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# Haunted by History: Interpreting Traumatic Memory Through Ghosts in Film and Literature

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**HAUNTED BY HISTORY:  
INTERPRETING TRAUMATIC MEMORY THROUGH GHOSTS  
IN FILM AND LITERATURE**

**A thesis submitted to  
Regis College  
The Honors Program**

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Graduation with Honors**

**by  
Gina Nordini**

**Approved by Morgan Reitmeyer & Susan Sci**

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## **Chapter One: The Problem of Defining a Ghost**

Ghosts serve as links to the past—that which was once alive is now dead, yet still present. The once-living being can still be interacted with through their spectral representative. A look at the interaction between a ghost and its witness reveals not only truths about the past, but important details about the witness' interaction with the past. Because the past that comes back to haunt is frequently a painful or traumatic one, a look into trauma theory helps inform the development of ghosts in creative narratives. In this thesis, I will be looking at three typical responses to the appearance of a ghost, and how those responses speak to the effect traumatic memory has upon the trauma survivor. The witness to a ghost within a work of fiction has the choice to respond with fear, with desire, or in rarer cases, with a neutral, non-emotive reaction—three concepts I will soon address.

### **Stories of Trauma, Stories of Haunting**

When approaching the topic of ghosts for academic study, the first challenge is how to *define* a ghost. Generally recognized as a supernatural, fictional creation, there is not a lot of concrete evidence to prove their existence. Without undeniable scientific proof of their existence, we must turn to other sources to determine a ghost's qualities. We must turn to anecdotal evidence and to cultural representations—folklore, literature, art, and film.

Unsurprisingly, relying on such sources can quickly become problematic. In traditional academic study, anecdotes do not stand up to the same tests of credibility as

scientific research and findings. While cultural representations carry credibility in such fields as anthropology, history, and cultural studies, they are no less problematic. Natural cultural differences result in varied understandings and representations of “the ghost.” Even within cultures (or perhaps as a result of cross-cultural interactions), ghosts do not manifest in the same way or carry the same purpose. Artistic choice further diversifies—and further problematizes—what a ghost is.

So where are we to begin?

In the 1990s, Jacques Derrida brought academic weight to the study of ghosts and their multitudinous manifestations with his work, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*. His coining of the term “hauntology” opened up exploration of the ways in which traditional understanding of the present are complicated by the liminal figures that “mediate the sensuous and the non-sensuous, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, reality and not-yet-reality, being and non-being”—in other words, the ghostly (Lincoln 192). Hauntology, while rarely focusing on explicit ghosts, has since been used to explore hauntings within a variety of cultural and academic fields.

Haunting becomes a particularly rich topic of study when looking at processes of grief, memory, and cultural identity. In their 2014 article “Toward a Critical Hauntology: Bare Afterlife and the Ghosts of Ba Chúc,” Martha and Bruce Lincoln look at both the development of hauntology and its practical application to sites of haunting and collective trauma in Vietnam. They examine two proximal memorials—one a government-

constructed mass grave that violates local customs on the treatment of the dead, the other a banyan tree that is said to contain the souls of those who were tortured and murdered at its base, and which continues to capture souls in its annual causation of serious traffic accidents. Lincoln and Lincoln emphasize the importance of ghosts and their various manifestations in forcing us to acknowledge, revisit, mourn, and commemorate episodes of violence, death, and injustice (Lincoln 194). The hauntings that result from these same episodes speak strongly to the role of traumatic memory.

While Lincoln and Lincoln use the historical example of the Vietnam War, they allow that “contemporary hauntologists have primarily concerned themselves with literary representation and figures of the imaginary” (Lincoln 194). In making this allowance, they open their own theory and analysis to application to characters within novels of the ghostly, as these characters are frequently (if not always) informed by “real humans who suffered pain and injustice, died in terrible circumstances, and were consigned to oblivion, but somehow lingered in memory, scandal, and rumor...[who] come to light, first in the experience, research, and imagination of authors, then on the pages those authors write” (Lincoln 194). The characters we encounter in fiction reflect real experiences of trauma. Whether directly linked to the author’s own trauma, or secondarily brought to light through research and imagination, these characters do have their roots in the real. The ways in which their trauma manifests, and in which they respond to it, is not disconnected from the experience of trauma in real life.

The ability of ghosts to force revisiting and acknowledgement of troubled history is a well-documented one within the scope of hauntology. Claudia Ruitenberg explores the specters left by memory and past, specifically the haunting presences from her own childhood in the Netherlands. In “Education as Séance: Specters, Spirits, and the Expansion of Memory,” she works her way through the various unavoidable histories that “will not settle down until we receive them” (297). For examples, we might look at existing institutions, linguistic histories, and cultures. Academic institutions are invariably haunted by histories of oppression of their own students—from women to people of color. Language is constructed from terms whose meanings change over time, but never shed their etymological basis. Ruitenberg’s own childhood was one informed by a culture with a history of religious and intellectual persecution. These haunting histories and ghosts (both real and implied) form a “critical inheritance” which must be engaged with. Ruitenberg advocates for relationship with this critical inheritance. I too will advocate for active engagement with the ghost as a basis for an analysis of a haunting presence.

### **Ghosts in the Language**

Despite their assumed nonexistence and dismissal, ghosts make repeated appearances in our language (the ghost of an idea, deconstructionist ghost words, ghostly settings, ghostly figures). They make repeated appearances in our art and entertainment. One has only to look at the success of the horror film industry. And they continue to appear in ghost stories of actual lived experiences—people that still feel presences, live

through unexplainable events, cannot shake the feeling of not being alone. It does no good, then, to simply neglect the topic of haunting, to ignore the ghosts that are present in our language, in our art, and in our experiences.

What we can do instead is to analyze those places where ghosts do appear in culture. We can look at the origin of the word “ghost.” We can trace later uses of the word—particularly those that use it in a metaphorical sense. We can look closely at phrases that make use of the ghostly. And we can look at those places where ghosts appear—or are constructed—in the language of literature and film. We arguably first come to know ghosts through the language of storytelling. The tradition of frightening young children with ghost stories is a long-lived one. These stories serve to explain the sensation of feeling as if one is being watched, feeling followed, of not being sure one is alone. They also serve to inform an understanding of death—a topic that many might argue is not understandable. The ghost is introduced in childhood. But we find it again in some of the most well-respected works in academia—works like William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Their popularity in the entertainment industry is undeniable as well; film serves to deliver both the visual and narrative tension of ghost stories. Storytelling is not concrete, and it is not scientific. But it is our best means of encountering the ghost.

In this project, I do not propose to prove the existence of ghosts in experienced reality, nor to explain the encounters and evidence amassed by ghost hunters and everyday people. My intention, rather, is to examine modern literary and cinematic representations of ghosts, and how they function within their respective works. In



particular, I will give attention to the relationship of the ghost to its human viewers, and the response on the part of the viewers. From this examination may be drawn hypotheses on why ghosts remain so prevalent in the human experience.

The word “ghost,” and the concept of a ghost, is a very old one in the English language. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘ghost’ has its origins in West Germanic—although its roots are Proto-Germanic. Pre-Germanic and early English understandings of the term define it in association with “fury, anger,” (*ghoizdo-z*); “to rage,” (Old Norse *geisa*); and “to terrify” (Gothic *usgaisjan, usgeisnan*). While treated as a noun, the early etymology infuses ghost with a sense of action, and assigns it with what it does—“rage” and “terrify.” The Oxford English Dictionary notes that ghost did not make its appearance as a verb (as in “to haunt as an apparition”) until the 17th Century (*OED*, 2). It is also around this time that ghost began appearing in other phrases and subjects, with “ghost of a chance” being among the earliest (10b). ‘Ghost,’ as understood to mean “the spirit, or immaterial part of man, as distinct from the body or material part” first appeared in Old English translations of the Old Testament around 800 C.E. (*OED* 3). The Old English term *gāst* (“the breath, the spirit, the soul”) was readily identified as the equivalent of Latin *spiritus*, in contexts where the sense is “breath or a blast” (*OED* 2, Lincoln 196). The English *spirit* was directly derived from Latin. In 1993, Derrida made the distinction between *ghost* and *spirit* one of development. The spirit (or *esprit* in Derrida’s native French) is an invisible, animating force made visible in the form of a ghost or *specter* (*spectre, revenant, or fantôme* in French). The ghost makes itself visible,

audible, or otherwise known. “The ghost is the phenomenon of the spirit” (Ruitenbergh 299). A ghost is characterized by its appearance to or performance for its chosen witness. More than a lingering trace of the past or energy left behind, the modern ghost is the recognized existence of something from the past occurring or acting in the presence moment.

### **The Necessity of the Witness**

These definitions do not yet provide the characteristics of a ghost. The stories in literature, film, and art serve that purpose. In Western tradition, the ghost is most often characterized as an invisible or transparent figure, seen by some but rarely all. It is even more often dismissed by those unable to see it; if it can't be seen, it does not exist (a statement superficially supported by Derrida's ghost/spirit distinction). Such limits on experience seem to be both self-imposed by the ghost—who selectively makes itself visible and fades away at will—and sometimes imposed from outside—with the ghost figure trying desperately to communicate, meanwhile being ignored or unobserved. Such limitations on the experienced ghost might suggest a loss of voice. The ghost is kept quiet by its inability to be fully observed by all. Its message (should it have a specific message to deliver) is revealed only to those chosen or who choose to listen.

In addition to hearing the message of the ghost, we must see it. A key characteristic of the ghost experience is a visual one—that of being *seen*. To reiterate my point above, a ghost is seen by some but rarely all, and it is dismissed under the assumption that if it can't be seen, it does not exist. The acknowledgement of a ghost

seems absolutely essential to its experience. What is a ghost if it is neither seen nor heard? Does a ghost exist at all outside of its moments of haunting in the presence of another? Or is it only brought into being through witnessing?

Perhaps this is why it is so hard to set down the characteristics of a ghost through culture and media. The argument could be made that a ghost does not exist outside of its experienced relationship to other (living) beings. Ruitenbergh writes that ghosts “unsettle us” because they serve “as those parts of our histories that we—or some of us—would rather not acknowledge and that, when we do, threaten to disrupt the comfort of our everyday assumptions” (Ruitenbergh 297). But even if we would rather not acknowledge the ghost, the ghost demands acknowledgement. It makes itself known visibly or audibly; it is unavoidably *seen* or *heard* by someone. An unwillingness to interact with the ghost is not an effective denial of its existence, although it does reveal a key characteristic to our understanding of ghosts. It is essential that we understand this point: A ghost does not exist outside of *relationship*. In order to solidify an understanding of ghost, we must look not only at the depiction of ghosts within certain texts, but at the relationships that create and sustain it. We must look at the people it haunts. By identifying the characteristics of the ghost-and-haunted relationship, we might in effect come to a better understanding of the ghost. Knowledge of the way it is seen, and of the way a haunted person reacts to what they see, informs the very significance of the ghost.

Why is the relationship so important? I hypothesize that a ghost is not just a ghost, but rather a metaphor or a surrogate for the past. A ghost most frequently appears in the

image of a dead person—a person directly from the lost past. The events surrounding the death of a ghost are rarely ever benign; ghosts return to see their murder avenged, or to perturb their enemies, or to put an end to their “unfinished business.” There is frequently some inability to accept or process what happened in life. So even when that life comes to an end, it remains unresolved—thus converting the troubled past into the experienced present, in the form of the ghost.

But what if it is not the dead person now represented by the ghost who could not resolve their past? What if it is the person who experiences the ghost that cannot reach resolve over the memory of some difficult past event? Ghosts seem to be particular in who they appear to; could this have something to do with the qualities of the witness? Is the person being haunted struggling to come to terms with their own past—just as much as the ghost is? In the next section, I will be looking at the communal sense of an unresolved past that makes the ghost-witness relationship possible in the first place.

