). After all, the sign on the door of Kynsey Road Hospital’s chief medical examiner’s office marks the

hospital as “the place where Death/Delights to help the living” because, in Anil’s case, she needs the dead more than they need her. She is, as Baudrillard might say, still fascinated with the minutiae, the norm, and the law that no longer holds truth or meaning.

Anil’s crusade is not just for Sailor; it is a quest for humanization in general and for her own sense of self-worth and identity, which are not forthcoming. That is, she seeks “something” of meaning in a meaningless world where her former lover is revealed to be married, her best friend has Alzheimer’s disease, and her country is embroiled in a civil war where distinctions between right and wrong are nebulous, as illustrated by the lawlessness of a government that kills its own citizens. To Anil, the skeleton becomes symbolic of truth and everything she, herself, stands for. In a country where fear is a “national disease” (53), truth “bounced between gossip and vengeance,” and the forces of social law are “uncertain” at best, her insistence on truth for its own sake makes her other. Her quest for “truth” individuates her and provides her with something solid in an unsolid world. Ironically, it is a veritable ghost figure (Sailor) who is expected to provide meaning. “Some people let their ghosts die, some don’t,” she says, urging that “we can do something.” Her whole purpose is to give some measure of meaning and substance, not just to Sailor, but to meaning itself; truth, regardless of its consequences, is her quest and her whole being. Her possession begins with empathy for the “truth” that a human being has been tortured and killed. Siding with the skeleton, she fears that Sarath will “make him disappear” (53) in one way or another, either by physically removing him or by talking him out of existence, for she fears the loss of something that has become her only center, her only referent in a world devoid of meaning. She cannot side with Sarath because, as she says, “I don’t really know, you see, which side you are on—If I can trust you” (53). She says this “right out” to him in her idealistic way, even knowing that it is “more dangerous” to tell the truth.

As specularity is a normal role for the postmodern ghost, Anil needs comforting and meaning and so she finds them in human nature and in texts which reflect her own values. Sailor, after all, is dead, a skeleton who does not speak, move, emote or signify. It is his *being* that signifies; as Zenia is to the three women, he (or it) is an utterance to which Anil responds. But, equally, the nature of that response is up to Anil, based on her interpretation of the signifiers that she takes as evidence. She does believe in an existence after death, for she thinks about a book “so thick with human nature” that she “wished it to accompany her into the afterlife” (54). So far removed from humanity as to be nostalgic for death, she is less connected with the present than with an “afterlife,” having “courted foreignness,” and achieved it as a way of feeling “at ease” and “completed” wherever she went (54). While she feels “completed” elsewhere, however, Sri Lanka offers only uncertainty.

Anil’s task, then, is to provide meaning; the ghost merely provides itself without relation or intent. To Anil, Sailor is an individual, but his signification to her is both enormous and elusive. Turning her recovery efforts towards a long-dead skeleton, Anil is similar to Tony in *The Robber Bride*, “hiding among the unhistorical dead.” But she is consumed by the question of nomination: “Who was he? This representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest” (56). One might recall the ghost in *Beloved* who represents “the sixty million and more.” It is up to Anil, healer of the dead, to give Sailor a name and, then, a voice. Until named, his voice is silent, his inanimate frame merely posing a question of not just *who*, but *what*, he is. It is the opposite of how the women in *The Robber Bride* feel about Zenia in their fear that naming the dead will bring her back to life; but, like Anil, they know the power of the word to raise the ghost from the grave. In fact, they all expect that the dead do not stay that way, for ghosts are connected to the

living; we are their connection to the physical plane, and they are our connection to the metaphysical one.

The lines between Anil (the human) and Sailor (the ghost) are increasingly blurred as she considers him to be alive as she is. There are times when, after hours of laboring over the skeleton, she “would need to reach forward and lift Sailor into her arms, to remind herself he was like her. Not just evidence, but someone with charms and flaws, part of a family” (170). She even lies next to him in a repose of death to have Sarath draw a chalk outline around her body (62). Of course, in some ways, she is also as dead as he is. In fact, her reaction to the dead is to empathize, as she physically shrinks and emotionally engages, reviving them through visualization of the violence that has killed them. When she encounters the heads of two students on stakes, “on either side of a bridge,” she recognizes one of them and wishes she could “shrink down into herself, but she cannot.... She desires to become nothing at all. Mind capable of nothing.... Cannot touch anything because everything feels alive, wounded and raw but alive” (174-5). Her empathy further obliterates the distinction between the dead and herself, as she becomes less and they become more, each consuming the other. When she dances in the dark, she is “blindfolding every rule she lives by,” using the music’s graceful flow to “eject herself out of her body” while Sarath watches from a distance, seeing “a person he has never seen. A girl insane, a druid in moonlight, a thief in oil. This is not the Anil he knows” (181). Both multiple and ungrounded she is almost ghostly in her fluidity and rejection of boundaries, for she is “invisible to herself, though it is the state she longs for. Not a moth in a man’s club. Not the carrier and weigher of bones—she needs that side of herself too” (182).

