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Hauntings in Twenty-First-Century Fiction

A Doctoral Thesis

By

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Submitted to Swansea University in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2024

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Abstract

There has been a proliferation in the first quarter of the twenty-first century of fiction that features haunting – be they traditional ghost stories or stories that feature other kinds of haunting. The reasons for this are identified as particular to the rapid changes and global upheavals of the political, economical, and technological situation of the times. These factors complicate for the reader, and for individuals more broadly, what is real and what can be trusted. While ghost stories have always encouraged mistrust in the reader towards the narrator, contemporary haunted fiction upends the stability of place and time, as well as narrative voice. In examining this concept, this thesis develops the work of late twentieth century theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard, who both theorised the ephemerality of reality: Derrida with his essays on hauntology, and Baudrillard with his work on simulacra and simulation.

These haunted texts are also peculiar in that they destabilise the notion of who and what haunts. This thesis argues that contemporary haunted fiction revises the notion of who haunts and who is haunted by moving agency away from those who traditionally control the narrative (the heteronormative, patriarchal, colonial subject), and towards voices previously unheard and/or suppressed. This builds on Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's work on Object Oriented Ontology in the Gothic, as the identity of the haunted subject and haunting object becomes fluid. This thesis researches texts largely new to literary examination, focusing on popular and award-winning contemporary fiction to truly reflect the stories that are desired for consumption by the 'average reader today' (with acknowledgement this is a construct), but also the stories publishers believe should be told. The methodology uses close textual analysis, building on Gothic and horror theory of the twentieth century, as well as personal correspondence with the authors for perspectives on authorial intention and the state of the text before publishing/editorial intervention.

Declarations and Statements

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to thank my doctoral supervisors, Dr Sarah Gamble and Dr Chris Pak. Their guidance and support has been instrumental in the production of this thesis.

During the course of my doctorate, I have found conference presentations invaluable in helping give structure to my ideas and discussing my work with peers. I would like to particularly thank the following for providing a forum for me to present my work: SFRA Dresden, BAAS in Keele and Hull, BAFFTS, The Past As Nightmare Conference, Gothic Consumption Conference, Contemporary Women's Writing Network, and BACLS. Further thanks to BAAS for their support in awarding me a grant as part their targeted research panel funding, which enabled me to spend a week at Gladstone's Library working on my thesis. My gratitude to the academic editors I have worked with during my doctorate for helping me develop my writing, Karen Renner and Simon Bacon. I am also very grateful to the authors of the primary texts of my thesis for being so kind with their time and enthusiastic about the project.

Particular thanks to Ally Wilkes and Tade Thompson and their publishing teams for allowing me early access to their works, which helped enormously with the research; and also to Stuart Turton, Caitlin Starling, Catriona Ward, Jason Arnopp, and Danny Robins for answering questions at various points through the project.

I owe so much to Rowan Bond and my husband, Greg Spencer, for running sense checks, correcting references, and providing moral support through the writing of the thesis. I wasn’t sure at the beginning of this process whether, having bipolar, my mental health would allow me to complete a Ph.D. This could not have happened without your love and support.

Finally, a thank you to my parents. This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, who died ten years ago at the age of 66, midway through completing his Masters in Ancient Greek. My parents brought me up in a house filled with books. They encouraged me to love learning for learning's sake, and to believe I could achieve anything I set my mind to. I have missed Dad so much during the last five years, being unable to share my research with him. I hope he would be proud with the results.

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Introduction

Although rapid change, new technologies, and political upheaval can be observed in almost every century, never have these three things occurred in a more concentrated form than in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. With the advent of the internet becoming an everyday domestic utility in the late 1990s, and the rise of the mobile phone at about the same time, technologies of rapid information became commonplace at the turn of the century, and the sharing of information online became a ubiquitous pastime. This sharing of information by everyday people upset the balance of power held by news media organisations, as it became quicker for the public to get news through social media networks such as Twitter than via even 24-hour news broadcasts. However, this new source of information also proved unreliable. The political rise of Donald Trump in 2015 saw the phrases "fake news"[1] and "alternative facts"[2] reach the mainstream, contributing to the "inflated rhetoric of the American news media" (Spooner, 2017, p. 13).[3] These terms describe how truth has become a flimsy, transient concept. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that this period has also become highly politically divisive in the Anglophone West. In 2018, the UK voted marginally to leave the European Union, creating an almost even split in the country (among those who voted) between "Brexiteers" and "Remainers". Similar divides were seen in the United States during the presidential race between Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton.

This potted history of the 23 years preceding this thesis's submission goes towards answering one of the first questions my supervisor, Dr Sarah Gamble, asked me when I originally proposed my PhD research topic to her: why the twenty-first century? Simply put, because the twenty-first century has been extraordinary, and the stories authors produce have responded to these extraordinary times in a way that reflects the lives, thoughts, and feelings of everyday people. In her monograph *Post-Millennial Gothic*, Catherine Spooner poses the question, "what stories does the

[1] "Fake news" was cemented as key to the current moment when it was made Collins Dictionary's word of the year in 2017 (Collins Dictionary, 2017).
[2] This phrase was first used by President Tump's US Counselor to the President, Kellyanne Conway, in an interview in 2017 to defend a false statement made by the White House Press Secretary about attendance at the president's inauguration (NBC News, 2017).
[3] Although Spooner identifies inflated rhetoric as an American phenomenon, it is hardly the domain of only American news media, considering the rise of controversial news media figures in the UK such as Piers Morgan and Katy Hopkins.

twenty-first century need to tell itself?" (Spooner, 2017, p. 11) – a question which this thesis intends to go some way to answering. I am not alone in considering the first quarter of the twenty-first century extraordinary in terms of its progress and political upheaval, nor in terms of its effects on the literature produced and responses to that literature during this time. Almost any collection of work focusing on the contemporary moment makes reference to the upheaval of the times in which we now live. As Gina Wisker writes in *Contemporary Women's Ghost Stories*, "Our ghosts tell us much about ourselves, our age, and they warn us – warnings ignored at our peril" (2022, p. 31). In support of this, Bacon, in his introduction to *The Evolution of Horror in the Twenty-First Century*, writes that:

> [T]he horror genre [is] intimately connected to our experience of being in the world at a very particular historical and cultural moment. This implies a certain responsibility on the genre itself … to engage with that moment in ways that both help to understand it and to interrogate it. (2023b, p. 2)

By studying the stories – particularly the Gothic and horror stories – of the twenty-first century, one receives a litmus test of how people in Anglophone Western society are responding, almost in real time, to the way the world is changing. While Simon Bacon acknowledges that "Making direct correlations between real world, political struggles and cultural artifacts such as books and films can be problematic … and maybe even more so in terms of horror-oriented texts that are inherently configured around excess and exaggeration", he nevertheless concludes that "horror … is perfectly situated to represent the affective results of such situations and often pose modes and strategies of resistance" (2023a, p. 8). Lucie Armitt agrees that "Gothic … has become a means of reading culture, not just a cultural phenomenon to read" (2011, p. 10).

Although several anxieties and fears have been listed in this summation of life so far in the twenty-first century, I want to acknowledge Baldick and Mighall's criticism of Gothic studies as "rel[ying] on the doubtful assumption" that Gothic writings "index to supposedly widespread and deeply felt 'fears' which trouble[] the middle classes" (2012, p. 279). Although it is arguably the primary remit of Gothic and horror to edge on the dark side, focusing on death, terror, and unfinished business, this thesis also promotes the positive effects of haunting and contemporary horror to highlight positive change and redress old wrongs. More important than the events and anxieties peculiar to the twenty-first century is the way in which people

form communities in order to process these events. For many people, the way now to build community is to move online. The internet and social media have provided an environment where people can not only organise and mobilise, as seen when a group of Donald Trump's supporters occupied the Capitol Building in Washington following Trump's failed re-election campaign in 2021, but shelter themselves from the opinions of others, creating "bubbles" and "echo chambers". Echo chambers are defined by Cinelli et al (2021) as "environments in which the opinion, political leaning, or belief of users about a topic gets reinforced due to repeated interactions with peers or sources having similar tendencies and attitudes" (para. 1), which are often formed on social media. This development of virtual tribes produces what Wisker describes as the "psychological and cultural fallout from gendered and economic inequalities and violations" which, in a haunting context, means "ghosts will not lie still, so by forcing recognition and demanding reparation, they can be agents of recuperation" (2022, p. 96). These online connections can also, however, foster the development of positive communities and shared information, a leading factor in increased awareness of multiple queer identities and building queer communities.

Similarly, global generations are divided by many factors, but their differing experiences of the internet growing up is a clear one, with Baby Boomers coming to the internet as mature adults, Generation X leading the development of internet 2.0 websites, Millennials growing up in the internet's infancy before many parental or other security controls were put in place, and Generation Z knowing nothing before the ubiquity of social media and smart phones. As Bacon observes, "each generation creates its own monsters" (2023b, p. 1), and in the twenty-first century these relate closely to the individual's relationship with online communities. The internet, however, proved to be integral to all generations in the upkeep of society when the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2019 resulted in many throughout the world being confined to the home for months at a time. Socialising, education, television production, and even political meetings turned to software such as Zoom to carry on the functional aspects of everyday life when people could not meet in person, highlighting the internet's function as a required infrastructure for modern life.

While the internet, social media, and smart devices only feature prominently in some of the primary texts examined in this thesis, the splitting and forming of

communities, and the haunting of one community by another is present and, indeed, a driving force in all of them. For all the exciting, catastrophic, and upsetting events in the twenty-first century, what truly haunts the Western Anglophone individual is their ever-present communities. They are encouraged to impress and pander to these virtual peers through social media, curating a vision of the self that 'fits in' and produces the echoes of the echo chamber. The online individual exists in opposition to rival communities, perhaps blocked, perhaps openly sought out for conflict. The twenty-first century has tribalised everyday life, and people are defined by monikers coined online: Remoaners, Brexiteers, TERFs, incels, feminazis. These are terms that cross class, political affiliation, geographic location, and other demographics that might have been used in previous centuries to determine wider ideology. This tribalisation encourages extreme binaries of opinion, and these binaries often occupy the same space, on Twitter (X) or other social media platforms. They are able to function and fester side by side thanks to the block button – but there is no block button in real life, and these polarities of individual opinion must continue to work, eat, and live together in real life, often even in the same families.

This thesis argues that these are the hauntings of the twenty-first century. The individual, whatever their affiliation, is haunted by those who agree with them, those who are visible and who will pass judgement on whether that individual is a worthy member of their tribe. They are haunted by the possibly unseen or masked threat of those who disagree in fundamental terms, tucked away in a different tribe online but potentially present anywhere and everywhere in everyday life. Tribes no longer wear a uniform, as they did in the age of Mods and Rockers, or Punks and Skinheads. This thesis will demonstrate the various binaries by which British society divides itself, and the ways in which these binaries live uncomfortably side-by-side, haunting each other with the possibility of betrayal and judgement. However, it will also demonstrate how voices that in previous centuries had little-to-no voice or community are now amplified, in part thanks to the tribalism of social media and the joining together of previously disparate and isolated individuals. Hauntings can be a power for good – righting injustices or highlighting the wrongs of the past to ensure a better future – or a power for evil – terrorising, rejecting, consuming, and ultimately killing the characters of the examined primary texts.

The Primary Texts

I have singled out Gothic and horror texts, partly because my focus of interest is in hauntings, which tend to come with flavours of Gothic and horror (although my texts also feature works of crime, science fiction, thrillers, and historical fiction). However, Gothic and horror stories are also perfectly placed to reveal the anxieties of the population through the entertainment they consume. As Kevin Corstorphine writes, "Horror's capacity to delve intimately into the human psyche, at the same time as reflecting the preoccupations of society more widely, makes it a mode that is particularly open to theoretical approaches" (2023, p. 22). Horror itself, as a genre, is enjoying a boom in the twenty-first century. Lucie Armitt identified the beginnings of this in the twentieth century, writing "twentieth-century reignition of interest in the contemporary Gothic has us reeling in terms of how best to take this amorphous and ever-expanding 'monster'" (2011, p. 2), but it continues to grow at an exponential rate in the twenty-first century. Waterstones Horror sections populated only by Stephen King, Anne Rice, and H.P. Lovecraft are a thing of the past, as not just more authors, but a greater diversity of authors are writing in the genre.

A number of horror imprints and independent presses have become established in the last twenty years and have published several of the books and authors that serve as primary sources for this thesis. Raven Books was launched as an imprint of Bloomsbury in January 2017. Although this imprint was launched to publish crime, its tagline identifies its books as for readers who "like their books with a touch of the dark side" (Bloomsbury), and they published one of this thesis's primary texts, Stuart Turton's *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* (2018). Similarly, Viper Books was launched in 2019 as an imprint of Serpent's Tail, again mainlining as a crime imprint, but serving a distinctly Gothic list and "books with bite" (Viper Books), including some works of Catriona Ward, one of the authors later examined. Note here not only the affiliation with the Gothic in terms of the material published, but also the imagery of the imprints' naming: ravens and vipers have been Gothic staples for centuries. In addition to crime imprints that commonly skew towards the Gothic and horrific, Tor Nightfire was launched in 2021 as a specific horror imprint, also publishing Catriona Ward and Tade Thompson, and Titan Books in 2011 started to publish fiction from the sci-fi/fantasy (SFF) and horror genres

(Titan Books, para. 4) and subsequently published Ally Wilkes's *All the White Spaces* (2022). Some critics have suggested that a rise in popularity suggests a sameness of the fiction produced as publishers attempt to locate the themes or motifs that produce the most sales (Bloom, 2021 [2002]; Jenicker, 2015), the "prevalence of these mass products" leading to "a standardized and unmotivated populace" (Jenicker, 2015, p. 28). This can perhaps be seen in racially and culturally diverse authors working with well-known Gothic and horror tropes or European traditions (see Chapter 1). However, the expanding inclusivity of the genres means that new things are done with these old tropes, and subversion and 'twists' are a common and popular result.

The rise of horror fiction can also be seen in the proliferation of podcasts on the subject over the last five years, including *Books in the Freezer* (2018-present), *Talking Scared* (2020-present), *She Wore Black* (2021-present), and *Dead Headspace* (2020-present). Simon Bacon, in the introduction to his collection on *Evolution in Horror in the Twenty-First Century*, begins by noting that "The beginning of the twenty-first century feels like a special moment in the evolution of the horror genre, in part due to the intersection of many areas of global and cultural anxiety over a world that humanity no longer has any control over" (2023b, p. 1). Besides this, 'mainstream' fiction publishers such as Penguin have described our current moment as "possessing a specific 'Shirley Jackson energy'" (Passey, 2023, p. 73), referring to one of the great horror authors of the twentieth century, particularly known for her ghost story, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959).

Limiting this thesis to the twenty-first century has meant working on texts and authors that, at time of writing, have received little academic attention. The only author featured in this thesis with a large body of critical material already written on her books is Sarah Waters, although texts such as Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* (2020) and Andy Nyman and Jeremy Dyson's *Ghost Stories* (2019 [2010]) are beginning to gain attention from the academic community. This thesis, therefore, uses theoretical work on comparable texts from previous centuries as an analytical framework to chart the movement of classic haunting tropes into this new age, seeking to draw a line from the past to the present to demonstrate what has changed, and what is peculiar to this century.

This thesis largely focuses on long-form written fiction, namely novels and plays, written in English and describing a British experience. Although there are works by North American authors, these, too, have a British slant to them. Caitlin Starling's *The Death of Jane Lawrence* (2021) is based in a second-world fantasy realm closely modelled on an England of the Victorian and Second World War eras, and while Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* is set in Mexico, the majority of the story takes place in the crumbling home of the English Doyles, their little piece of England brought to Mexico. Starling's *The Luminous Dead* (2019) and Sara Faring's *The Tenth Girl* (2019) are the only works that do not highlight a British experience. *The Luminous Dead* takes place in a distant future on another planet that could be anywhere and anytime, being, as it is, its own subterranean world, while *The Tenth Girl,* like Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic* (2020), is set in a crumbling stately home and finishing school setting that feels distinctly British. Their stories focus on colonialism and the reclamation of stories that have been adapted and bastardised to provide entertainment for white people – a model familiar to post-colonial literature focusing on the aftermath of British colonisation. There is, then, a British focus to this thesis, although Anglophone ghost stories and stories of haunting have proliferated globally. The scope has been limited in an effort to tie more closely together the primary texts, which otherwise come from disparate primary genres, settings, and diegetic time periods. Much work could be produced from widening this scope, but that is beyond the possibilities of this thesis.

This thesis is particularly interested in stories that are popular (as opposed to literary), and there are plenty to be had in the Gothic and horror genres as these kinds of works in the twenty-first century "mov[e] far beyond the niche interests of horror fans to become the stuff of the mainstream" (Spooner, 2017, p. 2). Novels are still the most popular form of written fiction, as evidenced by the preference of booksellers and publishers towards privileging and supplying the novel as opposed to short story collections and anthologies, so often left to the remit of independent publishing. In the interest of researching popular stories, the primary texts include several prize-winning and -nominated novels and authors. In particular, *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Harcastle* won the Costa First Novel Award in 2018, an award well-known for popular rather than genre appeal, and *The Little Stranger* was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize in 2009. These are novels available in a non-specialist bookshop,

or recommended widely on Amazon, their wider appeal either indicative of marketing that aims at a more general market, or reflective of content that appeals to a wide cross-section of readers. The plays included have also achieved great commercial success, with *2:22: A Ghost Story* (2021) enjoying repeated limited runs in the West End since 2021, and *Ghost Stories* receiving a movie adaptation and West End revival following its initial 2010 run. While the short story market in the horror genre does appear to be more popular than in other genres, with several magazines, anthologies, and small presses focusing on short horror fiction, these are largely consumed by readers who consciously purchase and support the horror genre. This thesis has tried to broaden its scope to works of Gothic and horror fiction with widespread and/or cross-genre appeal. For example, it includes works that straddle genres, such as Turton's *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, promoted as a work of crime fiction, and Thompson and Faring's works which fall easily into the category of science fiction. In targeting these texts, I hope to draw out an analysis of broader fears, anxieties, and trends than one might find in a more limited genre readership.

Ghosts and Haunting

While ghost stories might provide the obvious source of haunting, this thesis examines many different kinds of haunting. As the twenty-first century is a moment of much change and upheaval, it also offers a peculiarly haunted time period. From the ghost people of social media that individuals carry in their pockets on their smartphones – the uncanny and hyperreal versions of friends, family and strangers; to the close major political decisions that have been made and not made, providing haunting and hauntological possible presents and futures that are longed for by some but will never come to be; to the spectre of death that hung over the whole world in the opening years of the COVID-19 pandemic, and lingers still despite many politicians' assertions that life has returned to 'normal' (Smout & James, 2021; Pickard & Staton, 2021; Cecil, Bond & Lydall, 2022). Indeed, Bacon asserts that "the quest to go back to the 'old normal' was in fact a drive to return to old forms of discrimination and privilege" (2023a, p. 1). Weinstock writes that:

> The Gothic is the story of our moment, arguably the privileged lens through which we view our twenty-first-century experience, and perhaps the most Gothic realization the centrality of the Gothic to contemporary life compels is how intimately intertwined anthropocentrism is to apocalypse. (2023, p. 172)

It is perhaps, then, no surprise that in this current moment, our stories tend towards death and the spectral: meditations on what happens after the inevitability of death that haunt us through our everyday lives.

A ghost suggests a physical manifestation of a specific dead person, returned to the physical world in order to pass on a message or right a wrong, unable to move on to a settled state and instead lingering in a world that is no longer theirs. Ghosts are defined by "The fear of the living for the dead and the hatred of the living by the dead [which] form[s] the basis for every ghost tale" (Bloom, 2012, p. 217), but not all hauntings produce fear and terror. Wisker writes of contemporary women's ghost stories, "We bring with us our ghosts and layer them on to a place, which reflects them back, embodies their control" (2022, p. 62), but this is true equally of the things that haunt. These reflections need not be literal ghosts, but can be various afterimages layered upon person and place. Haunting, however, encourages a focus on the person or place being haunted, not the entity doing the haunting. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock makes a similar distinction when he writes, "spectrality can be considered as that which does not materialise fully; haunting is what the spectral does … both have to do with incompleteness" (2023, p. 20). Haunting's gaze lands upon the living and their response to haunting, in a way that seems appropriate to the egocentric twenty-first century. There are traditional ghost stories among the texts explored in this thesis – in particular *The Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters (2009), *Rawblood* by Catriona Ward (2015), and *2:22 A Ghost Story* by Danny Robins – but there are other kinds of haunting, too. There are the clones and doppelgangers of Tade Thompson's Molly Southbourne series, providing an uncanny mirror to the texts' protagonists; there are the digital ghosts and artificial intelligences of Sara Faring's *The Tenth Girl* and Stuart Turton's *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*; there are the spectres of disappointment that might equally be psychological failures of Caitlin Starling's *The Luminous Dead* and Jason Arnopp's *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* (2016; and there are otherworldly supernatural presences that take on the appearance of ghosts, as in Jason Arnopp's *Ghoster* (2019) and Ally Wilkes's *All the White Spaces* (2022).

The focus on what is being haunted as opposed to what is performing the haunting provides the analytic framework for this thesis, as the texts are arranged according to the people or spaces being haunted. The thesis opens with haunted places: the traditional haunted house, but also natural landscapes. These hauntings reflect many of the contradictions of the twenty-first century, in that the hauntings wish to both reject and consume the people occupying their spaces. Haunted houses desire an occupant, but also desire to hurt and/or kill that occupant. Landscapes, similarly, seem to beckon in order to consume and resist ownership by those who would lay claim over them. These hauntings examine ideas of ownership – over property or land – and what must be sacrificed for ownership. Haunted places have a strange animacy, recalling Weinstock's assertion in *Gothic Things* (2023) that the Gothic is all about "thing power". In these stories, apparently inanimate places become animate and exist to judge the living on whether they deserve to occupy space. This judgement takes up the argument of the overall thesis that locating who is haunted and who haunts – who is the subject and the object – is complicated by the dual roles people own in everyday life. Each person is a haunting object, surveilling the social media of others, and a haunted subject, constantly ghosted by the devices and destabilisation of reality as reflected in politics and the news media. Haunter and haunted are forever judging those around them, be it in the arena of social media, through the tabloid media's encouragement to judge easily accessible celebrities, or through opposing binary political movements. This complicates the notion of who has the agency to tell their story, and who is left as a silent haunting spectre. This thesis argues that while traditionally voice and agency have been given to the heteronormative patriarchal coloniser, contemporary haunting fiction shifts the perspective and narrative to focus on those who have previously been rendered silent and spectral.

The second section moves on to examine haunted people. As I have already asserted, the average individual of the twenty-first century is one who cannot help but be haunted. This section examines the *ways* in which people are haunted, looking particularly at family connections. With contemporary life expectancies so increased compared to previous centuries, older generations are living longer. At the same time, there is an increase in communication and encouraged openness about mental wellbeing, demonstrated by NHS England's Change Your Mind Campaign which

launched in 2016, aiming to "tackle stigma and discrimination around mental health" (Change Your Mind, n.d.a) through initiatives such as the "Time to Talk Day", which is "all about creating supportive communities by having conversations with family, friends, or colleagues about mental health" (Change Your Mind, n.d.b). As a result of this new emphasis on talking about mental health and trauma, Gen X and Millennial adults have begun to process family-related trauma while needing to care for aging family members. Wisker references the ghost story as specifically "invit[ing] the traumatic loss back in through spaces, bodies and voices, and in doing so privilege the dead" (2022, p. 222) – however hauntings, as opposed to ghost stories, privilege the living and the haunted over the ghost, "disturb[ing] the cultural realm of identity" (Bloom, 2012, p. 218). The resultant generational rage that cannot be properly expressed, the trauma that must go unresolved, is a central theme in this section, as haunted individuals must try to live in an age that promotes psychological openness in younger generations, which grates against the ingrained reticence and stoicism of older generations. There can be no arguing that the twenty-first century has also become the age of "identity politics", with more labels than ever available to differentiate one's self from others'. The factionalisation of politics and other divisive and self-defining opinions raise anxieties about defining the boundaries of the self from others, and this, too, creates a haunting affect.

The final section examines the newer space of haunted technology. Cyberspace is neither a thing nor a place nor a person, but a nebulous space somehow none *and* all of these things. Technology has been haunted and haunting since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) – another horror classic enjoying many afterlives in the twenty-first century – but the technology in this section refers specifically to social media, the internet, and virtual worlds. The internet has become so important that in the last few years, there have been active attempts to recognise home broadband as a standard utility, along with water and power (Guardian News, 2019). Smart phones are required for banking and authentication of identity, while the rise of ChatGPT 4 and "smart" home devices such as Amazon's Echo have brought artificial intelligence into the home. This section examines how virtual worlds haunt the individual, as a repository for the curated selves shared on social media, and as devices that linger in the pocket, the home, and the workplace, in the background but alarmingly in control of the user. It examines both the positivity and

toxicity of building communities online, and questions whether moral values need to be changed to keep up with the ways that technology encroaches on 'real' life. This section also looks forward into technologies in development, such as immersive virtual reality and augmented reality, to express anxieties about the world of the not-too-distant future, as "horror is not just about identifying the cultural anxieties of today but about revealing and recognizing the ways that we might ourselves, evolve into the future" (Bacon, 2023b, p. 6). Spooner, in fact, identifies this rapidity of development, not just in technology but in live news media and the general pace of life, as central to "Gothic in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries [which] acts as a kind of bellwether, alerting us to incipient trends as it rapidly responds to the Zeitgeist" (2021, p. 20). The rapid and secretive development of technology in recent years, and the lagging behind of legislation to regulate its research, development, and use, provide the focus of the final chapter.

What ties these types of hauntings together, and what this thesis aims to demonstrate, is that haunting is an act or experience of collective rage – be that in the haunting fury of *Rawblood*'s Iris, in the murderous revenge enacted by the mollys in the Molly Southbourne series, or in the egomaniacal rampaging of Mimi in *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*. Hauntings often occur to right an injustice. This is true whether the ghosts literally represent a dead individual who has lingered in the physical world to right a wrong, or whether the hauntings are different avatars of the self, lingering to solve a mystery or serve a prison sentence. In all cases, a true or perceived injustice has been served, and the twenty-first century's simultaneous broadening and specificity of experience and community, as facilitated through the internet, enables individuals to express their rage and injustice at length. However, this is often akin to crying into a void, as the overwhelming quantity of voices on the internet frequently drown out any one single experience. This is equally true of the examples given above from this thesis's primary texts: Iris haunts through her family's generations, but her family do not recognise her for who she is and therefore cannot help her; the mollys appear swarm-like until they are given their own names and voices, disregarded by both Molly Prime and the wider world; and Mimi is just a reflection of Jack's own ego with a bit of a demonic boost, a cypher for the many insecurities he feels he cannot show the world while maintaining his shallow persona and which therefore remain hidden and unspoken until his death. Hauntings express both a rage

borne from a number of injustices and its inherent impotency. This rage can be used as a power for oppression or for positivity.

In his introduction to *The Evolution of Horror in the twenty-first Century*, Simon Bacon identifies a shift in the horror genre from an ideology of strict conservativism towards what he calls “aspirational horror” (2023b, p. 3). Horror as a genre has traditionally been largely conservative in ideology – the master of horror fiction, Stephen King, has described the horror story: “beneath its fangs and fright-wig, [horror] is really as conservative as an Illinois Republican in a three-piece pin-striped suit” (2012, p. 395). But more recent horror has instead favoured a “call to action” to make us “better than we are now – more inclusive, more accepting of others though less accepting of the bad behaviour of others” (Bacon, 2023b, p. 3). Horror, Bacon writes, is moving towards a place of righting the injustices it has previously propped up, be that in its ideology, or in its saturation in the experience of the white straight man. Similarly, in her monograph *Post-Millennial Gothic* which celebrates the “happy” Gothic, Catherine Spooner writes, “There are a growing number of Gothic texts that are distinctly celebratory in tone” (2017, p. 3), observing a shift away not just from the dark and dour reputation the Gothic has, but again towards a genre that is inclusive and aspirational. The rapid expansion of the horror genre, that has already been noted, supports this in the raising of different voices in its authors, but also in the differing voices of rage – racial, generational, queer, and familial – which shout into the void of an audience and readership who might right injustices, or may be lost among many other voices. But it is this expression of rage, as opposed to conciliation or reparation, that is perhaps peculiar to the hauntings of the beginning of the twenty-first century, demonstrating that a “form of action and enlightened change is called for by these restless ghosts, this incessant haunting” (Wisker, 2022, p. 268).

Theoretical Frameworks

In the first instance, this thesis aims to build upon theoretical works that are aligned with but fall short of examining hauntings in the current century. Lucie Armitt’s *Twentieth-Century Gothic* (2011) provides an excellent review of the concerns of

Gothic texts up to the turn of the century, but as has been demonstrated, so much has changed in the last twenty-three years, a fresh take on current texts is necessary. Gina Wisker's *Contemporary Women's Ghost Stories* provides this movement into the twenty-first century, and there is some crossover in the texts discussed – particularly Sarah's Waters's *The Little Stranger* and Andy Nyman and Jeremy Dyson's *Ghost Stories* – but Wisker is limited to the ghost stories of women and, as her title suggests, to ghosts. In broadening this thesis's scope to hauntings, a much wider range of stories can be examined, and the focus of the research, as previously stated, falls upon the experience of the haunted rather than the figure of the ghost. Many collections and monographs that focus on the Gothic and horror genres in the twenty-first century such as Simon Bacon (ed.)'s *The Evolution of Horror in the Twenty-First Century* and Catherine Spooner's *Contemporary Gothic* (2006) and *Post-Millennial Gothic* (2017), broaden their scope to include many kinds of entertainment media, culture, and experience. In focusing on written fiction, this thesis provides specific analysis on the most popular kind of written entertainment. This specificity provides a clear snapshot of one kind of media's response to the times.

This introduction has already mentioned the horror and Gothic genres at some length, and so it feels appropriate to separate what is meant here by these two terms. In much theory, even when an attempt is made to separate the two, they are often perceived as "overlapping genres and distinguishing between them can be difficult" (Spooner, 2017, p. 28), resulting in their use as "often (if not usually) interchangeable" (Bloom, 2012, p. 211) terms. Baldick and Mighall further agree that "Gothic Criticism is commonly unable and unwilling to distinguish its supposed object from the generality of fearful or horrible narratives" (2012, p. 274). The difficulty comes from Gothic fiction's original mode and aesthetic, seeking to create terror in its reader.[4] However, as Gothic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has focused on reusing the styles and modes of the genre in its origins, its focus has moved away from creating terror to reworking what has come before. Particularly in the twentieth century, texts created specifically to terrify, drawing on contemporary fears and situations, have developed their own genre: horror. Spooner identifies that

[4] This is particularly observable and intentional in the works of Edgar Allan Poe – see Garrison (1966).

this led, from the 1980s – the time of horror film's big slasher boom – to a muddying of genre definitions between Gothic literature and horror film (2021, p. 11).

With a similar aim to Catherine Spooner's work on expanding Gothic studies into a broad analysis of Gothic culture, this thesis uses 'Gothic' to refer to an aesthetic or pattern of recognisable tropes in fiction and more widely that is recognisably Gothic. Clive Bloom recognises this emphasis on aesthetic in his article "Horror Fiction: In Search of a Definition", when writing of M.R. James's Gothic ghost stories, "The mythic haunted Britain … is essentially an aesthetic place" (2012, p. 219), and Michael Gamer in his monograph *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2000) describes the Gothic as an aesthetic (as referenced in Spooner, 2021, pp. 7-8). Gothic haunting looks backwards, re-uses the tropes and figures of Gothic past, and is self-consciously stylised in a way any individual, not just an academic, might identify as Gothic. Gothic, as Spooner summarises Botting, "reveal[s] generalized anxiety linked to the endless recycling of images and the absence of meaning that underlies it" (2017, p. 7). Gothic looks to the past, Gothic recycles, and Gothic has a strong visual aesthetic. Both the Gothic's look and tropes are easily recognisable to the everyday person.