### **In Relationship with the Past**

An analysis of the relationship between the haunted and the haunter is actually a look at a relationship between a person and the past, for ghosts are inherently linked to memory. Even those who study the typical (that is to say, unsupernatural) forms of grief expression have a hard time avoiding terms like “ghost” and “haunting” in their clinical work. Among these scholars is counseling psychology student Michael R. Maples, who in his article “Mental Ghosts and the Process of Grief,” makes wide use of spectral terminology in describing the varied reactions of widows and widowers to the death of

their spouse. Maples opens his article with the concept that “Memories may keep the deceased alive in the minds of the survivor and may even interfere with the formation of new relationships,” going on to write, “loved ones continue to exert some influence over their grieving survivors after their physical death” (Maples 1). Maples views the process of grief as a healthy and highly individualistic one, but one which may “interfere’ in everyday life” (Maples 5). One situation in which the grieving process interferes with everyday existence is when the memories of a loved one become “mental images [that] are real and may actually be experienced sensorily” (Maples 5). In other words, the memory connection to the deceased results in the direct perception of their continued existence in the presence. The best way to confront these ghosts (Maples’ own terminology) is to actively engage the memory of the deceased; habituating oneself to such memories can allow for the processing of grief and the possibility of an unburdened future (Maples 7). Maples makes brief reference to the possibility of confronting ghosts through narrative construction, which allows survivors to understand themselves before and after the loved one’s death through storytelling. My own analysis of literature and cinema would by no means discredit the power of grief processing through stories.

Maples links ghosts and memory through his look at grief processing. This relationship to the past equally defines the characteristics a ghost takes on and the reaction a person exhibits in their encounter with the ghost past. The specific reaction the person has to the appearance of the ghost speaks to the nature of the relationship to the past. The figure of a ghost cannot be adequately understood without consideration of the

relationship it exists within. When we look at cinematic and literary representations of ghosts, we are actually looking at the narratives of interaction between a person and their past. These narratives give shape to the ghost, who stands in as representative of a memory from the past. The ghost is only representative because it undeniably exists in the present—and in most narratives, demands some sort of future through its “unfinished business” or call to response. This leads to a key understanding of the ghost figure: its existence in past, present, and future. Jane Kenway elaborates on the conflicting temporal state(s) of the ghost in her exploration of hauntology within the modern school system, “The Ghosts of the School Curriculum: Past, Present and Future.” Kenway writes, “The ghost leaves traces of the past by conjuring those who are already dead. It invokes the future by conjuring the presence of those who are not yet born. The ghost confuses linear time. In other words, past, present and future no longer exist as discrete and consecutive points in time” (Kenway 4). The ghost represents multiple points in linear time while existing in a single temporal moment. Engagements with ghosts, then, become specific in the moment of temporality to which a witness responds. Is the response bound to the ghost’s representational past? Does the ghost *as past* inspire reaction because it is located in the present? What kind of future is the response suggestive of?

### **Locating Ghost Relationships in Film and Literature**

While much scholarship has been devoted to the ways in which ghosts represent the past and haunt those in the present, what seems to be lacking is an exploration of the way a witness’ relationship *to* the ghost, and not the ghost itself, expresses their

relationship to the past. I am additionally interested in the ways in which the ghost or narrative form informs the witness response. Because I am analyzing ghosts in creative works, my examples are drawn from three different categories. While my analysis of types of responses within genres will not, by any means, be comprehensive, I will begin to explore potential explanations for why certain genres or formats better fit certain witness responses.

Analysis of the relationships between ghosts and their witnesses, and of the structure in which the ghosts exist, is useful to our understanding of how humans experience and process their memories of the past. In the chapters that follow, I will first identify areas of trauma theory that might be applied to ghost-witness relationships. I will then identify the types of responses to ghosts most common in creative representations of haunting. I will explore these types of responses in a variety of literary and cinematic examples. The three responses I lay out are those of fear-rejection, desire-seeking, and neutrality-acclimation. The first response—the fear-based rejection response—is one in which the witness to the ghost is inherently averse to the past the ghost represents. This aversion to a painful moment in the past causes the witness to initially react with fear to the ghost appearance, and to consequently reject the ghost. In the narratives of fear-rejection, the witness must come to terms with the past. I will examine two pre-9/11 films, M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* and Guillermo del Toro's *El espinazo del diablo* (*The Devil's Backbone*), as examples of the fear-rejection response. Following this, I will explore the second response available to ghost witnesses: the desire-based

seeking response. Within the desire response, a witness feels a disconnect from the past, and the ghost becomes the only means of restoring that past. The ghost, however, is an inadequate replacement for that which was lost in the past. Within this response, I will examine two Victorian short fiction narratives, Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story" (1852) and Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw" (1898). I will then turn to the third type of response, the neutrality-acclimatization response. Most often found in magical realism novels, I will use Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967, English version 1970) and Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* (1993) to illustrate this response, in which witnesses acknowledge the ghost, but respond to its presence without strong emotion. Because the witnesses interact with the ghosts as they exist, and not as something infused with other meaning or potential, their relationship to their traumatic memories of the past are ones that acknowledge the trauma, but provide a means of adapting to life with the lived trauma. Ultimately, these examples reveal how characters relate to and process their pasts; when applied to human experience outside of literature and film, they will reshape understanding of the relationship we have to the memories of our own pasts.

In the next chapter, I will move beyond the symptoms and experience of trauma to look at ways in which those caught in a ghost-witness relationship respond to their encounters with trauma. The ghost represents both a previous trauma, and actively re-traumatizes by re-exposing the witness to the troubling memory. I lay out three possible emotional responses for the witness to a ghost. That emotional response speaks directly



and powerfully to their specific relationship to the past, and to where they are in their process of potentially overcoming the trauma.

## Chapter Two: Traumatic Memory

The relationship with a ghost is a relationship with the past; but it is certainly a relationship fraught with a troubling context. The deceased does not go to a quiet grave, where he or she ceases to disturb the living outside of their own recalled memories. The deceased, instead, returns to the world of the living, where it exists in a half-state of neither fully living nor deceased. The ghost comes back to haunt because it represents a past that has not been resolved. The ghost-witness relationship forms because the past that a person is connecting to by way of the ghost is one of trauma. The ghost is not a representation of the past alone; it is a representation of memories from a *traumatic* past.

Just as not every death—creative or otherwise—results in a ghost, not every past event becomes a source of trauma. Trauma becomes the response to specific types of experience and memory. A look at the psychology of trauma reveals that we do not respond to trauma in the same way that we respond to other memories. We can look to scholars in the field of trauma research to explore how trauma reactions form. As the study of trauma develops, more nuanced distinctions of what qualifies as trauma and how it is experienced emerge.

In order to get at the manifestation of a traumatic memory through the ghost figure, I will sketch a brief history of trauma development within the field of psychology. It will become evident that traumatic memories are not like other memories. The characteristics that separate traumatic memories are also what make them adaptable into

the ghost figure. I will conclude this chapter by laying out my own system of categorizing ghost-witness responses, which is based on understandings of traumatic memory found in psychology and cultural studies. Using trauma theory, I will show that the three ghost-witness responses speak directly to the relationship a character has with their own traumatic memories.

### **The Development of Trauma Studies**

The science of memory first becomes significant to my purpose in the Victorian era. Within Western Europe and primarily France at this time, three categories for memory problems were established: forgetting—or amnesia/multiple personality, longing or nostalgia, and haunted histrionics or hysteria (Roth xiv). Trauma, as a historic concept, can be traced back to these attempts to diagnose the aforementioned problems of memory. Wesleyan cultural scholar and prominent academic in human history development Michael S. Roth looks to nineteenth century medicine for these origins. Roth acknowledges that the dated medical beliefs may or may not be legitimate (particularly in the extensive misdiagnosis of hysteria), but highlights his interest in analyzing why “[t]he sciences of memory developed as a socially legitimate way of having reasonable discourse about how one becomes a normal human being...to express their concerns with how one was to live with the past—or how one was to live without it” (xv). Victorian era science saw the role of the past within the present; things that have already happened affect, indelibly touch, and shape new events and experiences. When the past becomes an interfering force with everyday life, memory disorders develop.

While nineteenth century Western medicine attempted to recognize and treat these memory problems, Sigmund Freud was beginning his own work on trauma. Freud was the original trauma theorist—although notably, trauma had been a long assumed concept prior to Freud. The Victorian-era disorders of memory were described in terms of trauma before trauma itself was defined. And with the onset of World War I, soldiers returned with shell-shock and conditions that, while not always understood or recognized, were easily associated with the trauma of battle. Medical doctors and clinicians were noting the qualities of “traumatic” memories—memories of pain, of “an overwhelming event that they had been unable to cognitively register at the time it happened” (Kaplan 30) that, somehow, were not accessible in the same way as “commonplace” memories; Freud and others, such as clinicians J.M. Charcot, Pierre Janet, and Josef Breuer, preceded the modern American Psychiatric Association’s definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (which first appeared in 1984) with their attempts to explain the memory processes that create trauma-related disorders.

Among the most prominent scholars in the cultural studies lens of trauma is E. Ann Kaplan. In her 2005 book *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in media and Literature*, Kaplan explores mediated trauma—particularly its culturally experienced form. In her definition of trauma, she falls back on this concept of defying meaning-making. She turns to psychiatrists Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart (noted for their extensive work in modern trauma theory) to explain the neurological effect of trauma. Kaplan writes,

In arguing that trauma is a special form of memory, [van der Kolk and van der Hart] stated that in trauma the event has affect only, not meaning. It produces emotions—terror, fear, shock—but perhaps above all disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. Only the sensation sector of the brain—the amygdala—is active during the trauma. The meaning-making one (in the sense of rational thought, cognitive processing), namely, the cerebral cortex, remains shut down because the affect is too much to be registered cognitively in the brain. (Kaplan 34)

When a person recalls a traumatic memory, they remember *differently*. That is, the effect on the brain is unlike that of a non-traumatic memory. Psychotherapist and trauma specialist Babbette Rothschild explains that memory occurs primarily in the amygdala and hippocampus. The amygdala is primarily responsible for the emotional effect of memory, while the hippocampus places “our memories into their proper perspective and place in our life’s timeline” ([Rothschild 12] Tracey 120). In traumatic memory, some sort of unconditioned stimulus activates the amygdala through electrical and chemical signals. These signals carry synaptic links to the sensory images that create memory. It is these sensory images that bypass the cortex entirely, due to their strength. Because the sensory images bypass the cortex, the amygdala and hippocampus become incapable of normal functions, and the victim of traumatic memory is “unable to modulate new, incoming stimulation”; thus the trauma “continues to invade the present, affecting the integration of the traumatic experiences and memory” (120). This difference in process

makes the traumatic memory more powerful, more acute, and more difficult to make meaning from ([Hoffman 15] Kaplan 37). A more detailed explanation of the science of trauma will not be necessary for understanding my analysis of ghost relationships in later chapters; therefore, it is important to simply know that traumatic memory is different from other memory, and that its effects are powerful upon cognition.

The language of science is important though—especially in its reflection of hauntological terminology. It is clear to see how the actual documented experience of trauma, as experienced by real people, could be translated in creative works to the symbol of ghostly haunting. The event not fully experienced, and the memory that defies meaning can only be described in metaphorical language—possession, haunting, lingering. The transferal, or rather translation, of trauma into literature and film adopts that language used to describe the traumatic memory and transforms it into the symbol of a ghost—who also possesses, haunts, lingers. The possessive memory is translated into the possessive ghost of the page and the screen. The ghost figure—traditionally one of fear and terror—quite logically translates the traumatic memory not registered in cognitive processing into the emotion of terror, fear, and shock. Within trauma, the survivor often exhibits dissociation, or the splitting of mental processes that usually go hand in hand. A process separates, changes brain activity, and results in trauma-related disorders. The ghost becomes the dissociated means of experiencing the emotions of trauma. By associating such emotions with the ghost, rather than with the personal memory or experience, the trauma memory is effectively removed from active cognition.

Removal from active cognition is primary in dissociation—that key concept to the experiencing of trauma. I argue that within creative works, dissociation is most fully manifested in the ghost. For what could further dissociate personal trauma than the formation of an outside entity, an outside *specter*, of that same trauma?