Further distancing herself from humanity and its shaky boundaries is Anil’s study of violent history, which requires a cultivated detachment made possible only by the “distance of time.” This

critical distance is central to who Anil is and how she operates. As a forensic pathologist, the cultivated “distance” dehumanizes her, makes her more ghostly, more empathetic with the dead, who give her what she craves: truth, unblemished by uncertainty or shades of grey. Anil “loved” a lab because, there, “time would be forgotten. No hunger or thirst or desire for a friend or lover’s company. Just an awareness of someone in the distance hammering a floor, banging through ancient concrete with a mallet as if to reach the truth” (67). Her work in forensics is, to her, similar to her identity as a swimmer in its “rhythm and intense activity, as if peering through time” (69). Fluid in her nominations, even her own name “had not always been Anil” (67), but one she bartered from her brother when she was twelve. Her identity is borrowed, defined by her own sense of lack, for when she recalls her childhood, it is “the hunger of not having that name and the joy of getting it that she remembered most” (68).

A veritable poster child for postmodern anxiety, Anil, despite her search for meaning, actually uncovers a pervasive *lack* of it. Bringing Sailor to life achieves little beyond exiling her from the country she considers her home, the place of her fictional origin story. Her work, essentially, is meaningless to her if the details she uncovers and interprets do not add up to a human being who represents an entire world. She is aware, ultimately, that they could not truly identify Sailor, for even in naming him, they “still knew nothing about the world” he lived in; and “if they identify him, if they did discover the details of his murder, what then? He was a victim among thousands.” She recalls a teacher in Oklahoma who tells her: “One village can speak for many villages. One victim can speak for many victims” (176), a truism which she clings to in order to justify her quest for individuation of one skeleton in a country full of skeletons. In postmodern style, divorcing object and meaning, she uses her work to turn bodies “into representatives of race and age and place” (55) so that the one stands in for the all. She studies not death, but the *lives* of

the dead, filing reports which “no one could ever give meaning to” (55). As trauma has robbed people of their loved ones and “normal times,” inanimate objects have become “sacred” and full of meaning. “This was the scarring psychosis,” as death and loss are ““unfinished”” (56). Besides suggesting that the one can insinuate a plenitude of signifieds, her words imply the corollary that, in such a case, one victim, village, or skeleton is, essentially, the same as any other and the individual ceases to be significant. Under such circumstances, we all become signifiers rather than signified, full of potential meanings, empty of solid, defining truths.

Anil only partially revives the dead, for she takes from them only a part of who they are, which is the supposedly factual, knowable part. Sarath perceives this incompleteness and the inherent futility in searching for something that cannot be known:

Half the world, it felt, was being buried, the truth hidden by fear, while the past revealed itself in the light of a burning rhododendron bush.... Anil would not understand this old and accepted balance. Sarath knew that for her the journey was in getting to the truth.... Sarath had seen truth broken into suitable pieces and used by the foreign press alongside irrelevant photographs. (156)

As Jameson reminds us, in a postmodern world there is no past, only an ever-changing now. “Reification” is “responsible” for the force of postmodernism, he says; as object and meaning (in this case, Sailor and his identity) are divorced from each other, anything means anything or, better yet, nothing at all: the object simply is what it is. History itself, then, disappears without a reliable reference point because we do not really know history, only bits and pieces, fragmented images (*Postmodernism* 96). That is precisely Anil’s relationship to both the skeleton and its history, as well as her own (and Sri Lanka’s) history: they are lost, unknown and untrustworthy. History is always incomplete and therefore leaves hunger in the seeker: “She used to believe that meaning

allowed a person to escape grief and fear. But she saw that those who were slammed and stained by violence lost the power of language and logic. It was the way to abandon emotion, a last protection for the self" (Ondaatje 57). Thus, people like Anil and Tony hide in the presumed past, away from emotion, so as to preserve (though, inadvertently, to mummify or to kill) some nostalgic notion of the self that one fears will be changed by connection with the rest of humanity. Such an encounter would lead them to confront the very ghosts they chase, and more besides; they, in fact, always see themselves reflected back in the spectral gaze and are made increasingly uncertain and paranoid by such a prospect. From such a perspective, the past is a country that holds certainty, for it is presumed finished; but Anil's digging shows her how incomplete it is.