Horror, conversely, lives within the affect it produces. With moments that trigger fear and laughter in the viewer, "the intellect is left behind at those heightened moments" (Nyman, 2019). Bloom states that humour and fear produce an involuntary experience on the part of the viewer or reader, "overriding the mechanisms of conscious response with pure emotion, felt through the reactions of the physical body" (2012, p. 220). Bloom continues, playing on a statement made by Stephen King: "If, for King, revulsion is the lowest form of horror affect, for many contemporary critics, especially academics and feminists, this has become the central motif of the horror genre" (Bloom, 2012, p. 220). Horror, then, is a genre defined by the way it makes its reader (or viewer) feel. Gothic has previously been defined as a genre of terror, and at its establishment this was perhaps true, but a shift has occurred which has separated horror from Gothic through the twentieth century as its own distinct genre. Horror has taken up the mantle of populist fiction designed to evoke fear, while Gothic has become a genre increasingly legitimised and therefore defined in the academic community. In the twenty-first century, Gothic's defining factors have become the reproduction of the looks and tropes of previous Gothic works,

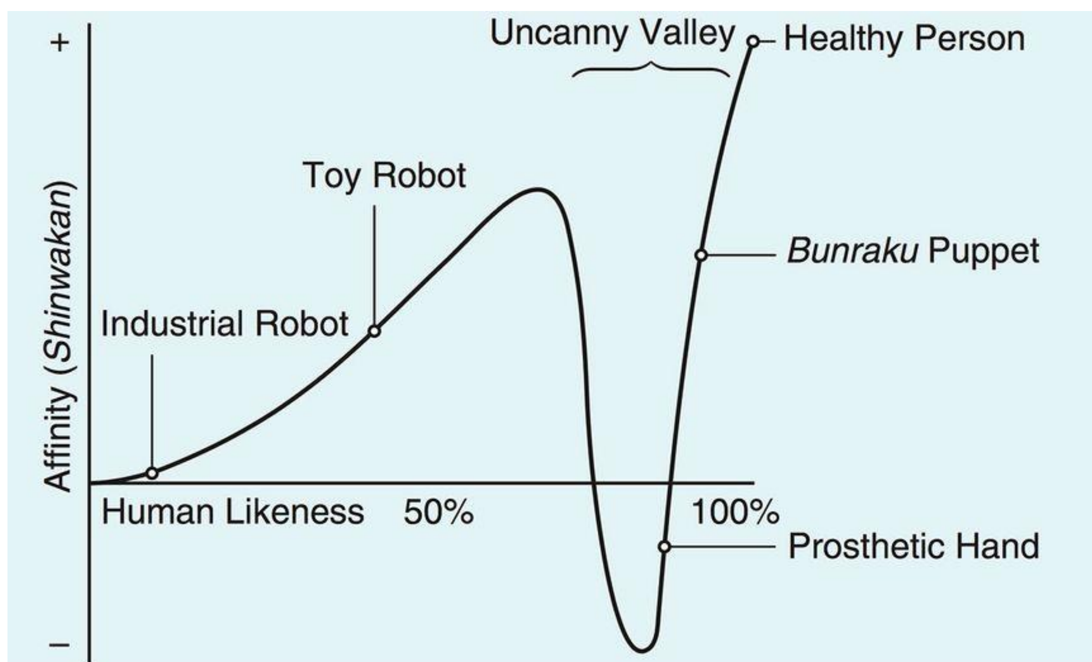
while the affect of terror has been subsumed into horror. For this reason, some of the primary texts that serve the basis for this thesis might normally be shelved in other genres (crime, science fiction, historical), but because they share moments that create a fear affect in the reader, or because they use aesthetics and tropes that are recognisably Gothic, they are here included as at least partial works of horror and Gothic.

As has been mentioned, this thesis uses texts about haunting from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their related theory and criticism to provide a lens to analyse the texts of the present. As Fred Botting notes, contemporary Gothic is "archly self-conscious of [its] generic precedents" (2008a, p. 62), and texts frequently build on the tropes, figures, and patterns of the works that have come before them. In particular, popular works of Gothic and haunting fiction which are the ancestors of the primary texts analysed here: Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (1999), Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, the works of Stephen King, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) have influence across chapters and, as such, theory and criticism on these works has been used to analyse the similarities and changes made as these much-studied texts enjoy afterlives in the twenty-first century. These texts are notable again for, with a couple of exceptions, having no ghosts but unquestionably including a haunting. The Gothic and horror genres are peculiar for their textual appropriation, and the twenty-first century is itself the time of the "digital recycling revival" (de Bruin-Molé, 2019, p. 6). It is therefore important to consider the texts that came before, which continue to live on in and through their modern-day afterlives. It is further worth considering the massive expansion of particularly horror fiction in the last ten years, and how difficult it is to find bases for comparison among a relatively small canon of pre-twenty-first-century horror fiction.

There are also several theoretical frameworks heavily utilised throughout the work that apply to multiple texts. Many of these are theorists of the twentieth century – Freud, Derrida, Baudrillard – and the emphasis is upon how these existing theories are developed in the twenty-first century to move with the rapid times. The persistence of Freud's theory of the uncanny has proved frustrating to certain scholars working in the Gothic, as his genital-oriented theories fall out of favour, replaced with updated frameworks with less problematic or, indeed, phallocentric

roots. As Corstorphine writes, “horror theory is finding an escape from the haunted house of psychoanalysis” (2023, p. 22). However, the uncanny is a necessary staple of haunting, describing, as it does, the peculiar affect of experiencing something at once “familiar and comfortable” and “concealed and kept hidden” (Freud, 1919 [2003], p. 132). The ghost and its presentation of a both familiar and fantastical figure cannot help but raise uncanny feelings. But more than this, the uncanny has become inextricably linked with technology in the twenty-first century. As Nicholas Royle identifies, it is “bound up with everyday life in relation to automation, technology and programming” (2003, p. 23). It has also been co-opted into theories about human response to artificiality in the Uncanny Valley. This is a term coined by Masahiro Mori in *Bukimi no tani*, translated as “The Uncanny Valley” (2012 [1970]), to describe a person’s affective response to something that appears close to but not actually human. As an object – say, a robot – becomes more and more human-like in appearance, the response to it becomes more and more positive, until it is very nearly human, at which point a strong dislike and rejection is expressed by the human subject. The expression of this on a graph (fig. 1) – the sudden dip in approval – is labelled the Uncanny Valley, a term originally used to describe the affective response to corpses, but now frequently used in graphics design, video game development, robotics, and artificial intelligence. The Uncanny Valley is frequently apparent in texts featuring both ghosts and digital worlds, as in the works of Thompson, Arnopp, Turton, and Faring.

Figure 1: Diagram of the Uncanny Valley



Note: Diagram shows the progressive affinity a person feels towards an object with human likeness, with a sharp dip at approx. 90% labelled the 'Uncanny Valley'. (Mori, 2012)

In close relation to the Uncanny Valley, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) is frequently referenced in this thesis for its theory of hyperreality. In close dialogue with the uncanny, which describes a thing both familiar and unfamiliar, hyperreality describes a false reality that is so close to "true" reality that the observer cannot tell the difference. This is particularly apparent in the context of social media, where users create accounts of themselves that are at once curated and "true". Hyperreality blurs the lines of reality, much as hauntings blur the lines between life and death, or between sanity and madness. Hyperrealities are apparent not just in the technological hauntings of Arnopp, Faring, and Turton, but also in Andy Nyman and Jeremy Dyson's sometimes surreal *Ghost Stories*, which presents a looping fantasy and reality, destabilising what is real for its audience in its quest to debunk hauntings. This thesis argues that the destabilisation of reality, in development of Baudrillard's theory, is fundamental to the twenty-first century and has become ubiquitous. Nothing can be trusted, and 'truth', rather than being a fixed constant, is constantly shifting, and therefore constantly haunting.

It has already been described how the twenty-first century is haunted by the possibility of worlds that could have been – realities in which Hilary Clinton became

president instead of Donald Trump; in which Britain did not vote to leave the EU; in which a vaccine for COVID-19 was not so quickly developed. As Fred Botting writes, "Histories become plural, perspectives multiply and genres hybridise. Elsewheres collapse on the here and now. Represseds seem to return at any opportunity, gothic fictions and figures, too" (2008b, p. 14). These possible presents and collapsed elsewhere are particularly strong examples of Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology, first used to describe the alternative-present spectre of Marxism in Europe in the 1990s. The rapid developments and divisive politics of the twenty-first century makes the spectres of alternative possibilities all the stronger, as displayed in the quantity and popularity of entertainment media that deals in 'multiverses'.[5] As it has been brought into the twenty-first century by theorists such as Merlin Coverley and Mark Fisher, hauntology goes on to describe the timelessness of Earth's landscape beyond the Anthropocene, and starts to describe a world that will continue on long after humanity has burned itself out, drawing in echoes of activism around the climate crisis – another source of intergenerational conflict and rage. Hauntology and the animacy of landscapes that outlive humanity can be found in Ward, Faring, and Turton.

As this existential crisis around the health of the planet and the longevity of the human species has persisted, and as identity becomes more and more central to the experience of being human, theorists have turned to what exists beyond and outside of the human in theories of posthumanism. This is the final overarching theoretical framework utilised by this thesis. One might think of haunting as a specifically human experience, but the ghost is essentially a posthuman: the remains of sapience after a human ceases to exist. However, posthuman concerns in this thesis focus particularly around what defines the conception of 'normal' humanity – what 'human's' demographics look like in terms of race, gender, body type, and sexuality. Posthumanism is increasingly used to theorise the life experience of demographics who fall outside of what is thought of when one imagines a 'human' – that is, someone who is white, male, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, thin or muscular-built, neurotypical, and middle or upper class. Also, posthumanism speaks towards the apocalyptic, which is particularly relevant in the current moment.

[5] See movies *Spiderman: Into the Spider-verse* (2018) and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), the several multiverses of the Marvel franchise, video game *Starfield* (2023), the TV series *Star Trek: Discovery* (2019-present), to name but a few.

Weinstock notes that in the twenty-first century we “perceive ourselves to be enmeshed” in chaos, “haunted by the past, contending with monsters, tending toward apocalypse. Everything is unstable, and we – the human – feel ourselves to be threatened and encroached upon from all sides” (2023, p. 172). The hauntings that take place in the texts examined in this thesis often deal with individuals who fall out of this common conception of humanity, such as in Faring, Thompson, Turton, and Arnopp. Theories of posthumanism are used to analyse how hauntings express an experience that is both human and not, as well as what happens to humanity after the Anthropocene in futuristic and virtual reality texts.

I: The Haunting of Place

Chapter 1: Haunted Houses, Haunted Cultures – Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger* and Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*

Introduction

The haunted house has long been a staple of horror and Gothic fiction, embraced by classics such as Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and the ghost stories of M.R. James. These classics are increasingly being reimagined, adapted and modernised in the twenty-first century. Jackson's masterpiece has seen film and television adaptations by Jan de Bont in 1999 and Mike Flanagan in 2018, while *The Turn of the Screw* has seen television adaptations by Tim Fywell for the BBC in 2008 and Mike Flanagan for Netflix in 2020, as well as Ruth Ware's novel modernisation, *The Turn of the Key* (2019), and John Harding's *Florence and Giles* (2010). M. R. James is similarly enjoying a revival in popularity with Mark Gatiss's adaptations in his continuation of the *Ghost Story for Christmas* series.[6] However, original haunted house stories are also proving popular and numerous, both neo-Victorian works that harken back to the tradition of M. R. James and 'classic' Gothic, and tales of old houses with new, contemporary owners.[7] Gina Wisker writes that "The haunted house is the history you are trying to escape from, whether you do so as an individual, a culture, or a community" (2022, p. 52), highlighting the importance of the haunted house in the twenty-first century, a period in constant tension between escaping from and reviving the past. However,

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[6] These were initially taken up by a variety of creators in 2005, 2006, and 2010, all adaptations of James stories, but has been taken up and championed regularly since 2013 by Mark Gatiss with "The Tractate Middoth" (2013), "Martin's Close" (2019), "The Mezzotint" (2021), and "Count Magnus" (2022), all by M.R. James.

[7] There are numerous examples, but to name just a few from the last ten years, *Kill Creek* (Thomas, 2017), *Mistletoe* (Littlewood, 2019), *Fyneshade* (Griffin, 2023), *The Silent Companions* (Purcell, 2017), *The House of Dust* (Broyles, 2021), *Man Fuck This House* (Asman, 2021), *Plain Bad Heroines* (danforth, 2020), *A House with Good Bones* (Kingfisher, 2023), *How to Sell a Haunted House* (Hendrix, 2023), *She is a Haunting* (Tran, 2023), *The Whistling* (Netley, 2021), and *The Upstairs Room* (Murray-Browne, 2017).

these stories are also unquestionably domestic, dealing with small casts of characters in intimate situations and settings. Wisker addresses this phenomenon, asserting that "As ghosts are social, it is unsurprising that they are part of families, their homes and everyday life" (2022, p. 189). And so, in the ghost story, there is a macro- and microcosm simultaneously at play, as small domestic stories play out tales that speak to larger cultural themes and oppressions.

In both Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger* and Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*, an old manor house lies at the heart of the action, as in *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Turn of the Screw*. *The Little Stranger* features Hundreds Hall, a Georgian manor that houses the Ayres family, who were once feudalistically important people in the county, but in the story's 1950s setting have fallen on hard times. In *Mexican Gothic*, High Place was built in the nineteenth century by the English Doyles who moved to Mexico to take over the silver mine of small village El Triunfo. Both houses, at the time of the novels' action, are in a state of great disrepair, echoing the declining importance of the families who inhabit them. However, the houses reflect far more than just one aspect of their families, acting as antagonist, parasite, malevolent characters, and island-like other worlds away from the rest of society. As Georges Letissier writes of *The Little Stranger*:

> The novel's progression is predicated upon the different perceptions of the house. The latter is never stabilised as a fixed, anchoring reference. On the contrary, both the building's plasticity and mutability are foregrounded, as it is mediated through a whole range of filters, from accurate architectural accounts to subjective reconstructions, blurring the dividing line between the actual and the phantasmal. (2012, p. 45)

In both stories, the houses act as monuments to a nostalgic time and containers for their inhabitants' many roles.

While on paper these are texts with a number of similarities, a deeper analysis of the works reveals them to be quite divergent. These texts formed one of the original bases for proposing my research topic when I first sought an institution to study my Ph.D., as both appear to portray the quintessential haunted house story, using multiple Gothic tropes that offer themselves to clear wider research. However, the more I researched these texts, the harder it seemed to persuade them to gel together into a single smooth chapter. While both texts are preoccupied with class, *The Little Stranger* offers a fading view of the English class system, while *Mexican*

Gothic focuses very heavily on post-colonialism and 'modern' American classes in opposition to outmoded English class hierarchies. Both texts feature crumbling haunted houses, but while Waters's Hundreds Hall is an originally homely place turned sinister by an unknown force, Moreno-Garcia's High Place is hostile to its inhabitants from the beginning. This provides the further divergence that Waters's ghost is never adequately explained, and may not be a ghost at all, while Moreno-Garcia offers a very concrete supernatural resolution to her story. These divergences have made this a difficult chapter to write, and mean the sections within sometimes fall in an uneasy or imbalanced way, as apparent textual similarities faded away on closer inspection, leading to more focus on one text than the other.

These texts are, however, excellent and popular examples of the haunted house story in the twenty-first century and, as has been noted, offer many Gothic tropes linking them into the Gothic tradition. Although, as asserted by Baldick and Mighall (2012), Gothic hauntings have, in previous centuries, been ascribed to the bourgeoisie, the twenty-first century haunted house highlights disrupted class politics. This arguably supports Baldick and Mighall's writings on Victorian and twentieth century Gothic, as class disruption is certainly an anxiety of the bourgeoisie, but in the twenty-first century, questions of class are less clear cut. The perspective of these novels is with the working class or a kind of hybrid class in Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger*, and with Mexicans who are treated as a lesser class by the English Doyle family in Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*. The texts examined demonstrate the deserved destruction of an outdated class systems, and following that destruction, the apparent absence of the haunting presences. Although both of these texts are historical fiction, as are several of the primary texts of this thesis, the authors use contrasting political and social events to critique life in the twenty-first century.

This section focuses on the haunting of place, and the difference in the haunting of enclosed spaces as opposed to open spaces, as discussed in the next chapter. A house is not just a building but a home, and its haunting must therefore be closely focused on the home's occupant(s) and owner(s) – with an acknowledgment that the owner and occupant may not be the same person. Ownership of the house may infer ownership over the ghost, but those who haunt houses frequently exist to torment the occupants for whatever reason. This works to create a double meaning of

‘possession’, in which the homes are possessed by their occupants in terms of ownership, but the occupants are also possessed by the house, which manifests hauntings that cannot be escaped. In both the examined texts, the haunted houses have been occupied by the same family for many generations. The ghosts, therefore, act as echoes of the families’ past as much as they are tormenting presences. Ownership is an issue of haunting in both this and the next chapter – in which ownership is claimed over wild places that should never be owned or even occupied by human presence. However, ownership in these texts precedes the hauntings: the Ayreses have lived for many years in Hundreds Hall without experiencing anything strange, and the Doyles built High Place as a repository for the gloom fungus that houses their hauntings. This chapter will consider the ownership of place to argue that houses act as characters, using haunting forces to ally with or act against its inhabitants.

Finally, both *The Little Stranger* and *Mexican Gothic* are texts that strongly acknowledge they sit within a long literary tradition and established canon of Gothic works. The texts are as haunted by their forebears as the houses are by spirits. Waters’s novel self-consciously references, both explicitly and implicitly, prior Gothic works, and as a scholar of English Literature herself, the author depends upon the reader’s literary connections to deepen the effect and affect of her hauntings. The reader cannot help but be haunted, as they read, by the texts that have come before. By contrast, Moreno-Garcia, from her choice of title which echoes the painting *American Gothic* (Wood, 1930) and the American Gothic literary genre, to her characters and story recalling English fairytales, draws a distinction between white Western Gothic and the non-white voices that have been suppressed in the literary tradition. For all her Mexican characters enjoy the urbane pursuits of their North American neighbours, it is their Mexican-ness that saves them. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate that the text acts as a haunted house itself, as the authors play with the intertextuality of the Gothic in order to spin new stories that allow previously oppressed or silenced voices to thrive, telling a new story than the white, Western, middle-class Gothic traditionally prioritises.

Haunted Class, Haunted Culture

The role of Dr Faraday, the narrator of *The Little Stranger,* is one of both power and subservience, disturbing the feudal Ayreses' idea of the 'natural' class order. In the 'present' of the novel in 1947, Faraday has broken free of his class position by becoming a physician, which also allows him both access to and power over the Ayres family. In the face of industry and a Labour government, the Ayres family are "rusting away, like something from another age" (Waters, 2009, p. 22). They no longer have a guiding position in the community, and the non-liquid capital that had once made them so prosperous is being whittled away or, in the case of the house itself, falling apart and creating more debt. Faraday describes this, "I had an impression of the house being held in some sort of balance. One could see so painfully, I thought, both the glorious thing it had recently been, and the ruin it was on the way to becoming" (Waters, 2009, p. 52). Faraday's perspective connects Hundred's Hall's glorious past and the dilapidated present, where the Ayreses are too close to see how decrepit their houses and lives have become. The Ayreses are stuck in a kind of time warp, trapped by their inability to move on or change their fate, and as a result of this inability are, just like the house and attendant property, whittled away.

However, besides casting himself as the hero, Faraday's perspective is also a limiting factor on the story. Most of the haunting occurrences happen while Faraday is absent from the house, and so are reported to the reader second- or third-hand. In this respect, Faraday's narration acts in a similar way to De Groot's description of fiction as "undermin[ing] the totalizing effects of historical representation and point[ing] out that what is known is always partial, always a representation" (2013, p. 57). Faraday's account is well-known to be biased and unreliable, but it is also necessarily partial. What the Ayres family, and Caroline in particular, tell Faraday is skewed by unknown biases and anxieties, and Faraday adds another layer of uncertainty by re-presenting the narrative again in his relation to the reader. History is famously written by the victor, but also parsed through many pens, altered as it seeps through the years, creating ghostly layers of truth that become historical 'fact' which morph and gain transparency through each telling. Waters achieves something similar and, indeed, highlights the truth of the ephemeral nature of history through

her layers of narrative subjectivity. This spectrality of the uncertain history produces a "quite physical sense of the lost, [and] the way that 'ghosts' can be recorded and archived and taxonomized, but still never really understood or comprehended" (De Groot, 2013, p. 66). It plays into "Waters's practice as a historiographer. The insubstantiality of the historical revenant, or the ghostliness of the referent, and its near-rational (but not quite) link with the reality of modernity is her subject" (De Groot, 2013, p. 66). This is not just the case in Waters's use of historical fact and textual fiction, as will be examined in more detail later, but in her use of Faraday as narrator and the layers of fact, fiction, and (in)accuracy that are destabilised by his biased and sometimes ignorant narrative.

In the first chapter of *The Little Stranger*, when a young Faraday sneaks into Hundreds Hall, he desires so much to possess something of the house that he breaks a decorative acorn off from a plaster moulding. This original act of vandalism demonstrates "an unconscious wish to spoil or destroy what he cannot possess" (Parker, 2013, pp. 106-107). It also works as an act of ownership, demonstrating that Faraday sees himself as the true heir to Hundreds Hall. His actions throughout the novel support both this destructive and possessive attitude towards Hundreds as what Gina Wisker describes as a "blinkered realist" with a "fantasy of acquisition" (2016b, p. 102). Weinstock writes that:

> [T]he main prerequisite [for a haunted house] is some kind of traumatic history associated with the building or the space on which it is built. Indeed, this is the haunted house formula at its most basic: building + tragic past. Through exploration of the haunted building, the tragic history is unearthed. (2023, p. 153)

However, this is not entirely true of Hundreds. There is plenty of tragedy related to the inhabitants' past, but *The Little Stranger* is notable in that its hauntings do not properly occur until Faraday's appearance at the house, linking the hauntings to his increased interest or presence rather than the Ayreses' tragic past. The tragedies the house reflects are those of its occupants, but the revenge the house plays on the Ayres family is the vengeance of class disruption as embodied in Faraday. This has led some critics to assume that the haunting force central to *The Little Stranger* is either caused by Faraday or the maid, Betty (Klonowska, 2017; Wisker, 2016b), as both are working-class individuals by turns fascinated and disgusted by the Ayreses' old-fashioned class pretensions.

At times, Hundreds Hall almost seems like an extension of Faraday himself, his relationship to the house going beyond ideas of possession (either physical or supernatural). Faraday narrates, "The house, I thought, didn't deserve [the Ayreses'] bad feeling; and neither did I" (Waters, 2009, p. 188) and "The thought of the Hall being opened up to strangers unsettled me slightly" (Waters, 2009, p. 77), as though the imposition were on himself rather than the building. Caroline Ayres apparently acknowledges Faraday's claim to Hundreds when she says, "Isn't that queer? You saw Hundreds before [Roderick] or I ever did" (Waters, 2009, p. 64). Ann Heilmann writes that:

> Hundreds Hall is a focal point for fractured identities and frustrated desires, but here members of the new professional class born from domestic service covet not subjection to but, rather, the possession of the old-time privilege bestowed by a hereditary house. (2012, p. 40)

This draws together Faraday's multiple identities as working, middle, and upper class, discussed later in this chapter, along with his desire to possess the house and its attendant privileges. Similarly, Lucie Armitt and Sarah Gamble write of Sarah Waters's first novel *Affinity* (1999), "[Margaret Prior's] presence in the penitentiary as observer is an integral part of its function, her gaze uniting with that of the institution's custodians to monitor and regulate the behaviour of the prisoners" (2006, p. 151). This can also be applied to Faraday's gaze over Hundreds Hall – the only gaze the reader is able to truly perceive in the first-person narrative. In this case, the prisoners are the Ayres family, who become increasingly trapped and isolated within their own house, and their behaviour is monitored and regulated by the ghost, the little stranger, they believe to be haunting them, as well as by Faraday himself as chronicler.

Gina Wisker describes the haunting at the centre of *The Little Stranger* as "a ghostly presence drawing its spiteful energies from patriarchal conservatism" (2016b, p. 98), again emphasising the ideological and cultural aspects of the haunting. However, this also highlights that the patriarch is missing from Hundreds, as Mrs Ayres's husband, Colonel Ayres, dies in the interim between the Empire Day fete and Faraday's return to Hundreds as an adult. This makes Roderick Ayres the patriarch, the young squire, but "crippled" (Waters, 2009, p. 146) and incapable, Roderick repeatedly fails to fulfil the patriarch role adequately. Capitalism is a strong haunting force in *The Little Stranger*, and Roderick is quite literally haunted by the need of the

estate to make money. His father's old desk in his bedroom, covered in receipts and invoices, takes over the space as he becomes increasingly manic. He complains to Faraday that their dairy manager constantly nags him, "Make more of a profit. It's all he talks about" and "Why can't I free up some capital?" (Waters, 2009, p. 57). The Ayreses' main problem, in one assessment by Dr Seeley, another local physician, is "a Labour government" (Waters, 2009, p. 378). The Ayreses' political situation is harmed by the "social changes brought in during the war, the rise of a stronger middle- and working-class" and how these "are directly responsible for the collapse of that section of upper-class families unable to cope with such changes" (Germana, 2013, p. 118). Dr Seeley adds, "Hundreds was, in effect, defeated by history, destroyed by its own failure to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. In [Seeley's] opinion, the Ayreses, unable to advance with the times, simply opted for retreat—for suicide, and madness" (Waters, 2009, p. 498). Here socialism, as represented by the Labour government, and capitalism, represented by the need for profit and liquid capital, work together to overwhelm the Ayres family just as they are overwhelmed by the haunting of their home.

In *Mexican Gothic*, Noemí's class ideals are also firmly aligned with Capitalism, placing her in opposition to the feudalistic Doyles. It is the Doyles' possessions and their state of upkeep that is important to Noemí, rather than any perceived value of items as historical artefacts. Noemí frequently associates the Doyles' possessions and house with a negative idea of aging, such as when commenting on the act of naming the Doyles' house: "Who does that these days?" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 22) and describing the house's green wallpaper with a firm tongue in cheek as "so beloved by the Victorians" (Moreno-Garcia, 202, p. 46). Similarly, Noemí's father describes the Doyles as living in "genteel poverty" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 56). There is a sense here of modernity as fresh and non-Gothic. The Doyles' old-fashioned possessions and lifestyle is what makes them Gothic, and makes them a site of haunting.

Letissier writes that:

> The distinction between the spectre of the past and the spectre of the future … proves to be immaterial in the sense that spectrality undoes any clear-cut opposition between the past, present, and future and, by extension, between the actual, effective presence and the virtual, unactualised prospect still in the offing. (2012, p. 36)

This directly links haunting to ideas of class. In Britain, class is frequently based on the familial line and its historical class positioning. Social mobility, particularly in the immediately post-war era in which *The Little Stranger* and *Mexican Gothic* are set, was significantly rarer than it is in the twenty-first century. Because of this, the people of this period were persistently haunted by their past – specifically, their family history, and the social class that history implied. Although very different people, both the narrating characters of *Mexican Gothic* and *The Little Stranger* possess an important ability when it comes to class: they have the ability to 'pass' in more than one class strata. As a doctor, Faraday administers to people from all social spheres. Despite his working-class upbringing, he is educated and able to not only spend time socially with the Ayreses, but also has power over them. This is demonstrated when Faraday enforces treatments, in his ability to commit Roderick to a mental facility, and his authority in telling the official story of the Ayreses and Hundreds Hall to the rest of the community (and the reader). Similarly, as the daughter of a prominent family in Mexico City, Noemí is able to associate and speak with both the working class Mexicans of El Triunfo, and the upper class, English Doyles. In many respects, Noemí even considers herself superior to the Doyles, who she perceives as outmoded and old fashioned. For example, Noemí describes the Doyles' car as:

> [A] preposterously large vehicle that made her think of swanky silent film stars of two or three decades earlier—the kind of automobile her father might have driven in his youth to flaunt his wealth. But the vehicle in front of her was dated, dirty, and it needed a paint job. Therefore, it was not truly the kind of automobile a movie star would drive these days, but seemed to be a relic. (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 19)

Noemí and Faraday's class mutability makes them spectral presences themselves, shifting between classes without truly belonging to any.

In *Mexican Gothic*, one very clear marker of class standing is the language characters speak. During this period in Mexican history, there was, among the upper and middle classes and the wealthy, a move away from Mexican tradition, and in particular, speaking Spanish. However, Noemí "like any good socialite … spoke English with remarkable ease" (Moreno-Garcia, 202, p. 9). As E. M. Coral Garcia writes, "from the 1940s onward learning English became the new trend to follow" (2011, p. 146) in Mexico, noting also how libraries "offer[ed] the Mexican middle

classes English courses and the opportunity to become more literate on U.S. culture" (2011, p. 122). He attributes this to the increasing influence of the USA over Mexico. Laura E. Ciolkowski writes how in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Jean Rhys's retelling of *Jane Eyre* (1847), colonised society "both unsettle[d] and reenact[ed] many of the commonsense structures of Englishness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (1997, p. 340). It could be argued that *Mexican Gothic* demonstrates something similar with Mexican culture becoming more American. This is shown in the way Noemí studies Mexican anthropology as though analysing the lives and history of another culture rather than her own, or in the polite American pursuits Noemí loves such as fashion and playing the piano. However, it is Noemí and Francis Doyle's ability to speak Spanish that allows them to plan and ultimately escape High Place, as Howard Doyle only speaks English and cannot therefore spy on their plans.

For Faraday, this passing between both social spheres also acts as a kind of limbo. While he can spend time in either social sphere, he does not feel that he truly belongs, or is accepted, in either: "[My poorer patients have] never been able to place me. I don't hunt or play bridge; but I don't play darts or football, either" (Waters, 2009, p. 36). This presents anxieties for Faraday, who frequently feels that he is betraying his working-class family, who might see him "as a fraud" and "laugh at [him]" (Waters, 2009, p. 47). This is particularly true as relating to Hundreds Hall, as Faraday's mother was in domestic service at the house. Because of this, Faraday has a direct connection to Hundreds Hall's past as a location of servitude and he defies the house's (and household's) superiority with his very presence. Similarly, Faraday feels a sense of inferiority about his origins, and a resentment towards his parents for placing him in this self-loathing position: "[My parents] paid a small fortune for my education, and all I learned was that my accent was wrong, my table manners—all of it, wrong. I learned, in fact, to be ashamed of them" (Waters, 2009, p. 250). But similar feelings are also expressed towards the upper-class friends Faraday begins to make: "I told myself bitterly that I was wasting my time with Roderick; that he had never liked me; that I wasn't part of his 'set'" (Waters, 2009, p. 460). Klonowska perceives the haunting of Hundreds Hall as Faraday's "revenge for his inferiority on those who for years despised and ignored his family" (2017, p. 175). However, rather than enacting a "revenge and retribution of the working class, exacted on the middle classes and aristocrats, for centuries of mistreatment, loathing and deprivation"

(Klonowska, 2017, p. 177), Faraday feels a strange tension throughout the novel of wanting to be a part of the upper classes while also finding them vulgar and superficial. He keenly feels the class system at work, noting when Caroline speaks to him "as if to someone of her own class" (Waters, 2009, p. 46), and recognises even the difficulty of what people in his own class set should call him when he notes, "it was queer for him [Tom, a builder working on the council houses, and a cousin of Faraday's] to call me 'Doctor', but out of the question, too, for him to either use my Christian name or to address me as 'sir'" (Waters, 2009, p. 248). This awkwardness frequently creates resentment and anger in Faraday that could result in his performing revenge by haunting Hundreds Hall, possessing the house whose owners make him feel so out of place, and reclaiming the house as his own after the Ayreses' demise.

Caroline Ayres also attempts to pass in both spheres, possibly out of a desire to escape Hundreds Halls and its class implications, or out of a desire to survive it – however, Hundreds Hall's "aim seems to be to prevent change" (Wisker, 2022, p. 161), and so Caroline's attempt is doomed from the outset. Caroline has a "society tone" (Waters, 2009, p. 319) which Faraday notes is different than her normal tone of voice, suggesting that Caroline uses her class as a role she performs, rather than as an expression of her authentic self. She also appears more comfortable at the hospital Christmas party than at her mother's soiree in Hundreds' grand salon. However, Caroline is trapped in her class by her history: "she was the squire's daughter" (Waters, 2009, p. 282). Caroline addresses her desire to be free of her class when she says, "I need to … get out. Right away. England's no good any more for someone like me. It doesn't want me" (Waters, 2009, p. 448). Here Caroline associates her class with who she is. She moves from "someone like me" to just "me". She also conflates Hundreds Hall with the whole of England, stating that neither want her. The problem is with her class and its history, but both that class and history are intrinsically a part of her and not something she can successfully escape or transmute.

Caroline identifies Faraday as an opportunity to escape Hundreds and all it represents, agreeing to marry him for as long as she believes he will take her away with him to London. When she realises that, in fact, Faraday wants to marry her precisely to increase his attachment to Hundreds Hall, she says, "I thought you were

unhappy too, that you wanted to break away as much as I did … But you'll never leave, will you?" and "You've had the idea, haven't you, that you and I could live here as husband and wife. The squire and his lady … But this house doesn't want me. I don't want it. I hate this house!" (Waters, 2009, p. 447-448). These two quotes are similar in their assumption that Faraday and Caroline are the same, only for this assumption to be proved false. Caroline and Faraday are fundamentally different, separated by personal and family history, and by their class. For all Caroline thinks Faraday can save her by transmuting her into a different, more 'modern' class or make her classless, they must always be separate. Ironically, Faraday also wants to use Caroline to transmute himself out of his working-class origins. The difference is, Faraday's class, thanks to the Labour government, is in the ascendence, while Caroline's is increasingly recycled and consumed. In the latter quote, Caroline combines sentiments already expressed: Faraday's desire to belong in a (higher) class, and the house's anthropomorphised animosity towards Caroline and, perhaps, the whole Ayres family.