Dissociation becomes a tool for the survivor of trauma, because traumatic memories prove to be more troubling for an individual or collective group than other memories. Certain past events are harder to process—war, crimes against person, natural and man-made disasters, sudden and unexpected loss of a loved one. So what is it that separates traumatic memory from other memories? To use Roth’s definition, trauma occurs when

[A] memory becomes a charismatic wound, an injury that attracts everything to it.

In trauma, the recollected past causes suffering, and the traumatic event has a magnetic appeal that pulls a wide constellation of experience...into its orbit. But the extreme event itself resists representation; it seems to defy the meaning-making activity at the core of both the psychoanalytic and historical enterprise.

(xviii)

The traumatic memory becomes a wound, a place of continuous pain and resistance to healing. Because the trauma is magnetic, it becomes all-encompassing—absorbing experience in a way that leaves little room for existence *outside* of the trauma. The trauma impacts its victim in everyday life; in some cases, it makes everyday life impossible. There is an absence of meaning making, as found in other memories, that

makes incorporation of the memory into experience extremely difficult or impossible. Trauma encompasses experience in a powerful way unlike memory precisely because of its meaning-making defiance. The individual with a traumatic memory cannot make cognitive meaning out of the troubling event. The experience of said trauma continues to trouble and afflict him or her because it cannot be processed logically. Without meaning, the trauma remains only the event. The event re-experienced repeatedly creates an effect, but that effect is one of affliction—not one that explains its own cause.

### **Translating Traumatic Memory into Metaphor**

Often, trauma is such a complicated concept to understand *and* to experience, that historical and fictional narratives must locate the trauma in an external figure or location; these narratives must dissociate the trauma into metaphor. Thus, when the ghost character enters the narrative, what we encounter is the externalization of the traumatic memory. The traumatic memory is unspeakable, unintegratable. But the ghost becomes the voice of that unspeakable moment. Fictional narratives offer an articulation of traumatic memory in the figure of the ghost as metaphor for the past.

The transformation process from living being to ghost is one of these disruptions of sense in trauma—a disruption to the very way of existing in the world. The ghost becomes a form of dissociation from the living. The narratives that form around the ghost experience all too frequently fixate on the pain of trauma. The violence of death becomes a painful continuity, a disruptive, rupturing loop of the old memory as the ghost and the new memory—in other words, the ghost as well as the witness experience of the ghost.



For the ghost serves as old and new memory in its liminal space. The ghost is a figure directly out of the past; it is a figure in which the past is permitted to exist in the present. But because the ghost exists in the present, it is *not* the past. Nor is it entirely old. Not fully the being it was in life, not fully, physically present, the ghost is something new—something that could and did not exist until the moment of death. It is a new being *made* in the image of the old, deceased being. Furthermore, the ghost fuses the past which it represents with new memories with the ones it encounters.

### **The Spectrum of Trauma: Primary and Secondary Encounters**

Through trauma studies, the experience of trauma becomes recognizable and definable. Yet specific experiences vary greatly between individuals. Trauma forms in response to many very different instances. Kaplan writes:

Equally important about trauma is one's specific positioning vis-à-vis an event. For this reason, it is necessary to distinguish the different positions and contexts of encounters with trauma. At one extreme there is the direct trauma victim while at the other we find a person geographically far away, having no personal connection to the victim. In between there are a series of positions. (2)

Kaplan goes on to further distinguish the extremes as primary trauma and secondary trauma. Primary trauma occurs for the direct survivor of trauma; for example, someone caught in a war zone, the victim of a crime, someone who walks away from a natural disaster. Secondary trauma occurs at the furthest geographic locations; people who hear or see about natural disasters on news programs, psychologists working with victims of

personal crimes, and family members of those suffering from primary trauma can also show signs of traumatic memory, despite their distance from the incomprehensible event. Many argue that the survivor of a primary trauma will experience more pronounced symptoms of trauma—or even more legitimate suffering. Yet the National Child Traumatic Stress Network recognizes PTSD symptoms in those suffering from secondary trauma—especially counselors and professionals who work with those who have experienced direct and primary trauma (NCTSN). The exposure to primary trauma through indirect and mediated forms is enough to create trauma-type responses in those personally distanced from the initial trauma event.

The experience of primary and secondary trauma is relevant to the study of ghost relationships because of the diversity in ghost audiences. Ghosts traditionally come back to haunt people with whom they had a direct relationship in life. They haunt their loved ones: children, lovers, spouses, siblings, friends. In instances where the ghost witness recognizes the spirit that appears to them, we might say that witness is encountering a moment of direct or primary trauma. In terms of relational proximity, the ghost is in a primary relationship with its witness. The personal relationship experienced in life is transformed in death. But the ghost-witness relationship directly echoes that experienced prior to one of the relationship partner's deaths.

The *trauma* comes from the fact that the ghost-witness relationship is an encounter with death, and thus a re-experiencing of the loss of a life or loved one. The ghost, obviously, experiences the trauma of loss of life—a point I will return to

momentarily. But I would first like to focus on the trauma experienced by the living partner—the loss of a loved one. In order for a ghost to exist in this relationship, a loved one must first be lost through death. The living relationship must come to an end. The ghost relationship might appear on the surface to be a continuation of the living relationship. But the ghost will never exist as a fully embodied and living entity again. Even in narratives where a character might find comfort in the return of a loved one in ghost form—may even come to desire the presence of that ghost—that relationship serves as a constant reminder that the loved one is, in fact, no longer alive. The ghost is a constant visual reinforcement of loss, or what we might call a *memento mori*. Thus a relationship with the ghost of a loved one is a continuous exposure to the moment of trauma.

### **The Trauma of Ghostly Existence**

To return to the concept of trauma as experienced by the ghost, this trauma may be the most primary. The ghost is fixed in a state of constant realization of its own death (although there are exceptions; one of which I will be exploring in Chapter Three). So many trauma experiences are tied to near-death; the transformation to ghost is effected through the ultimate trauma—death. Existence *as* a ghost is only possible because of the traumatic experience of death; existence outside of this trauma is no longer possible. It is an extreme and inescapable flashback to a former state of existence.

If the ghost's experience of trauma is recognized as primary, however, then the witnessing of a ghost as revisiting of trauma moves somewhere inward on the spectrum.

It is not on the extreme of primary trauma, but just slightly to the right of it. The witness experiences and re-experiences a profound trauma, and yet (unlike the ghost) continues to exist outside of that same trauma. In some moments, the witness even experiences respite from the trauma. We begin to see how the fear response forms here. When the ghost is not constantly present, the witness can attempt normal functionality in his or her life. Yet the ghost appears at random and unexpectedly. The unexpected quality of its appearance—much like the panic attacks characteristic of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—places the witness in a state of anxious expectation. The witness does not know when or where the ghost will appear again. He or she does not know what the possible response will be at the time of witnessing. This uncertainty inspires fear of the ghost. The ghost becomes the cause of anxiety over the unknown, and rejection of this anxiety becomes the fitting response.

The ghost does not always appear to a known relation, however. The ghost can appear—seemingly at random—to a stranger. They appear because of locational connection (as I will explore in Chapter Three) or thematic relation (see Chapter Four). This is where we encounter the opposite end of Kaplan’s spectrum—the survivor of secondary trauma.

Secondary trauma is a recent distinction within the field of trauma study—itsself a relatively recently formed field. Kaplan notes that one need not directly experience a traumatic event to suffer the effects. People are exposed to trauma through “accounts they hear”—an increasing problem among “clinicians who may be vicariously traumatized

now that increasingly counseling is offered to people who survive catastrophes” (Kaplan 2). The biggest exposure to trauma in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is—of course—mass media. The increased exposure to “mediatized trauma” results in secondary trauma; media also creates longer-lasting and more detailed records of traumatic events. Traumatic events like the Holocaust do not simply exist in personal recollections; they exist in photographic record. Natural and man-made disasters are made viscerally present through daily televised news and Internet accounts. Trauma exists in creative works as well—works such as film, short stories, and novels. Trauma is not limited by geography in today’s world. Researchers are just beginning to recognize the extent of media-induced secondary trauma in the twenty-first century. Secondary trauma can account for the ghost-witness relationship in which the witness does not personally know the ghost. The witness need not revisit the trauma of loss in his or her own life—although they frequently do. The witness only needs to know that a trauma occurred; often, the ghost story becomes the story of their discovery of this trauma.

In his article, “Magic Realism in the Americas: Politicised Ghosts in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The House of the Spirits*, and *Beloved*,” Stephen M. Hart considers ghosts as representative of collectively-experienced traumas. He writes:

ghosts often operate in magic-realist fiction as disembodied memorialisations of a trauma experienced by the subaltern, normally in the past. Given that the non-subaltern, or controlling, agencies of society are actively involved in suppressing

knowledge of trauma of this kind, it is not surprising that, from an empiricist-official point of view, ghosts do not exist. (119)

Denial of a ghost is not just an empirical stance, but a political one which denies the lived experience of a group of people. Denial of lived experience is central to what in this case is called collective trauma. Hart's ghosts exist in complicated relationship with their witnesses. On the one hand, without being directly and personally linked to the people they appear to, the ghosts become enactors of secondary trauma for their witnesses—a trauma experienced only through knowledge of an event, and not through personal recollection or experience of the event. On the other hand, Hart identifies the witnesses as members of oppressed classes (which we do see in magical realism novels and some Victorian literature). The oppressed peoples are victims of cultural crime, of ongoing and systematic trauma. The people exist within harmful systems of racial or class oppression and sexism. They then become primary experiencers of the trauma—and therefore the appearance of an unknown spiritual entity need not be secondary trauma.

The relationship a ghost witness has with the past—for which the ghost serves as a symbol—is in essence an encounter with trauma. It is an encounter with prior trauma in the form of troubling memories. It is re-exposure to trauma in the form of loss or actual death. It is the enforcing of new trauma through mediated experiences of past. And it is the continual reality of ongoing cultural and collective trauma.

### **The Three Types of Ghost Witness Response**

The appearance of a ghost results in some sort of reactionary response in those who witness the appearance. Reactions to the appearance of a spectral figure are, of course, as diverse as the manifestations of those same figures. In most cases, reactions can be classified and analyzed into a three part distinction of fear-based rejection responses, desire-based seeking responses, and neutrality-based acclimatization responses. The type of reaction lends insight into the way characters react not just to the ghost, but to the past. Through an analysis of this ghost-past dynamic, the reasons for the ghosts' existence become clearer. In the rest of this chapter, I will set up the three part reaction distinction, as well as provide a number of textual case studies for each category.

Fear-based rejection responses are the first to come to mind in discussing a ghost. This is the response in which a character views the ghost as a malicious and always unwelcome presence. The character may run away; they may hide; they may scream or faint or lash out. Whatever the physical characteristics of the reaction may be, they come from a place of rejection. The ghost as representation of memory and past stands in for a memory the character is trying to avoid, or a past from which they intend to distance themselves. Distance is maintained, and fear becomes the separator.

On the other end of the spectrum, we find characters so eager to reconnect with a past—a past they may view as lost—that they welcome the ghost; they may seek it out or even conjure it up. This is the desire-based seeking response. It is within this category that we find practices emerging from Victorian spiritualism—things such as séances, mediums, automatic writing, and spirit photography. All of these practices were meant to reunite the living with dead loved ones and/or participate in the world “beyond the grave” (Wolfreys). They were in essence a refusal to accept the past as passed—to believe that the people and events of former times were beyond the reach of the present. This deep longing for the past brings into being a ghost—either through conjuring, or calling out to a spirit that exists in another realm, or through creation, perhaps even hallucination. Reunion with the past can be uneasy, joyful, or even dangerous.