Traumatized by such loss of both history and meaning, Anil has difficulty with new narratives and "truths" that might destabilize her sense of identity and purpose. She is interested only in encountering familiar ghosts—those of her own making—and avoids the variety of truth that an emotional response might expose, risking only the facts of the here and now: "You live in Colombo?" a rest house owner asks, and she replies, "'In North America, mostly. I used to live here" (57). At the same time, she discovers Sarath's wife is not dead, despite what she had thought (57), but, to avoid "further conversation," she pretends to be reviewing her notes, detaching herself from harmful information and its source. Thinking about Sarath, she finds it "difficult to imagine him as a married man," for she is "already used to him in the role of widower, with a silent presence around her" (58). Sarath's wife thus becomes another of Anil's ghosts, for she empathizes with the dead, seeing them present in their absences. "A person will walk through a hundred doors to carry out the whims of the dead," she thinks, "not realizing he is burying himself away from the others" (58). Her diction is clearly an attempt to distance herself from those persons, denying that she, too, buries herself in the past. Like Tony (initially), she views humans

as “others”—people with whom she has little in common, for she is out of step with “the out-of-focus” world (59). Such knowledge is overwhelming for her, and so, in the end, faced with such a violent blow from the past and, potentially, from the present, she leaves for her new country, the less painful one of the present.

5.2.2 Anil’s Ghosts

Sailor is not Anil’s only “ghost,” since most other figures in the novel are at least somewhat ghostly and reflective of Anil’s needs based on what she has lost or is missing. Leaf, Sarath, Gamini, Ananda, Palipana, and a past lover named Cullis each signify a dissipating sense of history and historical perspective. They each underscore Anil’s fractured identity so that she no longer has any solid sense of self or of place, thus rendering most distinctions meaningless and causing her to seek solace in the old familiar, only to find it in ruins, utterly unrecognizable and unsafe.

Growing evermore ghostly, Anil becomes forgotten by the past, even as she forgets it, and the ground crumbles beneath her every footfall. Her friend, Leaf, has Alzheimer’s, causing a gradual deterioration of her memory and an accompanying “historical deafness” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* xii). Leaf tells Anil, “I’m forgetting your face,” and she “heard the noise of great distance in the line between them” (Ondaatje 63). The one piece of grounding information regards a frivolous movie scene in which John Wayne kills Cherry Valance; by the time Anil calls her from Colombo, Leaf is unable to remember the answer to the trivia question (which, as it turns out, is far from trivial because it represents so much), nor the fact that she has a sister. Likewise, the chip she removes from Sailor’s heel to give her “a private ID” serves the same purpose, a solid piece of unchanging, unchangeable individuating information. But that is Sailor’s ID, and Leaf’s; she comes to Sri Lanka in search of her own ID, but does not find it. The country is changing, yes,

but it is still Sri Lanka by any name; it is how it performs, not necessarily obeying any label(s) specifically. She is changing, too, but she is still Anil. The past, however, supposedly does not change, unless one adds to what one knows, causing the earth to shift once again, creating a new truth, a new narrative, and a new normal, as well as a host of new ghosts. Anil is rather ghostly even to her own ghosts, lacking a stable origin story of her own, lost to Leaf and never known to her former lover, Cullis, who tells her, “‘I can’t imagine your childhood . . . You are a complete stranger to me” (35). The resulting lack of groundedness is the same. Having become “thoroughly Western” (Hoffman 3), what little history she has, as “the swimmer” or as a Sri Lankan citizen, she either tries to shed through denial, or has taken from her by the war. When he asks about her background, she evades his question, speaking only in terms of her present self: “‘I live here,’ she said. ‘In the West’” (Ondaatje 36).

Palipana, the solitary epigraphist, is a ghostly figure, as well, living sparsely and “minimally,” as an outsider and a rumour: “you know the distinction between the gross material world and the ‘subtle material world, don’t you?’” he asks Anil (86), the latter being a lighter, more fluid plane of existence. Banned for illegal activity which can never be proven, Palipana chooses isolation while remaining a practitioner in his field. With its endless parade of available statistics, Palipana “always seemed to be saving himself for the language of history,” giving him “limitless subjects to record and interpret” (80); meanwhile, he “linked himself less and less with the secular world” (80-81). In his profession, he is like Anil in that he translates, as well as interprets, “graffiti.” He, too, has made a name from which he is hiding—as a translator, but also as a cheat: one who twists the truth and fabricates history and sources, based on what might be, rather than what was—for, to him, all history is fiction. Like Anil, he sidesteps emotional truth in favor of

factual truth; the moral question of whether he attributed certain quotes to people who do not exist is beside the point.