While family is used in *The Little Stranger* to attribute class ranks and responsibilities, Moreno-Garcia uses family to express deeper sentiments of belonging. Family does still provide Noemí with a sense of her hierarchical class position, but also provides her essence as a character. Noemí notes of her peers back in Mexico City:

> Everyone says they like me well enough, but that's because they have to. No one is going to declare they hate Noemí Taboada. It would be crass to state such a thing while you're nibbling at a canapé. You have to whisper it in the foyer. (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 103)

In this respect, Noemí's family name is like armour. It may not change the way other people feel about her, but it offers protection. But Noemí's family is also an important part of who she is. As Virgil says when Noemí threatens to leave High Place, "I think it's in your nature to stay. It's the dutiful pull of blood, of family" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 87). Here again the emphasis is placed on family not as an external factor dictating class, but a part of one's very personhood – a part of the blood. This is supported by the ways in which Noemí uses 'warm' memories of her family and childhood to combat the 'coldness' of High Place and the Doyle family. She imagines what her brother's opinions of the hauntings she experiences might be:

> Boy, would [he] laugh at [Noemí] if he saw her. She could picture him, telling everyone Noemí now practically believed in *el coco*. The memory of her brother, her family, Mexico City, it was good. It warmed her better than the robe [she wore]. (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 113)

Similarly, Noemí recalls her cousins' casino nights where they "put the record player to good use, tapping their feet to a snappy tune and carefully laying down their cards. It couldn't be quite like that at High Place" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 128). Noemí recognises the power of memory, and her and Catalina's vibrant, warm childhoods, and hopes to utilise this memory to bring Catalina back to health. It is a weapon Noemí uses against the Doyles to remind Catalina of who she is, and attempt to reinforce that she is not yet one of the Doyle ghosts. It is not entirely clear whether becoming a Doyle ghost – and being fully absorbed by the Gloom – can only happen after death, or whether Catalina's apparent madness indicates the Gloom's absorption of her, creating her ghost within itself. If the latter, Noemí's determination to make Catalina remember herself, drawing her away from 'madness', directly save Catalina and keep her sane long enough to keep her from spectrality.

However, family is equally, if not more, important to the Doyles, who literally bind their family to their house in the form of the gloom. When the gloom proves to be receptive to Noemí, she unwittingly dooms herself to become a part of the Doyle family. Virgil vocalises this transition, "You're already like us, you're family" and "You're ours, like it or not. You're ours and you're us" (Moreno-Garcia, 200). The phrasing here demonstrates that being a Doyle is not a marker of status, as it is for the Taboada family, but a state of possession. The phrase "you're ours" is repeated, suggesting that, despite the assumed equality of familial connection, Noemí is actually possessed, in a colonising way, by the Doyles. This is not a process that has been carried out with her permission, but rather she has been 'acquired' by the Doyles in the same way their land and mine were acquired. There is an interesting connection here with the adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw* mentioned in the chapter's introduction, and Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Bly Manor*. Like the texts examined in this chapter, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* enumerates the haunting of an old family home. The ghosts are numerous and some died many generations ago, but persist in not only haunting but stealing people and children who live in the house. Nanny, Dani (Victoria Pedretti), saves one of her charges from being taken into the lake by the house's original ghost by saying the words, "It's you. It's me. It's

us.” (Flanagan, 2020), creating a link of empathy between the living and the dead. This empathy enables Dani to take the spirit into herself, a mark of emotional connection the ghost has not felt in many centuries. By contrast, Virgil Doyle’s use of the inclusive personal pronouns “us” and possessive personal pronoun “ours” confers ownership rather than empathy. The Doyles do not offer an emotional connection, but rather they intend to absorb and consume. The result is to incite rebellion in Noemí, producing the opposite effect from *Bly Manor’s* absorption, instead pushing Noemí to demonstrate that she will not be owned or subsumed.

Houses as Parasites and Other Monsters

Both Hundreds Hall and High Place are cast in the roles of numerous Gothic monsters. Hundreds Hall is variously described as a “rearing ghost” (Waters, 2009, p. 176), “something from a horror film” (Waters, 2009, p. 427), and a “wounded, blighted beast” (Waters, 2009, p. 497), while High Place is called a “great, quiet gargoyle” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 23), and an “etching out of a Gothic novel” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 36). Both stories evoke monsters from the Victorian Gothic – the ghost and the gargoyle – and works that fall out of the modes of Gothic horror, the Gothic novel and the horror film. However, they also establish the houses not just as buildings, but as characters themselves. The houses are not exactly anthropomorphised – they are not strictly seen as people – but certainly as sentient presences: a ghost, a beast, a gargoyle. These images suggest movement and intention, which is matched by the creaking and groaning of the settling old houses.

With the human patriarchs of both texts either dead or mortally ill, the houses take up positions as head of the household; a patriarch keeping watch over the family and passing judgement over that family’s success or failure. The concept of houses as characters is supported in the ways their inhabitants speak about them. Caroline Ayres, says, “Sometimes this house *does* seem changed to me, you know. I can’t tell if it’s just the way I’ve come to feel about it, or if it’s the way it feels about me” (Waters, 2009, p. 239, emphasis original). Caroline also speaks about the house’s rooms having a “life” (Waters, 2009, p. 294). Meanwhile, Virgil Doyle says of High Place, “it’s quite a lovely house once it gets to know you” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p.

214). These quotes suggest Hundreds and High Place not only possess sentience, but also has opinions about its occupants. The happiness of the houses' inhabitants, it is suggested, is predicated upon the houses' approval. In this way, the authors imply that any malevolence experienced by the inhabitants are their own fault – they have behaved or acted in a way that has earned the houses' disapproval, and must face punishment accordingly.

In *The Little Stranger*, the responsibility of the Ayres family is laid out in the first chapter. They are an important family in the local community, and they are obliged to provide jobs and open their house for their lower-class neighbours to thrive and enjoy. They also have a responsibility of upkeep to the house itself, as a large house with impressive grounds is all very well, but it can only be enjoyed by the community if it is aesthetically beautiful. In this respect, *The Little Stranger* "responds to the conservative class and gender politics that characterize both the tradition of country house literature and the English heritage industry" (Parker, 2013, p. 99), highlighting that the Ayres family have responsibilities reflective of the time. By the second chapter of *The Little Stranger*, the Ayreses have failed both the house and the community. They only employ two people at Hundreds, and the house itself is in a state of deep disrepair. Furthermore, the gates to the property are closed and locked against strangers, keeping the community from enjoying the property, and sequestering the Ayreses away from the rest of the county. The consequences of failure for the Ayres family is that they are picked off one by one – incarcerated in a mental institute or killed – for failing to uphold the expectations of their class, as embodied by the grand and deteriorating house in which they live. Caroline perfectly describes this relationship when she says, "We have to sort of keep the place in order, keep up our side of the bargain" (Waters, 2009, p. 48). This seems to support Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's assertion that "it is the house itself that does the haunting, exerting a kind of unsettling agency that undoes the animate/inanimate subject/object dichotomies" (2023, p. 137) – that the house acts of its own accord in a kind of vengeance for the neglect laid upon it by the Ayres family. When, for example, Roderick fails to "keep up his side of the bargain" with his inability to properly manage the estate in the way that his family (both present and past, alive and dead) expect, the house punishes him and, as Caroline describes it, "the house seem[ed] to literally swallow him up" (Waters, 2009, p. 33). Roderick is almost killed when a fire

starts in his room apparently by itself. Had the house succeeded, Rod would have been literally eaten by flames. Although Mrs Ayres and Caroline's failings in their duties to the house are less explicit, they nevertheless allow Roderick to mismanage the estate, and retain attitudes of superiority against the lower classes without doing anything to deserve that superiority, resulting in their punishment.

Far from receiving sympathy or support from the local community driving this time of change, both the fading importance and dilapidated properties of former 'big' families are heavily criticised by their former reliants. Speaking of another of the old families, the Randalls, nouveau riche Mr Baker-Hyde says, "if they hadn't the money to maintain the house they should have packed up ages ago" (Waters, 2009, p. 90). The emphasis here is on liquidising capital as capitalism increasingly becomes the ideology of the time, rather than any qualitative benefits the families and their properties might have brought to the local community. In a reflection of one ideology subsuming and surpassing another, the property of Hundreds is, itself, sacrificed in order to make new council houses: "The rubble being used for the foundations of the new houses consisted mainly of pieces of broken brown stone from the demolished park wall" (Waters, 2009, p. 245). As recognised by Parker (2013), this demolition of the wall acts also as a demolition of the barrier between the classes. Faraday notes that, "From the road that ran beside the breach one could stare right across the parkland to the Hall itself. The house looked somehow more remote, I thought, and yet oddly more vulnerable," and Caroline says of this new view, "Mother and I feel horribly exposed" (Waters, 2009, p. 236). In breaking up the estate, the Ayreses are also breaking up their own identity and experiencing the resultant vulnerability in order to feed the class, culture, and dominant ideology that comes next.

In *Mexican Gothic*, High Place is a literal extension of the Doyle family, containing the consciousness of the Doyle patriarch(s) and echoes of dead family members in the fungus called the gloom which grows throughout the house. The Doyle patriarch and the house are one and the same, indistinguishable from one another, as demonstrated when Noemí is told not to smoke or make loud noises in the house because it upsets Howard Doyle, when it actually upsets the growing conditions of the gloom fungus. Heroine Noemí wishes to rescue her cousin, Catalina, from High Place and the Doyle family, while the family wish to make Noemí one of them, believing fresh genes will strengthen the family line. For this

reason, they are willing to overlook Noemí's objectionable, 'impure' Mexican heritage and desire to marry her into the family. Noemí's modern intrusions to High Place antagonise the house and progressively earns its displeasure. Noemí expresses her feelings about the house when she narrates, "the Kublai Khan executed his enemies by smothering them with velvet pillows so there would be no blood. She thought this house, with all its fabrics and rugs and tassels, could smother a whole army" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 37). Note the action of murder is placed upon the house, not its occupants. This raises ideas of class, with emphasis on the beautiful, luxurious soft furnishings used to bloodlessly murder (and thereby not make a mess of these same beautiful furnishings). But there is also an acknowledgement of how many people can be destroyed in this apparently bloodless kind of murder. The smothering of "a whole army" draws parallels with the mass deaths in the Mexican Revolution, which will be examined in more detail later. Noemí offends the gloom by being her normal self, much as she offends the Doyles with her modernity and Mexicanness.

Frequent comments are made about the dilapidation of Hundreds Hall and High Place that could equally apply to the families inhabiting them. In *The Little Stranger*, the Ayres family are a relic of a pre-war age that survived on feudalism and relied on large, important families to employ and invigorate the local community. Hundreds is "haunted by the grand country homes and mansions of a romanticised England conjured in poetry and long gone if it ever existed" (Wisker, 2022, p. 163). The novel opens with narrator Dr Faraday as a young boy attending an Empire Day fete at Hundreds Hall. As the son of one of the family's nursery maids, the inclusion of the opening memory of the Empire Day fete "implicitly points to the dangers of a heritage industry that … invites visitors to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of a country house while overlooking social inequality" (Parker, 2013, p. 104). Baldick and Mighall go further, writing of the Gothic mode generally that "if the good characters are 'modern' types … the villains are characteristically archaic, their principal function being to represent the values of a benighted antiquity" (2012, p. 278). This casts Faraday, despite his repeated problematic behaviour, as the hero, firstly because he is the sole narrative voice and he naturally wishes to be the hero of his own narrative, but also because of his relative class position and eventual status as a success story of class mobility. Moving into the establishment of the NHS at the

end of the novel as a symbol of his social and modern progression, as well as his use of new medical techniques to attempt to improve Roderick's disability, he is the good 'modern' character. The Ayreses, by comparison, are stuck in the past and resistant to modernity, casting themselves as the archaic villains, despite their clear victimisation within the text.

Alison Rudd in "Post-Colonial Gothic In and As Theory" writes about postcolonialism as "an alien, European, parasitic presence" (2019, p. 80), and details comparisons with European vampire stories, in particular Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). There are various allusions to vampirism in *Mexican Gothic*, including the literal drinking of blood between Noemí and Howard Doyle, but there are also subtler allusions to vampirism in the way the Doyle mine consumes natural resources, leaving El Triunfo a drained husk of a town: "There were many hamlets like El Triunfo where one could peek at fine chapels built when money and people were plentiful; places where the earth would never again spill wealth from its womb" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 20). Here we have a sense that El Triunfo is like many places in Mexico that have been bled dry by their former colonial masters. Enrique Ajuria Ibarra in "Latin American Gothic" takes up the image of the dessicated, drained rural area as being "away from urban and developed centres, help[ing] foreground social and governmental neglect" (2019, p. 269) – neglect caused in this case both by the fallout of the Mexican Revolution, and by the control and neglect of colonial and postcolonial landowners. Moreno-Garcia also draws on the imagery of birth and fertility in her descriptions of High Place by describing the mine as a "womb" – perhaps recalling Wisker's assertion that "the haunted house is a gendered site" (2022, p. 53). A fertile wife is a necessity for birthing the children that provide both vessels and psychic energy to the Doyle patriarch, much as Mexican workers and resources are needed to produce the silver that lend the Doyle family wealth, power, and prestige. And like the Mexican workers, wives belong to a class far below the Doyle patriarchs, as demonstrated in a memory-dream Noemí experiences in which a nameless past Doyle wife gives birth: "The scene was a little ridiculous. A woman, panting and giving birth in the dirt while the man … sat in velvet-upholstered chairs, as if [he] were observing a theater performance" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 144). Despite its mouldering appearance, High Place and the Doyle family act as a parasite on the village of El Triunfo, taking whatever they can from the local

community – and from the women of their family – and leaving nothing but waste behind. While the Ayreses struggle to adapt to changing cultures and ideologies, the Doyles suck everything around them dry without any care for the poverty they leave behind.

With High Place, the metaphor of the parasitic house is literal as well as figurative. The fungal gloom which feeds on Agnes Doyle in order to allow Howard Doyle to be immortal, "was alive. It was alive in more than one way; at its rotten core there was the corpse of a woman" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 199). Moreno-Garcia takes the metaphor of the patriarch sucking the life out of the exhausted wife to provide energy and vitality for himself entirely literally. However, the gloom does not just feed off of women. Marta, a faith-healer and local resident of El Triunfo, describes Florence Doyle's late husband Richard: "He was a strong man, Mr Richard, until he wasn't, and he looked rather shabby and thin, stopped coming into town and disappeared from view" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 65). The house ate away at Richard, just as it does at Agnes's not-quite-corpse in the mausoleum. Although Richard's nationality or race is not revealed, Richard is known in the village and played cards with the villagers. Richard, whether he is white or Latino, is closely associated with the natives of El Triunfo and only mentioned by them, his name unspoken at High Place, and so he is treated as a Mexican – used for breeding, then disposed of.

Hundreds Hall is also frequently described in parasitic terms, but the house feeds off the Ayres family in order to supply the local community rather than draining the community itself as High Place does El Triunfo. Caroline describes the house, "Hundreds is lovely. But it's a sort of lovely monster! It needs to be fed all the time, with money and hard work" (Waters, 2009, p. 69) and "It's greedy. It gobbles up all our time and energy" (Waters, 2009, p. 148). Although all of the Ayres family feel this way, to some extent, as the 'lord' of the manor, Roderick perhaps feels the parasitic nature of the house most acutely. At first Roderick's feelings about the house seem metaphorical, as he struggles to keep the estate together and says, "It wants me to buckle, that's all. I shan't give in to it. It knows that, you see, and keeps trying harder" (Waters, 2009, p. 155). We see here again the heavy personification (or monsterfication) of Hundreds Hall as Roderick imbues the building with its own agency. Roderick at this point in the narrative still has a combative feeling about the

house and his position within it, a desire to 'win' by making the estate function as it once did. However, his language becomes more frantic as he later says, "I felt as though the very blankets I was sitting on might rise up and throttle me!" (Waters, 2009, p. 164) and "It wants to destroy us, all of us" (Waters, 2009, p. 195). The tone becomes less combative and more defeated, reflecting how Roderick starts to see the house less as a challenge and more as a monster. This is supported by Caroline's observation, once Roderick has been removed from the house and her mother is dead, that "The house is still at last. Whatever it was here, it has taken everything it wanted" (Waters, 2009, p. 416). Although the haunting occupies and acts through the house, its damaging or correcting focus is on the house's occupants. Once the occupants have been fully corrected and destroyed, the haunting becomes dormant once more.

Besides housing an entity that feeds off its inhabitants, haunted houses are also frequently represented as a kind of disease or infection. Two obvious examples from the Gothic canon are "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe (1839), one of the many texts, examined later, that Waters uses as a direct referent in *The Little Stranger*, and "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892). However, the theme continues well into the twenty-first century, in works such as T. Kingfisher's *What Moves the Dead* (2022) (an adaptation of Poe's "House of Usher") and Gemma Amor's *The Once Yellow House* (2023). Roderick describes Hundreds Hall's malevolent entity as an "infection" (Waters, 2009, p. 165), and Dr Graham, a visitor to Hundreds Hall, "felt, irrationally, as if the place had a sickness in it, a sort of lingering infection in its floors and walls" (Waters, 2009, p. 476). This latter quote suggests that not only is there a sickness that is transmitted between people or people-like entities such as ghosts, but that the infection is a part of the physical building – the floors and walls themselves. This again encourages the comparison raised by the dilapidation of the houses that they are a physical manifestation of the families who inhabit them. The sickness in the family is the same as the sickness in the building, and vice versa. It is perhaps fitting, then, that the inheritor of the house and the narrator is a doctor, an individual perfectly placed to diagnose both the house and family's sicknesses.

Similarly, in *Mexican Gothic*, Catalina brings these two ideas together in her original letter to Mr Taboada, Noemí's father: "This house is sick with rot, stinks of

decay, brims with every single evil and cruel sentiment" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 11). This is one of the reader's first introductions to High Place, before Noemí sees and describes the house firsthand. Catalina draws parallels between the house's disease, its dilapidation in the form of its "decay", and a moral judgment about the house, that it is "evil and cruel". When describing aspects like the aging of the house or its likeness to disease and infection, the reader is not invited to pity the house or its occupants, but to make a moral judgment about them. The reader, however, *is* invited to sympathise with the late Mexican miners who caught a literal disease as a result of their proximity to High Place's gloom. The house and the Doyles are not victims of the disease, but the source and root of the infection. This is again expressed by Marta:

> There're heavy places. Places where the air itself is heavy because an evil weighs it down … the bad air, it'll get into your body and it'll nestle there and weigh you down. That's what's wrong with the Doyles of High Place. (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 122)

Again, the house and the Doyles are described as a single entity, one filled with evil.

The likeness of family and house is perhaps more metaphorical in *The Little Stranger*, but a likeness still exists, as the house crumbles over the year of the novel and the family self-destructs. But the house is also more fluid in reflecting the moods and personalities of the Ayres family. After the family dog, Gyp, is put to sleep, Faraday narrates that, "everything, I noticed, was faded, the bed-curtains bleached, the carpets threadbare, the floorboards with a white paint on them, worn to a streaky grey" (Waters, 2009, p. 126). While Rebecca Janicker asserts that "To speak of such a place [as a haunted house] is to conjure up an image of an archaic building, dark, decrepit and cavernous" (2015, p. 3), and Hundreds is undoubtedly all of these things, the house at this point reflects the sombre mood of the family in their moment of mourning and of the failure of the family's social position to protect them as it might once have done. In Roderick's case, Hundreds Hall begins to take on physical aspects of his body when his room develops burn marks that are "like the burns … on Rod's own face and hands. It was as if the house were developing scars of its own, in response to his unhappiness and frustration" (Waters, 2009, p. 148). Similarly, when the mysterious S marks start appearing on the walls to torment Mrs Ayres with the possibility they might be made by the ghost of her dead eldest daughter who died in infancy, Faraday notes, "I could almost fancy it's coming from

under the paint" (Waters, 2009, p. 299, emphasis original). Here, the representation of the family member bubbles up to the surface from some centre in the house. The house holds the family at its core, and the family's ailments seep slowly through the house to the surface.

High Place is a representation not just of the Doyle family, but of their position as English colonisers on Mexican land. The house was built in an English style, even incorporating soil brought over from England, carrying the gloom fungus's spores. The Doyles also brought English techniques and machinery to work in the Mexican silver mine, as did many English miners who relocated to Mexico in the nineteenth century. But now that the house is decomposing, Noemí narrates that it is "the house that disfigured the land" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 57). For Noemí, High Place is a representation of every wrong that has been perpetrated within its walls. The violent and miserable events stain the house. She speculates on the events following Ruth Doyle's murder of her family: "[A]fterward someone had scrubbed the blood away, someone had burned the dirty linens or replaced the rugs with the ugly scarlet blotches on them, and life had gone on" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 84). Again, the impression is that this scarring and staining of the physical structure does not just relate to the bloody violence the house has soaked up, but the colonial violence that has been perpetrated by the Doyles in Mexico, and the violence that has been soaked up in Mexican soil from the Revolution.

The Doyles initially moved to Mexico in the late 1800s, as many British did, to exploit the precious metal mines left behind by the evicted Spanish. The mine, at the time when the book is set, has ceased operations due to a lack of Mexican workers living in El Triunfo to operate it. The gloom infected and killed all the native Mexican workers, and the mine is not prosperous enough to attract new workers to the area. The dismantling of the mine is the main reason High Place is in such a state of decay, it having failed to provide a source of income since it closed. The lack of workers is partly due to the sickness that comes over them from being in close proximity to the gloom. However, despite knowing the gloom is the reason the workers became sick, the Doyles frequently blame the sickness on or associate it with the Mexican Revolution. Virgil says, "Your stupid Revolution robbed us of our fortune. We must get it back" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 216) and Marta tells Noemí, "They said that in the last epidemic, around the time the Revolution started, the

Doyles didn’t even bother sending down the corpses for a proper burial” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 59). This demonstrates that although the Doyles are English and their people have not directly acted in Mexico’s colonial history, they have situated themselves in their own minds, and the minds of El Triunfo’s citizens, as part of the colonial force largely put to rest by the Revolution.

These two quotes also show the opposing attitudes of coloniser and colonised. Virgil Doyle perceives the silver mine as the Doyles’ possession and right which has been “robbed”, without acknowledgement that it is a lack of Mexican workers on Mexican soil that has caused the deactivation of the mine. For the Doyles, returning the mine’s functionality is a matter of justice. For Marta, however, the death of the workers are the key point of the mine’s deactivation, drawing a parallel with the loss of life in the Revolution, in which an estimated 1.4 million Mexicans died (McCaa, 2003, pp. 370–371). Marta emphasises the Doyles’ disregard for loss of life when she describes their treatment of the workers’ bodies as being “tossed in a pit” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 59). This is reiterated when Marta says, “They died. Lots of the miners. Some of the people working at the house, and even Howard Doyle’s wife, but mostly a great deal of miners dropped dead” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 118). By comparing these quotes, and in general the attitudes towards colonialism expressed by the Doyle family compared to the Taboadas and El Triunfo residents, *Mexican Gothic* demonstrates that “The Gothic, in fact, is a mode of writing used by both settler and indigene to articulate the postcolonial experience, even while it also deals with the problems raised by more recent migrants” (Rudd, 2019, p. 72). *Mexican Gothic* shows the tensions, long after a colonisation has taken place, of two failed and miserable sets of people left living together. Mexico’s largest coloniser was the Spanish, but the English cannot help but colonise, and the Doyles’ circumstances have left them stranded in Mexico. The Doyles, as a representation of wider European colonisation, haunt El Triunfo and are haunted by their past successes and failures. Each haunt and blame the other, though one with more cause for blame, as the Mexicans are still the formerly healthy body sucked dry by colonialism, and the colonisers’ attitudes go unchanged.

The Haunted Text as House

The physical houses of these stories are not the only enclosures that feature hauntings. The text itself acts as a house, a physical block containing the narrative and characters, providing a housing to pass the story from author to reader. The text encloses the narrative and acts as its home. As such, the text itself can also be, and in these cases is, haunted. This can be seen in some of the language used by critics of ghost stories. For example, Gina Wisker writes that "Women's ghost stories peel away the deadly cladding or torn wallpaper revealing abjection, dismissal to silence and the liminal spaces or traumatic, oppressive histories and stories" (2022, p. 30), drawing together the ghost story with imagery of the house's infrastructure. The story peels like wallpaper and removes cladding, drawing to mind the dissolution of the haunted houses examined in this chapter, but also showing how the story itself is a structure. Similarly, Wisker writes of Bluebeard stories, such as *Mexican Gothic*, that "The ghosts are those of the previous tale" (2022, p. 121), highlighting that while Bluebeard stories may or may not have literal ghosts within their narratives, the stories themselves are haunted by the various versions of the tale told before. Passey agrees that "At its core the Gothic is four centuries of literature bound together by a tapestry of references, a series of interlocked texts" (2023, p. 74), and Botting acknowledges that contemporary Gothic is "archly self-conscious of [its] generic precedents" (2008a, p. 62). The Gothic is both a genre reliant upon intertextuality and an aesthetic that references what has come before. As proposed in this thesis's introduction, Gothic is recognisable by its aesthetic, the 'look' of Gothic acting as a kind of uniform. But in order for that uniform to be recognisable, it must reference prior Gothic works, perhaps altering the fit of its clothing to express the times in which it is produced, but highlighting those changes by making reference to the past. Both Moreno-Garcia and Waters use the Gothic stories that have come before to alter the 'fit' of their Gothic uniforms to express the changing concerns of contemporary times. As such, these haunted house texts are themselves text-houses haunted by the spectres of prior Gothic works.

Waters, before embarking on her creative writing career, completed a Ph.D. in English Literature, focusing on lesbianism in Victorian fiction. As a literary scholar, Waters will be well aware of the importance of intertextuality, and has said that she

consciously uses intertextuality in her writing, and in particular in *The Little Stranger* (Armitt, 2006; Taylor, n.d.). Megen de Bruin-Molé writes that "Adaptation implies change, but also continuation. Specifically, it concerns a temporal move from the past to the present, repackaging a story so it can better adapt to a new environment" (de Bruin-Molé, 2019, p. 19). This could be said to describe most ghost stories or stories of hauntings, in which the problematic or disruptive discords of the past incur into the present, refusing to adapt. While *The Little Stranger* is not a direct adaptation, it nevertheless re-uses and recycles other literary texts, some of them Gothic and ghost stories, adapting these Victorian and early-twentieth century Gothic works into the reader's twenty-first century and the novel's post-World War II period. Among the Gothic literary references noticed by Waters scholars are Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (in Roderick's naming), Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) (in the class inadequacy of its unforenamed narrator), and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) (which is name-dropped more than once by Caroline in the course of the novel). However, beyond these clear references are more fleeting associations that have been noted with texts as diverse as Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) (Heilmann, 2012, pp. 100-101), *The Turn of the Screw* (Braid, 2013) and Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) (Parker, 2013, p. 106).

As has been established, the Gothic as it was expressed in its first renaissance in the Victorian period, in which Waters is an expert, was concerned most with the anxieties of a bourgeois middle class. However, class ambition or mutation is a concern of several other of these intertexts. *Rebecca's* narrator starts the story as a person in service and awkwardly aware of her class indiscretions as she marries above her station and manages the class expectations of those around her, both her husband's peers and her new service staff. And while "The Fall of the House of Usher's" characters are all of the upper classes, the anxiety of the piece is about the Usher lineage's end. Neither Roderick nor Madeleine Usher have married or had children, betraying their class by allowing their family line and its attendant benefits and responsibilities – in particular, the literal house itself – to fall into dissolution. By failing to uphold the upper-class responsibility of continuing the family line, the Ushers are punished, their house and its land polluted. These turns are highly recognisable in what has already been written about *The Little Stranger*.

In this respect, the narrative structure of *The Little Stranger* adheres very closely to its literary precedents. As Clive Bloom writes of M.R. James, his ghost stories “are all told knowing the reader *already* knows the rules of the game” (2012, p. 218, emphasis original). Similarly, the intertextuality of Waters’s *The Little Stranger*, and Moreno-Garcia’s use of the English fairytale in *Mexican Gothic*, draw the reader into a story they already know – to which point the authors may adhere to or divert from in order to apply new meanings to well-known tropes and plot beats. There is the same focus on class anxiety, the same punishment for a failure of the upper classes to uphold their familial and feudal responsibilities. However, Waters’s novel is still subverted by the changing anxieties, and the dissolution of class focus, in the twenty-first century. Unlike in *Rebecca* and “The Fall of the House of Usher”, the story does not end with the destruction of the central family’s home. Hundreds Hall has an afterlife, in which it continues its dissolution, but is caretaken by Faraday. In this respect, the house has an inheritor – not through lineage, but through the house once again functioning in service to the community. The land of the house, sold while the Ayreses were still alive and in possession of Hundreds, is parsed out to build council houses that are complete in the final chapter of the book, housing modern working-class people who work at the local factories that so tempted away those who might once have worked in service to the Ayreses, including their maid, Betty. The house does not burn or fall, ending the story, but rather is absorbed by the working classes who were named as the downfall of the Ayres family by those looking on – by Doctor Seeley and Faraday himself.

While Gothic expectations might be for a final fatalistic ending, acting as a cautionary tale for its white, middle-class, Western reader, *The Little Stranger* provides an egalitarian ending. The Ayreses are almost forgotten by the people the grand family once served at Empire Day fetes. The thriving working classes demonstrate that, perhaps, the world is better off without them. Rather than expressing an anxiety in the aftermath of this family’s destruction, an emphasis is placed on the individual mental issues of each family member – Roderick’s post-traumatic stress and inability to act as a responsible patriarch; Mrs Ayres’s repressed grief for her daughter who died in infancy; and Caroline’s repressed queerness and independence, unable to be expressed or escaped in her role as the “squire’s daughter”. Their problems, despite their class, are not so different from the cross-

class concerns of the twenty-first century, many of them explored further into this thesis: intergenerational trauma and grief in *Rawblood*, queer rebellion in *The Luminous Dead* and *All the White Spaces*, or the feeling that life is an inescapable loop in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle, The Tenth Girl,* and *Ghost Stories*. As Parker observes, "The psychic pain and distress that are physically manifested in the poltergeist could emanate from any member of the Ayres family, who are all haunted by sadness and anger" (Parker, 2013, p. 105). These repressed and inter-related hauntings recall Gina Wisker's imagery in *Contemporary Women's Ghost Stories* of the ghosts "[w]e bring with us … and layer … on to a place, which reflects them back" (2022, p. 62). Again and again, Hundreds Hall reflects back the Ayreses' hauntings, in the scribbled S's that might have been made by Susan, or the scorch marks in Roderick's room so similar to the burns on his body. The way Waters has adapted the ending of her novel to show a world beyond the final cautionary destruction acts as a levelling, demonstrating that the Gothic is now for all, not just the bourgeoisie.

Baldick and Mighall, in their seminal essay "Gothic Criticism", pay much attention to the Gothic's reflection on and opinion of the past – whether it "construct[s] increasingly implausible models of … supposed latent fears, desires, and 'revolutionary' impulses" (2012, p. 268), or offers "a form of romanticism characterized by nostalgic resistance to bourgeois modernity and enlightenment" (Baldick & Mighall, 2012, p. 271, summarising Summers), the disruption of which creates an inevitable horror or tragedy. This demonstrates that the Gothic is focused on history and the perception of history. Victorian Gothic works looked back to the medieval, twentieth-century Gothic works looked back to the Victorian, and now twenty-first-century Gothic works seem to look to the first half of the twentieth century, as is apparent not just in *Mexican Gothic* and *The Little Stranger*, but several works in this thesis (*The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle, The Tenth Girl,* and *Rawblood* all have sections set in the 1910s-1970s, and while it looks to the latter end of the twentieth century, the Molly Southbourne series is set in the 1990s). Sarah Waters is what Jerome de Groot describes as an "historical novelist" (De Groot, 2013, p. 57) – as opposed to a literary novelist who happens to write in an historical period. Waters consciously frames her works in the past, he writes, in order to "force the reader into a temporal disjuncture. They demand a shifting of imaginative time

and, most particularly, a recognition of temporal otherness … The past as presented in historical fiction is a re-enactment, a recreation, a performance of pastness" (De Groot, 2013, p. 57). However, Baldick and Mighall contest that "The more the novelist insists that his or her narrative is about there and then, the more it reveals that it is about the here and now – precisely *our own* here and now" (2012, p. 276, emphasis original). As modernity becomes post-modernity, which becomes post-post-modernity, historical novelists keep re-defining and re-framing the past, creating more literary hauntings as more and more recent periods are reframed as a bygone era. The ages of modernity, flattened one on top of the other through literary allusion and nostalgic looking-back, draw out anxieties that remain over the things that have not changed. Historical fiction has been "marginalized" as a "'female' genre", much like the ghost story (De Groot, 2013, p. 57), and in this way, Waters works at the intersection of (at least) two literary marginalisations, nevertheless dragging them to a platform of legitimacy as she is lauded as a literary author, receiving repeated short-listings for the Man Booker Prize.[8]

Where Waters's textual house is haunted by classic Gothic references, Moreno-Garcia's text-house is haunted by the European fairy tale. From the nineteenth century onwards, European Bluebeard texts often find their heroines dismissing the wives who have come before them, rather than dying and becoming one of them, in order to continue in a form of happiness with their Bluebeard husband, hoping, perhaps unconsciously, that this will prevent history from repeating itself. However, in *Mexican Gothic*, Noemí literally burns down the pattern of the past marriages and murders, before escaping with Catalina to what she hopes will be a new life. In doing so, Noemí is able to break free of the threat of becoming Howard or Francis's wife and save Catalina by calling on her Mexican heritage and the power of being a postcolonial woman, strengthened by the resilience of surviving colonialism. Through common scenes and direct references, *Mexican Gothic* links itself with several classic English Gothic works, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. These are both examples of Bluebeard stories, works in which a female heroine falls in love with a man who is revealed to already have one or several wives, living or dead. The heroine discovers this terrible secret by coming across 'Bluebeard's chamber', and her struggle becomes the

[8] *The Little Stranger* was itself short-listed for the Man Booker Prize in 2009.

avoidance of becoming another one in a series of dead wives. As Gina Wisker writes, Bluebeard narratives show “imperialism and colonialism played out through gender and power” (2016a, p. 134). Sharon Wilson agrees, stating that the Bluebeard narrative in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) “is the institution of racism that is the Robber Bridegroom cannibalizing the characters and society” (2008, p. 84).