Under the desire-based seeking responses, we might also classify certain seeming fear reactions. I identified strong desire to reconnect with the past as a motivator for these reactions, and this motivator might lead to the conjuring of ghosts for oneself—frequently, within the mind only of the person who longs for that reconnection. If we look at examples of people who have “gone crazy” and consequently hallucinated their ghosts, we find that desire is also the root of these ghost appearances. The character desires so strongly to reconnect with the past that they conjure up a ghost, but in doing



so, they also fail to realize that the ghost is a projection from their own mind. Ironically, it is the failure to recognize the ghost as from and of the self that ultimately exposes the ghost as just that. As they increasingly witness the ghost, they draw attention to it. But the people around them cannot see the ghost that exists only in the mind of the one character. They do not see it, and so they identify it as something existing in the mind of one person alone—even as that person identifies it as something entirely outside of themselves, as in the process of dissociation.

For an example of characters who fail to recognize their own self-made ghosts, I turn to *The Turn of the Screw*. A governess takes on a new role caring for two children after the recent experience of what the text suggests is a traumatic past. Shortly thereafter, she begins witnessing two ghosts—former residents of the home, each with strange connections to the children. But while the governess sees these figures repeatedly, the characters around her do not do the same. The story remains ambiguous to the end, but many critics have interpreted it as an examination of the governess' descent into madness, as brought on by her inability to reconcile with her recent and painful past. She desires that reconnection to the past as a means of processing, or a means of overcoming the painful traumatic memories of her past. Unable to process these memories, her mind conjures ghosts that exist only for her as a means of bringing that lost past into the

present—and possibly giving her the opportunity to work through that past in a more effective way. This does not work out, as the narrative concludes with (according to one interpretation) a spiral into insanity and the death of one of the children. In Chapter Four, I will explore this text in greater depth.

Worth consideration in the desire-based seeking response is the success of the ghost form in meeting that desire. Because the ghost is not the physical reality of what is desired, but rather the visual echo of what was lost, the ghost is rarely successful. This partial existence drives the living loved ones insane, because what they desire is a return to life of the deceased, not a new and partial form. A refusal to accept the past as out of reach makes this mindset possible. The ghost, in and of itself, is a denial of the inaccessibility of the past. If the deceased can return to the present, it would seem that the past—and what was lost within it—can be restored. It is not out of reach. This is illusionary. Realization that a ghost is not a full restoration of what was lost is a discovery that the past is beyond the point of restoration after all. The ghost rarely, if ever, fulfills the desire of the person it appears to because it is simply a function of memory, and not the past itself made present.

Of particular interest to me are the responses of neutrality-based acclimatization. The ghosts are seen by multiple people, suggesting an actual presence and yet the

presence of the ghost inspires no strong emotional reactions or changes in behavior. It would be incorrect to label the neutrality-based response as a non-reaction, as the very acknowledgement of the ghost is a sort of reaction in the form of witnessing—even if no concrete action follows that witnessing. The neutrality-based response is one in which the people who bear witness to the ghost react without fear or desire—without any strong emotion at all, in many cases. The ghosts are simply acknowledged as being present, are accepted as normal, and are given little consideration after that. The living witnesses do not treat the ghost as something abnormal, or in any way out of the ordinary. The motivation behind these specters is far less obvious. The characters do not openly embrace the ghost—suggesting that they are not desirous of re-experiencing the past or filling a loss. But neither do they run from the ghost—which suggests that they are not unwilling to immerse themselves in the painful past. Might the neutrality-based response then be representative of an experience of life in which the past is always present? So much so that reaction to it is no longer necessary?

In the literary world, this reaction of neutrality appears most frequently in the magic realism genre. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the 1967 epic novel from Gabriel García Márquez, features several familial ghosts who receive bare acknowledgements, but inspire neither fear nor longing reactions from the Buendía family whom they return

to. One of these ghosts, Melquíades, the gypsy friend of the family, returns to continue the work he left off in his laboratory—that of writing the history and future of the family. One of the sons, Aureliano, interacts with this ghost. But the majority of characters simply leave him be. Prior to this ghost, we meet the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar. When Ursula, the matriarch of the novel, sees Prudencio for the first time, “it did not bring on fear in her, but pity” (22). The appearance of this ghost eventually leads to the Buendías’ departure from town and the founding of the village of Macondo. But the ghost never causes a strong emotional reaction, and never a typical emotional reaction. The ghosts of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* simply do not inspire strong responses in their witnesses. The past works as a continuous force—even as an entity throughout the novel. While the past’s immediacy is harmful to the family, it is also very much an unavoidable reality. The family reacts the way it does to its ghosts because it has become comfortable with a constantly present sense of memory and the past. For a further exploration of the novel, refer to Chapter Five.

Not every reaction to ghosts is easily categorized. The 1999 film *The Sixth Sense* poses a problem in the character of Cole, who sees ghosts. Cole reacts to some ghosts in fear—particularly ghosts that pose a violent threat. But to others—notably, Malcolm Crowe, who does not realize he is a ghost (the film’s legendary surprise ending)—he

reacts with a somewhat neutral reaction, treating Malcolm as just another normal human presence. While the individual reactions are categorizable, Cole's relationship to the past is not so clear. He reacts to some ghosts in fear—suggesting a wish to avoid the past (and pasts of trauma are certainly evident in this film). But he also reacts in neutrality—suggesting his acceptance of the past's continuance in the presence. As the film progresses, we see him react more and more frequently with neutral responses; this is as he becomes more comfortable with the ghosts of his reality, and with the role memory plays in his present. The evolution of Cole's relationship to the ghosts, and consequently to memory and the past, is significant in what it reveals about the ability to change. Those who react in fear might develop and evolve in their chosen response. Those who react in desire can grow to despise, and even fear, the ghosts. And those who are neutral toward ghosts—who see them as ordinary presences—can eventually find them to be unnatural.

When a character runs or hides from fear, and rejects the ghost, the ghost presence typically becomes stronger and stronger; from shadows and footsteps to appearances, and from appearances to outright threats and attacks. The rejection of a traumatic memory gives the metaphor for trauma--the ghost--more power. Traumatic memory makes ordinary everyday experience impossible, interrupts it. So as the ghost becomes stronger, the traumatic memory interrupts everyday experience more and more--until it cannot be

rejected or ignored any longer. The character must address it because he or she can no longer function day to day. Finally addressing the ghost reduces its power, and the power of the memory, until the witness can process and acclimatize to it.

In the desire-based seeking response, characters seek or long for a lost past. The ghost becomes the metaphor for what was lost, but is *only* a metaphor, not the thing itself. Therefore as the character comes to the ghost and approaches it, the loss becomes more and more profound because the ghost is failing to fill the loss. The loss grows to enormity, even if the ghost stays the same. The only way out of the desire response is backward; thus no resolution is found through ghost seeking.

In the neutrality-based acclimatization response, a character lives with the trauma, but does not run or hide or seek. The character talks to, interacts with, and sees the ghost. The ghost exists, but not mistakenly as that which was lost. The ghost reminds, but not overwhelmingly so. The past is clearly gone because the ghost is there. But the memory of the past is entirely present, and will likely continue to be so. Thus the character, able to recognize this, acclimatizes to their new reality. It is unlike existence before the loss, but it is a continued and functional existence--and perhaps the healthiest approach we can take to our own traumatic memories.

## **Responses Made Real**

The three types of reaction to ghosts create complications in our understanding of how we relate to the past. While the fear-based rejection responses express reluctance to be re-immersed in experiences of the past, they also suggest an inherent inability to escape from the past. Regardless of how strongly characters may want to avoid the past, it follows them and makes itself known. Even when the past is full of traumatic memories to be ignored—or perhaps precisely because the past is full of such ignored memories—the past cannot be avoided, and it will make itself known in ghostly hauntings. The past, in essence, is always present and acting upon the contemporary moment. The reading of neutrality-based acclimatization responses supports the concept of past as present as well—although in an arguably healthier way that does not inspire fear. Ultimately, the neutrality-based acclimatization response might offer the healthiest means of interacting with the past. Finally, the desire-based seeking responses reinstate the past as past—for despite the influence the past exerts and despite any visual indication, a significant remove from the past is in place. The past, as former, is not a thing that can be fully restored—no matter how strong the desire.

Ultimately, we must take the time to understand witness reactions to ghost appearances in order to understand the ghost's origins, and the traumatic memories which

they represent. If ghosts serve as metaphor and function of memory, the memory or memories will inform the *way* the ghost appears. Is the ghost immediately recognizable, even indistinguishable from the living form they represent? Or does the ghost appear as a separate and new entity? The distinctions in appearance would then inform reactions. Or is it the other way around? If desire for the past can create ghosts, then it is the response to a ghost which informs the appearance that seemingly precedes the reaction. The characters cannot physically react until the ghost has appeared, but based on what the response will be, the appearance is formed.

The next three chapters will explore the three types of ghost-witness responses through specific textual examples. Each chapter is divided by response type as well as genre. For fear-based rejection responses, I will turn to my two film examples. Desire-based seeking responses will be located in Victorian short fiction. Finally, the neutrality-based acclimatization response, most common in magical realism, will be analyzed in two magical realism novels. The film and literature examples illustrate the ghost-witness relationship clearly, and through analysis, offer insight into character processing of traumatic memory.



**Figure 1: The Three Types of Ghost-Witness Response**

The following chart offers a definition through characterization of each of the three identified ghost-witness responses, as well as what these responses indicate in relation to a character’s own response to traumatic memory, and the examples I analyze in the remaining chapters. Chapter Three will highlight the fear-based rejection response. Chapter Four will detail the desire-based seeking response. Chapter Five will look at the neutrality-based acclimatization response.

<p><b>Fear-Based Rejection Response</b></p>	<p>-running, hiding, avoiding the ghost -ghost presence typically grows stronger, harder to avoid</p>	<p>-desire to avoid past trauma or refusal to acknowledge it -ghost is an unwelcome return of the past, re-experience of trauma</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sixth Sense</li> <li>• The Devil’s Backbone</li> </ul>
<p><b>Desire-Based Seeking Response</b></p>	<p>-approaches ghost, attempts relationship with ghost -seeking, hunting, conjuring -attempts to connect with ghost are increasingly frustrated</p>	<p>-witness has acknowledges a trauma, but is unable to process and move beyond it -ghost offers a means of restoring the past, returning to a time before the trauma</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Turn of the Screw (Henry James)</li> <li>• The Old Nurse’s Story (Elizabeth Gaskell)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Neutrality-Based Acclimatization Response</b></p>	<p>-acknowledges the ghost through witnessing -no marked emotional reaction</p>	<p>-traumatic memory is ever present, but does not dominate -Witnesses adapt to a new lifestyle in coexistence with the traumatic memory</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So Far From God (Ana Castillo)</li> <li>• 100 Years of Solitude (Gabriel García Márquez)</li> </ul>

### Chapter Three: The Fear-Based Rejection Response in Film

The fear-based rejection response finds its most effective form in film. The visual medium lends itself to the audience's sense of the horrific, both through what is shown on screen and what is deliberately *not* shown. Horror film aficionados suggest that it is that which is not seen, which is left up to the imagination, that inspires the most fear. In this sense, film becomes a particularly effective means of conveying fear through the use of off-screen space.

Ghost films from the last two decades offer rich examples of the fear-based response in ghost-witness relationships. In this chapter, I will be looking at two such films: Guillermo del Toro's 2001 *The Devil's Backbone* (*El espinazo del Diablo*) and M. Night Shyamalan's 1999 *The Sixth Sense*. Both films feature a young male protagonist around the age of nine or ten who becomes the secondary recipient of a ghost's primary trauma. While both boys have personal histories of trauma, their contexts are extremely different. *The Devil's Backbone*'s character finds himself caught in the crossfire of the final days of the Spanish Civil War in 1939. *The Sixth Sense* takes place in late 1990s Philadelphia. The ghosts they encounter are visually disturbing, with the exception of the principle ghost in *The Sixth Sense*. To resolve the trauma represented by the ghosts, both boys must address the traumatic experience of another—but not necessarily their own.

*The Devil's Backbone* presents ghosts as the initial inspiration for fear—only later exposing the living figures who should truly be feared. Carlos is a young Spanish boy left in the care of a family friend after his parents disappear into the losing Republican side of

the Spanish Civil War. In the final days of the war, his new caretaker abandons him as well at an orphanage in the middle of nowhere. He is surrounded by other boys who have been orphaned or abandoned, presumably because of the war. Within days of his arrival, Carlos begins to be haunted by a former resident of the orphanage—Santi.