“Deeply knowledgeable about the content of the ancient cultures” (79), Palipana’s work essentially is the study of ghosts. There is “no real evidence for the existence” of the texts he cites: “They were a fiction,” according to one of his proteges: “No one could find the sentences he had quoted and translated” from supposedly historical figures (81). While his work briefly “ended arguments and debates by historians,” it suddenly came to be seen as a purposeful “trick” on the world. But, to himself, it was “not a false step but the step to another reality, the long last stage of a long, truthful dance” (81). He connects with his subjects; rather than listen to other professors, he works in the field, touching ancient runes, talking to local people, and piecing “truth” together. He “drew parallels and links” and “began to see as truth things that could only be guessed at. In no way did this feel to him like forgery or falsification” (83). Protected by his own version of truth, he sees himself as linking hands with the past, with “unproveable truth,” meaning he was not necessarily right, but that did not mean he was necessarily wrong.

Indeed, history has taught Anil well and she finds herself wishing not to leave the place where they have found Palipana (97). This place must surely feel like heaven to her, for it is “safe” (86)—the “afterlife” where she might read texts full of humanity and reflective of herself. It is the sort of comfort and safety she has been seeking, a place outside the world, where a “subtle, material” man will tell her that the truth can be personal, provable, unchangeable and representative, regardless of the apparent lack of evidence to support it. It is, perhaps, the very sort of world for which Don Wanderley is nostalgic in *Ghost Story*. Like Sailor (and Zenia), Palipana, too, will be “buried twice” (89), once emotionally and once physically, so that certain truths will be preserved and hidden, while certain others will be raised. Palipana, like a ghost, or one of his own

texts “was thin, like some lost animal, some *idea*” (90). In his own teaching, he would never use a student’s name, “as if that were immaterial to the discussion or search” (94), for names seem empty and, simultaneously, perhaps, so full that they pose an impediment in the search for something true. Anil, on the other hand, has imposed a name upon the skeleton, making him real to her: “The reality of life versus a concept,” much like Sailor himself and much like any ghost. While Anil retains a belief that truth means freedom, Palipana asserts, “Most of the time in our world, truth is just an opinion.” He points out the “paradox” inherent in a retreat from the world for a monk cannot survive if society does not exist: “you renounce society, but to do so you must first be a part of it, learn your decision from it,” “breaking free,” he says, is “the difficult stage, when you leave the world” (103), as, one might add, many ghosts find to be true, as well, which is why they remain connected to us.

Ananda, the artist, is like Palipana in that he has one foot in each country of the living and the dead, providing a portal for Anil to either side. He likewise bridges the abstract and the solid, erasing the boundary between imagined and real. In his hands, the spirit of the Buddha takes residence in the sculpted eyes of a monument; what he creates is not the face of the Buddha, but its spirit and essence, as glimpsed through a reflective glass. On the recommendation of Palipana, Anil has Ananda perform his divining on Sailor’s skull. In doing so, he shows the personalized nature of the artist’s interpretive role, for he imbues himself into the ghost of Sailor, interpreting the skeleton’s historical face as being similar to that of his lost wife. “What he wants of the dead” is “peacefulness” (185), and so that is what he gives them through his art, perhaps in order to bring serenity to himself. Like a ghost, he “never stepped fully into electrically lit areas” where he can be fully seen; like Sarath’s tracing of Anil’s figure lying next to Sailor’s, Ananda touches her face

and makes her feel “as if hers too was a face being sculpted” (187). His very touch is a reconnecting force, as it restores to her something of the “lost childhood” she craves.