As Alexandra J. Sanchez (2020) discusses, Bluebeard texts often reference and situate themselves amongst other Bluebeard texts. Similarly, Bluebeard scholar Maria Tatar notes how Angela Carter, in her Bluebeard retellings, “borrows bits and pieces from the repository of our collective literary and folkloric imagination to construct a story that challenges our understanding of characters and plots that have stood the test of time” (2004, p. 115). *Mexican Gothic*’s relationship to classic English Gothic works, which are also Bluebeard narratives, is sometimes direct and sometimes suggested. The book opens with heroine Noemí leaving a fancy-dress party at which she has had a miscommunication with her boyfriend about their costumes, leading him to be angry at her. This is reminiscent of the fancy dress ball in *Rebecca*. However, unlike Mrs de Winter’s mortification at her costume faux pas and her misery at her husband’s anger, Noemí seems genuinely not to care. Her date is the one left annoyed and feeling out of place – as Noemí notes, “You look adorable when you’re irritated” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 8). *Mexican Gothic*, like *The Little Stranger*, also echoes many of *Rebecca’s* concerns about class mismatches, albeit with a postcolonial sensibility, and like *Rebecca*, *Mexican Gothic* ends with Noemí taking up a course of action which Alfred Hitchcock (1940) placed in Mrs Danvers’s hands, by razing High Place to the ground, leaving nothing but “a bunch of smoldering ashes” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 269).

Other English Gothic texts are referred to more explicitly, particularly with reference to the Doyles’ house, High Place. On first seeing the house, Noemí narrates:

> It was the kind of thing she could imagine impressing her cousin [Catalina]: an old house atop a hill, with mist and moonlight, like an etching out of a Gothic novel. *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, those were Catalina’s sort of books. (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 36)

Here we see direct references to the Gothic texts that have come before, as in Waters's *The Little Stranger*. The weather and the mist around High Place also remind Noemí of the literary Gothic:

> The mist gave the cemetery a romantic aura. She recalled that Mary Shelley had rendezvoused with her future husband in a cemetery: illicit liaisons by a tomb. Catalina had told her this story, just as she had gushed over *Wuthering Heights*. (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 89)

As well as providing a comparison with other texts (the mist also recalls Mr Rochester's first appearance in *Jane Eyre*), the mist works in the novel to emphasise Noemí's anxiety. The mist makes it difficult to leave High Place, as the road up to the house is treacherous. The mist also obscures figures' features, making it difficult for Noemí to know who is close to her, so she fears ghosts in the mist. In this way, the mist links *Mexican Gothic* to the English Romantic Gothic, but the way Noemí feels about the mist is more fitting to Gothic horror. The use of these classic English Bluebeard adaptations not only frames *Mexican Gothic* amongst them, but contributes to the story in terms of setting up reader expectations and providing plot points that draw Noemí into her role as a potential Bluebeard wife. On noting the intertextuality and referencing of other texts in another Bluebeard novel, Helen Oyeyemi's *Mr. Fox* (2011), Sanchez writes that these different texts are contained in the narrative "*because* of each other and not *despite* each other" (2020, p. 9, emphasis original), and this is equally true of Moreno-Garcia. Their inclusion is a purposeful device used by the author, designed to create links that are clear to the reader, to create a 'sisterhood' of (potential) intertextual wives and place Noemí and Catalina among their ranks.

Shuli Barzilai theorises that there are four key characters which feature in both Bluebeard narratives and Gothic romance: a persecuted young woman, a (possibly) dangerous man, a helper/rescuer, and a mad, bad or very unlucky wife (2009, pp. 110-111). *Mexican Gothic* demonstrates these figures, however, Moreno-Garcia also provides some confusion to these usually strictly separate roles. The (certainly) dangerous men could be Howard Doyle, who embodies the Doyle patriarch, or his grandson Virgil, who wishes to take over as the family patriarch and is Catalina's husband. There are a string of mad, bad or unlucky wives, including the ghosts of Ruth Doyle and other Doyle women, Agnes Doyle's decomposing but still alive body in the crypt, Catalina, and potentially Noemí herself. The figure of rescuer

could be seen in Francis Doyle, who rebels against his family in helping and advising Noemí, but also in Noemí herself as Catalina's rescuer. Wisker writes that women in haunted houses "break down, but rarely break through to another version of self" (2022, p. 59). However, Noemí does break through to another version of herself, as well as another archetype in the traditional Bluebeard narrative. As for the 'persecuted young woman', all of the women in *Mexican Gothic* seem to be persecuted in some way. By conflating these character archetypes, Moreno-Garcia shows how upsetting the traditional Bluebeard story with her postcolonial Latin American setting disrupts the established order of Bluebeard narratives. Because Noemí and Catalina are at both an advantage and a disadvantage by virtue of being Mexican, (post)colonised, and Other in an 'English' Gothic story, they are able to upset the 'natural' order of the well-known tale.

The Bluebeard narrative is dependent on a test of obedience for the new wife on a rule or set of rules given by the husband. In the first written accounts of the story, this is the forbidden or 'bloody' chamber, to which the wife is given a key but told she may not enter. When Noemí first arrives at High Place, Florence Doyle tells her, "We do things a certain way around here, and we expect you to follow the rules" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 24). Florence's rules include not leaving the house (as the longer Noemí stays in the house, the more she is infected by the gloom's fungal spores), not smoking in the house (as the smoke upsets the gloom), and making no excess noise (as this upsets the ill Doyle patriarch). In general, the house is kept in a state that promotes fungal growth, almost reminiscent of the protective forest of Sleeping Beauty, one of Catalina's favourite fairytales. Even the villagers of El Triunfo seem to be aware of High Place's Gothic rules. As Marta tells Noemí, "You can't leave High Place" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 127). However, Florence also positions herself as a victim, a potential wife, when she says of her late husband, "I thought he'd take me away, that he would change everything, change me … But there's no denying our natures. I was meant to live and die in High Place" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 107), suggesting that she knows she will join the ranks of the faceless, voiceless wives who exist in the gloom. She is the mouthpiece of the patriarch but has no power of her own.

As in almost every Bluebeard tale, "The enunciation of a prohibition inevitably turns it into an invitation to engage in a transgression" (Tatar, 2009, p. 26),

and Noemí repeatedly breaks the rules of High Place. As Tatar notes, “If repression and repetition are the hallmarks of Bluebeard's life, investigation, disruption, and improvisation are aligned with his wife” (2009, p. 17). Noemí is noisy, smokes her expensive Gallouise cigarettes inside and outside the house, and repeatedly persuades Francis Doyle to take her into El Triunfo without telling Florence. In this way Noemí not only foreshadows that she is different than the previous wives in her non-conformity, but also that she is disruptive and dynamically opposed to the Doyles’ oppression. However, Heta Pyrhonen writes that “According to the contradictory logic of ‘Bluebeard,’ the husband ensures that the stated goal of obedience is never reached” (2010, p. 123), suggesting that the rules of High Place are intended to be broken. This is supported when Virgil Doyle reveals that he knew Francis was bringing Noemí a tonic to help her fight off the gloom, allowing her to rebel to see how far she could get.

Catalina describes her own role as one of Bluebeard’s wives shortly after Noemí’s arrival at High Place: “There’re people and there’re voices. I see them sometimes, the people in the walls. They’re dead” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 80). As she says this, Noemí describes Catalina as having “the visage of a woman possessed” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 80). While Catalina describes the ghosts of the wives who have come before, her description as appearing possessed places her among these ghosts – either as one of them, or as being possessed by one of them. She is not the Catalina of Noemí’s fond childhood memories but has become a product of High Place. Further into the story, both Noemí and Catalina are ‘made’ wives by their clothing – Noemí by wearing a wedding dress that is a Doyle family heirloom (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 224), and Catalina by wearing a white nightgown that makes her look like a “second bride” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 242). This demonstrates that appearances are important to ‘becoming’ a wife. While the Mexican heroines cannot be made pale and golden like the incestuous, interbred Doyle wives who came before, they can be made brides using the whiteness that is so desired by the Doyles in the form of dress rather than skin colour.

Shortly after, Noemí is invited to imagine herself as a Doyle wife. Howard Doyle says and Noemí reacts, “’To be a Doyle is to be someone’ … Someone? Did that make Catalina no one before she came to High Place? And was Noemí therefore confined to a faceless, luckless band of nobodies?” (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, pp. 106-

107). Here Howard Doyle emphasises that one of the key qualities of his wives is to be faceless, nameless, "no one". This is borne out by Noemí's description of the portraits of the Doyle wives that hang in the hall: "The faces of long-dead Doyles stared at Noemí from across time … Pale, fair-haired … One face blended into another. She would not have been able to tell them apart even if she'd looked closely" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 25). It is difficult to imagine dark, Mexican Noemí or Catalina as part of this procession of inbred women, but their position as Mexican women still makes them powerless 'no ones' – as Noemí notes, "Mexican women couldn't even vote" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 87).

Both their sameness and their lack of identity are reflected in the wives' ghosts when they appear. Where the ghosts' faces ought to be there is instead "a glow, golden like that of the mushrooms on the wall" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 54). This golden glow does not just replace the face, masking or removing the ghost's individual identity, but emphasises the Aryan nature of the Doyles' ghosts, their goldenness a cipher for whiteness and Englishness. Amy King writes about the intrinsic link between Britishness (Englishness) and the "white racial purity and superiority [that] lingers underneath" (2013, p. 60), equating Englishness not only with whiteness, but the insinuation of inbreeding which is reflected by the Doyles, who are literally inbred to preserve the 'purity' of their bloodline. Noemí later assesses the Doyle wives' phantoms as, "A memory? A ghost? Not quite a ghost" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 212). The conflation between the phantoms' position as ghost or memory brings into question the nature of their existence: whether they are living or dead, real or remembered, present or past. Their lack of identity suggests they are not remembered, but rather remain a faceless legion, recalled only according to their role. The question of ghost or memory also raises the issue of whether the phantoms are autonomous. Ghosts haunt with a purpose, but memories belong to the one who remembers. The ghosts in *Mexican Gothic* are also voiceless; a loud buzzing is the only sound they can make aside from repeating the words they spoke in life. When Noemí discovers Agnes Doyle's body, she understands that the buzzing is her attempt to scream but, as Griselda Pollock notes, Bluebeard's wives are "often mute" (2009, p. xxv) – their role is to silently stand as a warning, not to have a voice of their own.

When Noemí discovers the truth about the origin of the phantoms, she struggles to describe these issues of autonomy and memory: "All the ghosts were Agnes. Or rather, all the ghosts lived inside Agnes. No, that wasn't right either. What had once been Agnes had become the gloom, and inside the gloom there lived ghosts" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 258). The 'gloom' here represents patriarchal control as contained in patriarchal memory. It houses Howard Doyle's consciousness, again suggesting the phantoms are what remains in the patriarch-gloom's memory, which is a faceless, voiceless ghost-memory that serves no purpose, beyond the role of wife which they can no longer fulfil, and mother-host to the gloom itself. The gloom is also described by Noemí as:

> [T]he manifestation of all the suffering that had been inflicted on this woman. Agnes. Driven to madness, driven to anger, driven to despair, and even now a sliver of that woman remained, and that sliver was still screaming in agony. (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 262)

Patriarchy is housed inside anonymous female misery, from which it draws its power.

Howard Doyle makes clear the purpose of the wives in his family when he describes his second wife, Alice: "She was fruitful. A woman's function is to preserve the family line … she did her duty and she did it well" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 71). This obliquely references that the children of the wives are not just the literal Doyle children, but also the consciousness that allows the gloom to perpetuate. This is reinforced by Agnes's headstone in the graveyard, which reads, "Agnes Doyle. Mother" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 138), despite the fact Agnes bore no biological children. Nina Auerbach theorised that in Daphne du Maurier's fiction, "to be a woman is to be rotten or, at best, defective" (2002, p. 110). Similarities can be drawn here with the Doyle women, the majority of whom are defective in their inability to produce strong, male heirs for the Doyle family. In Agnes's case, she is literally "rotten", having physically decomposed and been overtaken by the gloom. Furthermore, even though Howard Doyle hopes to breed strength into the line by luring Mexican women into the family, they are still perceived to be defective in that they are not white or English.

Eventually, as every potential wife must, Noemí discovers Bluebeard's chamber, in this case the mausoleum that houses Agnes Doyle's body: "The gloom was alive. It was alive in more than one way; at its rotten core there was the corpse of

a woman, her limbs twisted, her hair brittle against the skull" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 199). Having looked upon her, Noemí discovers that Agnes Doyle is not entirely dead, as her body provides a living consciousness for the gloom. While the gloom acts as a conduit for the Doyle patriarch and is ostensibly under his control, it cannot exist without a 'mother', a living being to provide organic food and soil, and a consciousness that allows it to be sentient. The full description provides several interesting points:

> Noemí stared straight into the face of death. It was the open, screaming maw of a woman, frozen in time. A mummy, a few teeth dangling from her mouth, her skin yellow. The clothing in which she had been buried had long dissolved into dust, and instead she was clothed in a different finery: mushrooms hid her nakedness. They grew from her torso and her belly, they grew down her arms and her legs, they clustered around her head creating a crown, a halo, of glowing gold. The mushrooms held her upright, anchored her to the wall, like a monstrous Virgin in a cathedral of mycelium … This was the golden blur she'd seen in her dreams, the terrifying creature that lived in the walls of the house. (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 256)

The description of Agnes references both ghosts and mummies, staple monsters of the Gothic genre. Clothing is again emphasised, like Noemí's bridal gown and Catalina's bridal-like nightgown. Agnes is still in some respects clothed as a bride, the golden mushrooms acting as bridal gown and the mushrooms creating a "cathedral", the location of a high-status wedding ceremony. The mushroom-gown both hides Agnes's nakedness and grows from her belly, emphasising the conception and birth aspects which are so important in Doyle wives.

As has been previously noted, from the opening of the novel, Noemí is positioned not only as a victim, but as a rescuer. Catalina writes in her letter to the Taboadas, "You have to save me. I cannot save myself as much as I wish to" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 11). This again casts Noemí as different from Catalina's English Gothic heroines, because she has the potential to save the victim, rather than becoming one of them herself. Although this is later undercut as the Doyles attempt to recruit Noemí to the ranks of the Doyle wives, the reader is shown early in the novel that Noemí is different. Some similarities are drawn between Noemí and Ruth Doyle, who refused to marry her cousin and killed most of her family with a shotgun. The injuries given to Howard Doyle are referenced as the source of his weakening – both in terms of the debilitating disease that leaves him almost bedbound, and in

terms of the decaying appearance of High Place and the disfunction of its mine. However, Ruth's failure to completely end the Bluebeard cycle is intrinsically linked to her Englishness. When thinking on the murders, Noemí notices "There was only silver on display, and she wondered, incongruously, if the bullets the murderess had used might not have been made of silver" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 64). The potential use of the Doyles' silver as murder weapon ties Ruth back into the Doyle family and their role as colonisers, separating her from Noemí as a Mexican. Ruth's embedding within postcolonialism, as a postcolonial beneficiary of the mined silver, mean rebellion will not 'work' for her. She is not Mexican and so has no cultural claim on the Mexican silver that, it is suggested, she used to try and end the Doyle patriarch's control.

Despite *Mexican Gothic's* preoccupation with class difference – Noemí being from a well-known, powerful family in Mexico City compared to El Triunfo's poor, tired citizens – *Mexican Gothic* aligns Noemí and Catalina with the villagers of El Triunfo as 'equally' Mexican. When El Triunfo's village doctor, Dr Camarillo, states that he came to El Triunfo because he "wanted to help the people here", Noemí responds, "You should start by helping my cousin" (Moreno-Garcia, 2020, p. 59). Here Noemí positions the wives – specifically Catalina – as the responsibility of the Mexican doctor, as much as the poor Mexican people of El Triunfo. She asserts that there is more than one kind of person in need, more than one kind of victim, in a way that breaks away from the traditional Bluebeard narrative. Bluebeard heroines do not ask for help (until it is too late) and are often isolated; but by seeking the help of Marta and Dr Camarillo from the outset, Noemí attempts to strengthen her position as wife-rescuer by avoiding isolation and aligning herself with other Mexicans.

Noemí's Mexicanness provides her a way to associate with or relate to the English Doyle wives that haunt High Place in accordance with Barbara Klonowska's argument that "haunting signal[s] the return to that which has been suppressed, unrealised, lost or too painful to confront openly" (2017, p. 172). In the case of the English wives, this is their femininity and their lack of control as a result of being women in a patriarchal society and family. Noemí is also a woman, but her status as a Mexican woman makes her particularly vulnerable – as reinforced by the Doyles in their various racist microaggressions and vocal support of eugenics. Mexico's colonial history resulted in the silencing and suppression of indigenous cultures, and

prejudice against the colonised Mexican peoples who survived. In highlighting the prejudice against and erasure of Mexican culture, *Mexican Gothic* fulfils Klonowska's statement that "haunting may also suggest problems suppressed by official discourses, be it private or public, which yet resurface in a spectral form to mark the trace of that which has been silenced and eliminated" (2017, p. 172). In producing such a popular novel,[9] with such clear connections to Gothic literature by White authors, and to European fairy tale culture, Moreno-Garcia uses a Mexican setting and characters not only to demonstrate how the lives of colonised peoples are so often like a Bluebeard's bloody chamber in the death and expectation of obedience placed upon them, but shows how the body and spirit of the Other can be stronger than these patriarchal, colonial monsters when they are allowed to speak and act.

Conclusion

Although the haunted house story appears on the surface to follow the trials and tribulations of a small group of interconnected individuals – the family, the tenants, the owners or occupants of a home – the message of the haunted house can often be spread much wider. In the case of *The Little Stranger*, the haunted house "does not call [the Ayres family] back to redress earlier wrongs, it calls them to recognise the wrongs of the English gentry more broadly" (Wisker, 2022, pp. 164-165). Similarly, *Mexican Gothic*'s judgement does not sit squarely on the Doyle family, but on any who espouse eugenics or use their own class superiority to excuse colonial ownership over indigeneity. Traditionally, the haunted house has expressed class concerns, and in some respects this has not changed. However, the haunted house of the twenty-first century illuminates the metamorphosis carried out through the twentieth century by looking nostalgically (or otherwise) back on the previous century, much as the Gothic writings of Jackson, Jean Rhys, and du Maurier did in the twentieth century, to chart where we have come from and where we are going. Gina Wisker writes that ghosts "are a form of conscience and of memory laced into the surroundings … which reflect back at us the need to remember" (2022, p. 112).

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[9] *Mexican Gothic* in 2021 won the Aurora Novel Award, the BFA Horror Novel Award, and the Locus Horror Novel Award. It was nominated for the Stokers, the Nebula, and Shirley Jackson, and the World Fantasy Awards.

In the haunted house, memories may literally seep into a building, but they might equally seep out of it. And what seeps with the memories, nostalgia, and regret, are the ways in which the world is evolving.

The haunted house story moves beyond the destruction of the house itself, and all of the old class structures or colonialisms the houses represent, to a future in which more voices are heard and social mobility is possible if only through the dismantling of old-fashioned class structures and the collateral damage that implies. Janicker identifies that twentieth-century haunted house fictions “do more to engage with the complexities of ideology inevitably wrought by social change”, however “they are often unable to provide easy resolutions to the issues they raise” (2015, p. 7). While neither text provides an easy resolution – with Moreno-Garcia’s uncertainty over Noemí and Francis’s continuing survival, and Waters’s positioning the potential villain of the piece as Hundreds Hall’s caretaker – these twenty-first-century haunted house fictions nevertheless do more than simply engaging with social issues, instead using social issues to utterly up-end their establishments and class disruption to lay to rest their ghosts.

Chapter 2: Places No One Should Go: *All the White Spaces* by Ally Wilkes and *The Luminous Dead* by Caitlin Starling

Introduction

While the haunted house might be considered the traditional home of locational haunting, the twentieth century saw hauntings move away from buildings to more general "bad places", including "fiction about haunted space more generally" (Jenicker, 2015, p. 8). In the age of Google Earth and global satellite imagery, there are very few, if any, undiscovered landscapes on Earth. The map has been filled in on terra firma, and most attention in the twenty-first century is being projected outwards into the stars or under the oceans for humanity's next great discovery. However, there are still spaces on Earth that, while imaged from above, are relatively unknown to human existence. One such place is the Antarctic. While the pole was 'discovered' in 1911 by Roald Amundsen's polar expedition, much of the continent is still unknown – still a 'white space', if not on the satellite-imaged map, then on human experience. Similarly, there are landscapes below the Earth's surface that still surprise as cave systems are uncovered, such as the Bear-Clawed Cavern in Spain, a "huge cavern, sealed off for a millennia" that has only in the last year been discovered, explored and mapped (Jones, 2023). Where this thesis has explored the haunting of homes, this chapter throws open the doors and considers not just haunted landscapes, but landscapes that are open and unknowable, with hauntings that take on the form of both the otherworldly and the familiar.

Caves as sites of the Gothic have been well documented by other critics. Antonio Sanna, for example, describes how "The exploration of a cave often generates in the visitor many of those feelings typically experienced by the characters of Gothic narratives" (2013, p. 17), and Dimitrij Mlekuz contends that, "The affective atmosphere of caves can be described as 'haunting'" (2019, p. 50). Similarly, writing about the Antarctic as a site for science fiction imaginaries, Elizabeth Leane writes that:

> [T]he ice-covered landscape of the Antarctic was perceived by many as hostile, unearthly, and surreal. Unlike the Arctic, however, the Antarctic was doubly qualified as an sf [science-fiction] setting in that it was also remote, antipodean, and uninhabited; almost anything could be hidden in its unexplored regions. (2005, p. 226)

The concept of these places as empty but haunted is perhaps an odd one. One thinks of places where there are people as sites for haunting, as a haunting primarily requires a person to witness the haunting, and the haunting presence would normally originate from someone, presumably originally human. Why, then, would these empty, undiscovered places contain ghosts for those who first explore them? A character often takes their hauntings with them, and in both *The Luminous Dead* by Caitlin Starling and *All the White Spaces* by Ally Wilkes, the characters are unquestionably haunted. But the places, too, have their own spirit: an atmosphere that both beckons and devours any human who dares to attempt to lay claim over it. As Nicular Liviu Gheran and Ken Monteith put it, “concepts of space and location are socially constructed ideologies and themselves are essential components of cultural production” (2013, vii). The hauntings, then, are the product of human ‘discovery’ and attempted ownership, an example of Earth’s empty spaces fighting back against a human desire to map and to name. The landscapes themselves have a link to queerness, being secretive and undiscovered. The cave, in particular, is a sapphic space, being enclosed and vagina-like. The discovery and naming of otherwise unexplored spaces links to the increase of labels and microlabels within the queer community, attempting to name and categorise what may have been overlooked before.

This chapter will examine unknown and unknowable landscapes in these primary texts to demonstrate a Gothic rejection of discovery and ownership over ‘wild’ lands, using hauntings that draw on the explorer characters’ queerness to both beckon in and devour. It will then demonstrate that this method of haunting reflects the heteronormative response to queerness, as one that desires to absorb the queer Other and simultaneously destroy it, while querying what is more ‘natural’: queerness or heteronormativity? Finally, this chapter argues that the liminality of the unmapped and unmappable spaces questions the borders of queer identities and their spectral resistance to strict definition.

Places that Should Never Be Occupied

Antarctica is one of the last land masses on Earth to be explored. The continent was only circumnavigated in the eighteenth century, confirming that it was a single land mass, but the cliffs of ice that surround Antarctica meant that human investigation of the land itself did not commence until much later in 1821. Antarctica remained, as Leane asserts, "cling[ing] to the outside of the Earth, remote and, until the early nineteenth century, unseen" (2005, p. 235). In the time between the circumnavigation and the first on-foot explorations, much speculation was made as to what Antarctica might contain, some ideas seeming fantastical now. Quoting Victoria Nelson, Leane notes how "it was at 'the northernmost and southernmost points of the zodiac, or the apex and nadir of the heavens,' that respective openings existed for the departure of souls after death and their return at rebirth" (2005, p. 230), and Johan Wijkmark agrees that, "there was an unknown part of the world of a magnitude that could easily accommodate a continent the size of Europe or Australia … thus leaving plenty of room for the imagination" (2009, p. 87). This makes it the ideal site for reimagining and revising historically horrific events – as has been done already in classic Gothic literature by Edgar Allan Poe ("The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket", 1838) and H.P. Lovecraft ("The Mountains of Madness", 1936). Furthermore, its imaginaries make it ideal as a location of haunting, as "Antarctica becomes a state of mind, a space of inner as much as outer exploration … It acts as a simplifying, cleansing, renewing landscape where inner demons can be faced head-on and past traumas healed" (Leane, 2012, p. 20). The reference to inner demons and past traumas makes the Antarctic an ideal site for hauntings related to queerness in the twenty-first century.

Wilkes's title, *All the White Spaces*, refers initially to the blank spaces on the map where Antarctica has not yet been surveyed and discovered – "that map of Antarctica, … the white space in its centre" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 36). Mapping as a practice is important to exploration, but also to Wilkes's storytelling, as her acknowledgements state that "Expedition Point – and the precise geography and weather conditions surrounding it – can't be found on any map of Antarctica" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 355), further destabilising the precise location of her characters within the 'white spaces' and adding a dimension of the fictional on top of the

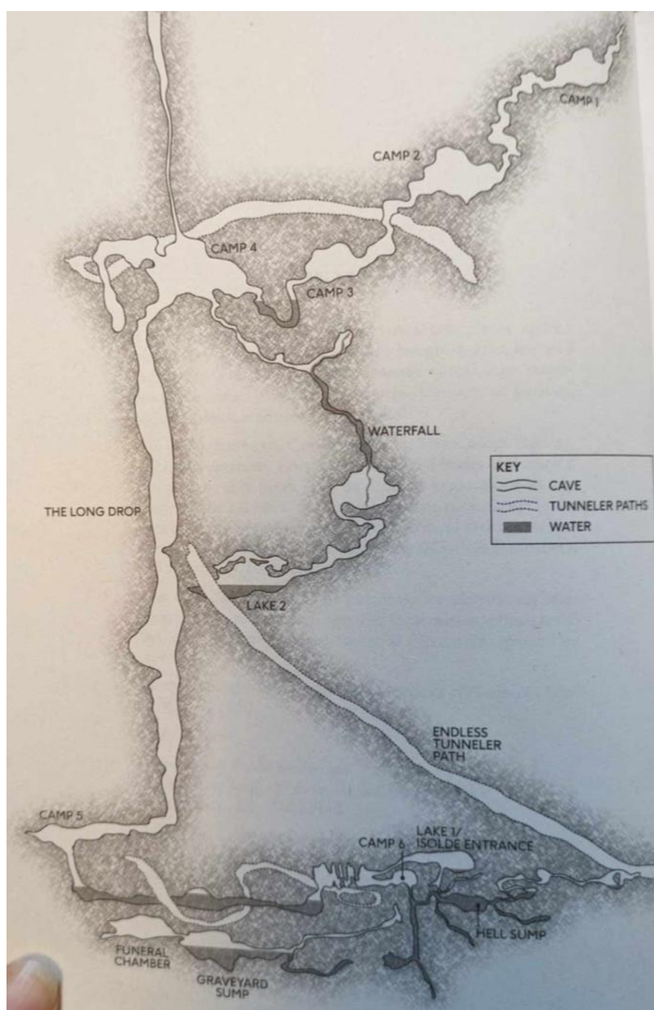
physical and supernatural. However, there are also references to the Antarctic as a literal white space, covered in snow year-round, blanketed by a blankness that masks an ever-changing geography. This similarity is voiced by Randall: "the middle of a blizzard: snow screaming around you, so thick it's darkness itself … The map's a big blank thing, and there are crevasses lurking … Nicholls here—he knows the white spaces" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 60). From its title, then, *All the White Spaces* draws a strong link between the blankness of the map and the blankness of the landscape, to the point that the reader, at times, may not know whether the 'white spaces' or 'blank spaces' frequently mentioned throughout the book are referencing one or the other. This is also reflected in theoretical writing about Antarctica. Gheran and Monteith write that, "space itself has cause and consequence" (2019, p. vii), which again suggests a dual meaning: a space that is filled, and a space that is absent. Similarly, Leane writes of how "marks on a page become like footprints or ski-trails in the snow: signs only of humanity's interference, of its pathetic attempts to master the continent's vastness" (2012, p. 1). The page and the landscape are inextricably linked, and they are constantly at odds – the page desires to be populated rather than left blank, to be filled with a map, while the landscape's blankness refuses this possibility with its changeable nature and unmappability.

However, the first blank space the reader is introduced to appears when Jonathan reads the letter informing his family of his brothers' death at the end of World War I: "I dropped the piece of paper—so few words, so many blank spaces—onto [my mother's] desk" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 3). This introduces the concept of blank and white spaces not just as referencing the landscape, but as referencing haunting. Jonathan is later haunted in the Antarctic by an entity that pretends to be the ghosts of his dead brothers. The blank spaces of the letter provide a space and spectrality that might be filled by these ghosts. Jonathan's brothers are also central to the formation of Jonathan's queer identity. Jonathan is a young trans man who has dreamed for years of exploring the Antarctic with his brothers. The linking of Antarctic exploration with transness has documented history within real-world exploration. For example, Ernest Shackleton was approached by "three sporty girls" who "apparently enjoyed cross-dressing", asking to join his expedition, and Wilkes may have been inspired in writing *All the White Spaces* by the story of Marjory Collier who asked to join Mawson's expedition as his "cabin boy" (Leane, 2012, p.

99). Wilkes herself cites “Dr James Barry (a military surgeon with a fascinating 1800s career) and the stories of those assigned female at birth who lived as men in order to have military careers” (A. Wilkes, personal communication, January 5, 2024) as her inspiration for Jonathan.

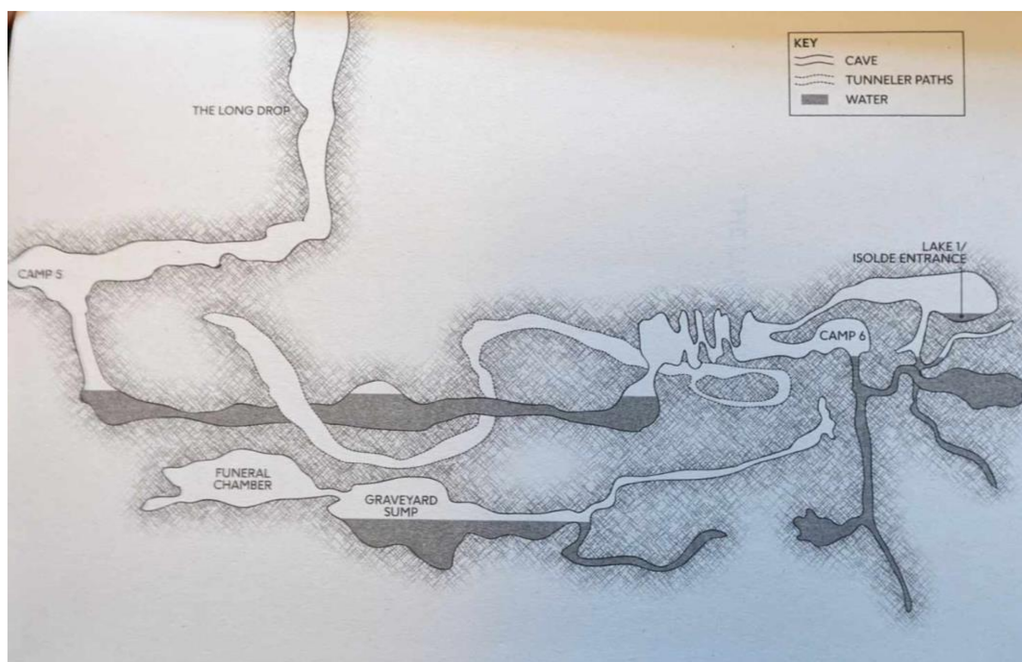
Jonathan’s transness and the inadequacy he sometimes feels about his own masculinity is often represented in opposition to his late brothers’ secure masculinity, and even their deaths in battle as a masculine ideal. This is presented when Jonathan touches his brothers’ uniforms, which they wore when they died, and have been sent home to the family: “Little nicks and holes, ragged sleeves, and one horrible area of tearing on each tunic, as though savaged by a wild animal. I’d dared to put my fingers into the holes, reaching through to *absence*” (Wilkes, 2022, p. 42, emphasis original). Paulina Palmer writes of queer characters putting on uniforms “in order to gain access” and “transform” into their doubles (2012, p. 76-77), and in touching/penetrating these uniforms, Jonathan is able to touch his masculine doubles. The uniforms, representing everything Jonathan thinks of as masculine, have been given blank spaces in their ‘nicks and holes’, which he can put his fingers through – but what he finds through the holes is ultimately ‘absence’. Such an absence is emphasised again when Jonathan experiences Antarctica: “I saw no horizon and no sky; no ground and no stars. The wind had brought the snow down from the secret interior. It was white all over. A great white darkness, so complete in its *absence*” (Wilkes, 2022, p. 127, emphasis original). Note how “absence” is repeated and emphasised on both occasions, demonstrating that what Jonathan is trying to touch cannot be reached by trying to be someone else. Jonathan’s masculinity is not located in the persons of his brothers, or in the action of exploration, but by identifying a masculinity within himself. In these passages, Wilkes begins to build up and broaden her definition of what the white spaces are, and how they relate to the characters’ perceived absence of masculinity or masculine ideals.