At first, Carlos only encounters Santi in sightings out of the corner of his eye and whispers from the other orphans—who, like him, are more abandoned than truly orphaned. But he later encounters ghostly footprints, ominous shadows, and whispers. These encounters keep drawing Carlos back to the kitchen, and the cisterns that lie below it. Eventually, Carlos goes down to the cisterns and sees Santi face-on: a small, dark haired boy with a shattered skull and floating film of blood. Visually, Santi evokes a sense of fragility and victimhood. His shattered skull looks like that of a porcelain doll; this both speaks to his age—as a child who could appropriately play with dolls and other toys—and serves to distance him from the other living boys at the orphanage—somehow he seems less real. His eyes are inverted in color—the iris is pale, while the “whites” of his eyes are inky black, an effect that further distances him from the living. The floating film of blood gives the impression of being underwater. An eerie, metallic clicking sound is heard every time Santi is present. The audience learns to anticipate Santi’s present through the audible before recognizing him through the visual. Because Santi is not seen clearly until Carlos encounter him in the cisterns, the noise plays into the effective use of film’s off-screen creation of fear in the witness.

In addition to the fearful image of the ghost, the film offers another haunting visual image. In the courtyard of the orphanage, the shell of an enormous bomb sits. The bomb fell on the night the living Santi disappeared. It did not explode on contact with the ground, and was later disabled. But the shell was left behind, and the orphans speak of the echoing noises coming from inside—suggesting to them that the bomb may still be, in some way, active. The bomb becomes a constant visual reminder of the war occurring just beyond the walls of the orphanage.

The story is a tale of ghost encounter in that Santi begins as a figure of fear that can only be mediated through communication with past events and problem solving for a future peace. As Carlos continues to encounter Santi—through a chilling chase scene, and Carlos' later decision to confront the ghost—the unknown past is slowly revealed. Santi's death is the result of greed and violence. Jacinto is one of the men who work at the orphanage—and a former orphan himself. Jacinto manipulates the people around him to get what he wants; and what he wants most is the gold being kept in a locked safe in the kitchen. As his efforts to open the safe are unsuccessful, his actions become increasingly self-driven and malevolent. On the night Carlos first sees Santi near the cisterns (although before he witnesses him face-to-face) he is nearly caught out of bed by Jacinto, who has gone into the kitchen to check the lock to the safe. Carlos learns from Santi that Jacinto caught him in the cisterns—and believed he knew about Jacinto's plan to take the gold. In anger, Jacinto hit and pushed Santi—right into a stone pillar, which crushed Santi's skull. To cover up what he has done, Jacinto ties him up and throws him in one of the cisterns

to drown. Santi's body still lies under the cloudy surface of the water, unseen. His murder is unknown to those who run the orphanage—with only Jacinto and Jaime, another orphan, as witnesses. Neither reveals what has happened. Through his relationship with the ghost, Carlos becomes the new witness to the crime, and the one to bring to light the murder.

Carlos is unable to attain full justice for Santi. As the war comes to a close, the orphanage becomes subject to attack by Jacinto and a group of local thugs. They blow up the kitchen and the last remaining vehicle; in the process they kill Carmen and several young boys, and injure several others, including the last remaining adult, Casares. Carlos' mission then becomes one of escape. His escape is aided by Santi and later the ghost of Casares, who does not survive his injuries. When Carlos and the other boys lure Jacinto into the cisterns, they push him into the water. The corpse of Santi rises up and drags the murderer down into the water. In this way, Santi is finally laid to rest.

Casares, however, remains. The film closes with a silhouette shot of Casares at the entrance of the orphanage, watching the remaining boys walk away. Casares asks what a ghost is. One of the characteristics of a ghost is that they are stuck in a place, or a time. This is the case with this character, who remains keeping watch over the orphanage even after the orphans are gone. Much like the traumatic memory, which becomes a location of pain that is revisited without processing, the ghost of Casares becomes a figure caught in time, appearing repeatedly.

Carlos must communicate with the spirit of Santi in order to learn about the past, and can only end his own haunting by exposing the unknown of that past. But this film is not just a haunting ghost story. It has an undeniably political bent. It is implied that most of the “orphans” are actually the sons of loyalists—left behind for the sake of a cause. The people who run the orphanage—Carmen and Casares—are clearly loyalist sympathizers; in fact, the gold they keep at the orphanage is tied to the Republican effort. And most prominently, there is the shell of the bomb in the orphanage courtyard: dropped there, undetonated, diffused, and forgotten. The bomb remains the most evident and obvious reminder of the war—although it too is a ghost of what it once was.

The violent past between Santi and Jacinto serves as a microcosm for the mediation of the Spanish Civil War. The period of war, and oppressive dictatorship that existed in the decades after, remain a painful and traumatic moment in the collective Spanish memory. In placing the setting of the film within the final days of the war, del Toro makes the film a metaphorical image for the war itself. In his essay “Permanent Hauntings: Spectral Fantasies and National Trauma in Guillermo del Toro’s *El Espinazo del Diablo* [The Devil’s Backbone]” Enrique Ajuria Ibarra looks closely at the collective trauma of a nation and its expression in film. Ibarra writes that the film, “invests in these two objects [the ghost and unexploded bomb] particular significance and meaning to fill a persistent historical gap in Spain. The ghost and the bomb voice the silenced horrors of the Spanish Civil War; they also link all other filmic events and circumstances into a coherent narrative infused with historical and cultural meaning” (Ibarra 57). The civil war

left an imprint of pain and unresolved injustice—much like the murder of Santi. This becomes clear in the final scene of the film. Santi has been laid to rest; but the orphanage and Spain remain haunted. Ghosts continue to occupy the space where painful past occurred. The ghosts inspire the fear reaction because the past is something the characters want to avoid. The violence of abuse, the crime of murder, and the pain of war are things to be avoided, to be hidden from sight. But it is only by bringing them to light that such traumatic things can be processed.

An initial reading of the film would suggest that the traumatic past being relived is that of the orphans, who are subject and witness to the violence of Jacinto. Jacinto further experiences the trauma of his own past—one in which he is orphaned and confused. But why then does Carlos become the key witness to the ghost? Carlos is in the process of dealing with a traumatic past linked to the trauma-inducing war. He was left at the orphanage because of his father's link to the Republicans, who are in the dying throes of the war. His feelings of abandonment are a result of civil fighting. The painfully recent events of his past are relived and reinforced by his residence within the orphanage, an inescapable reminder of his abandonment. He exists in a state of continual reinforcement of trauma. Thus, he becomes an ideal witness to the ghost. The ghost, a repetition of traumatic past, appears to Carlos, who is living in a repetition of his own personal traumatic memories.

When Carlos first arrives at the orphanage, Casares tells Carmen, “They’ve brought another boy.” Both this comment—that “they” have brought “another” boy—and

Carmen's later discussion of her inability to continue caring for the children of the Leftist side tells the audience that Carlos is not alone in his trauma. Most of the boys are at the orphanage not because they are actual orphans, but because they have been abandoned by those pursuing the war cause. The boys' existence in the orphanage constantly reminds them that they have been abandoned—a repetition of the trauma. As the war goes on, more and more are abandoned—and are afflicted with the trauma of abandonment. The orphanage is a sight of haunting in the same way that it is a sight of repeated trauma—one that is particularly painful, and one that is being avoided. When that avoided trauma manifests itself—in this case, as the ghost of Santi—the boys naturally run away from the trauma representation in fear. They reject it.

The bomb and the ghost work in cooperation in their mediation of the past. When Carlos asks, the bomb shell to show him Santi, the red ribbon comes loose from the casing, and floats in the direction of Santi, toward the cisterns. The red ribbon visually echoes the stream of red blood floating from Santi's broken skull. Like Santi, the bomb is also not fully what it was in "life." The bomb is no longer the destructive weapon—or so they've been told—but a deactivated shell left behind as a visual reminder of the traumatic events of the outer world. Santi is no longer a living boy, but rather a shell of who he was in life, and a visual reminder of his own traumatic death. The bomb fell and did not detonate on the same night when Santi was killed; but the echo of Santi and the bomb remain present and visible. The bomb and Santi, through this layered visual and



symbolic connection, exist in relationship. This relationship is the source of trauma reiterated, and rejection of that trauma.

*The Sixth Sense*, much like *The Devil's Backbone*, tells a ghost story in which a witness initially rejects and fears the ghost as a representation of trauma, but can only come to mediate that trauma through communication with the ghost. The witness to the ghosts, nine year old Cole Sear, is initially haunted and terrorized by the apparitions, who often act in violent or unsettling ways. In order to end the horror, the ghost witness must communicate with the ghosts and recover their unheard messages. The ghost witness must cooperate with the ghost in order to lay it to rest and end the haunting, and by extension, the fear.

The film opens with child psychologist Malcolm Crowe, who has just received an award for his work. He and his wife are in their home when they realize their bedroom window has been broken. They discover that a former patient of Malcolm's in the bathroom. The patient shoots Malcolm and himself. Some time later, Malcolm begins working with Cole, whose case is in many ways similar to the earlier disturbed patient's. Cole eventually reveals that his troubling behavior is the result of seeing ghosts. The first ghost does not appear on screen (to a first time viewer's knowledge) until fifty minutes into the film. This is after Cole has acknowledged to Malcolm—and to the audience—that he sees dead people. Cole initially seems to be an example of the traditional fear response. He runs, hides, and avoids ghosts. He seeks shelter in churches and handmade

tents. When trapped in a closet during a birthday party with a ghost, he screams and briefly enters a catatonic state.

But he doesn't always run, as only a second viewing of the film will show. When Cole sees Malcolm for the first time, he hurries away, at one point breaking into a sprint. But when he reaches the church, he stops, and Malcolm catches up to him, playing with toys in a pew and whispering to himself in Latin. Malcolm tells him, "In the olden days, in Europe, people used to hide out in churches. They would claim sanctuary." Cole responds by asking, "What were they hiding from?" Cole engages his ghost in conversation—although he avoids eye contact through most of the scene and leaves only moments later. His parting words are, "I'm going to see you again, right?"—an acknowledgement that the trauma of ghost witnessing is far from over.

Malcolm is the primary recipient of trauma—the trauma of his own death. But he is unable to experience the trauma in a first-hand and explicit way. The trauma of death is instead shifted onto Cole. Cole bears witness to Malcolm as a dead person, and carries the horrible weight of Malcolm's unrealized state of existence. Cole tells Malcolm, "[The dead] only see what they want to see." And this is the way in which Malcolm experiences his trauma—as an avoidance, through seeing only a partial reality.

Furthermore, the ultimate lesson for Cole is how to cope with his ghosts, and help them move on. He learns to listen to, speak, and calm the apparitions of the deceased, rather than run away. The fear response is ultimately not the proper response for Cole. Rather, a response that acknowledges the ghost, and openly interacts with the ghost, is

the best course of action, and perhaps only means of laying the ghost—and the trauma—to rest. The people who were previously connected to Malcolm's life—primarily his wife—experience the trauma of his loss in an expected way.

Malcolm comes to terms with his trauma through the simple act of recognizing it—of recognizing his own death. By realizing he has died, he is able to assume the condition of deceased, is able to *cease* existing in the liminal spirit space. Recognition is the key to escaping his entrapment.

Yet recognition is not a clean healing process. Malcolm does not cease to exist the *moment* he recognizes his death. Rather, he continues to exist in ghost form temporarily afterwards. He manifests once more in the home of his wife, and to Cole. Acceptance and action, then, must accompany recognition.

## Chapter Five: The Desire-Based Seeking

### Response in Victorian Fiction

The Victorian era saw a rise in Spiritualism; interest in séances, ghost photography, apparitions, and other forms of reaching out to the dead became popular following the losses of the Civil War, and popularity in America quickly spread to Europe. It is within Victorian short fiction that we find many examples of the desire-seeking response. The restoration of the past that the ghost *seems* to offer draws in the witness. But the seeking within the response carries its own complications.