Ananda’s art is not a “reconstruction” of the past, but an interpretation which does not rely solely on transmutable “facts.” The past is a fiction, Anil learns from all of her “ghosts”; all narratives are imbued with feeling and “fact” by the artistic, imaginative, empathic self. In a sense, her own work is no different from that of either Ananda, who interprets according to his own desires, or Palipana who, even as “letters and words began to disappear under his fingers and from his eyesight” as he grows blind, begins to see that there is more, as Denver does in *Beloved*. Gamini, the war doctor who is Sarath’s brother, shares with Anil a piece of wisdom which he has gleaned from a surgeon he once knew: “The important thing is to be able to live in a place or a situation where you must use your sixth sense all the time” (231), and its wisdom seems useful to Ananda, as well as to Palipana. As Sarath explains, “It was just the next step for him [Palipana]—to eliminate the borders and categories, to find everything in one landscape, and so to discover the story he hadn’t seen before” (191). Ananda, she says, “called forth the dead” (196) and, when he tries to kill himself eventually comes back “among the living” (197); he is like Anil, Palipana, Gamini, and even Sarath in that they all call to the dead, wishing the past to return. Such returns, forbidden by the laws of reason, do occur. But, at the same time, they are not complete; nor do they bring completion, for, as this thesis and *Anil’s Ghost* repeatedly illustrate, ghosts are hungry and, as such, bring hunger to the conjurer.

Gamini, too, is ghostly in his lack of groundedness, for he is “a soul who had only just survived.” He clings to a dead past—for he “had loved his childhood”—while avoiding both the dead and living; he simply does as much as is necessary to float. A talented mimic, Gamini “remained invisible, even to himself, seldom looking into mirrors,” including human ones such as

Sarath and the war dead. The Emergency Services ward becomes a retreat for him, not exactly a heaven such as Palipana finds, but a hidden purgatory where the living, dying, and dead meet to compare battle scars, where in the “chaos” (223) he has found himself in a “state of grace,” for it was “*here* that people could lose themselves as if in a dance.... He could be at the centre and still feel he was invisible” (223). Gamini is a foil to Anil because he chooses detachment from the dead, whereas she seeks connection with them. Working in an emergency services hospital, he covers the faces of the dead and departs quickly; he also prefers to have the faces in the photographs covered so that there is “no danger of his recognizing the dead” (213). This denial of their individuation—in contrast to Anil’s quest—is a practical matter, based on a need to work “better” and a fear of caring too much when there is nothing to be done; his ghosts (including both Sarath’s wife and Sarath himself, as well as the war dead) are too real. He avoids them all, for fear of what they would reflect if he could see their faces and if they could speak to him. But they already speak to him, which is why he keeps a studied distance. His chosen life is chaos; after his wife has left him and he is ordered to take a leave of absence from his job, he “realized that Emergency Services had become for him, even in its mad state, a cocoon” (215): a place in the safe (though normally chaotic), comfortable past where his identity is his work. Like Sailor, Gamini bears the “markers of his occupation” (166), feeling most comfortable in “world he had burrowed into, created around himself, this peculiar replica of childhood order” (215). He identifies himself as both the same as his brother and yet different from him; Gamini recognizes that the “secret war between him and his brother” had begun “with the desire to be the other” (221).

Gamini wishes to retain the boundary between him and his brother, Sarath, not wanting “the universes brought together” (223). But the ghosts return, one by one, in thought and in body. As hard as he suppresses them (Sarath, Sarath’s wife, and his beloved childhood), their return is

harder. Unlike Anil who seems possessed by the ghost of Sailor, Gamini resists such “occupation” of his soul, for he has always known that “the first necessary rule is to stop invasions of ourselves,” sounding very much like a man who is certain of having a “self” to protect. Refusing to be a part of these personal battles, he chooses to lose himself in the chaos of civil war, drawing boundaries around himself. Mourning the past, he inhabits a form of living death, making ghosts of everyone, including himself: “And we become therefore more comfortable and intimate with strangers,” he thinks (224) by keeping a “good distance from his family and “talking intimately” with strangers with whom he can keep a “distance and anonymity” (224). He never knows anyone, remaining as anonymous to them as they are to him. He considers himself to be a “perfect participant in the war,” finding himself the “only clearheaded and sane person” on a “boat of demons” (224) and “invisible to those around him” (247).

He keeps a careful distance from the living, inhabiting a world in which the “boundary between sleep and waking was a cotton thread so faintly coloured he often crossed it unawares” (211). Gamini, like his brother, keeps a “distance” (211), “not touching” but keeping “that offhand hungry gaze, that offhand wave to the departing” (211), as seen in his parting after a rendez-vous with his brother’s wife. Similar to Anil and Sarath, he has a job that makes him “come upon strangers and cut them open without ever knowing their names”; he rarely speaks and does not approach people “unless they had a wound, even if he couldn’t see it” (211). Just as Anil identifies people by their “marks of occupation,” Gamini relates himself to them according to their wounds, just as Ananda and Palipana, likewise, deal in signs which allow them to generalize, to find individuality in the common, and to find a general humanity in the specificity of a battle scar. Unlike the others, however, Gamini “had chosen not to deal with the dead” (212), avoiding the corridors where victims are brought “to be identified” (212); when he does deal with the dead, it is

at a careful distance, going over reports and photographs, and confirming “what was assumed,” and giving his signature where it was asked for.