Figure 2: Cave Map from *The Luminous Dead*



Note: Full-cave map taken from the front matter of The Luminous Dead*, showing the layout of the cave at the end of the novel. (Starling, 2019, Front Matter).*

Figure 3: Cave Map from *The Luminous Dead*



Note: Cave map taken from the front matter of The Luminous Dead, *focused on sections between Camps 5 and 6, particularly showing the sumps. Layout as it appears at the end of the novel. (Starling, 2019, Front Matter).*

Mapping is similarly important to Caitlin Starling in *The Luminous Dead*. The book opens with two maps of the cave system (fig. 2 & 3), as the characters understand it at the end of the book (the cave undergoes a number of structural changes throughout the story). However, cave maps are problematic, relying, as they do on a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional space. As such, the map provided is confusing to the eye. For example, the reader can see from the key that the looping, apparently isolated passage beside and around the cave system is a "Tunneler Path" (Starling, 2019, front matter), but there is no indication of how this path interacts with the rest of the cave system – whether it runs parallel or intersects. The reader, furthermore, does not know at this point what a Tunneler is, creating further ambiguity. However, this is not a difficulty shared by the characters of *The Luminous Dead*. The book is set in a distant future, and the cave system in question is not even on Earth, but a colonised planet. Caver Gyre has a HUD in her suit that maps the cave around her in real time using sonar, and can provide various interfaces to show currents, temperature, and various other variables that are superior to her

natural eyesight.[10] Furthermore, the cave has been largely mapped by previous cavers' descents, although these maps sometimes prove unreliable as the cave is a space that changes. Either way, Gyre has a far more complete idea of the space within the cave than the reader can have from a two-dimensional map, opening a gulf between the character and reader's shared experiences.

The cave map provided in the novel's front matter lends itself to Gothic interpretation. Labels such as "Graveyard Sump" and "Funeral Chamber" stand out from otherwise highly functional markers such as Camps 1-6 or "Waterfall" (Starling, 2019, front matter). This chapter will more closely examine the similarities between the cave system and crypt later, but the stark labelling from the very beginning of the cave system as a place of death establishes *The Luminous Dead* – which was marketed as a science fiction and survival horror book – as one that is nevertheless firmly rooted in the Gothic. Wilkes's novel similarly focuses on grave sites: "Francis [Jonathan's brother] was here, somehow; down here in the white spaces. They'd buried him in France. But he was here" (2022, p. 189). There is a link here that draws together the place of the dead with the location of haunting. The very concept of mapping suggests an attempt to know and understand a space; an attempt the landscapes of *All the White Spaces* and *The Luminous Dead* refuse – as Jonathan narrates, "I had the sudden impression that this place was laughing at us—toying with us. Resisting our attempts to know it" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 242).

While the white spaces at first suggest to Jonathan a site of adventure and of masculine possibility, the survival horror experience quickly changes his perspective and that of the whole expedition party. Situating the ghosts – or the apparitions of Jonathan's brothers, be they ghosts or not – remains a priority for Jonathan: "My brothers weren't in Antarctica. They weren't to be found in the white spaces. This wasn't my brother—or even his ghost" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 275). The white space here begins as a place of possibility, as Jonathan hoped to fill the space/blankness/absence with his brothers and the masculinity they represent, the possibility of their approval

[10] It is worth mentioning that cave survival horror is frequently associated with a departure from technology, featuring texts in which technology is either useless or actively hostile (Sanna, 2013; Gomel, 2023). Gomel states that "contemporary femininity, as reflected in subterranean horror, is uneasily situated between technology and nature" (2023, p. 43). However, Starling's female characters merge seamlessly with their technology, are bonded by technology, and survive only because of their technology.

of Jonathan's new male identity. However, Jonathan realises the instability of the 'ghosts' the party encounter, which undermines his ability to locate his brothers within the white spaces, or anywhere else. This is supported when Tarlington, another expedition member, says, "I don't think this place is real. It's like the shadow of a place, on a cave wall. We've dropped down a . . . hole in the cloth of the world. Been sucked into one of the white spaces on the map" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 307). The imagery that has occurred throughout relating to white spaces is here countered with the idea of 'shadow'. The place where the expedition find themselves is a false whiteness, and the blankness and absence are actually dark, the 'holes in the cloth of the world' like the holes in Francis and Rufus's uniforms.

All the White Spaces' proximity in setting to the end of the First World War is another spectre that haunts the novel in the expedition's paranoia over meeting former enemy nations in this supposedly neutral space. Prior to the book's beginning, a German expedition organised by Karlmann has made an attempt on the Antarctic, and Randall's expedition shelter in the Germans' huts after their ship's fire. However, the German expedition left Argentina before the end of the War, and Randall's expedition lives in fear of the Germans reappearing, assuming the British to still be their enemies. Despite Randall's assertion that, "we'll shake their hands and tell them the War is over, and share and share alike until we can get out of here. We're all men, down South" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 135) and his demand that the German flag they find in the huts "be washed, and carefully pressed, so the Germans might see—on their return—we meant no offense" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 145), the spectre of the Germans hangs over the expedition – both the possibility of their return, and the question of where and how they have disappeared. There is a constant paranoia about "hidden German encampments, trenches in the snow, caves and dugouts hiding our enemy in the landscape" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 196) and some of the expedition assume that it is the Germans, and not ghosts or otherworldly forces, that haunt Expedition Point. The anxiety over contested ownership of both Expedition Point and the wider continent of Antarctica demonstrates Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's assertion that:

> Places are never just 'there,' passive substrates for human cognitive colonization; they actively assert themselves, in a sense seeking out their perceivers. *Something of the space causes the perceiver to pause, and the qualities of that space then help shape interpretations*. (2023, p. 139, italics original)

Jonathan steadily comes to understand that the idea of nationality is simply its own kind of ownership of the land, which the Antarctic thoroughly rejects. He "thought of that [German] flag ripped down. As if the Germans had realised—too late—that they had entered enemy territory. That they were trespassing" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 307) and he "burned the German flag, shoved it into the dying stove, as if [he] could convince [the haunting] that [they] made no claim" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 318). Mlekuz writes of caves that "human interaction … can be seen as attempts at domesticating … alien power" (2019, p. 54), and the same is here proved true of the Antarctic – and perhaps all landscapes that refuse to be known.

While Randall's expedition is never explicitly labelled as cursed, it would be easy to come to this conclusion given all that happens. Starling, however, is much more forthcoming in naming her fictional cave system and the various expeditions to explore it as cursed. At various points Gyre and Em make this explicit: "Sometimes I feel like the job is cursed" (Starling, 2019, p. 76) and "This whole cave was cursed" (Starling, 2019, p. 143). At other times, the cave is anthropomorphised with murderous intent: "This cave wants me dead" (Starling, 2019, p. 374) and "This cave killed people" (Starling, 2019, p. 46). Although the vast majority of explorers killed in the cave died due to human or technological error – only one directly killed by the enormous Tunnelers which live below-ground – the cave is still blamed for their demise in a way that gives the landscape an agency it should not have. Before once again asserting the cave is cursed, Gyre notes, "This expedition shouldn't be killing this many people" (Starling, 2019, p. 162). The cave contains life – besides the Tunneler, there are small fish, insects, and numerous plantlife and fungi – but is not alive itself. A cave is a hole, an absence, a space within matter, and therefore cannot be animate. Yet the characters act as though it is, and the fluid movement of the Tunnelers through stone materially changes the shape and construction of the cave, as well as giving it an organic, if not sentient, quality. In this respect the cave is like the Antarctic: a landscape that not only rejects human influence but actively ends it, in however passive a way. This links with the assertions about the Antarctic: "We shouldn't be here—shouldn't be so far south" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 102) and "The veterans had always talked as if the South were alive. And if it could be alluring or cruel by turns, why shouldn't this particular place—or whatever guarded it—be vengeful?" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 314).

The cave system of *The Luminous Dead* and the Antarctic landscape surrounding Expedition Point in *All the White Spaces* create ghosts for their explorers that exist to entice them further into the darkness. Jonathan is persistently haunted by his dead brothers, while expedition leader Randall sees his dead son Charlie, and Tarlington sees his biological father Randall (after his death). Even when the explorers know that the ghosts are not the real essences of their dead loved ones, they still prove difficult to resist. Conversely, Gyre is haunted by others who have died in the cave. She rarely names them as ghosts, often thinking they are somehow the real cavers who have somehow survived in this inhospitable landscape, but she does occasionally refer to them as ghosts or technical anomalies – ghosts in the machine of her suit. Gyre also acknowledges that the cave is haunted by her handler Em's past, as both Em's parents died in the cave, and Em is arguably responsible for the deaths of all of the cavers who subsequently attempted to locate her parents' bodies. Although Gyre is initially frightened by and paranoid about the ghosts, by the end of the novel they beckon her back into the cave where she feels both she and Em are meant to be, and meant to die.

However, before Gyre encounters any ghosts or possible ghosts, the cave itself is once again given a life and agency of its own and portrayed as beckoning Gyre in: "Camp Five wasn't far off. Gyre could feel its presence like a rope tied around her ankle, tugging her farther into the cave. And like a noose tied around her neck" (Starling, 2019, p. 113). Here Starling uses this same duality of beckoning and destroying – tugging Gyre further into the cave, but with a noose around her neck. Similarly, the cave surrounds Gyre with ghosts "As if the cave wanted her to join them" (Starling, 2019, p. 311). Although not strictly an anthropomorphisation, the cave is further presented as a home for the dead, and for Gyre's dead body specifically. Her thoughts just before Em rescues her are, "*Walk into the cave and don't turn back. Stay with us. Stay with all of us. This is where you belong*" (Starling, 2019, p. 395, italics original). This feeling of belonging with and in the cave is reiterated:

> [S]he could join Eli. She could be with Isolde. Then when Em came, she would follow them all. Em would follow her down, desperate to find her, and then they'd be together, all of them, in the heart of the cave. They'd be together in the blackness. (Starling, 2019, p. 396).

Both Starling and Wilkes's novels are about characters attempting to find their place, and specifically a place of familial belonging. Both authors use family members as figures of haunting, and the cave system of *The Luminous Dead* is directly referenced as a place that welcomes, even if its embrace means death.

Antarctica similarly beckons to Jonathan as a site of masculine adventure, providing an opportunity to feel united with his dead brothers, who had dreamed of travelling to Antarctica as part of Australis Randall's expedition. Jonathan narrates: "I heard it then: the call of the South" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 8) and "The aurora will greet us soon" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 100). This makes the South sound like a welcoming place, but those familiar with expedition know the South is "beguiling and hostile by turns" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 52). Before long, Jonathan's reaction to this beckoning changes affectively, making his "skin crawl" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 103) and feeling "trapped by something invisible and deadly" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 110). Soon the expedition recognise that what beckons them into the dark (and white) is also deadly: "Francis by the windbreak … clearly expecting me to follow" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 184) and "I've seen it—twice. It wants me to follow" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 246). Unlike Starling's cave ghosts which forcibly drag Gyre further within (Starling, 2019, p. 394), the Antarctic ghosts use emotional manipulation to draw out its victims, presenting them with a person they long to be real, who beckons them out into the night. This, however, also presents a limitation of its power as Jonathan identifies:

> [I]t still needed me to go with it. No one had been taken—dragged off kicking and screaming into the night. That was why it begged, and cajoled, and lied: it required my willingness, couldn't steal me away without it. (Wilkes, 2022, p. 301).

This is confirmed by the presence itself, in the guise of Jonathan's brother Rufus, when it says, "You came here … You came here looking for us. And now you're ours" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 336). Both the cave and the South eventually claim ownership over the people who would seek to claim ownership over the landscape.

Echoing the apparently binary dichotomies of beckoning and devouring, the make-up of the landscapes of these two novels ironically also raise in their characters the normally opposite feelings of claustrophobia and agoraphobia. They have wide open spaces, as seen in the great plateaus of the Antarctic and the cavernous qualities of The Long Drop or the apparently endless Tunneler Path in the cave system. But

they also have highly enclosed spaces, such as the tents and Expedition Point huts of *All the White Spaces*, and the tight crawls and sumps of *The Luminous Dead*. This does, however, conform to Moritz Ingwersen's assertion that "The human fear of space oscillates between two extremes: the void and the trap – agoraphobia and claustrophobia" (2013, p. 41). Jonathan is initially intimidated by the openness of the Antarctic landscape: "the ice above us loomed four or five storeys high, a dwelling built to no human proportions" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 115), and many of the quotes already given from *All the White Spaces* express the enormity and barrenness of Antarctica, generating an agoraphobic affect.

By contrast, Leane writes of how, in Antarctic expedition writings and diaries, "The base is treated as a generic, isolated, self-contained environment" (2005, p. 227) – and Yi-Fu Tuan agrees that these are domestic spheres: "So many things in [homeplace] give passing aesthetic pleasure – a shining copper pot, a handsome rug, cool shadows – that one is hardly aware of them individually … together they engender a diffuse sense of well-being" (2011, p. 140). Expedition Point's huts, by contrast, create conflicting and ultimately unsettling feelings in Jonathan and the rest of the party, almost from their very discovery. Jonathan expects to "feel glad" when given shelter in the huts, but "Instead, I had the strange sense that we were shutting ourselves in" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 153). In his much-quoted work on the creation of safety in exploration, Tuan posits that human environments, as they border with unexplored spaces, are comprised of three zones: home place, which "is everywhere a protected – at least partly enclosed – space" (2011, p. 139); home space, which includes explored safe lands that can still be considered hospitable; and alien space, "which is normally perceived as threatening … few individuals in any society are drawn to it" (2011, p. 140). However, Wilkes's Antarctica collapses these three zones one atop the other. The closed-in space of Expedition Point is not hospitable. Although it contains objects of domesticity, and although it provides some shelter from the aurora and its ghosts, it is more of a holding area for the party to wait for their deaths than a place that provides any real shelter from the hostile environment outside. From the moment Randall's expedition arrive to find trampled German flags, it is clear that Expedition Point is not home place. Its appearances of safety are false, and its walls do not protect those inside

from being beckoned outside. Its enclosure does not make it "protected" – on the contrary, it creates a space that is claustrophobic.

Rather than oscillating, the two fears, the two kinds of space, seem to be experienced simultaneously in these novels, engendering both phobias on their characters at once, demonstrating that "[t]he relationship between landscape and cave is not a binary opposition between the 'outside' of the landscape and the 'inside' of the cave" (Mlekuz, 2019, p. 48). One would argue, with its sudden collapsing into fissures and snow burying landmarks, that the same can be said of the Antarctic. Wilkes also refers to the permeability of the inside when she writes, "I'd let it in—whatever it was" (2022, p. 196) and "It's turned us on each other. It's come—inside" (2022, p. 316). This is a reflection both of the assumed ownership of the 'inside' as a safe place, which Wilkes's characters can call their own (although, as previously established and occupied by the German expedition, even this is not entirely true), and a penetration of the characters' own interiors by the manipulative tactics of the Antarctic's ghosts.

The hostile physical landscapes of *The Luminous Dead* and *All the White Spaces* are in some ways supernatural, but they are nevertheless physical and concrete in the analysis thus far. However, as with many locations of haunting, there is a liminal aspect to these spaces that has already started to be expanded upon with the consideration of inside and outside; claustrophobia and agoraphobia. This chapter will now consider these landscapes as liminal spaces and places of border-crossing, for both the dead and the living.

Liminal Spaces and Life after Death

Hauntings have long been associated with liminality, as "[t]he figure of the ghost … can operate as an image for liminality and border-crossing, as illustrated by its ability to traverse the boundaries between inside and outside, present and past and, even more mysteriously, life and death" (Palmer, 2012, p. 66). However, the landscapes of *All the White Spaces* and *The Luminous Dead* also act as liminal spaces. In Starling's cave system, as has already been noted, there is the peculiar sense of being both

inside and outside. The cave's symbolism as home of the pre-historic past, and its exploration in a distant, space-travelling future, allows it to occupy the liminal space between past and present. Meanwhile, the unexplored Antarctic acts as a liminal space between the discovered and the undiscovered, as Expedition Point holds the huts of explorers who have come before, but offers no evidence of where they have gone or what happened to them. Both of these spaces also act as a boundary between life and death, which make them ideal sites for haunting. The cave system holds the bodies of cavers who have come before, but has strangely preserved many of them, leaving the bodies suspended between their dead state and their living appearance. And Expedition Point contains an entity that is able to take and make vanish explorers, apparently killing them but without leaving bodies as evidence of death. However, the liminality of these places can be solidified or traversed with the imposition of human perspective. Mlekuz writes that the presence and aliveness of a cave "come into being as human (and non-human) bodies move around the landscape and encounter them" (2019, p. 47). This section will further engage with Starling and Wilkes's settings as liminal to demonstrate that moveable and permeable borders must be both traversed and made solid in order to survive in survival horror.

Caves have a tradition as a "typical characteristic of many Gothic narratives … which vest dark passages and secret tunnels with the most intimate fears and terrors of their characters" (Sanna, 2013, p. 22). Both the cave and crypt are subterranean spaces with an opening at ground level that descends into the Earth. The cave as crypt has been utilised by Gothic texts as early as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), in which Theodore hides Isabella's body in a cave. By comparison, the cave system of *The Luminous Dead* is a mass grave, made literal by the cavern names "Graveyard Sump" and "Funeral Chamber" (Starling, 2019, front matter). Gyre feels an affinity with the bodies of the cave, knowing that her death on the expedition is a likelihood and it might be her fate to join the dead in the cave system. She refers to the cave as a "tomb" (Starling, 2019, p. 98) and shows a concern for the dead by asking Em, "What about the bodies?" (Starling, 2019, p. 124) to emphasise that the remains need to be treated with some kind of ceremony rather than be left and forgotten. Em's final words on the cave also imagine the crypt, as she says, "I am sealing this cave. It's time to put the past away" (Starling, 2019, p. 402). This transforms the cave fully into crypt, as a repository for the dead that can

be sealed, as opposed to an ‘open’ cave system accessible to all. Em here also acknowledges the liminality of the cave system as a threshold between past and present, as sealing the cave is symbolic of moving on from her traumas of the past to begin life anew.[11]

Graves and funeral rites are central to *The Luminous Dead*. Mlekuz describes ritual as “a technology for creating and maintaining symbolic order and for keeping it separated from meaningless chaos” (2019, p. 53) – it creates a means of separating out a liminal space to create a firm boundary between order and chaos. When Gyre sees ghosts, she is often haunted by the dead whose bodies are not found and laid to rest. “[W]itness[ing] the dead” (Starling, 2019, p. 163) acts not just as catharsis for Gyre and Em, but seems to release the spirits of the dead from their place trapped within the cave system. Funereal rites in *The Luminous Dead* take two forms. Firstly, the bodies are moved in such a way that the decomposition process can take place. This almost works with Jennie Mercer, one of Em’s cavers arrested from decomposition by her suit which locks her in a preserved state of composition. Gyre begins to feel less haunted by Jennie Mercer after she opens the dead caver’s helmet, allowing her body to begin decomposing. As Em says, the forestalling of the decomposition process means the cavers are “stuck down here forever” (Starling, 2019, p. 327).[12] The bodies are “interrupted … and denied what would be seen as the occurrence of otherwise ‘natural’ processes” (Piatti-Farnell, 2023, p. 307). As Gyre says to Em, “When I opened Jennie’s suit . . . she had barely begun to rot. It didn’t seem right” (Starling, 2019, p. 327). However, when Gyre returns to Jennie’s body in the hopes of cannibalising her suit for batteries, the cave has taken over her body, creating a “flowering corpse” (Starling, 2019, p. 347). Gyre’s full dismantling of the suit desecrates Jennie’s body rather than laying it to rest as she had originally intended, and the suit’s adhesion to Jennie’s body makes Gyre think about the frailty of her own:

> Gyre sat there, breathing hard and staring at the tubes and electrodes running from the suit to Jennie’s torn flesh. This was her, beneath the suit. Wired in, plugged in, part of the technology … she could picture her own skin sloughing off, the tubing tugging, rupturing, her body a bag filled with fluid

[11] ‘Moving on’ as a post-traumatic and haunting concept is explored in more detail in Chapter 4.
[12] As a note of crossover, this is also a phenomenon experienced in the Antarctic and other frozen places, as “explorers’ dead bodies are kept in pristine condition by the extreme cold” (Leane, 2012, p. 20).

> and blood and bile, punctured and leaking out onto the cavern floor. (Starling, 2019, p. 267)

Jennie, her body claimed by both the tech of her suit and the fungal growths of the cave, cannot rest in peace. She becomes instead the most concrete of the restless dead, physically dragging Gyre back into the cave when she attempts to escape. This could be an example of what Sanna describes as "the conception of caves as sacred places that must be respected" (2013, p. 17). The cave both requires its dead, feeding itself with bodies, but also acts as crypt, as a resting place for those dead treated with proper rituals.

The second attempt at laying to rest occurs when Gyre finds the majority of the original expedition in Graveyard Sump, where the bodies have been perfectly preserved by the chemical make-up of the liquid in the sump. Gyre pulls the bodies out into the more normal air of Graveyard Cavern and lays the bodies side-by-side. She lights a fire from an old camp stove found with the bodies in a manner reminiscent of burning incense at religious ceremonies, but dares not burn the bodies themselves, as would be normal in many traditional religious funeral rites. Gyre scatters the ashes of the burned material on the bodies, as the mourners of cremated dead often scatter the ashes of the remains. Although this funeral rite does not stop Gyre from being haunted by Hanmei, who appears to Gyre at the end of the novel, she is a passive figure, unlike Jennie Mercer, who was inadequately laid to rest, and Isolde, whose body was never found. Despite the best attempts of the ghosts to persuade Gyre to stay and die in the cave, the respected dead act as a talisman as Gyre tries to escape, and Em recites the names of the dead when Gyre asks for her to say "anything" to keep her going (Starling, 2019, p. 373).

Funereal rites are utilised in a far more structured way in *All the White Spaces*, but again the discovery and location of dead bodies is a key issue. Funeral rites are raised from the first page of *All the White Spaces*, as Jonathan notes the photographs of his dead brothers have become "A sort of shrine" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 1). His brothers' bodies were not returned from France, and Jonathan often thinks of them in anonymous graves in mass graveyards. The priority, then, for Wilkes in remembering the dead is the existence and specific location of a body. This is demonstrated when Randall holds services for the early dead in *All the White Spaces*, reading appropriate poetry over graves with the other members of the expedition

gathered around. However, this need to have a body to create remembrance becomes like the mapping and naming of the empty, hostile spaces of the Antarctic: a ‘civilised’ need that harsh natural forces refuse. This is voiced when Jonathan narrates, “There was no point holding the [funeral] service outside: there was no grave” (Wilkes, 2022, p. 183). The desire for bodies, for a location of the dead, is quickly dropped in favour of survival, as Jonathan realises “The dead should be remembered; honoured. Then left” (Wilkes, 2022, p. 296). Returning to Mlekuz, the ritual of funerals act here as a human imposition of order onto chaos, but where chaotic forces are overwhelming, the ritual of funerals becomes unnecessary. “Remembering” and “honouring” are sufficient to lay the dead to rest, removing the need to situate a body which has been sacrificed to the “chaos” of the white spaces.

Haunted as the characters of *All the White Spaces* are by the recently ended spectre of the First World War, the Antarctic is often treated with language reminiscent of war. The battlefield is another liminal space. Aptly labelled ‘no man’s land’, the battleground is a mid-place between contested territories, and a location rich with death, near-death, and possible-death. The lexis of war runs throughout Jonathan’s exploration of the Antarctic, such as when Jonathan describes surverying the Antarctic landscape as like “looking over a battlefield” (Wilkes, 2022, p. 90), or Randall declares, “Now the battle begins … A glorious one!” (Wilkes, 2022, p. 100). These establish the Antarctic not just as a liminal space, but one in militant opposition to human occupation. Expedition Point becomes the battleground, the literal no man’s land, and the occupying characters understand that they are not welcome. However, battle imagery is also used vividly in several descriptions as the hauntings of Expedition Point increase. Jonathan narrates that “He dreamed of mud: was buried in it; woke choking on it; and they were there. Blown to pieces. His memories were stalking him, and he couldn’t lay them to rest” (Wilkes, 2022, p. 173). Here the imagery of battle is directly linked to the concept of “laying to rest”, as discussed previously. Similarly, during an Austral storm, Jonathan describes how “A piece of tarpaulin crackled past, making me duck, and struck the windbreak with the force of incoming mortars. Stones and pieces of shrapnel strafed the huts; I heard the crash of breaking glass as windows gave way” (Wilkes, 2022, p. 181). The descriptions of war are not just visual but haptic in nature. Time is given to the sensation of choking on mud, and the physical force of incoming mortars. In these

descriptions, war moves from a masculine fantasy to a real, physical experience, undercutting Jonathan's original fantasy of war as the epitome of masculine adventure. This is further developed when Jonathan later narrates, "The wind struck the canvas like incoming mortars. The battlefield. France. Harry. My brothers, and where this had started" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 331). The liminal spaces of the Antarctic, the battleground, and the frontline in France specifically, are drawn together with the memories of Jonathan's brothers who died in the War.

Finally, the liminality of the caves and Antarctic are represented in their uncanny geographies. Uncanny geography refers to places that change or move without apparent logic, creating spaces that should be knowable and mappable, but somehow deny definition. They are places that exist where they should not exist, and move and change when they should remain static. Gherand and Monteith say of uncanny geography in Arthur Conan Doyle's description of moors that "nature is constructed as a form of monstrous geography" (2019, p. ix), linking the natural world with a geography that cannot entirely be trusted. Simiarly, Mlekuz describes how "[t]he cave, where the familiar landscape is folded into itself, where the monstrous landscape innards become exposed and tangible, is a perfect stage for the uncanny" (2019, p. 50). This recalls the map at the beginning of *The Luminous Dead*, and the ways in which it might confuse as much as inform the reader, given that the map shows the cave as it appears at the end of the novel, rather than how it appears as Gyre (and the reader) first enter it. Besides this, Starling's labelling of the "Endless Tunneler Path" (2019, front matter) suggests the cave's uncanny geography in a tunnel that impossibly never ends, and disappears off the page, as well as the passages which confusingly loop around one another without apparently joining. However, the description of uncanny geography also applies to places that have not been mapped and resist the process of mapping, as has already been discussed in relation to the Antarctic in *All the White Spaces*.

Wilkes and Starling's spaces first express their uncanny geography in their fluidity and ability to change when a landscape should remain static. When the Tunneler moves through the cave system, it changes the shape of the rockface, moving the rock so it "flowed down like it was water" (Starling, 2019, p. 127). Mlekuz writes that "Stones (durable and hard) can be plastic and malleable and were shaped into fantastically formed passages" (2019, p. 52) when caves are created,

though this is normally a process that takes thousands of years. In *The Luminous Dead*, the rock facing of caves literally flows like water before Gyre's eyes, changing the geography of the cave within moments. This is reminiscent of Mlekuz's assertions about nature as "full of promiscuous and obscene vitality … chaotically creative and … destructive … it is an unnatural nature" (2019, p. 52). Here the 'uncanny' of uncanny geography is in the natural made unnatural when apparently solid rock performs in a way that should not be possible. Furthermore, in Starling's short story that acts as a prequel to *The Luminous Dead*, "Caver, Continue" (2023), Eli narrates how the cave system seems to change entirely in the time he spends within it, without a Tunneler directly changing the geography: "This isn't the path he remembers, isn't the cave he remembers" (Starling, 2023, p. 15). It is unclear whether it is Eli's memory or the cave itself that is at fault – Eli is starving and has ingested the spores of anxiety-inducing fungi – but with Gyre's narrations of the cave's physical mutability, this description can be taken literally.

This fluidity is further reflected in the currents of Hell Sump, where Gyre notes "there were currents that hadn't been there before" (Starling, 2019, p. 129) and "Had anyone been able to establish a line that held, or did it keep moving? Did it shift every time?" (Starling, 2019, p. 144). Although water is obviously more fluid than rock, the currents within a cave should remain reasonably static (assuming consistent weather conditions/rainfall on the surface), and the apparent inability of any caver to lay a reliable line add to the fluid nature of the system. The swirling, changing currents of Hell Sump act like the vortex Ingwersen describes as "function[ing] as powerful motifs of an ambiguous space, whose sensation at best induces nausea but most of the time signifies the irreversible passage to a new order of space" (2013, p. 47). The fluidity and unmappability of the cave are also reflected when Gyre tries to find her way in a part of the cave previously unmapped, as she loops back on herself, walking for hours only to return to her point of beginning. In this way, the cave system is like a labyrinth, "leading nowhere, only into [itself], eternally folded" (Mlekuz, 2019, p. 49). Labyrinths are designed to disorientate, holding secrets or treasures at their centre. In *The Luminous Dead*, the secret the

labyrinth is protecting is a way to the surface, and its treasure is the dead bodies no one has previously recovered.[13]

As *The Luminous Dead* progresses, Gyre's conception of the cave system changes from perceiving the cave as a fluid thing that should be static, to a true liminal space that refuses physicality and reality, lying somewhere in a liminal state. She narrates, "the currents could shift and the tunnel could lead anywhere—or nowhere" (Starling, 2019, p. 190) and "There was nothing there. There was never anything there. It was *always* there" (Starling, 2019, p. 241, emphasis original). These demonstrate Gyre's shifting perception of the cave as both a somewhere and a nowhere. This is compounded by the reader's experience of the cave narrative. The reader never follows Gyre as she enters or exits the cave. Rather, the novel opens as Gyre arrives at Camp One, already underground, and Gyre passes out as she is about to be rescued from the cave, the narrative jumping in the final chapter from the cave to an enclosed room on the surface. Aside from the final chapter in which Gyre is on the surface,[14] the entire novel is encapsulated within the cave system, the reader as entrenched and trapped within the strange subterranean space as Gyre is.

Heteronormativity Haunting the Queer

While these texts' liminalities are strongly expressed in their physical uncanny geography and the characters' interactions with them, evoking the battlefield and providing (or refusing to be) places where the dead are laid to rest, there are further liminalities in the ideologies of the texts. Both *The Luminous Dead* and *All the White Spaces* feature queer characters in hostile environments: Jonathan is a trans man, and Em and Gyre end the novel in a sapphic relationship. Palmer describes the queer

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[13] Vortexes are similarly to be found in pre-exploration concepts of the contents of Antarctica. Before boots hit the snow on the continent, there were theories that the pole contained a vortex through which the spirits of the dead could pass, acting as an underworld and portal both. As Leane writes, "As a literal underworld, it suggests the monstrous, the infernal, the Satanic. Polar mythology, with its whirlpools and abysses, dovetails readily into the gothic concern with fearful, dark spaces" (2012, p. 59). She identifies, "This tradition exploits the symbolic resonances of Antarctica's position on the underside of the world, casting the continent as a repository for both humanity's deepest fears and its hidden, forbidden desires" (2012, p. 55), highlighting Antarctica's implicit Gothicism.

[14] Even in this final chapter, Gyre is in an enclosed room with no windows and no natural light. The space feels cave-like, even though it is presumably situated on the surface.

experience as “The disconcerting sense … of living in two interlinked but disparate worlds, the heteronormative and … the lesbian or gay subculture, [which] lends itself particularly well to uncanny treatment” (2012, p. 13). Ruth Bienstock Analik agrees that “although the sexual Other is mysterious, threatening and different, lurking on the other side of the sexual divide, no national barriers or social markers separate the sexual Other from the Self” (2007, p. 2-3). Although both *The Luminous Dead* and *All the White Spaces* take place in heteronormative worlds,[15] their characters’ queerness is not spectral. On the contrary Jonathan, Gyre, and Em’s queerness is solid, and it is the heteronormativity of the world around them that is spectral. Bacon identifies that horror “defamiliarize[s] the world around us, by revealing the darkness and violence within it, becom[ing] a way to look at and investigate what we think of as ‘normal’” (Bacon, 2023b, p. 3) – ‘normal’ being the root of the ‘norm’ in ‘heteronormative’. But these texts present a new normal in their remote and/or enclosed spaces, queering the normal. Jonathan and Gyre’s existence within these places makes the space queer, applying Wisker’s statement that “We bring with us our ghosts and layer them on to a place, which reflects them back, embodies their control” (2022, p. 62). This section will demonstrate how Wilkes and Starling subvert expectations of ghostly queerness to create an uncanny world in which the queer is solid and homely, and heteronormativity is spectral and uncanny.