In Elizabeth Gaskell's 1852 short story "The Old Nurse's Story," an aged nurse recounts a tale from the beginning of her career to the children of the woman she first served as caretaker to. Hester is hired as governess for the young Miss Rosamond. Shortly after her appointment, Miss Rosamond is orphaned, and the two of them are sent to live with an elderly aunt and her household staff. Their new home at Furnivall Manor is suitable for a haunting:

We had left all signs of a town, or even a village, and were then inside the gates of a large wild park...we saw a great and stately house, with many trees close around it, so close that in some places their branches dragged against the walls when the wind blew; and some hung broken down; for no one seemed to take much charge of the place;—to lop the wood, or to keep the moss covered carriage-way in order. Only in front of the house all was clear. The great oval drive was without a weed; and neither tree nor creeper was allowed to grow over

the long, many-windowed front; at both sides of which a wing projected, which were each the ends of other side fronts; for the house, although it was so desolate, was even grander than I expected. (24)

The Manor is immediately characterized as a remote and distance place; distance from “all signs” of civilization indicate both a return to a time from the past and a break from known reality. It is within this sort of un-reality outside of time that the ghost presence becomes possible. The narrator also provides key details to the experience she and her charge are about to encounter. The tree branches “dragged against the walls when the wind blew.” The Manor is an eerie place where tree branches can be heard against the exterior of the house. Wind, also, will come to play an important role in scene-setting. The narrator also indicated the two wings of the house. The Manor is later characterized by an east wing that is closed off; the locked wing, a place of secret-keeping, is indicated in the very first description of the house. Hester and her charge are not at the house long before haunting occurrences begin. The first is the sound of the great organ playing in the hall. Formerly the possession of the lord of the manor, the organ is now “all broken and destroyed inside” (30). Yet it continues to make music—without visible player—and all of the residents seem aware of this music. James and Dorothy, the caretakers, initially claim it is nothing but the wind, but Agnes, a servant, reveals that it is the former master playing, usually before the coming of a winter storm.

The next haunting occurrence is during one such winter storm. While Hester is away at church, Rosamond goes missing. The little girl is nowhere to be found in the

house. When Hester looks outside, she finds “two little footprints, which might be traced from the hall door and round the corner of the east wing” (Gaskell 33). She follows the footprints to a grove of black holly-trees (“black marks on the hillside, where no other bush was for miles around”). Before she can get there, a shepherd finds Rosamond freezing and unconscious. After Rosamond is brought back to the house and restored to consciousness, she has a strange tale to tell. While her nurse was away, Rosamond looked out at the falling snow, and saw “a little girl, not so old as she was, ‘but so pretty...and this little girl beckoned to me to come out; and oh, she was so pretty and so sweet, I could not choose but go’” (35). Despite the one visible pair of footprints in the snow, Rosamond claims to have been led by the little girl to the holly trees. There, she found a weeping woman who “began to lull me to sleep” (35).

In her initial and subsequent encounters with the ghost of the little girl, Rosamond reacts without fear. She goes to the little girl, and allows herself to be led. She begins to refer to her as “my poor little girl,” and becomes violent with Hester when the nurse attempts to restrain her from going to the girl. Equally unusual is the reaction of Miss Furnivall, the elderly aunt. Hester explains why Rosamond disappeared, and “when I came to the mention of the other little girl out in the snow, coaxing and tempting her out, and willing her up to the grand and beautiful lady by the holly-tree, she threw her arms up—her old and withered arms—and cried aloud, “Oh! Heaven, forgive! Have mercy!” (36). But unlike every other resident of the house, Miss Furnivall offers no warning, and

does not react in fear. Her cry to heaven is ambiguous. Who is it that heaven must forgive? Have mercy on who? But her appeal is not one that rejects the ghost figure.

As the winter progresses, Hester begs details out of the other residents of Furnivall Manor. She learns of Miss Furnivall's—formerly Miss Grace—older sister. Miss Grace and her sister fell in love with a foreign musician who visited their father in the summer. It was this musician that selected the grand organ in the hall—the one that still plays on its own. Both sisters carried on affairs with the musician, but the oldest eventually wed him in secret and had a daughter, whom she kept hidden from her family at a remote farmhouse on their estate. The next summer, the foreign musician returned, but the two sisters

led him such a life with their jealousy and their passions, that he grew weary, and went away, and never was heard of again. And Miss Maude, who had always meant to have her marriage acknowledged when her father should be dead, was left now a deserted wife, whom nobody knew to have been married, with a child that she dared not own, although she loved it to distraction; living with a father whom she feared, and a sister whom she hated. (41).

After her abandonment, the older sister moved her daughter into the east wing of the house, which she kept locked. But Miss Grace discovers her daughter and learns of the secret marriage. She vengefully reveals this to her father, who then drives the young mother and child out of the house in the middle of a snowstorm. The next day, some shepherds find the older sister, “sitting, all crazy and smiling, under the holly-trees,

nursing a dead child” (42). Within the year, the older sister and the father die. Only Miss Grace remains to carry the burden of her memories.

The appearances of the little girl increase after Hester learns the story of her death, and she and Rosamond are distracted nearly every night by her cries. It is Miss Furnivall who eventually puts an end to the haunting. One night, as they are sitting by the fire, Miss Furnivall cries out that she hears voices, at the same time that Rosamond begins crying for her “little girl.” While Hester’s reaction is to hide from the voices—which are even audible to her—Miss Furnivall and Rosamond both walk toward the east wing to let the voices in. Hester catches Rosamond, but Miss Furnivall continues to the front hall. Once there, the doors to the east wing are flung open, and the ghosts of the father, the sister and her daughter, and even the younger Miss Furnivall appear. The ghosts reenact the evening the father forced his daughter and grandchild out into the cold. While the older Miss Furnivall begs her father to have mercy, the ghost of young Miss Favisham stands by and watches, “with a look of relentless hate and triumphant scorn” (46). As the father strikes the child, the elder Miss Furnivall collapses. She does not rise again, muttering “Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age!” until her death.

Although the narrative ends here, the beginning of the story, in which the old nurse is telling the tale to Rosamond’s children, implies that the haunting episode comes to a close after Miss Furnivall addresses it.



“The Old Nurse’s Story” falls within the desire-based seeking response. Although the ghost of the young child—and later, the sister, father, and younger Miss Grace—inspire fear in Hester, they serve as figures of desire for specific characters. That is to say, they represent a lost past, and the deep sense of nostalgia for that past. Miss Furnivall desires not only the days of her youth before her sister’s death, but also the possibility of redemption. Her entreaty to her father to “spare the innocent child” this time, in contrast to her younger self’s cold passivity, reveals her sense of guilt and regret. When she hears of the ghost child for the first time, she cries out, “Oh! Heaven, forgive! Have mercy!” It seems to me that she is begging mercy on herself. Even years after this tragic episode in her past, Miss Furnivall is haunted by memories. The child returns to remind her that she is not yet forgiven.

This serves as a traumatic event in her past because of the multiple losses, and her own sense of responsibility in the loss. Within a year, Miss Furnivall loses her father, sister, and niece—not to mention her beloved musician. The ghost of her younger self reveals her inability to process loss in the moment; she stands by passively, with only hatred and triumph reflected on her face. Her reaction as an older woman is much different—and thus reveals a change in mindset. Rather than coming to terms with the past, Miss Furnivall remains caught up in regret and desire for that time before the loss. The ghosts become metaphor for her past, but rather than fear them, the past is exactly what she desires. She approaches the voices in the east wing, which expresses that active desire.

In her encounter with the ghosts of her past, Miss Furnivall approaches a means of coming to terms with her painful past. Yet she does not fully recover. Rather, she collapses, and remains bedridden until her death. She becomes stuck in a cycle of repeating the same phrase, “Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age!” She recognizes her responsibility in her own loss. But she is still unable to move past that to a true sense of healing.

What of Miss Rosamond? The child has no direct link to the ghost figures as memory; unlike Miss Furnivall, she is not viewing reenactments of her own past. Her strongest tie seems to be that of blood relation to the once-living figures the ghosts represent. But does she connect to that moment of the past that the ghost child and its ghost mother represent? Perhaps what we find in Miss Rosamond is a more general desire for that which is lost. The narrative arc of the story and optimistic characterization of Rosamond makes it easy to forget the circumstances that bring the little girl and Hester to the Manor in the first place. Rosamond has been orphaned. Her father died of illness, and her mother died in childbirth, along with the new baby. The ghost child, then, represents to Rosamond both her own lost identity of a child who has a mother, and the infant sibling and mother she lost. Rosamond feels an undeniable pull toward the ghostly figures. In one encounter, she cries to Hester, “...it’s the lady! the lady below the holly-trees ; and my little girl is with her. Hester! Hester! let me go to her; they are drawing me to them. I feel them—I feel them. I must go !” (45). Her irresistible pull to them is drawn from her own loss. The lady below the holly trees becomes a sort of surrogate mother.

The reader never learns if the ghosts have bad intentions in drawing Rosamond outside; but their significance in her own past of death and loss is undeniable.

Within this story, we find the lack of development characteristic of the desire response. The desire response is informed by an unfulfillable longing for the past—unfulfillable because the past can never be restored. For this reason, the desire response to a ghost is inevitably caught in stasis. The structure of this story is brief; little detail is provided in the end. We know Rosamond and Hester survive the ghost confrontation in the east wing only because of the opening framing of the short story—that of the older Hester telling a story to Rosamond’s children. We do not witness Rosamond’s response in the moment to the ghosts, nor how this episode affects her growing up. Her own development from orphaned child caught in the desire response to (presumably) healthy adult is left out. Miss Furnivall’s response, too, is one of continued stasis. While the confrontation with the ghosts of her past provide a means of transition, she does not transition to a state beyond the desire response. She desired a restoration of the past; the confrontation only enforced the unreachability of the past. Her response to this confrontation, then, is continued stasis and eventual death. Because this is a short story, Gaskell can end abruptly, and offer a conclusion to the story without the need to explain the transition out of the desire response.

In “The Turn of the Screw,” another child caretaker encounters ghosts. The story is written within a frame structure, with an outside narrator recounting a friend’s telling of a “true” ghost story, which is the story that makes up the majority of the work. Within

this central story, the unnamed first-time governess takes on a position at Bly House, where she is responsible for Miles and Flora in place of their distant uncle. Before long, the governess begins to see apparitions of former caretakers—Miss Jessel and Peter Quint—who were engaged in an illicit sexual relationship. But the governess ultimately finds that the spirits she sees are not recognized by those around her—or are at least denied.

The first apparition occurs when the governess is wandering the grounds, fantasizing about the children's uncle bearing witness to the good work she is doing. As she walks, she glances up at one of the towers of the house and sees "An unknown man in a lonely place" (51). The governess does not recognize who or what the man is, nor does she share her sighting with anyone else in the house, allowing her "beginning of fear was one, as I may say, with the instinct of sparing my companion" (53). The governess' immediate response of fear is one quickly countered by conflicting emotions and the choice to keep her concerns to herself. In part, she does not tell the housekeeper Mrs. Grose, or anyone else, because she feels "so intimately concerned" with the apparition of the strange man. This is the beginning of her desire response, in which she feels a longing for the ghost that does not lead her to take action to drive the ghost away—for example, by telling another person in the household that might expel or eliminate the threat.

To understand the loss the governess feels, we must first understand what brought her to Bly House. The governess obtains the position through previous contact with the uncle—"a gentleman, a bachelor in the prime of life, such a figure as had never risen,

save in a dream or an old novel, before a fluttered anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage” (40). After getting to know him in this context, he presents the caretaker position as an immense favor to him, something she might do to further win his favor. She accepts, of course. Later clues indicate as to why. The framing narrator’s friend comments, “of course the seduction exercised by the splendid young man. She succumbed to it” (42). The governess herself comments to Mrs. Grose, the housekeeper,

“I’m afraid, however...I’m rather easily carried away. I was carried away in London!”

I can still see Mrs. Grose’s broad face as she took this in. “In Harley Street?”

“In Harley Street.”