Anil thrives on chaos, much as Gamini does; there is an element of “acceptance of complexity” in her “need to break things apart to know where someone came from” (259). At the same time, much like the word ghost when seen in the full light of day, secrets, she says, “turn powerless in the open air” (259) by losing their inherent “tension and danger” (259)—strikingly similar to the manner in which the newly-told narrative in *Beloved* dissipates the power of the ghost over Sethe and Denver. Despite being similar in their needs and professions, the difference between Anil and Sarath would seem to be the latter’s belief in “character and nuance and mood”—implying a reliance on “the sixth sense,” as Gamini calls instinct—while Anil finds truth “in the bones and sediment” (259). While such things may govern us, it is “not the truth,” says Anil; ““For the living, it is the truth,”” says Sarath, betraying his alliances and exposing the distinction between him and Anil. He professes a love of history, “the intimacy of entering all those landscapes. Like entering a dream. Someone nudges a stone away and there’s a story,” which Anil alternately calls a “secret” (259).

Through her various encounters, Anil discovers truth to be a ghostly proposition, whose body is missing or invisible, sitting always in the room, perhaps with its face covered, but gaining substance only with the well-chosen words which give it flesh—such is the illusion of language that it lends materiality to abstractions. The choice of silence—the hesitation to name—is the choice between peace and chaos, despite the ever-present and obvious existence of chaos already, particularly in a country imbued by civil war. That is, the presence of the ghost or any truth is not dependent upon nomination: it exists already, whether acknowledged in name or not. The words—such as Sailor’s name or personal details—might trigger a chaos, unleashing the taboo

ghost and thereby throwing up an explosive secret for public viewing, but they might just as easily lose their “tension” and “intrigue,” become normalized for lack of a genuine sense of anxiety.

When violent death is an everyday occurrence, the reasons and circumstances become less important; what people crave, even (and especially) in the face of chaos, is “peace.” So that is what the government provides, not just for its supposedly “safe” citizens, but for itself; “serenity” is what the artist provides and what the archaeologists and historians seek to give, as well, at least in this novel—a concept seemingly in contrast to either the “hesitation” accompanying the postmodern or the “uncertainty” marking the gothic. The spectre of chaos is tangible and present without being named, while the ghost of peace is elusive, requiring constant naming and telling in order to be achieved. But even in the naming—even in the telling of truths, the uncovering of details, the provision of labels—chaos remains; if buried, it will rise again, although it never truly has departed, but has been willfully ignored for a while, “as if parting or death or disappearance were simply the elimination of sight in the onlooker” (278). While Anil strolls the harbor, feeling her own departure, she sees the blood “everywhere. A casual sense of massacre,” such as that which Gamini sees in the war emergency room, even while there is no blood on him, as if he really was not there. It is similar for Anil since, for all her attempts at return, she is ghostly; she was never really in Sri Lanka, not in her soul. At the moment of losing “possession” of Sailor, she claims citizenship, reclaiming the country of her past: “she was no longer just a foreign authority. Then [Sarath] heard her say, ‘I think you murdered hundreds of us.’ *Hundreds of us*. Sarath thought to himself. Fifteen years away she is finally *us*” (272). Tellingly, however, when she is opposed, Anil claims to work “for an international authority,” exposing her cultivated foreignness. She wishes to report the truth that “some government forces have possibly murdered innocent people” (275), while—in an echo of the artist, Ananda—Sarath reminds her that the belief in “the

truth of history” sometimes must give way to a more pragmatic belief in a present-day “society that has peace”; what she proposes, he tells her, “could result in chaos” (275).

Appropriately, after bringing together the two brothers, Gamini and Sarath, Anil leaves Sri Lanka and practically disappears in the remaining twenty pages of the novel, for she is barely mentioned again; she becomes “subtly material,” as Palipana might say. It is as if she fully becomes a ghost, having been there, created some small amount of chaos—a slight suture being required in her absence. Gamini, after all, begins looking at pictures again and recognizes the wounds on his own dead brother, who has been murdered by government forces for his part in uncovering the “truth” and handing it to Anil in the form of the lost skeleton named Sailor (287). Finding his brother dead in the Emergency Services hospital, Gamini becomes a healer of the dead, for he thinks: “He could heal his brother, set the leg, deal with every wound as if he were alive, as if treating the hundred small traumas would eventually bring him back into his life” (287). He believes there is a choice now, to repress his brother’s “unhappy shadow” or to have his death mark “the beginning of a permanent conversation with Sarath” (288): to invoke his ghost for his own purposes. In the end, though, like Zenia in *The Robber Bride*, the corpse “was what it was. No longer a counter of argument, no longer an opinion” that the beholder “refused to accept” (289).