The figure of the spectral lesbian was first summoned by Terry Castle in her seminal work *The Apparitional Lesbian*, in which she writes, “To try to write the literary history of lesbianism is to confront, from the start, something ghostly: an impalpability, a misting over, an evaporation, or ‘whiting out’ of possibility” (1993, p. 28).[16] Castle here describes a history of queerness – specifically lesbian queerness – that has been silenced, repressed, lost, until it appears more spectral than physical, relying on the efforts of contemporary scholars to fill in the ‘whiting out’ and reinsert queer voices into history. To a certain extent, this is also Wilkes’s intent in writing *All the White Spaces* as a trans narrative, as she amplifies the voices of persons on the margins – apparent women who wanted to be “cabin boys” on expedition, as has

[15] Although there are no grand ‘coming outs’ along the course of establishing Em and Gyre’s relationship, and the story takes place in a distant future, there is still evidence to suggest that Em and Gyre live in a heteronormative world. For example, both come from families centred around a heterosexual couple.
[16] It is interesting here to note the crossover of “whiting out” of lesbian history, and the expansive “white spaces” motif of Wilkes’s novel.

been related previously. However, Starling's novel deals not with the past but with the future, and a future in which queerness does not seem to be unusual or requiring of explanation – there is no 'coming out' storyline in *The Luminous Dead*, even while heteronormative patriarchy seems still to be the ruling ideology. Nevertheless, Gyre, Em, and Jonathan are all solid rather than spectral characters, two of whom are the narrative voices of the story, leaving only Em as a potentially spectral lesbian, with no "solidity in the world" (Castle, 1993, p. 32) until the final chapter. Although this final chapter outside of the cave, in the 'real' world, feels somewhat jarring in comparison to the rest of the novel, it nevertheless provides an opportunity for Em to take on a solid personhood. No longer touching Gyre with ghostly caresses through her suit, or appearing as a disembodied face or voice, Em becomes solid, subverting Castle's notion of "The kiss that doesn't happen, the kiss that *can't* happen, because one of the women involved has become a ghost" (1993, p. 30).

As has already been discussed, both Starling and Wilkes's hauntings rely on a simultaneous beckoning and devouring from their hostile spirits. However, in both texts this beckoning takes the form of a heteronormative figure summoning the queer towards heteronormativity. This state of heteronormativity is one that beckons, in that it encourages queer individuals to be closeted or to pass as non-queer, but also devours in its expectation that the passing queer will self-eliminate their queerness or reject their queer identity in order to pass. It speaks of a heteronormativity that eliminates anything aberrant in favour of maintaining the straight status quo. However, the characters of both texts survive spectral horrors by othering heteronormativity and embracing their own queerness. Bienstock Anolik writes of queerness in the Gothic:

> Gothic anxieties regarding sex and sexuality are a manifestation of the fear of the unknown; the anxiety is not generated by some generalized fear of sex but is an anxious response to the difference of the sexual Other … who resists epistemological apprehension and who is unknowable and therefore as mysterious and frightening as the supernatural. (2007, p. 4).

However, the queerness of Wilkes and Starling's characters is well known to the reader, and rarely treated as unusual. It is the heterosexual that is made uncanny and dangerous through specific figures in each novel, who represent a sexual Other that is heteronormative rather than queer. This complies with what Botting describes as a "strategy of reversal … that identifies monstrosity differently and perceives, often

against the grain of texts, not an individuated monstrous other but discourses, practices and systems that make monsters through exclusion and suppression" (2008b, p. 15). While this normally applies to the queer – an easy Other in previous centuries – Wilkes and Starling's texts "exclude and suppress" the heteronormative to create their monsters.

Natasha Marchini identifies that "modern society, plac[es] the monster as a symbol of the oppression faced by those within the LGBTQ+ community" (2023, p. 200), and in these texts, the monsters are monoliths of heteronormative control. Heteronormativity is expressed in each novel respectively by figures of straightness: in *All the White Spaces* by Jonathan's brothers, Rufus and Francis, who presented a binary difference when Jonathan was their sister, leaving him out of gendered games and belittling him as feminine and inferior. In *The Luminous Dead* the figures of straightness are Isolde and Eli, whose role will be discussed shortly. Isolde is Em's mother, who abandoned Em to return to the cave in order to retrieve her husband's body: "She wanted to say goodbye to my father and the others, too, and now I'm doing what she couldn't finish. I'm going to do what she wasn't able to" (Starling, 2019, p. 92) – Gyre tellingly responds to this, "You're still sacrificing everything for a ghost" (Starling, 2019, p. 92). While Isolde is the literal ghost of heteronormativity, it is also worth mentioning Gyre's mother, who also abandoned her daughter at a young age. Gyre accepts the job exploring Em's cave in order to raise money to try to find her mother, and as such, the heteronormativity represented by Gyre's mother is also a key factor in Gyre's being drawn into the cave. As Gyre narrates near the beginning of *The Luminous Dead*, "With nobody else to talk to, she'd stared up at the photo of her mother hanging on the kitchen wall. Your fault, she'd thought, over and over again. Her mother had made her into this" (Starling, 2019, p. 13). As the story continues, and Gyre's survival becomes less certain, she berates herself in the voices of her heteronormative parents: "*You arrogant fuck up, what have you done?* It was her thought, but she heard it in her dad's voice. Her mother's" (Starling, 2019, p. 226). The cave's position as a site of heteronormative haunting is reminiscent of Mlekuz's assertion that "The idea of haunting explains why we often return to a place because of the place itself; the senses, feelings, desires and attachments that remain inside or upon us and/or others, and that also reside within the place" (2019, p. 50). The cave, for Em initially, but later also for Gyre, represents a place of

familiar and familial feeling, which also imposes a suffocating heteronormativity in its desire to reassemble the nuclear family and return the child to the parent(s).

The other threatening figure of heteronormativity in *The Luminous Dead* is Eli, the male, presumed heterosexual caver who last entered the cave before Gyre. He was believed to have died in the cave, but actually lost contact with Em following an accident and survived in the cave system by living off Gyre's supply caches. He is the protagonist of Starling's short story set in the same world as *The Luminous Dead*, "Caver, Continue", and comparing his experiences to Gyre's provides a very different perspective on the system – a heteronormative-patriarchal rather than queer experiencing of the environment. For example, while Gyre enjoys the cave's narrowness and twists, feeling safest in its confined spaces, Eli states, "The inside of the world isn't built for people. Isn't made for them. Doesn't *fit* them" (Starling, 2023, p. 11, emphasis original). When Eli refers to 'people' we may extrapolate that he means 'people like him' – male, heterosexual. Elana Gomel identifies the Victorian subterranean as a feminine space in which "the protagonist is always male, while the world he encounters is replete with feminine symbolism" (2023, p. 45), descriptions which apply to Eli's experience of the cave system. He describes how he has spent his life "sliding through dark landscapes that were not built for him, that he does not belong in" (Starling, 2023, p. 16). Similarly, whenever Gyre is confronted with a caving disaster, she often finds the oddly animate cave to be on her side, its uncanny geography taking her to where she needs to be, even if it is usually just in time before her potential death. By contrast, Eli describes how "The planet refuses to create a path" (Starling, 2023, p. 14), rejecting his attempts to return to the surface or signal for help, trapping him in the cave rather than delivering him to safety.

The heteronormativity of Wilkes's ghosts are far more blatant. Jonathan can hardly remember a familial experience with his brothers that does not revolve around exclusion on the basis of gender, or the feminine expectations laid on him by the rest of his family. Jonathan's purpose in travelling to the Antarctic is to fulfil an ambition his brothers never managed to achieve and, in doing so, to take his place as one of the 'Morgan brothers'. The very expedition is a symbol of hetero-masculine adventure: "this was my great adventure: the last Morgan sibling was heading South" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 17) and "I'd hoped the men of the expedition would see me as

daring. Audacious. An adventurer" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 25).[17] It is clear that the adventure of expedition is not just an ideal of the Morgan brothers, but is bound up with wider ideas of masculinity. There is a direct conflation between what it means to be a man, and to be brave and on expedition, when Tarlington (also a queer character) says, "It's a ridiculous sham … The whole idea that being willing to die makes you more of a man" to which Jonathan replies, "I'm not afraid to die. If you don't even want to be here—that just shows what sort of a man you are" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 50). Tarlington's masculinity is complicated in Jonathan's eyes as Tarlington was a conscientious objector during the War. His refusal to risk his life makes Tarlington unmanly, one of the greatest sins against masculinity that Jonathan can imagine, to whom being 'manly' is the challenge of his life. The appearance, then, of his unquestionably manly brothers – who achieved the pinnacle of masculinity by dying in battle – presents an irresistible chance for acceptance and induction into masculinity for Jonathan. The ghosts act as wish fulfilment, as voiced by Harry when he says, "Didn't you wish—more than anything—that you could see [your brothers] again?" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 173).

The utilisation of the expedition as adventure also creates a remote enclave of masculinity, free of female or other external influence, in which the expeditioners make their own rules. While these are sometimes overbearing – particularly when Randall is angry or absolutist – they are nevertheless their own masters and rule-makers, separating the expedition from the war frontlines, where men were at the mercy of their remote superiors. This sense of liberation is referenced by Leane when she analyses fiction set in the Antarctic, citing the attitude that "it was the people left behind who faced the real hardship, while those who travelled to high latitudes escaped to a less complicated life" is a recurrent theme in "literary responses to Heroic-Era exploration" (2012, p. 98). This is most apparent when considering what might happen to Jonathan after the end of the story. The book ends with Jonathan, Clarke and Tarlington aboard the wrecked *Fortitude*, spotting a ship that might bring them relief. However, Jonathan is only capable of being Jonathan (rather than Jo) in

[17] It is worth noting that Antarctica has a history of providing a utopic setting for subverting hetero-patriarchal societies, as utilised by Ursula Le Guin, who "presents a utopian version of exploration that is not premised on conquest, nationalism, fame or priority" (Leane, 2012, p. 100). This is not to suggest that Wilkes's Antarctica acts as a utopia, but that its imaginary history as a place of subversion of the norm is already established.

the context of remote exploration. If Jonathan returns to civilisation, to his family, to a ‘normal’ life, he risks being forced back into feminisation and a woman’s life, which he has struggled so hard to escape. The apparently optimistic ending has darker heteronormative connotations.

In a similar way to the expedition as an epitome of manliness in *All the White Spaces*, the capitalist corporations of *The Luminous Dead* represent a kind of toxic masculinity. The corporations are centred as normally masculine in ownership when Em employs a man to interview her cavers, rather than allow them to see her as the handler of the expedition. Gyre says of the man who interviewed her, believing him still to be the owner of the operation, “he didn’t want an indentured servant—he wanted a caver. She couldn’t say the same about most other male owners” (Starling, 2019, p. 16). This establishes the corporations who mine and exploit the land and people of Cassandra-V as largely male and patriarchal. The corporations’ interests are always centred around profit, and profit is presented as the most worthy cause for risk. For example, discussing the reasons to front the expense of sending a caver into any system, Gyre lists “a huge mineral deposit” or “a way in to sabotage another concern” (Starling, 2019, p. 91) as worthy reasons, highlighting the gaining of wealth and competition of markets as worthy endeavours. However, the cave itself resists patriarchy. As Sanna writes, “money is a useless utility in the subterranean tunnels, and the international movement of capital has absolutely no value inside an environment that has changed very little from prehistory to contemporary times” (2013, p. 26). Mlekuz agrees, taking this point further into philosophical superiority: “descent into the cave … allows the brave access to superior knowledge, possession of extraordinary objects, and contact with the dead” (2019, p. 45). Here Mlekuz draws a direct link between subverting the desires of capitalist patriarchy with spectrality, a concept enacted literally in *The Luminous Dead*, as Em pours her money and resources into repeatedly attempting to explore this single cave system, in which she hopes to find the bodies of her dead parents.

The patriarchal and heteronormative systems represented by the ghosts of Wilkes and Starling’s novels must be subverted in order for their queer characters to survive – and it is worth noting that apart from Nicholls, Tarlington’s lover, no queer characters die in either of these texts, an unusual survival rate for queer characters in horror. In *The Luminous Dead*, both Gyre and Em come to the realisation that they

must move on from the memories and influences of their heteronormative parents in order to pass into a queer future together. Gyre says to Em, "You're not giving up. You're moving forward. You're succeeding where your mother failed" (Starling, 2019, p. 304). This presents heteronormativity and the nuclear family as an outdated institution to be relegated to the past, so Em can move into her positive queer future. Similarly, Gyre thinks of her own mother, "she realized that she'd actually spent her life thinking of her mother as ultimately gone. Maybe not dead, but unreachable. A fantasy, a ghost story, a fairy tale" (Starling, 2019, p. 333). Here the spectral is raised again in the "ghost story", relegating the heteronormative nuclear family to a thing of the past, and a spectre that haunts the queer present. This is supported in Starling's short story, "Caver, Continue", by contrasting Gyre's queer optimism with Eli's expectations for his future beyond the cave: "*Get to the surface. Sunlight, fresh air, skin cancer, unlivable wages, an empty house, and empty bed*" (2023, p. 8, italics original). His heteronormative, patriarchal future is a grim one, even if he could escape the cave. Although ritual and laying to rest are important for the bodies of the dead in the cave system, the true exorcism of *The Luminous Dead*'s spirits take place when its characters move on from the trauma of their childhoods, and their heteronormative parental expectations.

In *All the White Spaces*, Jonathan uses his queerness in a far more literal way to overcome the hauntings of the South – or rather, to see that they are not hauntings at all. Throughout the novel, Jonathan makes recollections of his past which are at once comfortingly domestic and cloyingly heteronormative. He presents his almost-fate:

> I'd been meant for boarding school, around the time my brothers were finally being sent to the Front: another way in which my parents hoped to make me different, more appropriate. I'd dreaded the very thought of it, some entirely foreign and female country, from which—somehow—I'd never expected to return. (Wilkes, 2022, p. 38).

In this respect, the boarding school is an equivalent danger to the Antarctic, it being a place from which he "never expected to return", as well as being an entirely "foreign country". Jonathan's brothers are portrayed as supporting this regime of feminising Jonathan and making him "appropriate", providing the mechanism by which Jonathan is able to reject his hauntings: "This thing wore [Rufus's] face. Spoke with his voice. Called me *Jonathan*, and saw me at last. It was just showing me what I

wanted" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 278) and later, when a spectre calls him Jonathan, "That name didn't belong in its mouth: it was mine, and I'd claimed it on my own terms. Rufus had never seen me as I really was, but I was Jonathan—all that it meant—with or without him" (Wilkes, 2022, p. 336). Jonathan here describes a transformation not just of himself, but of his idea of the ghosts of his brothers. In his knowledge that they would not accept or acknowledge him as Jonathan rather than Jo, he demonstrates a change in himself and in the world around him. This is reminiscent of Gina Wisker's statement about the development of gender in the twenty-first century:

> [J]ust as the boundaries between just two genders are tested and found wanting, and as the bold, brash, heaving maintained divisions between the genders are questioned and eroded, leading to a range of potential interactions and identities, so women's ghost stories can be seen as pointing the crooked ghostly accusing finger at these constructed limitations and constraints and meanings so that the narratives and worldviews which limit our lives can be seen as only that, themselves imaginary world constructions, descriptive families. (2022, p. 129)

Wilkes blows open the limitations and constraints that have held Jonathan in place and allowed him to be haunted by his own gender guilt, in the form of knowing that his brothers would not accept him as he is. The ghosts of his brothers, by not pointing an accusing finger and re-labelling Jonathan as feminine, but rather accepting his masculinity as natural, free Jonathan of his limitations. Jonathan knows that his brothers, as they were in life, would never accept him as the man he has become, and so the revelation that the spirits call him "Jonathan" and not "Jo" (his deadname) provide Jonathan with the evidence and drive to know these are not real ghosts – not the actual spirits of his dead brothers. Jonathan is able to go on living and leave Expedition Point by acknowledging his queerness and turning away from the oppressive figures of his past.

Conclusion

In *Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive Fictions*, Paulina Palmer writes that, "Gothic is … notable for its mobility and … its ability to reconstitute itself anew in the light of changing social and cultural circumstances" (1999, p. 4). It is appropriate, then, that the Gothic in the twenty-first century provides a vehicle for evidencing a change in

society that has come rapidly in the last twenty years. Palmer was writing in 1999, when “Lesbian critical studies [were] … a relatively new discipline” (1999, p. 4). Only twenty-four years later, lesbian critical studies have become, if anything, de rigeur, and the Queer Gothic has expanded to include examination of homosexuality, pansexuality, asexuality, polyamory, transgenderism, agenderism, gender fluidity, and more besides. Queerness has not only been normalised in everyday life, but the common vocabulary for what queerness includes has been expanded. In her monograph *Gothic Remixed: Monster Mashups and Frankenfictions in twenty-first-Century Culture*, Megen de Bruin-Molé poses the questions, “what does it mean that our historical monsters have moved from the margins to the mainstream? … How can the monster, a figure that traditionally represents marginality … become an emblem of the dominant ideology?” (2019, p. 3). Wilkes and Starling’s works effectively answer these questions, creating monstrosity out of dominant ideologies, and making the mainstream monstrous. While the Gothic has long contained narratives of transformation, works that have been interpreted in ways that embody a number of queer identities, specifically and purposely transgender narratives have been absent. That the Gothic is one of the first to give voice to these identities, and reinsert them into a past they doubtless occupied, silently and invisibly, is perhaps unsurprising. However, the shift from spectrality of the queer Other transforming into the heteronormative Other is a refreshing skew of perspective that speaks not just to queerness of narrative, but authorial perspective.[18]

[18] Although Wilkes has not publicly discussed her sexual or gender identity, she self-identifies as a queer and LGBTQIA+ author (Horror Writers Association, 2021; Forshee, 2023).

II: Haunting the Self and Family

Chapter 3: Murderous Clones and Shadow Selves in Tade Thompson's *Molly Southbourne* Series

Introduction

Unlike the other chapters in this thesis, this chapter does not examine two novel-length works of fiction. Instead, this chapter focuses on a trilogy of novellas written in the horror genre by a writer more commonly associated with science fiction. Furthermore, the texts' publication over a series of years, and the different components' focus – beginning as a Bildungsroman, then providing contextual material on the source of the clones, then focusing on the lives of the clones who survive their originator – provides enough changing perspectives to sit happily in its own chapter. Furthermore, while clone fiction has become more prevalent in the last few years,[19] the Molly Southbourne trilogy began at a time when little attention was being paid to clones as horror monsters, and the more recent clone instalments have less to do with haunting. This is also the only Black-authored text featured in this thesis, expressing, as it does, a British story. While Black voices are growing more numerous in the horror genre, this is less the case in the UK than in the USA and Africa.[20] Racial issues, while no less damaging, are rooted in a very different history in the UK than USA, with a focus on purity, whiteness, and migrant experiences which are also expressed in the Latin American works of Chapters 1 and 7.

The subjective positions of haunted and haunting are particularly important in this chapter. In the introduction, I emphasised that the reason for researching hauntings over ghost stories was to consider the subject who is haunted rather than

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[19] See *The Echo Wife* by Sarah Gailey and (2021) *The Last to Leave the Room* by Caitlin Starling (2023).

[20] A notable exception not included in the thesis is the author Helen Oyeyemi, whose novel, *White is for Witching*, is mentioned later in this chapter. Unfortunately, this text was omitted from closer examination as many of the issues raised by Oyeyemi appear in other texts in this thesis which worked more synergistically together.

the object (the ghost) who haunts. The Molly Southbourne series is particularly of interest as the reader's perspective of the subject who is haunted changes during the course of the series, beginning with Molly Southbourne herself, and changing to recognise the haunting of her clones by the violent actions of the original and her family. This switching of perspective is made possible by providing a voice to an oppressed minority who, this chapter argues, are reflective of racial minority experiences in Britain. Through first positioning the clones as monsters, using abject techniques, and portraying the clones as shadow selves, Thompson sets up a biased impression of the clones which is later subverted when the clones receive their own voice. This switch of perspective highlights the experiences of the Other in Britain, but considering Thompson's position as a prominent Black British and Yoruban science fiction/fantasy/horror (SFFH) author, and close analysis of descriptions of the clones, they particularly portray a Black experience of haunting.

To understand the positioning of clones as racial minorities in this trilogy, it is important to consider the author's place in the Black British SFFH canon. Tade Thompson is a Black British author born in London to Yoruban parents. He grew up in Nigeria, returning to England in 1998 where, as well as writing novels, short stories, and screenplays, he works as a psychiatrist. Thompson identifies as Yoruba, both in cultural descent and faith. Biographical details are often unhelpful when considering a novel's critical context, but Thompson's dual citizenship and categorisation as a Nigerian writer are important when considering his canon. Thompson is perhaps best known for his Wormwood trilogy, a set of science fiction books set in Nigeria. The series is multi-award winning, boasting prizes including the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the Nommo Award for Best Novel. The trilogy has placed Thompson's work in what *The Guardian* refers to as an "afrofuturism" that is "taking over sci-fi" in the twenty-first century (Roberts, 2019, title). It is worth noting that this perceived sudden rise of afrofuturism in science fiction is a 'phenomenon' which Thompson himself has written about scathingly as "perpetuat[ing] a gentle literary oppression that keeps African science fiction infantile" (Thompson, 2018, para. 4), the result of an "amnesia that fogs things up until the next big budget event" (Thompson, 2018, para. 6), referencing the films *Black Panther* (2018) and *District 9* (2009). Thompson further describes his writing:

> I'm not an Afrofuturist author … I wouldn't even define my Afro-centric work as Afrofuturist. Some of my work has been classified as Afrofuturist by others and I don't resist that because possibly the nuance isn't important on that occasion to that person … Afrofuturism is a distinctly American creative form, by and for African Americans. It has suffered from definition drift over time, and it's been used at various times as a synonym for 'Black fiction' or 'African fiction', but that is erroneous. (T. Thompson, personal communication, January 3, 2024).

Nevertheless, Thompson places himself in the position of African-British commentator (as he notes, "before I set foot in Africa, I was British" (T. Thompson, personal communication, January 3, 2024)), and is a significant voice among Black British authors, providing a view in his fiction of "a white world through the Black lens" (Johnson-Hunt, 2023, p. 221).

The perception of African science fiction expressed by Roberts can be contextualised as coming from a non-African collective of consumers and critics and, by implication, one who is also white. While neoliberal Britain is a so-called multi-cultural nation, the general Briton is envisioned as being white. As Amy King puts it, "Although the 'Motherland', Great Britain, is now populated by immigrants from all over the globe, the specter of white racial purity and superiority still lingers beneath – and sometimes above – the surface of the 'multicultural' space" (2013, p. 60). It is precisely this 'spectre' that is expressed in many of the hauntings of Thompson's Molly Southbourne series, a trilogy of novellas about a woman who creates clones of herself when she bleeds. As Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock writes in *Gothic Things*, "Doppelgangers … undercut the uniqueness of human subjects and force a consideration of human beings as merely things to be copied or inhabited" (2023, p. 66). As noted in the introduction, this thesis is particularly interested in the haunted subject over the haunting object. However, Thompson's series conflates the ideas of who is haunted – the original or the clone. Thompson establishes a dominant minority who must remove a populist scourge of haunting spirits in order to maintain their dominance, before revealing that it is the previously silent, agentless clones who are really haunted by their oppressors. In giving the persecuted and silenced minority a voice, Thompson demonstrates how perceptions of who is haunted and who is haunting has developed in the twenty-first century, drawing on race theory, abjection, and family hierarchies to flip the narrative and relocate the haunting/haunted dichotomy.

Clones, Evil Twins and Shadow Selves

The clones in the Molly Southbourne series are the result of Molly Prime's[21] mother, Myke, undergoing an operation while working as a double agent spy in Soviet Russia. Following the operation, Myke produced very occasional clones, but Molly Prime produces clones throughout her life, almost from the moment of her birth. Throughout the series, the majority of the characters perceive and treat the mollys as 'other', as sub-human. The narrative of the series questions this othering, eventually positioning the mollys as individuals and giving them a voice to present their own humanity. Molly II recognises and describes this distinction when looking, with her clone Molina, at Magritte's painting "Golconda":

> At first the men had seemed identical and Molly [II] thought to herself, *this is me, this is us*.
>
> 'They're not identical,' Molina had said, and she was right. A closer look showed variations in the face and even builds. Molly [II] thinks of it often, feels unsettled by it. (Thompson, 2022, p. 49, italics original)

Thompson does not specify whether what so unsettles Molly II is the men's similarities or their differences. However, this neatly encapsulates the thesis of the series: that what might appear to be a faceless collective, an army, a band of 'others', are actually made up from separate individuals, each with their own perspective and story.

Thompson relates matters of race to the taxonomy of personhood in a personal communication, when he writes, "Who gets to be a person is the main question of minority/majority relations. In most societies Black people are given partial personhood, no matter what you achieve" (T. Thompson, personal communication, January 3, 2024). The racial biases of white characters and, indeed, the white narrative perspective of the Molly Southbourne series are occasionally quite explicit – for example, when Vitali Ignatiy refers to Tamara Koleosho, one of the only black characters in the series, as "the African" (Thompson, 2022, p. 108)

[21] Throughout Thompson's novels, he refers to the original Molly Southbourne as "Molly" and her clones as "mollys" or "a molly". However, in *The Survival of Molly Southbourne*, the narrative is taken over by a molly who becomes, to a certain extent, the Molly. Therefore in this chapter I will refer to the original Molly as Molly Prime, the molly who takes over as Molly II, and the unnamed clones as mollys or a molly.

rather than by her name or any other distinguishing feature. However, many of the racial undertones of the series are far more subtle. One noteable observation linking the clones to Black Britons is the proposition that mollys do not feel pain. Molly II claims, “The mollys don’t register pain, even when they are deep in it. They cry out involuntarily, but no rictus or grimace, even while I break their arms or push their shoulders out of joint” (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 77). However, like so many observations about the clones made by people who are not clones, this assumption of a lack of pain is not confirmed by the clones themselves. It is based only on the observations of non-clones without questioning of or interaction with the clones themselves, and must therefore be subject to bias. While Tamara, who also produces clones, generally treats her clones with more care than Molly Prime, she still has little respect for their pain. Tamara uses her clones as a kind of swarm or army when there is danger, expecting them to sacrifice themselves for whatever needs to be protected at the time. As Tamara describes the collective to Vitali Ignatiy, “Our name is Tamara Koleosho and we are many” (Thompson, 2022, p. 27).

This assumption that the clones do not experience pain in the same way as a ‘normal’ human is reminiscent of racially motivated stereotypes within the medical industry. The dehumanisation of black people was at its most rampant perhaps at the height of the slave trade in the eighteenth century, but studies conducted as recently as 2016 have confirmed that there are still biases in medicine against People of Colour. Hoffman et al noted that “black patients are less likely to be given pain medications and, if given pain medications, they receive lower quantities” (2016, para. 2), and in their study found that “many white medical students and residents hold beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites, many of which are false and fantastical in nature, and that these false beliefs are related to racial bias in pain perception” (2016, para. 18). Some of these beliefs included Black people’s nerve endings being less sensitive than White people’s, and Black people’s skin being thicker than White people’s (Hoffman, 2016, Results). While this was a study conducted among American resident doctors, and racism in the United States is different in its roots and presentation to British racism, there have also been similar issues of bias in British medical textbooks that have only been amended as recently as 2017 (Rozina, 2017). Given Thompson’s work in the medical profession, besides the fact he is Black himself and may have had firsthand experience of these biases, it

is certainly not unlikely that Thompson is aware of this bias in the medical field. There is also a history of the medical industry using Black communities for purposes of experimentation, as seen in the Tuskegee syphilis studies of 1932-1972 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). The mistrust of Black communities towards the medical industry could still be seen in the last five years over anxieties amongst Black communities towards the COVID vaccine (Goodwill & Fike, 2023). While Brendan Grafius writes that "Horror has a long history of treating black bodies as disposable, a history that continues to the present day" (2023, p. 234), this could equally be said of the White-led medical industries in Britain and the United States.

As well as the reported pain biases in the Molly Southbourne trilogy, various comments and descriptions are given by Molly Prime and other 'normal' people that cast the mollys as inferior in terms of their intellect, personality and ability – in other words, anything that might make them 'equal' to a human. Molly Prime narrates that, "She cannot stand children. They remind her of the mollys, with their innocence and their half-formed personalities" (Thompson, 2017, p. 64). Meanwhile, a colleague at the university where Molly Prime works asks of one of her clones, "Does she have special needs?" (Thompson, 2017, p. 93). Both of these quotes imply a 'simplicity' to the mollys' apparent intellects, marking them subhuman – and their subhumanity, in turn, makes them spectral. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, writing of the objectification of Black people and women in horror, writes that "some bodies have always been considered more thing-like than others" (2023, p. 12), and this is demonstrated in the dumbing down of the mollys into 'things' that cannot have their own voice or expression. When Molly Prime does consider a change in the mollys' disposition or thinking, she attributes it to herself, rather than to any quality the mollys themselves might possess: "The mollys seem to be more intense, more focused. Does that have to do with being at the university? Does [my] thinking hard make mollys more acute?" (Thompson, 2017, p. 71). It is impossible to Molly Prime that her clones could have any attributes of their own. They are never more than pale spectres of herself.

The motif of using clones or doubles as representative of a secondary, subhuman class is also used by prominent Black film-maker Jordan Peele in his movie *Us* (Peele, 2019a), which first aired in the midst of Molly Southbourne's serial publication. *Us* features a middle-class African American family on holiday in Santa

Cruz, where they are beset by a race of clones or second selves called the Tethered. The Tethered are the result of scientific experimentation carried out during the Cold War, like the clones in *Molly Southbourne*, which have been subsequently abandoned and forgotten. Everyone in the country has their own Tethered doppelganger. The Tethered are led by Red – who is both one of the Tethered and a 'real' human, having been switched with her double as a child – in an effort to join hands across America as a symbol of their ascendance into the light. The Tethered normally live underground where they carry out a shadowy parody of their above-ground selves' lives. Red, the Tethered second self of the film's protagonist Adelaide, frequently refers to herself as "the shadow" (Peele, 2019a). In creating the Tethered, Peele says that he intended to represent that when one tribe of people prosper, another suffers (Peele, 2019b). While, as stated previously, the nature and presentation of American racism is different to British, this film has some startling resemblances to the Molly Southbourne series in its use of clones as a response to Soviet-era anxiety, in the initially voiceless nature of the clones, and in the anxieties over separating the doppelganger clones from the 'real' originals. It is perhaps telling that these texts do such similar things and were released contemporaneously.

This idea of one tribe suffering so another can prosper, as proposed by Peele, can also be applied to the *Molly Southbourne* series. The mollys suffer so that Molly Prime can live the semblance of a normal life. Molly Ann, a clone, explains this suffering, and why it is the clones rather than the originals who must suffer: "People like us have a way of becoming disposable. They kill us. They kill us because we are many and they are fewer, and becoming fewer every day" (Thompson, 2022, p. 98). She expresses the white/'original' anxiety of a people who are an actual minority persecuting others because they can, in an effort to raise themselves higher. Even Tamara, who seems to treat her clones with love and respect, frequently also treats the tamaras as expendable. Many tamaras die during *The Survival of Molly Southbourne* (2019a), and Tamara does not appear to mourn their loss as individuals or even as a collective until the epiphany of the final book. There are, after all, plenty more where they came from.

However, this explanation for why non-clones seek to kill clones can also be equated to observations about post-Empire Britons' attitudes towards immigrants, particularly in nineteenth century Gothic fiction. Discussing the immigrant politics in

Helen Oyeyemi's *White Is for Witching* (2009), Jean Wyatt describes the classic Gothic novel's anxious preoccupation with post-colonisation: "the colonized will immigrate to the metropolis, colonize the colonizers, victimize the victimizers and replace the British economic and social order with their own social codes" (2021, p. 267). While we might think ourselves far removed from these anxieties in the twenty-first century, they are still fully demonstrable in British news media, such as the *Daily Mail*'s titling of their immigration section "The Migrant Crisis" (Mail Online, 2023), or in the linguistic choices of *The Times*' headline "Immigration figures to hit new high as fresh crackdown looms" (Dathan, 2023) – note the implication that high immigration is a negative, and a "crackdown" is necessary in order to control the purity of Britishness. Thompson equates the anxiety of colonisers with the creators of the cloning process and those who themselves produce clones. The migration of the 'other' subhuman into and within the 'pure' human is perhaps particularly relevant in the series, as the process of clone creation was developed as a potential solution to a global fertility problem. This creates a secondary tension as it becomes clear that the clones produced are not quite human, or at least cannot be considered as such by many of their human counterparts.

The status of human-but-not-quite-human recalls the Windrush scandal of the 2010s in Britain. The Windrush generation were thousands of migrants from the Caribbean who came to the UK from 1948-1971 with a right to live and work in Britain, helping to mend a population crisis created by the losses of the Second World War. However, in the 2010s a series of scandals revealed that vital domicile documents relating to the Windrush migrants had been lost or destroyed, preventing individuals and their subsequent generations from accessing healthcare, work and housing, and even resulting in deportation (BBC, 2023). The subsequent Home Office-commissioned paper that investigated the scandal drew direct links between the invited immigration of mostly Black Caribbeans, and inherently racist migration laws and practices in the UK (Gentleman, 2022), purposely classing migrants as second-class citizens – as not quite British and perhaps, by extension, not quite human. Direct links can be drawn between the Windrush generation and Thompson's clones: their invitation into the country, or into the world in the clones' case, by an agency seeking to restore the population during a crisis, with a simultaneous removal of their rights as citizens. The clones are given no paperwork, no citizenship, no

documentation, not even real names. In her essay “Black Diasporic Gothic”, Maisha Wester notes that the horror that has come about in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement “voices the terrors of the violence and the systemic structures and ideologies which not only makes it conceivable, but which ultimately enables and maintains the slaughter” (2019, p. 172). The ‘originals'’ fear – those who can be read as the British, the white, or the truly human – then becomes that ‘normal’ humans will be entirely wiped out and replaced with these inferior, sub-human clones. As a result, a distinction must be maintained. While the British desire for a preservation of whiteness might fear a ‘dilution’ of race created by mixing with non-white immigrants, the human ‘Primes’ in the Molly Southbourne series risk being wiped out and replaced altogether.