“Well, Miss, you’re not the first—and you won’t be the last.” (44-45)

This subdued exchange reveals what happened between the governess and the uncle prior to her position at Bly. The governess was seduced not just into her role at the house, but into a sexual relationship with the uncle. Seduced, of course, is a dated term. What actually happened to the governess seems to be significantly more troubling. Her passive language—“I was carried away”—implies a lack of agency and choice. In situations where she is in control—as one in charge of children frequently is—she expresses surprise, saying things such as “I was strangely at the helm!” (46). Prior to meeting Miles for the first time, the governess states to Mrs. Grose that she likes boys “with the spirit to be naughty...But not to the degree to contaminate...To corrupt” (47). Incomplete references to Harley Street and fragmented thoughts about the uncle pepper the text; the

governess obsesses over the innocence of the children and all that the world might do to corrupt that innocence; as Miles obtains degrees of power over her, the governess feels a male-centric anxiety. The narrator implies that the seduction, in euphemistic Victorian fashion, was a less-than-consensual encounter between wealthy bachelor and poor unemployed young woman. The governess is clearly suffering from a past trauma, and James seems to be suggesting that the trauma is one of rape.

The governess is suffering from the inexpressible loss of her own innocence. She longs for the past before she became involved with the uncle, and became just one of many to be “carried away in Harley Street.” She feels as if she has been “contaminated” or “corrupted.” The “element of the unnamed” haunts her everyday experience. Her own illicit sexual relationship and suggested rape leave her in that state where cognition cannot make sense of the past. The past, then, manifests in the ghosts of specifically sexual characters. In her very first sighting of Peter Quint, the governess at first mistakes him for the uncle, whom she had just been wishing to appear to approve of her work with the children. The face of the uncle and her violator is conflated with the face of the ghost, and of the past itself. Her description of Peter Quint is one of a violator. “We have been,” she says, “collectively, subject to an intrusion; some unscrupulous traveller...had made his way in unobserved, enjoyed the prospect from the best point of view and then stolen out as he came...that was but a part of his indiscretion. The good thing, after all, was that we should surely see no more of him” (54). Peter Quint’s actions, as described in this passage, parallel the actions of the uncle, who intruded upon the governess’ physicality,

made his way in unobserved by those who would stop him, had sex with and likely raped the unmarried woman, and then left her life through her appointment at Bly—where, she has been reassured, she should never see him but only communicate through letters. The uncle is to the governess as Peter Quint is to Bly House. The governess expresses the hope that she might never see the man in the tower again; but of course this is just the first of many ghost sightings. Peter Quint, like the traumatic memory, appears again and again. The governess may wish to forget the trauma of her past, and the man who caused the trauma. But the problem with traumatic memory is the way it catches its witnesses in the continual loop of re-immersion in the memory of the trauma. The ghosts recur, just as unbiddingly as the memory of trauma is recurring—unspokenly—for the governess. But as the ghosts become something that the governess seeks out, they highlight the place of loss that she is now trying to fill. The two ghost characters come to represent the time before the governess came to Bly—and presumably long before she met the uncle. Her seeking of them serves as an attempt to fill the loss of that time prior to her interactions with the uncle. They are the pre-trauma past for her; therefore she seeks them out.

To a lesser degree, the children also use the ghosts as a means of attempting to fill their own loss. The children's desire response is complicated by the fact that the narrative never offers proof outside of the governess' perceptions that the children actually see the ghosts. Assuming, for the moment, that they do, the ghosts represent a direct return of that which was lost in the past. The children are "steeped in their vision of the dead restored to them" (82). And the children have so many dead—their own parents, their

grandparents, their most recent caretakers. The voluntary absence of their uncle—their only remaining living relation—seems to reinforce the trauma of loss and abandonment. The children are essentially alone in their world. Their loss is profound. And so the traumatic memory of those losses becomes the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint.

Unlike Gaskell, James does not offer the hope of a better, trauma-free future for the governess and children. In the climactic scene of the story, when the governess insists that the ghosts are present in the room, Miles dies of shock. The governess now has the additional trauma caused by the death of her charge, on top of the unspeakable trauma that occurred at the hands of Miles' and Flora's uncle.



## **Chapter Six:**

### **The Neutrality-Based Acclimatization Response in Magical Realism Novels**

Within novels from the magical realism genre, we find characters that learn to coexist with their ghosts. Often victims of cultural and collective trauma, the characters seem to adopt a mode of living with continuous and present trauma. They acclimatize to their new realities as those realities present themselves. Many times, the new reality is the return of a lost loved one.

In Ana Castillo's 1993 *So Far from God*, a family of four distinct women face identity challenges—as women, as Mexican-Americans, as lesbians, and as outcasts from various community groups. A number of significant losses are experienced over the course of the novel—starting with the sudden death of the youngest daughter, La Loca, on the first page. La Loca is resurrected at her own funeral, and presents a complicated character thereafter. The eldest daughter, Esperanza, is the next to die under mysterious circumstances as a war correspondent. Her body is never recovered, but she does return to her mother's home as what Castillo calls “an ectoplasmic presence.” Caridad is the next to die, after she and her lesbian lover are chased off a cliff by one of Caridad's devoted male admirers—or to use a more fitting term, stalker. Again, no body is recovered after the jump; the earth swallows the two women so they “would be safe and live forever” (211). Fe is the only sister who does not return in some form after her death

from cancer, contracted during her work in a corrupt chemical plant producing weapons. It is her death that “lingers among us all heavier than air” and is hardest for the others to speak of (170). La Loca herself faces a second tragic death from AIDS. If the death of her four daughters and a lifetime of economic struggle were not suffering enough, single mother Sofi must deal with the disappearance, return, and presence of her husband Domingo. Loss is prevalent amongst the family—and trauma is too.

The various tragic deaths represent a clear and distinct trauma for the family. But the trauma of existence at a cultural borderland permeates the lives of every character. *So Far from God* takes place in New Mexico; the characters are all strongly shaped by their Mexican-American identities. This dualistic cultural identity and the racism and institutional injustices that accompany it form cultural trauma. In her article “Culture, Influence, and the ‘I-Ness’ of Me,” Cleonie White looks at three authors’ perspectives on the practice of psychoanalytics on people suffering from identity conflict due to cultural trauma. White writes of the challenge, when members of racial or cultural groups exist as “more than their culture, more than the myth of their race, class, ethnicity, gender. [Yet] They are unrecognized as subjects capable of managing their lives and wish that fact to be publicly stated” (White 668). The dehumanizing effect of being treated only as one’s culture, and not as an individual, forms a traumatic influence. This is an influence that attacks an individual’s very identity. One of the authors White cites is Susan Bodnar. In Bodnar’s words, “Because the mind is organized by a capacity for multiple self-states, and because most people are symbolically fluent in multiple cultural realities, there can

be traumatic psychic damage when there is violation or injury along any of those dimensions of self-experience.” The violation or injury of a self-state creates dissociation. Existence within a cultural group, unfortunately, seems to necessitate the enacting of violation and injury of self. White makes an important point that I don’t want to neglect—that “culture, race, or any other group to which a person belongs are (in and of themselves) sources of traumas; but cultural trauma...[is] indisputable” (672). It is the historical and ongoing treatment of a group, and the ill effects that go along with being a member of that group because of social inequities, that cause the trauma. Existence within a cultural group becomes a dissociative experience when the group is treated as “other” within the context of one or more other groups; this dissociation informs the trauma.

To bring the ghost into this picture, the dissociation of traumatic experiences divides one from oneself. The separation of what White and Bodnar call self-states creates identities that do not fully belong to the individual. The self-state might then manifest itself in the ghost.

Death is not a finality by any means in Castillo’s novel. This should come as no surprise to the reader when a major character dies and returns from the dead in the space of five pages. La Loca dies at the age of three, but then quickly rises from her coffin, calling for her *mami*. Various characters return in some form after their death, and others undergo metaphorical and pseudo-resurrections. Most relevant for this analysis, though, is those characters that return as ghosts.

The first ghostly apparition is a pseudo-ghost. Caridad is attacked and left for dead, horribly injured. A full recovery is impossible, and she becomes an infirm in her home. But one day, while her mother and sisters are in the living room, something catches their eyes.

Dogs, cats, and women, twenty-eight eyes in all, saw *Caridad* walking soundlessly, without seeming to be aware of them, across that room. Before anyone could react she was out of sight. Furthermore, it wasn't the Caridad that had been brought back from the hospital, but a while and once again beautiful Caridad, in what furthermore appeared to be Fe's wedding gown. (37)

Sofi and her daughters expect to find Caridad dead in her room after this apparition passes. But what they find instead is a fully recovered Caridad with nothing more than a fever.

Esperanza is the most concrete ghost appearance. After her death overseas while working as a war correspondent, her body remains absent. But her spirit returns home. She is seen by La Loca and Caridad, by her father, Domingo, and by her mother, Sofi. The characters do not respond in fear. Caridad and La Loca "[have] long discussions, even if mostly one-sided" with their deceased sister (one-sided meaning that Esperanza turns out to be a particularly verbose ghost). But the characters do not respond with the emotional response of desire either; they simply accept that Esperanza has returned, and carry on with their lives. In the final chapter, too, we see this reaction to ghosts as ordinary. By the end of the novel, all four of Sofi's daughters have died. All except Fe

return in “occasional ectoplasmic appearances” (248). Sofi becomes the founder and president of M.O.M.A.S., or Mothers of Martyrs and Saints. At this peculiar organization’s annual gatherings, the deceased children—all characterized by the miraculous, holy, and strange—return to visit their mothers. At the reunions,

... ‘jitos from all over the world, some transparent, some looking incarnated but you knew they weren’t if you tested them in some way... There were some who appeared just as they were in life when they were well and others as morbidly as they looked at the time of their death, or as the M.O.M.A.S. put it, transcendence, that is, all maimed and bloody or deteriorated, if that is how they met their end. But all seemed pretty happy to be there with everybody, no matter what their story in this life had been. (251)

The martyred and saintly children return as ghosts to see their mothers. And the event is no stranger than any other reunion. “[A]ll seemed pretty happy to be there”; no one reacts with fear. The officiality of the event also excludes it from the desire category; in fact, the narrative makes it clear, “It’s not like Las Mothers had to hold séances or nothing like that” (250). Las Mothers do not reach out to their deceased loved ones, or attempt to draw them near. They simply coexist with them, in attendance at the same conference.

Perhaps the most interesting of Castillo’s ghost characters is the one she did not create herself. La Llorona makes an appearance as a minor character in *So Far from God*. La Loca, who spends much of her time by the *acequia* befriends a well-known figure from Mexican folklore: La Llorona. While Sofi is initially disturbed by her daughter’s

friendship, it is not so much because her daughter is friends with a *ghost*, but rather that she doesn't understand how La Loca has come to know La Llorona—a character that Sofi deliberately chose not to share with her children.

La Llorona is one of the most popular ghost stories throughout Mexico and parts of the Southwestern United States. The story tells of a ghost woman of uncertain identity. La Llorona was either abandoned by her husband, or married and unable to unite with her lover, or unmarried and rejected by the father of her children. In all versions of the story, she drowns her children; then driven mad by grief and cursed by God for her sins, she is condemned to wander the earth looking for her dead children. She appears near bodies of water, and will drown small children and the occasional unfaithful husband. She may also portend death for those who see her. Her most identifiable feature is her cry. Sofi “refused to repeat this nightmare to her daughters” (161). Sofi, a single mother too, does not drown her children after her husband leaves, and is disturbed by this figure who would do so. But Sofi seems to be aware on some level that there is more—much more—to La Llorona than a murderous mother.