Such acceptance of impending death and the uselessness of revenge lies at the thematic heart of *Anil’s Ghost*, for as the artist Ananda acknowledges, “The war around him was to do with demons, spectres of retaliation” when what most reasonable people want is “peace,” some monument to godliness, a reminder of the possibility of order and meaning, even in the face of its impossibility. Ananda knows that he and Anil “would always carry the ghost of Sarath,” but, naming her, he acknowledges his own possession by, and of, Anil’s ghost, henceforth. He wants peace for them all, even if that means invoking it through naming, detailing, or illustrating it, in

lieu of being able to create it. Ghost literature often portrays the discovery of “new” narratives and metaphorical countries as simply a matter of taking that “next step” into the elimination of labels and boundaries, of recognizing that there are no fixed meanings, no referents: “to see through camouflage during war, to see the existing structure of the figure for what it is, whatever it is” (191) without ever affixing signification to the structure. Truth, in other words, might just be a matter of recognizing the place of the self in a broad, borderless, postmodern landscape.

5.2.3 Summary

As both *The Robber Bride* and *Anil's Ghost* illustrate, it is increasingly difficult to confine the meaning of “ghost” to its traditional significations of the filmy, white figure of a dead person who, unable to move into another phase of existence, returns from the grave. In fact, more and more in literature, this earthly plane *is* the next phase, whether heaven or hell (or something in between) and we all have a foot in each country, whether or not we realize, or say, it. None of these characters are strictly ghosts, but, like the governess of Bly in James's 1898 text, they have many qualities in common with the ghost and, at times, may seem to be one. After all, ghosts derive from humans, and being “human,” or anything solid, is an increasingly nebulous notion. Thus, texts such as *Anil's Ghost* and *The Robber Bride* exemplify the difficulty in naming a ghost “other,” especially when so much “meaning” depends upon the perspective of a self that is already destabilized.

Anil's many “ghosts” do as Anil herself does: they invoke, name, and remind of the lack of solidity in the world; in fact, “the world” is a misnomer because the presence of ghosts, like the postmodern text, allude to another world (or other worlds) outside of this one; it is difficult to name anything definitively without the nagging feeling that the label will not be inclusive enough,

particularly when we have visitants from elsewhere. Alzheimer's in a friend, for example, is the simultaneous descent into chaos and return of simplicity; the loss of memory erasing the details of a life that began with no memory, details, or identity. What is left is a loss of all referents, meaning, boundaries, and labels. Anil brings an element of chaos to Sri Lanka by going against the proverbial grain, trying to name the nameless, to bring order to chaos and peace to a land that abhors it, or has forgotten it, and her. She carries these ghosts with her and dwells with her truth so absolutely that it absolves her of responsibility to the living. The very unknowable quality of history—which resides inherently in the pursuit of meaning and individuation for those whose identities can never be known, even if their names are recovered—will keep her hungry, forever dwelling in the land of chaos where nothing is ever truly settled and peace is never found, except in acceptance of the chaos. What she acknowledges, ultimately, is that she is surrounded by ghosts, but, if she wishes for peace, she must either never name those spirits or she must normalize them, keeping the secret to herself, allowing the name to retain its power, but not its retaliatory qualities.

Conclusion

At the end of the twentieth century, the postmodernization of the ghost constitutes an acknowledgement, in art, of our loss of reliable referents, solid meaning and certain boundaries, the challenging and revision of foundational constructs such as history, self, and text and a simultaneous return in new, hauntingly strange, yet familiar, form. With the loss of “reality,” the commodification of virtually everything, and the normalization of chaos, the ghost is evermore ubiquitous, as is the Gothic, which is “all around us” (Punter, *Pathologies* 11). Indeed, because of our wavering sense of self, along with the commodification of the Gothic, we now encounter ghosts nearly everywhere and barely hesitate when we do so. It is little wonder that “literary” authors are appropriating the ghost, materially or conceptually (and often both), without giving their texts over completely to the Gothic. In blending their genres, they simulate the dailiness of the ghost, often encouraged by the maxim that “Gothic sells.” Why exactly it sells is a matter of some debate, but it may have something to do with our own propensity for “self-torture,” as Poe once explained our predilection for horror. Increasingly, Gothic also bespeaks our objectification of the body, our emptying of the human as having any fixed meaning, particularly as it is simulated on screen or in fictions, and so we have a perverse pleasure in seeing the ways in which human beings that are us, but not us, can be emptied of life, as well as meaning.