The ruling human attitude towards clones in Thompson’s series, even ‘friendly’ clones, is one of bestial inferiority. When describing the tamaras, Molly II sometimes uses insectile or ‘swarm’ language. She states, “I have a picture in my mind of a queen bee, a tamara with a gigantic swollen sac that is constantly pushing out tamaras” (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 58). Molly II sees the tamaras as a swarm which gravitates towards or is focused around Tamara as the queen. Tamara’s position as ‘fully’ human and an original is described by Molly II: “It’s obvious that she’s the original. Maybe it’s a body language thing, maybe it’s because she comes right for me with a broad smile, but I know before she opens her mouth” (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 59). Both these ideas – the ‘swarm’ language and Tamara Prime’s supremacy as an original over her derivatives – are also expressed by a tamara in *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne* (2022): “We’re not a hive mind. Each person has a duty. Only Tamara [Prime] knows the whole picture” (Thompson, 2022, p. 83). Again, a clear divide is made between the ‘originals’ or first selves and the lesser clone second selves that seems to be materially intangible, but governs the lives of the ‘colony’ of mollys and tamaras.

Both *Us* and the Molly Southbourne series utilise the idea of the second self. C. F. Keppler defined a second self as a literary device which involves doubles or doppelgangers where there is, “the mystery of a contradiction, of simultaneous distinction and identity, of an inescapable two that are at the same time an indisputable one” (1972, p. 1). A ghost creates a duplicate of a self that has passed from life to death, but it is seldom one encounters one’s own ghost (although not

unknown – see Chapters 4 and 7). Still, the first selves of both these texts are haunted by their duplicates. The duplicates are lesser and therefore spectral, and the haunting creates a horror and disgust affect in the original. The second self differs from a mere duplication of a single individual as "duplication in character, cannot possibly be a feature of it, since such duplication would result in no relationship at all, but merely an inert coexistence" (Keppler, 1972, p. 2). Literature of the second self, then, relies on the relationship that forms between the 'first' and 'second' self as individuals who are apparently the same but have intrinsic differences of personality or psychology. In addition, Keppler delineates the first self from the second as:

> [T]he thoughts of the first self are always more readily accessible to [the reader] than those of the second … he is always the self in the foreground, the one with whom we tend to identify ourselves, and whose judgement of values we tend at least initially to accept. (1972, p. 27)

The first-self, then, is the narrator, the storyteller, while the second self may only ever be a secondary character. The first self is also the subject, the haunted, while the second self is the object, the one who haunts.

The mollys conform to this idea of second selves as they are genetically identical but psychologically other than Molly Prime. Molly Prime is also easily identified as the first self as she narrates a large portion of *The Murders of Molly Southbourne* (2017), which is her story of her life. However, the distinction becomes less clear as Molly II takes up the narration in *The Survival of Molly Southbourne*, a book in part about Molly II trying to place herself as either a first or second self, and *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne*, in which Molly II tries to accept the remaining mollys as individuals or as their own first selves. In addition to this, the mollys barely speak throughout *The Murders of Molly Southbourne* and only have their own voice towards the end of *The Survival of Molly Southbourne*. Their lack of speech keeps the reader from engaging directly with the clones, leaving their thoughts and feelings blank to be filled in only with the suppositions of Molly Prime. The naming convention of the mollys – the use of a lower case 'm' to demark a common rather than proper noun – also marks them out as inferior to the reader. Even when referring to a singular or specific clone, that clone is a 'molly'. They are not a proper noun, not afforded the capitalisation of an individual's name, but classed as one might an animal, naming it a 'rabbit' or 'cat'. The molly is an individual, but one that is subhuman.

When Molly II is taken to see Vitali Ignatiy, a scientist and former Soviet spy, Vitali goes to some efforts to convince Molly II that she has become an original or Prime self. He uses scientific evidence based on a radio signal that Molly II gives off to support his assertion, but also speaks based on some innate instinct. He says, "You are the only one there is. You are Molly" (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 68). He also uses the chess-based metaphor of a pawn crossing to the opposite side of a chess board to become a queen: "'Perhaps there is something in the cell profile that allows promotion,' [says Ignatiy.] 'A pawn that reaches the opponent's side of the board,' [says Molly II.] 'Becomes a queen. You, Molly, have been promoted to a queen.'" (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 69). The lexis is again reminiscent of the 'hive' language used about Tamara and tamaras when Molly II refers to Tamara Prime as the "queen bee" (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 58). Molly II, for the majority of *The Survival of Molly Southbourne*, pushes herself to believe Vitali Ignatiy and attempt to take up the position of an 'original', absorbing the idea that the second selves are lesser copies of the first self. This is in spite of evidence that, as a clone herself, she is an individual apart from the other mollys, and an individual apart from Molly Prime. Molly Prime and Molly II have different apparent sexualities, different dress sense, and different psychiatric issues. The clones are clearly separate individuals, but Molly II is convinced by Ignatiy that her individuality is a result of her inheritance of 'Prime-ness', not an innate quality she has always possessed and which all the clones possess.

While Vitali Ignatiy encourages Molly II to think of herself as a single 'first' self promoted above the other molly 'second' selves, when Molly II speaks to other mollys, they have a different point of view. Although she is told by Molina, "You have more of [Molly Prime] in you [than I do]" (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 113), Molina later says, "You're trying to be her … To be Molly Southbourne. You can't. You'll always be a molly. Stop trying to be something, someone, you're not. Be yourself, be true to yourself" (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 117). The idea of individuality among the second selves is here introduced, as the surviving mollys are given their own names: Molina, Moya and Mollyann. Although these are undoubtedly derivatives of 'Molly', they encourage the mollys to retain and/or develop their own independent personalities. They become proper nouns, although they are still referred to collectively as mollys. In this way the demarcation 'molly'

becomes more a marking out of a separate race or tribe, with individuals represented within that race. By being given a name they are also given a voice and an identity. This identity begins to subvert the figure of the clone from haunting object to haunted subject. In order to express a haunting, the haunted must be able to tell their ghost story. Having a voice is crucial, and Thompson here begins the development of the clones from voiceless spectre to haunted storyteller.

It is worth noting there is a similar ambiguity and preoccupation in *Us* regarding whether Red or Adelaide is the 'original' Adelaide, and therefore the first self. While Red is undoubtedly referring to herself when she describes the 'shadow' in the story of her life, she is the only Tethered who can speak and use language, while Adelaide was mute for a time after first meeting her second self as a child, suggesting that a switch was made. Note that, again, an important differentiating factor lies in speech as a symbol of agency. For much of the first two Molly Southbourne books, none of the clones are really given a voice and it is therefore easy for the reader to take the first self's statements about them as truth. However, in *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne*, the remaining mollys are given a voice and even therapy sessions to fully explore the world from their own points of view. The only molly who persists in muteness is Moya, who is severely burned and, it is assumed, the most traumatised of the clones, especially when her narrative reveals that she was the one who killed Molly Prime. This is comparable to the difficulty of locating Black voices as experienced in Abolitionist slave writings. As Teresa Goddu writes, "The scene of slavery exceeds the representation of art. By passing over what is too dreadful, fiction makes the unreadable readable, paradoxically unveiling slavery yet concealing its worst aspects" (2006 [1997], no page number). It may be that the reason the clones are not initially given a voice or a story is because their reality is too dreadful or 'unreadable' to be properly expressed through fiction, and can only truly be addressed when the mollys begin to go through therapy sessions and understand their own experiences.

One reason the clones are considered a primitive version of the original Molly Prime is their violent tendencies. Keppler writes that the second self is a pursuer in a way that feels particularly relevant to Thompson's series when he describes, "the evil second self, whose malevolence, however, is not directed against the tribe as a whole but concentrated upon the person of his first-self counterpart"

(1972, p. 28). In this way the mollys act as second selves also in terms of their animosity towards Molly Prime. But while this is initially expressed as a mindless malevolence, Thompson justifies the mollys' violence towards their first self in the later books. As Molina says, "I have memories of the others [Molly Prime] killed. I know how it goes" (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 113). The mollys attack pre-emptively to save themselves and survive. But what is the mollys' purpose beyond survival? Their apparent lack of direction may suggest that they have no purpose beyond violence and survival, like Peele's Tethered. In *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne*, Vitali Ignatiy explains the Hayflick Limit[22] to Myke:

> Human cells grown in culture were once thought to be immortal. Leonard Hayflick demonstrated that this was not the case in '61. They divide between forty to sixty times before involuting. After too many generations of duplicates, the products become defective. We called it Going Hayflick. You get mollies that won't remember anything they are taught, mollies that commit murders against random people, mollies that can't be civilized, mollies that rot. (Thompson, 2022, p. 108)[23]

Vitali Ignatiy uses this scientific theory to explain why the mollys are defective and inferior. But this explanation is also reminiscent of the way people with learning difficulties, especially the neurodivergent, have been treated in regimes that promoted eugenics and ethnic cleansing. It suggests an assumption of the 'correct' or 'ideal' way a person should be, and that those who do not fit that mould are refuse. The clones – or at least, the mollys – are deemed worthless because Vitali Igantiy believes they cannot "be civilised". He does not consider that, when a race feels permanently under attack, there is nothing it can do but attempt to survive, however uncivilised that survival might seem. Again, the representation of the mollys is similar to slave-era attitudes to Black people, right down to the terminology of "breaking" a slave or a molly in order to make it amenable (Thompson, 2017, p. 115; Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 62).

As has been noted in the chapter's introduction, while there is a long tradition of Black diaspora and a Black tradition in the American Gothic genre, there are fewer

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[22] It is worth mentioning here that *The Hayflick Limit* was the original title of the third book in the series before the title was changed to bring the title in line with the naming conventions of the rest of the series, thus emphasising the importance of the theory to the themes of the final book (Thompson, 2021).

[23] The spelling convention changes between the first two Molly Southbourne books and *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne* to use 'mollies' instead of 'mollys'. As 'mollys' is used in the majority of the texts, that is what I use in my own writing.

Black texts to draw on in the British Gothic canon. Maisha Wester writes about the representation of Black experiences in twenty-first century Gothic texts:

> Modern Black Diaspora artists such as Nalo Hopkinson, Jeremy Love and Jordan Peele introduce new monsters – antagonists which often blend figures from African and Caribbean folk belief with Western compulsions – to better encapsulate the horrors of racial subjugation and construction, and the insidious terror of Western regimes. (2019, p. 289)

The inciting event at the centre of the Molly Southbourne series – Myke's experimental operation at the hands of the Soviets – is the direct result of the British preoccupation with and paranoia over tensions with Russia. This inciting event took place during the Cold War, in which Mykhaila was initially a British spy infiltrating Russia, who quickly defected to work for the Russians, returning their experiment to Britain so the West could further develop the Russians' ideas. On the surface – or in the backstory – the insidious terror drawn on comes from a very (white?) British tradition. However, as Thompson himself notes, there are strong links between Africa and the Soviet Union during the Cold War period, with generations of Africans educated in the Soviet Union. Thompson himself "almost went to medical school in the USSR" and recalls "When I lived in Nigeria there were Russian students" (T. Thompson, personal communication, January 3, 2024). Yet the insidious Russian enemy, as perceived by white Britons, is comparable to the mollys in their role as 'monster'. Mykhaila writes of the 'enemy' in a letter to Molly Prime: "We were taught to think of them as less than human, because of ideological differences, but they are just people. Like us" (Thompson, 2017, p. 104). It is interesting that Mykhaila is able to think of her wartime enemy in this way, but never transfers these ideas to the mollys. She says of them to Molly Prime, "They are not clones or sisters. Best to consider them a kind of fleshy construct, biological robots, androids" (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 22). However, Myke reveals her feelings about the mollys to be more extreme when confronted by them in *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne*, as will be explored later in the chapter.

As already noted, the clones themselves share aspects and treatment comparable to People of Colour and, in particular, Black people. This is recognisable in the assumptions made about the mollys without their consultation, the bestial language used when describing the mollys, but also in their lack of history. Wester, paraphrasing Hopkinson, goes on to note:

> [T]he use of [non-Western] figures [used by twenty-first-century Black writers] points to the presence of a cultural past; they are the very chronicle which colonisers denied existed in order to argue against black humanity on the premises that people of African descent lacked a recorded history predating European contact. (2019, p. 292)

Thompson himself agrees, “Dehumanizing is important for oppression to occur. A lack of history is also important (see various articles on how the West tends to see Africa as ahistorical)” (T. Thompson, personal communication, January 3, 2024). The mollys, who come into existence at whatever age Molly Prime is when they are produced, have no history of their own. They develop into fully formed adolescents or adults without their own background or history – and as the main narrative of *The Murders of Molly Southbourne* demonstrates, Molly Prime’s story and history are the central topic of interest. Furthermore, the mollys have no voice until Molly II begins to name and listen to them, enabling her to hear their history. Johnson-Hunt writes that “for most Black girls … silence is used as a coping mechanism in light of the traumas they have to face” (2023, p. 228), and there is no denying the mollys have suffered a collective, cultural trauma. But equally, their silence is a tool used by their oppressors to demonstrate their subhumanity.

However, when the surface is scratched and Molly II begins to speak to the remaining mollys, they express that they share memories. They remember the trauma of the previous mollys, and they remember that Molly Prime and her family are dangerous to them. This is the cause they give for their murderous intentions towards Molly Prime, and later Molly II. In many respects, this recalls Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s (1994) ideas on inter-generational trauma which will be examined more closely in Chapter 4. While their violence suggests “a transgressive presence who seeks gratification through cruel and calculated means” (Johnson-Hunt, 2023, p. 221), the trauma experienced by previous mollys is literally a memory belonging to subsequent mollys. As Molina puts it when talking to one of the feral mollys in *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne*, “I’m going to tell you a story about yourself. Well, you’re like me, and the story is about me, so it’s about you” (Thompson, 2022, p. 97). This suggests the mollys consider themselves not only to be joined familially, but to be literally the same person with the same experiences – a tribe of their own. In respect of this shared trauma, the mollys have a history that is never acknowledged or even known by Molly Prime and only becomes known to the reader

late in the series. Janicker identifies that "haunting gives its protagonists and, by implication, its readers, special access to the histories and ideologies contained within these supernatural locales" (2015, p. 4), highlighting that haunting and cultural history are inextricably linked; that one uncovers the other. The mollys have a culture and collective memory that is repeatedly erased by their collective murder at the hands of Molly Prime and her parents, their effective colonisers. While this collective memory might seem to support the envisioning of the clones as an animalistic hive without individual character or feeling, the memories reflect a culture and history that predates their own existence. By giving the clones a cultural memory (as opposed to a hive mind), Thompson again promotes the clones' movement from haunting object to haunted subject, enabling them to identify and voice what haunts them.

The erasure of the mollys' history, the assumptions that are made about them without allowing them a voice, and the way they are subjugated and othered clearly demonstrate how the clones are not just classed as secondary or lesser selves. They reflect quite clearly the historical and current Black experience of othering and silencing that still haunts British culture today. In this way, Thompson uses White British anxieties and assumptions to throw up a mirror to society, and to express the old imperialist nature of racism in Britain. He demonstrates how ethnically non-White and particularly Black bodies act as spectres of the slave trade and racial impurity in a Britain that would happily forget its historical involvement in racial genocide. However, he also demonstrates that White Britons are not the only subjects haunted by this spectre, conflating the haunting and the haunted to give a voice to a tribe previously left voiceless.

Abject Hauntings

In Barbara Creed's seminal work on women in horror, *The Monstrous Feminine* (2007), she builds on Julia Kristeva's (1982) ideas of women and the abject, and examines how these can be applied to female monsters in the horror genre. Kristeva defines abjection as that which "beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire", but which desire "Apprehensive … turns aside; sickened, it rejects" (2024 [1980], p. 1). Abjection works then at the curious intersection between desire or fascination and

disgust. In particular, Kristeva is interested in the boundary between the self and what exists outside the self: "It is not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva, 2024 [1980], p. 4). This can also relate to haunting and the spectral as ghosts provide an 'other' that is somehow part of the body, in that it mimics or provides an after-image of the body, but is external to the body. One might also consider the Victorian seances that produced ectoplasm as evidence of the spirit world – bodily fluids that are not bodily. Creed is particularly interested in drawing out these theories as they relate to the "mother-child relationship", the "border" and the "feminine body" (2007, p. 8), all areas that create horror and emotion in the Molly Southbourne series. Fitzpatrick references the "invisible monster [that] lurks … as a material entity that transgresses the boundaries of the human body, requiring its audience and characters to reconsider their place within the natural world" (2023, p. 262), and in this way, Thompson's clones also transgress a natural order. Johnson-Hunt identifies that "historically it is Black women who must assume the mantle for strength as well as the role of *object"* (2023, p. 222, emphasis mine). This frames the structuring of subject and object in racial terms, placing the Black woman squarely in the role of object; as passive haunting force. Molly Southbourne's clones begin as objects that haunt, transgressing the boundaries of body and body politic in order to reconsider their position as subjects who are haunted, subverting the natural order. Abjection enables the boundary to be transgressed, and provides an affective horror medium through which the horror that haunts the clones can be truly expressed.

Creed writes that "the horror film" – although this can relate just as strongly to other forms of entertainment media – "attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject … in order finally to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and non-human" (2007, p. 14). This thesis has already proposed Thompson's clones as examples of the subhuman and referents for the peoples of twenty-first-century-Britain perceived by the dominant White Britain to be Other. This section will consider each of these points of abjection in detail as they relate to *Molly Southbourne*, before continuing to explore the ways in which Thompson subverts traditional ideas of the abjection of women. In doing so, I argue that haunting is abject, and the visceral horror that Thompson's abjection creates demonstrates the everyday horrors for the Other in White patriarchal Britain. Early in

Creed's exploration of the abject, she writes her own definition: "The abject threatens life; it must be 'radically excluded' from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self" (Creed, 2007, p. 9). Here parallels can be drawn between Creed's "living subject" and the subjective positioning of the haunted.

The use of blood to produce or 'birth' clones in the Molly Southbourne trilogy is a particularly abject choice. Creed writes that, "images of blood … are central to our culturally/socially constructed notions of the horrific" (2007, p. 13). Blood is a reminder of menstruation and childbirth. Thompson seems often to be in dialogue with Creed in the themes and imagery he uses. For example, the births of Molly Prime's clones often happen 'off screen', but on one occasion Molly Prime purposely watches a molly develop. Where she has left her blood on the floorboards of her bedroom, a pit appears, and in the pit, "a glistening mass has formed … A transparent membrane of sorts covers it, and deep within something flexes and relaxes" (Thompson, 2017, p. 38). This is suggestive of a baby born in a caul, but also of the alien 'birth' scenes (such as the alien chestburster) in the film *Alien* (1979), which Creed herself uses as a primary example of the abject. A short while later, Molly Prime "sucks her finger, keeps her vigil, wondering if a molly can form from the blood she swallows. That would kill her—a molly bursting through her belly" (Thompson, 2017, p. 38). Thompson here seems to reference *Alien* directly, although also foreshadows the abject births to come.

Molly Prime's ability to produce clones, not even through parthenogenesis, but with just her own blood, excludes the male from the reproductive cycle. However, Molly Southbourne does not just exclude the male from reproduction; she actively endangers the men with whom she has sex. When Molly Prime has sex with men, somehow a clone is produced inside of them. Leon, a casual sexual partner, dies from the growth of a clone inside of him, but her longer term boyfriend, James Down, makes an effort to make his body hospitable to the clone by increasing his food intake to ensure he can sustain life. Creed notes that, "when male bodies become grotesque, they tend to take on characteristics associated with female bodies" (2007, p. 19). Perhaps the most grotesque moment in the series is the scene

in which Molly II finds James Down just before the clone he has been bearing is 'born':

> All I can see of James is a distended belly, larger than the rest of him, about six feet in diameter, tight as a drum, reticulate with veins. This skin is as thin as a teenager's pimple. James twitches feebly at the side of this tumorous mass. His arms and legs are like twigs with crumpled skin, and his rib cage appears tiny, spread at the bottom to make way for the belly. He is naked, but his genitals are shrunken and soaked in a pool of piss and excrement … The skin on James's belly points and ruptures. Straw-coloured fluid sprays outwards in all directions, pressure relieved, and I am drenched in it. (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 110)

Here there are many excellent examples of Thompson utilising the abject, using imagery that reminds the reader of growths and foreign bodies like the "tumorous mass", and unpleasant bodily functions such as the teenager's bursting pimple and the pool of piss and excrement. However, Thompson also makes an effort to highlight James Down's humanity. He refers to specific body parts in a way that deconstruct the body, but also situates James Down as a man that is still human, even if his genitals are shrivelled in a way that masks or subverts his gender. At the point of 'birth', Thompson also includes Molly II in the process, situating her as a kind of mother and midwife figure as she is covered in the bodily/birthing fluids. What is left of James Down is never told. Molly II confirms that he is dead, and then he is never heard of again. As Creed puts it, "the primeval mother does not need the male as a 'father', only as a host body" (2007, p. 28). Molly II goes on to be a 'mother' to the molly; James Down having completed his function as surrogate mother and birthing instrument, is subsequently forgotten from the story.

While this might present the idea of birth in the Molly Southbourne series as unnatural and destructive, there are elements of birth in the series that utilise naturalistic imagery. Molly Prime first loses her virginity beside a river on her family's farmland, in a scenario she has deliberately orchestrated to be romantic and pastoral. Molly Prime hopes to wash her hymenal blood in the river to prevent the creation of a molly after the event. Molly Prime's loss of virginity is described in naturalistic terms with "the gurgle of water over stones and the high-pitched complaint of a fox" (Thompson, 2017, p. 45), and as she has sex with her partner, Molly Prime quotes Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" (1593), a notable romantic pastoral poem. Similarly, the molly created by this experience (despite Molly Prime's

efforts to wash away the blood) literally drips with nature: "It drips with water from the stream and it is muddy up to its ankles" (Thompson, 2017, p. 47). The clones themselves are shown to be organic beings, not just made of flesh but of whatever materials created them. As Molina says, "New mollies have these transverse lines across their nails, growth lines that correspond to what materials they built themselves from" (Thompson, 2022, p. 66). The clones create themselves from whatever organic material comes to hand, not just from the flesh and blood of their original.

However, these ideas of the clones' formation as a natural, even pastoral phenomenon, are subverted by abjection when considered from another point of view. Myke, Molly Prime's mother, claims she is disgusted by the clones as a reminder of the deaths of her husband and daughter – for Myke, they are literal ghosts. However, her disgust actually stems from much earlier, when she first encounters her own clone:

> Standing at the foot of the room is a girl that looks exactly like [Myke]. The girl has a fixed stare and breathes in and out like … a toad? It looks grotesque, but Mykhaila cannot say on what level. She is like a twin, after all. (Thompson, 2022, p. 115)

Using words like "toad" and "it", Myke expresses her natural but visceral reaction to her own clone and, one might suppose, to any clone she might encounter. Myke goes on to attack and kill the clone, unprovoked. The emphasis on what is natural and unnatural, already explored by the clones' existence in comparison to the original, highlights Myke's 'natural' maternal feelings or her 'unnatural' lack thereof. As will be explored further, Myke expresses strong feeling for her daughter, but does not act in a traditionally maternal manner towards her. Myke is not comforting or soft or sympathetic. Myke's priority is ensuring Molly Prime can maintain her own safety by killing her clones and avoiding dangers that would lead to bleeding and more potentially dangerous clones. In this respect, Molly Prime and Myke's relationship is unnatural, as is Myke's visceral hatred of the clones who are identical to her daughter.

Another aspect of the abject is the corruption of women by sexual desire, traversing the boundary "between innocence and corruption, purity and impurity" (Creed, 2007, p. 32). In particular, this is highlighted by sexual perversion or

deviance, particularly of previously apparently ‘innocent’ women or girls. At a young age, Molly Prime engages in sexual acts with her clones. This is described in a mother-daughter conversation that is both typical of and a perversion of any coming-of-age story. Myke says, “[Your father] said you were touching [the molly’s] genitals,” to which Molly Prime replies, “I was only looking. I was curious” (Thompson, 2017, p. 48). The act is described almost in an exploratory sense, in the way a young girl might experiment with masturbation. At this point in the narrative, Molly Prime has not fully ‘othered’ her clones, has not been totally institutionalised against them by her parents. The conversation concludes with Myke saying, “Don’t play with the mollys. They are dangerous” (Thompson, 2017, p. 48). The dual meaning of “play” is interesting here, as it can be taken both in a childlike playful sense and a sexual sense. The mollys are again playthings, without desires or motivations of their own. Even so, it is Molly Prime who Myke feels must be protected. This begins to establish a familial hierarchy, where mother/creator has a role of control over the daughter/clone. As Passey writes, “the Gothic novel is haunted by the ‘creator’ – whether God, father, mother, author, mad scientist, blood-sucking fiend” (Passey, 2023, p. 82). In Thompson’s series, the mother is at the top of the hierarchy – as Myke’s dominance over her husband suggests, even over the father – along with the Primes, as creators.

As an adult, Molly Prime has another encounter where a molly appears while she is engaged in sexual intercourse with her boyfriend, James Down. The molly “does not go bad while the three of them make love, and Molly [Prime] kills it with regret and an ice pick the next morning” (Thompson, 2017, p. 102). While this is depicted in *The Murders of Molly Southbourne* as an almost romantic scene, and an example of the mollys’ “personalities reflecting [Molly Prime’s] state of mind at the time” (Thompson, 2017, p. 102), the scene is later recalled by the molly born from James Down in *The Survival of Molly Southbourne*: “I remember the time he and Molly [Prime] spent the night fucking one of our kind, killing her the morning after, so excuse me if I don’t feel bad that he’s dead” (Tade Thompson, 2019, p. 116). With the two different descriptions, the act in question changes from “making love” to “fucking”, introducing an aspect of the abject with crude language. The molly itself changes from being an impersonal pronoun, “it”, to being not only “her” but “one of our kind”, part of a tribe. There is also an incestuous aspect to these sexual

encounters. As will be demonstrated in the final section, Molly Prime is often positioned as the mother of the mollys, in that she is their creator, and the narrative implies that she has sexually experimented with a molly, one of her ‘children’, on more than these two occasions. Creed’s theories on the abject in this way help understanding of not just the horror implicit in the series, and the affective response of haunting on Molly Prime and Myke, but the hierarchy of family where the mother-creator is more important because she comes before and creates the child-clone. The hierarchy is similar to the subject-object hierarchy of haunted and haunting, and the following section will demonstrate Thompson’s full subversion of this hierarchy to present the clones as the subjects of haunting.

Motherhood or Sisterhood?

In the previous section, abjection was used to begin to expound the maternal relationships between originals and clones. This section draws together the subhumanising of the clones with their familial relationships to demonstrate the building of ‘othered’ communities and the ways in which old ghosts are being slowly laid to rest in the twenty-first century. As Simon Bacon writes, “entanglement and relationships are of increasing importance within contemporary horror” (2023b, p. 5), and this chapter focuses on familial relationships and their entanglements to establish the hierarchy (or disruption of hierarchy) that is produced by familial relationships. Unlike Myke and Molly Prime, Tamara has an instinct for motherhood or the ‘birth’ of tamaras. Many of her clones are made deliberately. She narrates, “There are seventeen of us, though we’re getting that itch in the base of the brain that means number eighteen is most likely coming soon” (Thompson, 2022, p. 27). This suggests that Tamara Prime experiences a kind of broodiness, or perhaps even a feeling of gestation when a new clone is soon to be ‘born’. However, she also positions this as a feeling shared between her and her clones, as it is “we” who gets the itch rather than “I”. This introduces the idea of sisterhood between the original and the clones. As Tamara tells Molly II, “[Ignatiy] wants you, the Prime. I told him we don’t recognize those distinctions anymore” (Thompson, 2022, p. 27). Molly II makes the distinction more explicit when she narrates, “Molly [II] herself doesn’t train in the house or talk about anything that might upset her sisters. Sisters. How easy it comes to her now, saying siblings, but they are duplicates” (Thompson, 2022,

p. 48). The transition from offspring to siblings represents a destabilisation of the hierarchy between original and clone.

This suggests a growth or development between books, and one which has been recognised by both sets of clone 'families', despite their apparent lack of contact in the intervening period between *Survival* and *Legacy*. However, it should be noted that in *The Survival of Molly Southbourne*, when a tamara is 'born', she is taken first to Tamara Prime to be welcomed into the collective. In a remembered conversation from their time together in *The Survival of Molly Southbourne*, Molly II recalls Tamara telling her: "You only think in terms of command, obedience, discipline, Molly. That's not the way. Become one. Make every single one of you the same person and there's no limit to what you can achieve" (Thompson, 2022, p. 57). This suggests Tamara's focus, at least at that time, was on creating clones of herself that were thorough duplicates. She did not promote the sort of individualism that might be better associated with siblings.

Molly II's household seem to 'live' the idea of sisterhood more thoroughly than the T/tamaras. Molly II even arranges family therapy sessions to help her own and the clones' understandings of the traumas they have all been through and to try to reach some kind of resolution. In response to Tamara's statement quoted above, Molly II replies, "*I don't want that. I … we're individuals. We each have to live our lives*" (Thompson, 2022, p. 57, italics original). Tamara still uses her clones to carry out dangerous missions, and they are hurt in the process, still without apparent empathy or remorse from Tamara Prime. Tamara Prime's own participation in the Hundred Man Kumite karate challenge might suggest that she considers herself superior to her clones still. There is, then, some tension between the two books as to whether Tamara (and by implication, Molly Prime and Molly II) is a potential mother figure and therefore in a superior hierarchical position to the clones, or one of a number of sisters who have equal status.

The mollys themselves, including Molly II, are sterile, in that their blood does not produce clones like Molly Prime's does. This is interesting as the scientist Vitaliy Ignatey suggests that Molly II emits a signal that should only be produced by Molly Prime, and the mollys report feeling the pull of Molly II as though she is Molly Prime. However, Molly II along with the other clones remain sterile. None of the

clones can ever become mothers. Similarly, although Myke was the original subject of the operation that triggered the clone-making abilities, she herself produced very few clones. Molly Prime, by comparison, is a fecund ‘mother’. As the premise for developing the clone-creating operation in the first place was a drop in birth rates, this suggests following generations of Primes may become more and more fertile in their ability to produce clones. However, this theory cannot be tested as neither Molly Prime nor Tamara bear traditionally conceived children. The clones are their only progeny. The haunting of a twenty-first-century text by its predecessors from previous centuries has been explored more widely in Chapter 1, but it is worth mentioning that in using falling birth rates as the inciting mechanism for his clone creations, Thompson’s trilogy invokes the spirits of well-known texts from the twentieth century that used a similar premise, such as Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) (itself enjoying a strong afterlife in its twenty-first-century television adaptation (Miller, 2016–present)) and P. D. James’s *Children of Men* (1992). These, not the only but the best-known, texts on the dystopias created by falling birth rates, are texts by white women that conflate questions of race with the rights of women over their bodies. Atwood’s work obliterates Black people from the novel, their having been disposed of either through death or servitude by the ruling class of Gilead before the novel’s narration begins, while James places the first pregnancy in a generation into the body of a young Black woman who must be protected by the White people around her. There is a legacy, then, of the usefulness of the female body for pregnancy being connected with race relations which casts ghostly echoes in Thompson’s work.

Molly Prime’s relationship with her mother, Myke, while not emotionally close, is strong. Myke Southbourne uses her skills as a former spy to give Molly Prime combat training, allowing her to overpower and kill her clones. This training becomes a central aspect of Molly Prime’s childhood as she does not attend school but instead lives through a sort of bootcamp childhood and adolescence. Myke is therefore both mother and teacher/trainer, and many of Molly Prime’s attitudes towards her clones can be traced back to Myke’s own hatred for them. Early in the series we are told that, “Molly [Prime]’s first memory is of her father killing her” (Thompson, 2017, p. 19), before she has developed sufficiently to realise that her clones are not her. This suggests a kind of reverse Electra complex, where rather than

Molly Prime fantasising about killing her mother to have sex with her father, she sees her father kill herself. When Molly Prime starts to kill her own clones instead of relying on her parents to do it for her, she asks her father, "Why do you find it so easy to kill me? … You must hate me" (Thompson, 2017, p. 43). Molly Prime later suffers from a condition called Capgras Syndrome: "the unshakeable belief that the people around you have been replaced by doubles" (Thompson, 2017, p. 58). In this case, Molly Prime believes that her parents are doubles who want to kill her. The irony of believing her parents to be doubles when Molly Prime herself is repeatedly attacked by her own doubles is apparent. However, it is also significant, when we learn that clones do not have to be murderous, that Molly Prime believes that her parents are both doubles *and hostile*. Molly Prime is here squarely situated as a haunted individual, but those who haunt her – who she perceives to be unreal – are her family. Molly Prime's Capgras Syndrome translates subject to object, demonstrating that this is not a phenomenon peculiar to clones: it can happen to 'normal' people as well.

The spectrality of Molly Prime's clones is made more literal when Molly II spends part of *The Survival of Molly Southbourne* surrounded by ghosts of herself, or of mollys, that only she can see. This is presented as a psychiatric issue, although it is never diagnosed. However, the ghost clones that she sees vanish once she discovers the clones that still exist, trapped in Vitaliy's basement, and which she names Molly Ann and Molina. The ghosts seem almost to remind her that other mollys exist, even if they are unseen. Unlike the clones themselves (up to this point in the series), the molly ghosts have a voice and an opinion. They guide Molly II and advise her, which possibly leads to Molly II's decision to name the mollys she frees and treat them as individuals. Their continued, non-hostile presence may also prompt Molly II's decision, which becomes apparent in *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne*, to refer to the mollys as sisters where they have previously been positioned as children. Molly II recognises that she is not an original, a superior, or a figure of authority, as a parent might be, but an equal; a sibling.