Castillo introduces La Llorona as “A woman whom everyone knows, who has existed under many names, who has cried over the loss of thousands but who was finally relegated to a kind of ‘boogy-woman’” (Castillo 160). The first of this woman’s names may have been Coatlicue or Cihuacoatl—an Aztec goddess of various manifestations (“La Llorona A Five-century-old Lamentation”). In her article “From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros,” Ana Maria Carbonell

identifies Cihuacoatl as the patron goddess of midwives—a symbol of creation. But her connection with maternity may have been predated by the more ancient identity of Coatlicue, “earth goddess of both war and birth” (Carbonell 305). An increasingly militaristic and sacrificial Azteca-Mexica culture was responsible for the fracturing of the earth mother/war goddess identity. Coatlicue was split into “descendent” goddesses—including Tonantzin the good mother, Cihuacoatl the bad mother, and the “serpent-woman, that wandered about the the [*sic*] broad streets of the Great Tenochtitlan wailing and lamenting: ‘My dearly beloved children; your departure is near; we’re about to become estranged!’” (“La Llorona A Five-century-old Lamentation”). This fractured identity led to later confusion and compounding with the goddesses of non-Aztec native religions, including the Mayan goddess of suicide, Xtabai (“La Llorona A Five-century-old Lamentation”). The re-identification, and perhaps misidentification, of the goddess Coatlicue allowed increasingly negative characteristics to be associated with her. Furthermore, it allowed her power and stature as goddess to be reduced over time.

While the fracturing of the goddess’ identity began long before the Spanish conquest, most scholars identify the arrival of Cortés as the moment of conversion from goddess to human figure. Around this time, legends of La Malinche took hold. La Malinche was an indigenous woman who became an interpreter and contested consort/lover of the infamous Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. Folklore holds that she became the mother of the new race—the Mestizos—when she gave birth to a mixed race son; Martín Cortés was indigenous and Spanish. He was also illegitimate, which led

to the vilification of La Malinche (Moreman & Calafell 314). La Malinche has been isolated in folkloric history as a symbol of cultural betrayal and a complicit agent of oppression. In the worst of cases, she is renamed *La Chingada* and blamed for the complete downfall of the indigenous Mexican culture (Carbonell 306). In some accounts, she is given the words of Cihuacoatl from above: “My dearly beloved children; your departure is near; we’re about to become estranged!” These words serve as her prediction of the future generations of fractured identity that will be experienced by those living in the borderland regions of Mexico and the Southwestern United States.

La Llorona was formed from the roots of Aztec religion and La Conquista legends. She lacks the divine power of her goddess ancestors, but holds more control than the indigenous woman under Spanish control. Her rejection of the maternal role and ability to instill fear in children and vagrant husbands makes her a figure of subversive female power. Yet that role will always be haunted by its origins and the implicit reduction of female power—from goddess to mortal woman.

When La Loca befriends this figure of fractured female identity, she brings together the conflict of gender roles and the experience of the major characters as women of color. It is these self-identities that bring into focus the cultural trauma that White writes on. La Llorona is a folkloric figure that has been repeatedly dissociated from herself. While her goddess identity and current ectoplasmic existence are less real than La Malinche, as a figure born from her culture, she comes to represent the conflict of those



who identify as Mexican-American, Chicano/a, and as female. She represents the trauma of dissociative identities within culture and gender groups.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* chronicles the epic history of the Buendía family as they found, develop, and witness the downfall of the microworld of Macondo. The story begins with José Arcadio and his cousin and wife Úrsula. The two leave their hometown behind after José Arcadio kills Prudencio Aguilar, a cockfighting rival who insults his sexual competency. José Arcadio and Úrsula set out with a large group of friends who are “like him, excited by the adventure,” with the intention of reaching the sea (23). They give the goal up after two years of wandering, and settle down in a mountain valley. The name “Macondo”—which “had a supernatural echo” comes to José Arcadio in a dream and the village is founded (24). Macondo then experiences a long period of discovery, growth, war, modernization, affairs, corruption, aging, and finally its own downfall with the last of the family line, cousins Aureliano and Amaranta Úrsula, and their pig-tailed child.

Márquez’s most famous novel is known for its place in the magical realism genre. The author was a master at incorporating the supernatural into otherwise ordinary life in a way that made the supernatural ordinary too. The characters that become ghosts do not form relationships of terror, nor of particular desire.

The first ghost we encounter is the one who sets the Buendía family in motion—Prudencio Aguilar. After losing a cockfight to José Arcadio, Prudencio tells him, “Maybe that rooster of yours can do your wife a favor.” José Arcadio replies calmly, “You go

home and get a weapon, because I'm going to kill you" (21). José Arcadio proceeds to do exactly that, spearing Prudencio down from a distance and then going home and consummating his as-yet-unconsummated marriage with Úrsula while Prudencio's wake occurs nearby. But both José Arcadio and Úrsula suffer "a twinge in their conscience" over the violent death (22). This twinge soon manifests itself in the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar. One night, unable to sleep, Úrsula goes out to get some water, and "saw Prudencio Aguilar by the water jar. He was livid, as sad expression on his face, trying to cover the hole in his throat with a plug made of esparto grass. *It did not bring on fear in her, but pity*" (22, emphasis mine). The ghost of the man her husband killed does not inspire any terror in her. She does not run or hide, because her relationship to her past does not drive her to reject the ghost. But because Prudencio was not a significant part of her past, the emotion of desire is absent for her as well. What she does instead is *acclimate* to the ghost. She "placed water jugs all about the house" for him to wash his wound with. She observes him moving through their home. She gives every sign of being able to continue living this way. It is José Arcadio, the murderer, who finally decides to leave his home and in that way "give some measure of peace to Prudencio Aguilar" (23). The Buendías and their friends leave Prudencio to wander without the reminder of their presence.

But this is not the last encounter with Prudencio. Years later, as José Arcadio is approaching the end of his life, Prudencio Aguilar's ghost comes to Macondo. "After many years of death the yearning for the living was so intense, the need for company so

pressing, so terrifying the nearness of that other death which exists within death, that Prudencio Aguilar had ended up loving his worst enemy. He had spent a great deal of time looking for him” (77). In this interesting reversal of the ghost response, it is the *ghost*—the metaphor for the traumatic memory—who experiences longing and fear. Prudencio is driven to seek out the living, and is terrified of his own second death. He chases the living both as longing to return to the living, and as an avoidance of death. This sort of response, typically only exhibited in the living, is evident in his appearance. The ghost has aged since his young death. While still only spirit, and still with the wound in his throat, he has grown old like José Arcadio and Úrsula. The ghost is undeniably dead—and yet distanced from death. In this way, the *ghost* exhibits his own witness relationship to traumatic memory.

In terms of the living witness’ relationship to the ghost, José Arcadio’s is one of neutrality-acclimation. He greets Prudencio like an old friend the first time he sees him in Macondo, saying, “You’ve come from a long way off!” (77). The two form a friendship, and have long all-night conversations. When José Arcadio goes insane, “the only person with whom he was able to have contact for a long time was Prudencio Aguilar” (139). Prudencio becomes José Arcadio’s caretaker as he nears death. José Arcadio loses touch with the living in his life.

After his death, Úrsula sees his ghost. She treats the ghost much like she treated her husband after he went insane. She recognizes his presence, she knows he is there, but she does not interact with him beyond basic caretaker responsibilities. The only time

Úrsula exhibits a significant emotional interaction with her husband's ghost is when she learns of her son Aureliano's death. She sees her husband sitting under the chestnut tree in the rain, and goes to cry at his knees. The loss she is suffering here is primarily that of her son—who does not return after death. Her interaction with the ghost is most similar to the interactions she would have had with the living José Arcadio. She recognizes he is dead; but she witnesses to him as if there is little divide between his living form and his post-death presence.

While Prudencio and José Arcadio become ghosts that interact directly with people from their former lives, *100 Years of Solitude* also offers a cross-generational ghost. One of José Arcadio's closest friends, and one of the most important innovators of Macondo, is Melquiades. Melquiades is “a heavy gypsy with an untamed beard and sparrow hands,” “a gloomy man with an Asiatic look that seemed to know what there was on the other side of things” who “wore a large black hat that looked like a raven with widespread wings (1, 6). Melquiades brings wonders of the scientific world to the isolated village of Macondo; he helps José Arcadio discover such truths as the roundness of the world and the magic of magnets. He constructs an alchemist's lab in the Buendía home. It is in this lab that he composes the hundred year prophecy for the Buendías, and it is here that he resides after his death. Aureliano Segundo, one of the great grandchildren, forms a bond with Melquiades when he enters the old room. Although the room has been locked for many years, and the padlock “had become fused together with rust,” the room itself remains untouched (183). “There was not the slightest trace of dust

or cobwebs, with everything swept and clean, better swept and cleaner than on the day of the burial, and the ink had not dried up in the inkwell nor had oxidation diminished the shine of the metals nor had the embers gone out under the water pipe where José Arcadio Buendía had vaporized mercury... In spite of the room's having been shut up for many years, the air seemed fresher than in the rest of the house. Everything was so recent..." (183). The room is clearly still lived in, worked in, and cared for. It remains a functional location, despite being locked off from the rest of the house for so many years. Aureliano begins reading the books and manuscripts left behind by Melquiades, as well as trying to decipher his own family's prophecy. While he reads, Melquiades sits in the window and watches. The ghost does not startle him; "Aureliano Segundo recognized him at once, because that hereditary memory had been transmitted from generation to generation and had come to him through the memory of his grandfather" (184). While Aureliano Segundo's own grandfather was only a child when he knew Melquiades, the gypsy carries on in the collective, generational memory of Macondo. Aureliano Segundo has a classic neutrality response; he greets the ghost with a friendly "Hello." The two carry on a friendship for several years, with Melquiades attempting to pass on his worldly wisdom to the Macondo native every afternoon. Aureliano Segundo becomes withdrawn, but he does not display fear or desire. He cannot desire the ghost as most witnesses do; because Melquiades is not a part of his own past, he cannot seek him as a way to fill a loss. For him, there is no personal loss, only the collective loss of a family that, by now, is entering upon its fifth and antepenultimate generation. Still in his youth, Aureliano Segundo has

yet to experience major tragedies in his life. Melquiades cannot serve to fill a loss that isn't there. And fear is so clearly absent in the relationship. Aureliano Segundo, almost instantly acclimated to the presence in the once-locked room, co-exists with the ghost.

Aureliano Segundo abandons his relationship with Melquiades for—what else—the love of a woman. But his twin brother, José Arcadio Segundo, later inhabits the room. José Arcadio is the only survivor of the forgotten banana massacre, which government leaders later erase from history (a powerful commentary on Colombian politics and South American memory). Military forces attempt to eradicate every last trace of the massacre—including witnesses like José Arcadio Segundo. They track him to the Buendía home. He is hiding in Melquiades' old room. While José Arcadio Segundo is not yet a ghost in death—although perhaps in history—he becomes protected by the ghostly qualities of the room. While his family members see him clearly, the soldiers look right through him. As they walk away from the freshest, cleanest room in the house, one remarks, “It's obvious that no one has been in that room for at least a hundred years” (312). The “supernatural light” of the room keeps people outside the family from seeing the metaphorical figures of the past, and the room appears aged, as it would in a reality outside of magical realism. José Arcadio Segundo takes his brother's place in the room, becoming only a ghostly (though still living) presence in the Buendía family's day-to-day reality.

The neutrality response appears with most frequency in the magical realism genre. While not always the case, within my two examples magical realism is tied to cultural,

collective, and ongoing trauma. The deaths of Esperanza, Caridad, Fe, and La Loca present concrete and troubling losses—traumatic losses. While Melquiades’ death is not necessarily traumatic, it is a loss. The murder of --- is inherently traumatic in its violence. But these concrete losses occur against a background of cultural conflict and colonialist oppression. Castillo’s women are constantly negotiating identities as women in a world where women are oppressed. They are additionally struggling with questions of race. Esperanza and Fe in particular offer extremes on the spectrum—with Esperanza delving into Aztec religion and Mexican-American politics in college, and Fe assimilating almost entirely to the white banking culture in which she works. The gendered and cultural conflict of these characters fractures their identity, and separates them from themselves. Colonialism, too, creates a fracturing and separating from personal identity. The inhabitant of the colonized territory is part of the oppressed culture by birth, but they cannot help but inhabit the dominant culture as well, due to education, laws, social structure, and cultural appropriation. They become, then, not fully native and not fully colonizer.

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