Today, the word “ghost” means something essentially, vaguely historical, emanating from a shadowy past, while the word itself relinquishes any concrete signification. After all, who knows what a ghost actually looks like, other than that its appearance and signification depend on circumstance? Still, the word retains its Gothic connotations, promising uncertainty and the possibility of the unforeseen unknown. The word “ghost” or its synonym, “spirit,” appears in the titles of films which do not feature actual phantoms (*Ghost Dog*, *The Ghost and the Darkness*, and

The Phantom, for example), as the name of a car (Spirit and Esprit), Spirit Airlines, the “Spirit” Mars rover, and in phrases such as ghost nets, ghost towns, ghost ships, the slim ghost of a chance, giving up the ghost, the ghost in the machine, ghost writing, the Holy Ghost, ghost prisoners, ghost bikes, ghost crabs, ghosts from the past, and so on. The ghost of the ghost hovers all around, often unattached to a “real” phantasm, and yet the concept is ever-present, conjured by nomination, thickened by stirring and usage.

We now more and more see the possibility of limitlessness, of globalization, instant communication transcending borders of time and space. We see that there are no boundaries that cannot be crossed and there is nothing that is contained by a stable identity. The only rules are those of which we can conceive, and even those are subject to transgression. In such a world, ghosts have always existed, if they exist at all. The postmodern ghost signifies a questioning of boundaries of all kinds, especially those between the self and the other, since we are less sure of what a self or an other looks like. As adversarial relationships continue to come under scrutiny, such nominations are becoming more difficult to apply with any degree of certainty. In a postmodern scenario, the ghost is increasingly called for what it is, thereby normalizing the chaos and the schizophrenia it signifies by its very presence. The relationship between ghosts and human is now co-dependent, for they are both on the same side, working for a common cause: reconstruction and revival of the whole self, rather than the fragmented, schizophrenic self, through a fusion of past, present, and future as represented by the nearly-human ghost. Accepting the ghost acknowledges that chaos is the norm, that the self is inherently both schizophrenic and whole, that all narratives are both fragmented and complete (or that, perhaps, the complete self is fragmented by nature). Within these novels, as within these enchanted spaces, there is no doubt for each protagonist that ghosts exist and that the spectres want something from humans. Possibly, we have

ghosts because we need them; but, possibly, they need us, too. All ghosts would seem to be hungry, but their hunger emanates from, and often mirrors, the cravings of their human beholders, as if the living can give them what they need, and vice versa. Where these desires and fears begin, it becomes impossible to identify, as ghosts become such an extension of the dreams and nightmares of their beholders that they interact with one another on the same physical plane. By the end of the century, mostly gone is the need for enigmatic “signs,” warnings, or fleeting apparitions; these newer ghosts want contact, stories, play, food, and whatever the human beholder can give them. Sometimes, they even give back. That is appropriate since humans want the same things from their ghosts, although the food we seek is more psychological than material.

Ghosts, at least in literature, are increasingly not what they used to be. To say they are being “postmodernized” is simply to imply that they are undergoing a process of constant reinterpretation, always shifting towards something else (whether of the future, past, or present), but forever defined by how they perform within (or without) a given text, usually signifying a rupture that instigates a loss of further referents, a destabilization of reality. It is difficult to draw a line between the “postmodernized” ghost and the non-postmodernized ghost for, one might well argue, ghosts have *always* been becoming human, and vice versa. Indeed, *everything* has always been shifting towards something else, probably. Each era chooses its own monster and, in the twilight hours of the era formerly known as the postmodern, ours might just be ourselves. The postmodern ghost is not a monster, even though its story as one must be retold and cannot help but be rememored. But its story is different now because we are different; we are, as Zenia says, “out there” and fragmented, just as the ghosts are. Our relation to them is that there is no relation, except maybe for the inescapable one that once existed. Once “out there,” however, there may be no going back for the ghost, and the obvious choice is normalization.

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Televisionography

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Medium. Created by Glenn Gordon Caron. USA, 1995-present.

Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased). Created by Ray Austin. USA, 1969-71.