However, Thompson again uses ideas of abject motherhood when characterising Myke and her relationship with Molly Prime's, and indeed her own, clones. When Myke comes upon a molly in *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne*:

> The molly squints. ‘Mother? Ma?’
>
> Myke sees red instantly. She falls to her knees and starts pummelling the molly. ‘I … am … not … your … mother. I had one daughter, one perfect woman, and her name was Molly Southbourne. You are not my child. You are a nail clipping, you are shed hairs. You … are … not … real!” […] “You are not real,’ she says. ‘And I am not your mother.’ (Thompson, 2022, p. 91)

As has been discussed, the abject is particularly interested in excrement and other bodily fluids as “what goes out of the body, out of its pores and openings, points to the infinitude of the body proper and gives rise to abjection” (Kristeva, 2024 [1980], p. 109). Here Myke uses such an analogy when she describes the clones as “nail clippings” and “shed hairs”. Myke considers the provenance of the clones to be all that matters – that they are a refuse product of her daughter and can never amount to more. But it is the idea of motherhood itself that Myke finds so offensive. For Myke, motherhood is encompassed in a very specific space. It does not at all extend to people who look like or even share the same genetic make-up as her daughter, and the idea that it might pushes her to extreme violence. As her former Secret Service handler puts it when Myke asks how he knew she would agree to destroying the clones, “Because you hate the mollies and would exterminate them for free if I asked nicely” (Thompson, 2022, p. 21). In this case, the mollys are a literal spectre of Myke’s dead daughter, Molly Prime. Their revenance, however, is physical rather than spectral. They are made of Molly Prime’s bodily waste – her hair and fingernails – and provide physical bodies for Myke to blame and kill.

Creed discusses monstrous motherhood in the ideas of consuming all in order to feed offspring, and of horrific childbirth, but Myke presents herself as a separate figure in relation to the clones. She says to Molina, “I am not your mother … I am the opposite of a mother to you. I am not bringing you life. I am the anti-mother, the one who gives you death” (Thompson, 2022, p. 140). This idea of an anti-mother inverts the mother who will destroy all for her monstrous offspring, and instead brings about the anti-mother who visits death upon her (non-)children. However, it is worth remembering that Myke’s maternal love may itself be corrupted. When she considers her death at the hands of a molly, she writes, “*To die, to be killed by Molly, a weapon I perfected, this would be a good death*” (Thompson, 2022, p. 124, italics original). Weinstock writes that “We expect figures that look human to ‘act’ human – that is, to display a range of emotions, including empathy and compassion” (2023, p.

112). The reader first perhaps observes this lack of empathy, to appear human, in the molly clones, but by this point in the series, Myke's anti-mother fully demonstrates that it is the human originals, and not the clones, that fail to "act human". Myke's interest in her daughter as a repository for what Myke has taught her further suggests Myke has ceased to see her own daughter as a person, or even as a daughter, but only as an object she has created for a specific purpose. The pride she expresses is at what Molly Prime has achieved rather than who she is; at the qualities Myke has taught Molly Prime rather than anything innately 'Molly'. In this final statement, Myke succinctly demonstrates that it is the human originals who have haunted the clones, a final subversion of Thompson's apparent original premise.

Conclusion

While Thompson's clones are seldom ghostly, they nevertheless act as spectres of that which 'normal' (White) people would rather forget. He utilises language and attitudes long held towards Black migrants in Britain, and other marginalised peoples, in order to make the clones 'other' – but he also reflects the ways in which these people are made voiceless. Those who are voiceless are naturally spectral, as they can only haunt, rather than being able to speak their own story. Thompson therefore uses several techniques – including the abjection of the clones, and giving the clones a voice and collective history in the form of cultural memory – to turn them from haunting objects into haunted subjects. Of course, the trick is that Thompson does not make this thing happen: the clones were subjects all along, and only needed a mechanism and opportunity through which to make their voices heard. The twenty-first century is a time of amplifying the voices of the previously silent, of building communities where once people were disparate and unconnected. Thompson therefore democratises who has a voice – who is a subject – using mechanisms recognisable to the twenty-first-century reader, such as group therapy and closure of family trauma. As Thompson writes, "the resolution of the trilogy was acceptance" (T. Thompson, personal communication, January 3, 2024). The literal hauntings are hidden behind psychological diagnoses like Capgras Syndrome, leaving space for the spiritual, familial, and cultural hauntings to go unlabelled but to be amplified nonetheless. Although this chapter deals with clones and doppelgangers, there has been no mention here of Freud's uncanny. This is because the molly clones

are thoroughly canny – they are truly no different than Molly Prime or Molly II, once they are understood and allowed to speak.

Chapter 4: Self-Haunting through Time and Generations: *Rawblood* by Catriona Ward and *The Death of Jane Lawrence* by Caitlin Starling

Introduction

Throughout works on psychoanalysis, references are made to words associated with haunting. For Abraham and Torok, it was the crypt, the place inside a subject's self where they kept painful secrets, as the covert shift in the psyche "leads to the establishment of a sealed-off psychic place, a crypt in the ego" (1994, p. 141). For Freud, the unconscious materialised as ghostly encounters, both real and transparent, palpable but invisible (Frosh, 2012). Lacan, meanwhile, has been linked with ghosts in a collection on his works, *Lacan and the Ghosts of Modernity* (2004) edited by Marshall Needleman Armintor. To study the mind is to work with layers of the self or the individual. These layers haunt not only the psychiatrist who studies them, but also the subject themselves. This is even truer in the twenty-first century, when the ubiquity of social media and online identities encourage individuals to express themselves in more than one form, as will be explored in Chapter 6.

However, the current moment also sees, in its proliferation of neo-Victorian, classically Gothic works, a nod towards the psychology of the self that is multitudinous and haunting. They combine classically Gothic tropes with a contemporary splitting of the psyche, and selves that are layered through time and understanding. Two texts that exemplify this are *Rawblood* by Catriona Ward (2016) and *The Death of Jane Lawrence* by Caitlin Starling (2021).[24] This chapter will demonstrate how the understanding of the split self – as explored in psychological theory on trauma and as experienced through the multiple faces of the individual on different social media platforms – produces a ghostly quality in the self, which haunts the self. It will particularly focus on intergenerational trauma, and the way

[24] Although *The Death of Jane Lawrence* is not a neo-Victorian work, its alternate universe borrows heavily from British Victorian and post-World War II history. It is particularly Victorian in its use of "fairly developed surgical practices and the more modern image of the dashing surgeon doctor" (C. Starling, personal communication, January 4, 2024).

trauma haunts through family history, creating a legacy of guilt felt as keenly as a physical congenital illness.

Abraham and Torok write that:

> More often than not, the dead do not return to rejoin the living but rather to lead them into some dreadful snare, entrapping them with disastrous consequences. To be sure, all the departed may return, but some are destined to haunt: the dead who were shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave. (Abraham & Torok, 1994, p. 171)

For them, the haunter has no choice but to haunt. Their secrets and their emotions make haunting inevitable, and the overspill of emotion that creates the harm of haunting is a psychological mess compounded by secrets. However, in the twenty-first century, hauntings have a tendency to occur not just from the past haunting into the present, but from the future haunting into the past. The reason for this, this chapter proposes, is an intergenerational trauma that deals not with the generations of a family, but global generations such as Baby Boomer, Millennial, and Generations X and Z. In the last twenty years, as Generation Z and Millennials have achieved platforms of authority from which to make their voices heard, blame and accusations have been levelled against previous generations for economic and environmental crises that have seriously affected these generations' ability to survive and thrive. This chapter, therefore, explores both these versions of intergenerational trauma, and how this affects the haunting of the self and the family line.

Family and Intergenerational Trauma

In his essay "Horror Theory Now: Thinking about Horror", Kevin Corstorphine identifies that "Trauma, at both a personal and collective level, has emerged as a trope that captures the mood of the early twenty-first century and lends itself overtly to reading the themes of horror." (Corstorphine, 2023, p. 20). Catherine Spooner agrees that "the twenty-first century has been marked by the rise of interest in trauma and its manifestation in literary texts" (2017, p. 14), and further summarises Alexandra Warwick's "Feeling Gothicky" (2007) when she writes, "Whereas once the Gothic text registered the terrors of trauma and the impossibility of coming to terms with it, contemporary texts rather seek out trauma and cultivate it" (2021, p. 10). While, as has been addressed in the introduction, this trauma can be identified in

a number of national and world events, there is also a strong domestic element to twenty-first century trauma that lies between the generations. Abraham and Torok describe the phantom as “a formation of the unconscious … It passes – in a way yet to be determined – from the parent’s unconscious to the child’s” (Abraham & Torok, 1994, p. 173). Clara Mucci agrees that “After the denial that characterised preceding generations, our generation is probably the first to acknowledge the vastness and the depth of damage caused by human actions” (Mucci, 2013, p. 184), suggesting that we are starting to site a location for this trauma.

Both *The Death of Jane Lawrence* and *Rawblood* feature heroines who are suffering from intergenerational trauma. Gerald Fromm defines intergenerational trauma as: “what human beings cannot contain of their experience – what has been traumatically overwhelming, unbearable, unthinkable – falls out of social discourse, but very often on to and into the next generation as an affective sensitivity or a chaotic urgency” (Fromm, 2018, p. xvi). This falling out into the next generation is visible in Jane Lawrence, whose parents died in a bombing during a conflict reminiscent of World War II when she was a child. She was evacuated before their death, and carries with her the fear that her parents did not love her enough to make themselves safe and parent her to adulthood. She is brought up instead by her guardians, who are affectionate, but Jane fears, found her difficult or peculiar because she is neurodivergent. In *Rawblood,* Iris’s family history is a long generational line of trauma, beginning with the violent deaths of her grandparents, to the violent vivisectional experiments and substance abuse of her father, to her own accidental murder of her father and subsequent torture in a mental health facility. Trauma, as Ward puts it, “Tread[s] through the generations” (Ward, 2016, p. 333), and haunts through the generations in both texts, creating in their heroines feelings of anger and fear that are not entirely their own but have been passed down to them.

Firstly, addressing the intergenerational trauma that occurs within families, it is important to note that this is not only restricted to the biologically related, but also to categorisations of ‘found’ families. Ward’s Meg speaks of learning witchcraft from her guardian, Mrs Bantry, who learned it from her family: “Women’s games, passed down through her family, thrilling and secret” (Ward, 2016, p. 196). Although Mrs Bantry and Meg are not biologically related, they share a home and a fear of Mr Bantry, an abuser and rapist. Their trauma creates a familial bond, and their response

to this trauma is a kind of witchcraft. This is expressed as a feminine thing, “Women’s games”, creating a familial link between women, whether biologically related or not. However, the witchcraft passed to Iris is not a force for empowerment, but an entrapment, tethering her ghostly body to Rawblood after she dies. This recalls Abraham and Torok’s claim that “the words giving sustenance to the phantom return to haunt from the unconscious. These are often the very words that rule an entire family’s history and fiction as the tokens of its pitiable articulations” (1994, p. 176). The words in this case are “That the ones you love may never die” (Ward, 2016, p. 192), spoken by Iris’s lover Tom over an altar made by her mother. While the sentiment behind these words is one of keeping a love alive, their practical effect is entrapment, keeping Iris on a mortal plane and within the Rawblood grounds after her death. These are words repeated through different generations of the family, as well as by Tom, and the repetition through generations becomes a haunting superstition.

Similarly, the hauntings of *The Death of Jane Lawrence* occur through generations of the family – such as Jane’s trauma over the war experiences and deaths of her parents, and Augustine’s trauma over the death of his first wife and his other patients – but much of Starling’s trauma is experienced by generations of women in similar positions. Jane perceives herself as inheritor of the trauma of Augustine’s first wife, Elodie. For example, she narrates, “Something connected [Elodie] to Jane, something unknown. Perhaps unknowable” (Starling, 2021, p. 312). Jane’s connection to Elodie is emphasised by Augustine’s attempt to operate on Jane, believing her, during a hallucination, to be Elodie, and Jane thinks that the ghosts she sees in the glass are Elodie, when they are in fact Jane herself. The experience compresses, for Jane, the trauma related to her parents’ death in the war, and Elodie’s traumatic death:

> The taste of ether brought memories roaring back, not of Augustine covered in blood, but of sitting tucked in her mother’s lap, waiting for the shelling to stop. The fumes – not ether, much worse, but so similar in how it had burned – had reached her first …
>
> *Shallow breaths, darling, shallow breaths*, [Mother had] repeated over and over.
>
> But Jane couldn’t take shallow breaths. She could feel the panic of that night as if the very floor was shaking beneath them from the impact of the mortars. (Starling, 2021, p. 204–205, italics original)

In this example, the dual traumatic experiences of surviving war and surgery are laid over one another, flattening into a single traumatic response. Similarly, Jane feels a strong affinity to Abigail Yew, who Augustine operates upon to remove an ectopic pregnancy. Jane perceives that they are both wives who have been, to some extent, abandoned to suffer alone by their husbands. Starling writes, "Jane's stronger breathing timed to Abigail's own as if their parallelism could keep the woman alive" (Starling, 2021, p. 193).

In *Rawblood*, intergenerational trauma is compared to congenital disease. Alonso, Iris's father, works with his colleague and former lover, Charles, to identify rabbits that are genetically immune to toxoplasmosis, in the hopes of transferring that research to his own family to discover an "*Immunity which travels in the blood*" (Ward, 2016, p. 65, emphasis original) against the family's haunting. Rather than perceived as a mental deficiency (at least, at this point in the family's history), Alonso believes the haunting to be part of a physical malady that can be cured with medical treatment. This conflates language of superstition and medicine, as Alonso describes the family as "cursed", yet seeks a scientific cure for this curse. This could be in an effort to give trauma a physical manifestation that is identifiable and controllable. However, it also acknowledges the "curse" as a phenomenon that is real and quantifiable. Alonso describes the curse as "not caused by contagion, or by a virus. It is caused by feeling" (Ward, 2016, p. 15). This is true in the very bluntest sense, as the hauntings of the Villarcas are prompted by the excess of rage Iris's ghost feels. However, it also acknowledges the way that feelings, and in particular negative or traumatic feelings, can be passed down through generations, much like a congenital illness. Dr Goodman, Iris's psychiatrist, uses early understandings of psychoanalysis to proclaim as much: "It is a congenital defect. There is a long history of it in your family" (Ward, 2016, p. 179). Language is used to conflate ideas of science and the Gothic in the name Ward gives to the disease Alonso believes afflicts his family: *Horror autotoxicus,* meaning literally autotoxic horror, a horror that is toxic to oneself. This prompts a reading rooted in self-haunting, as the being that haunts Iris and the rest of her family is herself. She is autotoxic, and she becomes a horror.

Furthermore, it is implied the particular curse that afflicts Iris and her father is the result of two cursed lines intermingling, like genetic lines predisposed to a

particular illness creating a greater vulnerability in the ongoing family line. Don Villarca, Iris's grandfather, says, "This is an old truth: that when we, the Villarcas, marry, we invite the bad luck in" (Ward, 2016, p. 238) and "We should not share ourselves with others. It is not a good thing … Our lineage is steeped in blood. There is no family more deserving of a curse" (Ward, 2016, p. 239). Mary Hopewell, Iris's grandmother, then adds:

> [T]he Hopewells die young, also. Like the Villarcas, we murdered each other merrily, we fought duels, and we died, yes we died plentifully … One by one we fell victim to disease … You speak of the blood, of the curse of the Villarcas, but in truth the Hopewells are no less damned. (Ward, 2016, p. 21)

There is much focus on blood here, as a metaphor for lineage but also as a bodily fluid expressive of carrying disease, intermingled with superstitious language. The "curse" acts as a genetic flaw, doubled by intermingling two susceptible bloodlines. However, this also expresses the comingling of familial trauma. Both parties express a history of bloodshed, loneliness, and violence, compounded into a single bloodline. This trauma cannot help but be passed down the line, in the form of stories of the family that has come before. Mary's companion, Miss Brigstocke, who has Roma heritage and claims prescience, agrees this point saying, "This marriage will bring sickness and death. It will lay waste to generations" (Ward, 2016, p. 245). While the focus is on the forward line, the "generations" to come, this is also an example of the self-fulfilling prophecy of intergenerational trauma. The subsequent generations know to expect "sickness and death", precisely because they are told it will be so by the generations who came before.

Although the intergenerational trauma of *The Death of Jane Lawrence* does not span multiple generations, it nevertheless passes from Jane's parents to herself. When first describing her parents' death, Jane says, "'My parents died when I was very young, when Ruzka began gassing Camhurst during the war" (Starling, 2021, p. 4). As she says this her "hands shak[e]" and she notes "She hadn't meant to say it; she never spoke of her parents" (Starling, 2021, pp. 4–5). Starling here evokes a commonly known symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, with Jane's shaking hands. She also establishes the code of silence that often weaves around intergenerational trauma by noting Jane never spoke of her parents. As Lomnardi and Gordon write, "It is when trauma is hidden, unspeakable, and unopposable, when it remains within an encapsulated shell of experience, that it does most damage"

(Lombardi & Gordon, 2015, p. 174), demonstrating that silence is a marker of trauma as much as more visible symptoms.

Iris's father, Alonso's, response to the family trauma, to the "feeling" that curses his family, is to reject or guard against the very idea of feelings. He tells Iris, "If you have a strong feeling which you cannot control, you must tell Papa at once. It could be the first sign" (Ward, 2016, p. 15). This leads to a generationally prompted suppression of feeling in Iris, which may be the cause of her extremity of feeling when she finally is forced to let loose her emotions. Again, Dr Goodman clumsily articulates this when he says of Iris, "Your distress and your grief are not acknowledged by you because you have shut them up" (Ward, 2016, p. 180). This is an example of the effects of intergenerational trauma as described by Lombardi and Gordon: "the intergenerational transmission of trauma … while not experienced directly by the subject, may nevertheless leave their mark through the shame, abjection, and feelings of helplessness of the previous generations which are affectively passed down to the following generations" (Lombardi & Gordon, 2015, p. 174). It also demonstrates a paranoia towards emotion. The scientist in Alonso does not trust that which he cannot control, namely "feeling", and therefore demonises it, creating an equal paranoia in his daughter. The fear of emotion comes from a sense that 'She' (the only name given to the family ghost) is drawn to feelings: "She has no desires save one, which is to end you" and "*she* comes to those of our family, comes sooner or later – when we love" (Ward, 2016, p. 78). Alonso ascribes 'Her' a quality of having no desires or feelings except to kill his family, when quite the opposite is true: Iris's haunting is the result of an abundance of repressed anger. His conclusion, then, that she is drawn to Villarcas who love may be accurate, in that Iris is strongly motivated by a misplaced sense of envy for affection. However, it is unclear whether this envy would have come about at all, had she not been isolated by her father's fear. Here, the haunting enters one of several paradoxes (more on this later).

Both texts use the family's house – a site of familial inheritance – as a central focus for their hauntings. Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) is well-known in Gothic circles for its conflation of the house as bloodline and as physical building (Nadal, 2016), and Weinstock identifies that "the meaning of 'house' in Gothic narratives often quickly inclines toward 'family,' including ancestors, lineage, patrimony, inheritance, and the like" (2023, p. 145).

Both the contemporary primary texts follow on with this conflation between the house's role in establishing the family name and estate, and providing a building as a site in which hauntings of the family occur. Ward's Rawblood is a building that has not always belonged to the Villarca family, but still has a long generational history with Iris's forbears. Iris narrates: "I can't describe it any more than I can my own bones, my eyes" and that "Rawblood is written into us [the Villarcas]" (Ward, 2016, p. 6–7). Iris here draws a parallel between the body of Rawblood's inhabitant-spirit and the house itself. The specificity of "written into us" also ties the house together with the story of the family, an acknowledgement that this is a narrative, while also evoking the connection in the contemporary reader to congenital illness being 'written into' DNA. The house is likened to human biology, to the body of its family, to the extent that Alonso asserts: "Rawblood and the Villarcas are one" (Ward, 2016, p. 50). By comparison, Starling's Lindridge Hall was built by Augustine's family and designed to accommodate the magical rituals they perform, including a vast crypt in the cellar with a table or altar suitable to both magical and medical practices. Its architecture is confusing to Jane, who has a very mathematical mind. She finds "several fake doors that only confused her more" and "she would catch a glimpse of a room or the angle of a hallway and think that she saw some grander design to it, some shape only visible from a certain perspective" (Starling, 2021, p. 74). Although Jane feels a distance from the house, not encountering it as her own 'home', she nevertheless has an affinity for the building. Geometry becomes important both to the magic that allows Jane to haunt herself, and to protecting herself from various ghosts who mean her harm.

The house of Rawblood is passed from one family member to another, much as their 'curse' is. Alonso tells Iris, "*She* is like a disease … I believe she travels in our blood, passed down, that she is a biological inheritance, as much as a spiritual one" (Ward, 2016, p. 77). The importance of lineage, and the different kinds of inheritance, are here all brought together, linking the house and the blood with the inheritance of legacy and the inheritance of genetics. What is not mentioned directly, but is omnipresent, is the inheritance of trauma. The family's trauma, perhaps, is passed down in the words themselves; in Alonso's warning to Iris about her inheritance, and the actions and words Alonso uses to try to curtail this inheritance, even though these very actions and words perpetuate it. However, there is also in this

quote a focus specifically on blood. This preoccupation with blood occurs throughout the novel, such as when Alonso says, "'I feel her here.' He tapped a blue vein, bulging in his pale wrist. 'Within me. Coursing in my blood'" (Ward, 2016, p. 165). There is an emphasis, again, on the biology and physicality of the Villarcas' haunting. The blood refers to bloodlines, but also the bodily fluid.

While haunted houses and houses as sites of haunting have been closely examined in Chapter 1, Ward and Starling's houses occupy a different role in these stories. They act more as illusions of imprisonment than actual sites of haunting. Augustine Lawrence believes himself tied to Lindridge Hall, although there is nothing intrinsically malevolent about it. The ghosts that feed on his guilt are situated in the house, but they are a result of his own failed magical experimentations rather than any malevolence of the house itself. There is an early perception that the house is at fault – Jane narrates, for example, "Augustine, devoured by the house. Augustine, afraid and lost and consumed" (Starling, 2021, p. 213) – but it is later understood that the house is only haunted because it is the seat of Augustine's guilt. The haunting is centred on Augustine himself, not on a personified or animated Lindridge Hall. Jane, in fact, is able to utilise various aspects of the house in order to save herself and Augustine, such as sealing the door to the cellar to keep Augustine from attacking her, and using the house's windows and mirrors in order to haunt herself with advice from the future. Even when the house does physically imprison Augustine, it is as a result of Jane's magic and a response to Jane's need for protection, rather than the house acting against its owner. The house itself, in fact, is quite benign.

Similarly, Rawblood itself is not a house of danger, despite its name. This name is explained away by Iris near the beginning of her narrative: "It sounds like a battle, like grief, but it's a gentle name. 'Raw' from 'Sraw', which means 'flowing', for the Dart River that runs nearby. 'Blood' from 'Bont', a bridge" (Ward, 2016, p. 6). The reader might perceive here an awkward explanation, relating words that do not actually sound alike to their derivatives. They might instead choose Iris's initial descriptions of the name being "like a battle, like grief" which are supported by Charles's assertion that "I imagine [Rawblood] has withstood battles … It seems evident from the very name of the place that it is so" (Ward, 2016, p. 55), or a local soldier's description of it as a "bad, lonely place with a name like murdered flesh"

(Ward, 2016, p. 322). Indeed, this is the fate of the house, to be filled with Iris's grief, with her battle to take vengeance on the lives of her family. Contrary to a site of danger, Rawblood as a house is frequently cited as a place of home and safety. Mary Hopewell describes Rawblood: "I have seen, and lived in other, perhaps finer houses. But none have elicited in me the very particular sensation of being *home*" (Ward, 2016, p. 224–225, italics original). Iris feels similarly possessive as she returns to Rawblood as an adult and searches for the ghost that tormented her, not yet knowing the ghost is herself: "Rawblood breathes her like a lung. This house. My house" (Ward, 2016, p. 331).

Jane feels quite the opposite on first finding herself at Lindridge Hall: "She hesitated to even call it a *home*. It was … a building. Only that" (Starling, 2021, p. 59, emphasis original) and later, "Lindridge Hall was just a house" (Starling, 2021, p. 79). Here Starling emphasises that the house is benign, but also creates a separation between a house as a building and a house that holds the quality of 'home'. Jane does not feel drawn to Lindridge Hall in the same way that Mary and Iris feel at home in Rawblood. It is perhaps this difference between mere building and home that creates a grounds for haunting. Iris haunts Rawblood because she feels it is hers, and her family's. What Jane eventually haunts is herself and not the house. She only haunts within the house because that is where she is and it provides the mechanisms – the windows and mirrors – necessary to haunt. By comparison, Augustine feels entirely tied to the house. He tells Jane, "I am yours. Every inch save what this house demands of me" (Starling, 2021, p. 94). Quite beside the physical manifestations of the ghosts, Augustine feels he is possessed by the house, both in terms of the ghostly possessions that haunt him at night, and in the sense the house owns something of him – yet the house is still not at fault in the way of High Place or Hundreds Hall. Lindridge Hall does not have its own agency.

When Iris haunts, she does not limit herself to the family members she knows or has heard stories about. Iris haunts back through time as far as she can reach, including those who are "of a time before names, long before Rawblood was" (Ward, 2016, p. 335). While intergenerational trauma has been examined in psychology in the context of second and third generations from the original trauma – particularly in family lines who survived mass traumatic events such as the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima – Ward's haunting passes far further back in time. There is no

originator of the trauma except for Iris herself, who is the last of the Villarca/Hopewell line. Iris, in fact, creates the curse that Don Villarca and Mary Hopewell discuss together as afflicting both their families. Time loops back on itself, allowing the originator of trauma to come at the end, threading tragedy and haunting through all her line throughout history. This looping of time conforms to Julian Wolfreys's ideas of memory and haunting, as, critiquing Peter Childs, he writes, "memory is mutable … the trace that returns cannot be defined by such fixed points as 'past' and 'present'" (Wolfreys, 2018, p. 220). Weinstock agrees that "haunting is established not as a function or extension of architecture, but rather of memory" (2023, p. 143). Memory holds an important role here, as Iris haunts her own memories, returning to the sites where she herself remembers seeing 'Her', and similar moments related from her father's memories. Wolfreys proposes that haunting is a mechanism specific to memory, asking, "What would it mean to realise ourselves as nothing other than memory?" (Wolfreys, 2018, p. 216). Jane, similarly, knows where to haunt based on her memories of when she saw a ghost. If Iris and Jane become less than or other than human when they become hauntings, what they become may be nothing other than memory. Wolfreys goes on to assert, "our ghosts are often all too honest revenant souvenirs of all we no longer are, and no longer have, except as phantasms of Being" (Wolfreys, 2018, p. 216). Again, both Jane and Iris, at the point of their haunting, are no longer who they were. Iris has experienced a massive personality change due to her repeated lobotomies and trepanations. Jane has been through a transformative experience by learning magic and discovering that the stability of the world is based upon her own belief. Their hauntings provide souvenirs to the past of the people they become, which is very different from the old selves being haunted.

The generations that haunt and hurt one another are not limited to the generations of a family. In the twenty-first century, much attention has been paid to global generations and how the decisions or lifestyles of one have effected or created blame for the others. Blame and frustration has been passed forwards, from older generations to younger generations, as can be shown in sundry news articles with titles such as, "Twenty Things Millennials Have Been Killing Off in the Last Decade", which features the line, "Hating on millennials has become so popular that headlines pointing out trends in their choices have also become irresistible click-bait"

(Donvito, 2023, para. 2). The headline format has become so ubiquitous, one individual made a collage of fifty news headlines blaming millennials, as reported in the *Daily Mail* (Stern, 2017). However, this blame is passed both ways, as younger generations reach positions where they have a voice and platform to retaliate. Perhaps most famously, this has been vocalised by environmental activist Greta Thunberg in her 2019 UN address, which she made at the age of sixteen: "you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you! You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words" (Thunberg, 2019, para. 2 & 3). The anger at the imminent climate crisis is only one battlefield between generations, with British Millennials and Generation Z beset throughout adulthood by joblessness and precarity in the workplace in the form of ubiquitous zero-hours contracts. There are many reasons, economic, sociological, and political, for this, but some blame must be attributed to the structural implications of an aging workforce who retire later, leaving little succession planning possible to create positions, particularly in graduate industries, for younger generations.[25] Years of economic recession in the West, combatted ineffectually with years of austerity economics in the UK, combined with skyrocketing house prices have meant younger generations struggle to afford their own housing, leading to yet more feelings of precarity and displacement. This is in part due to mortgage lenders requiring higher deposits in house purchases, a backlash from financial negligence in the 1990s and early 2000s which led to several banks and building societies in the UK collapsing.

This anger at previous generations for environmental and economic crises has been expressed more blatantly in other horror texts, such as *Hide* by Kiersten White (2022), but also provides an explanation for this new trope of hauntings that occur not just from the past into the present, but from the present into the past.[26] Both Jane and Iris are frustrated by the family history that has resulted in their personal trauma. In Iris's case, this fury is passed back through her entire ancestry in the form of malevolent hauntings. In Jane's case, a weary sense of inevitability prompts her to haunt a more naïve version of herself. The present or future haunting back through

[25] See, for example, Pitt News's "Entry-Level Jobs Don't Exist Anymore" (Xiong, 2023).
[26] This is particularly apparent in recent television series, such as *Russian Doll* (Lyonne, Headland, & Poehler, 2019-2022), *Kindred* (Jacobs-Jenkins, 2023) – an adaptation of Octavia E. Butler's book *Kindred* (1979) that, as in these texts, forefronts recent and legacy intergenerational trauma – and *The Haunting of Hill House* (Flanagan, 2018).

the past is becoming a common trope in twenty-first-century Gothic fiction, as the acknowledgement and healing of parental trauma has become common in wider fiction.[27] Starling and Ward are both Millennial writers, part of the generation that are increasingly frustrated by the dual pressures of generational blame and a lack of control or autonomy.

Self-Haunting

The Gothic is full of spirits that at first appear malevolent, only to later be revealed as providing a necessary message or pointing to an important secret or injustice. Examples of this can be seen in contemporary texts, such as the film *Crimson Peak* (2015) or *Things Heard and Seen* (2021), based on the novel *All Things Cease to Appear* by Elizabeth Brundage (2016), as well as in more classic Gothic works, from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* or May Sinclair's *The Nature of the Evidence* (1923). However, in the twenty-first century, the ghost with a message is just as likely to be a version of the self, haunting through time from some future or past moment to deliver a message. As Graham Fraser writes, "Under the anachronous conditions of spectrality, a ghost may return from the future as easily as from the past" (2018, p. 492), emphasising that hauntings occur through time. Classic haunting texts, such as Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, have hinted at elements of self-haunting, as noted by Richard Pascal who writes of the subject of Jackson's haunting, Eleanor, "haunted hitherto, she now aspires to do the haunting herself" (2014, p. 481). However, this is a concept explored far more explicitly in the twenty-first century. Haunting forces are not just a visitation of the past upon the present, but can occur as well from the future. This is a device that twenty-first-century adaptations have layered more literally onto historical texts, such as Mike Flanagan's adaptations *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (adapted from Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* respectively). Crucially, these adaptations rely on a lack of recognition of the haunting self, the future self having changed so entirely as to be unrecognisable.

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[27] See for example, The Birdcage by Eve Chase (2022), Mothered by Zoje Stage (2023), or The Skeleton Key by Erin Kelly (2022).

There are elements of this haunting through time that also appears in the time loop novels that will be addressed in Chapter 7, but *Rawblood* and *The Death of Jane Lawrence* focus most closely on the self as split, using this self-division as their 'twist' reveal endings. This section will argue that these texts use traditional haunting tropes to focus on the self as split, unsettling the reader with the possibility of unknowable or unrecognisable selves. In *Rawblood*, Ward teases the idea of self-haunting throughout the text. That Iris is also 'Her' is never far from the surface. For example, when Iris first encounters 'Her', she narrates, "I thought something horrible was in the cave. But the horrible thing is inside me" (Ward, 2016, p. 29). This excerpt also demonstrates the self-loathing and guilt created by trauma, and by Iris's encouragement by her father to suppress her feelings. It is not until the end of the book, when Iris has searched Rawblood for the ghost that haunted her as a teenager, that she realises: "I thought I was haunted. It's the other way around" and "*There is no* her. *There is only you* [Iris]" (Ward, 2016, p. 334, italics original). Both these excerpts show a reflection in the writing, between the subject who is haunted and the object who haunts. They act like sentences on either side of a mirror, evoking a sense of duality and reflection.

The version of the self seen in the mirror is discussed in many texts on the uncanny, as the image of the self seen in the mirror is reversed, and not quite the same as the real person. Further, an individual does not know what they actually look like, and the version of a person in the mirror can be very different from that individual's mental idea of their self-image. This lack of recognition is raised in *Rawblood* as Iris is told, "one day when they wake you, your hair will be grey and you won't know the old woman in the mirror" (Ward, 2016, p. 185). It is no surprise, then, that Starling utilises for her uncanny self-hauntings reflective surfaces. The spirit Jane believes to be Elodie appears only in mirrored surfaces, such as darkened windows and mirrors. Jane does not recognise herself but sees that "her reflection looked short, hunched perhaps … Her reflection had red eyes" (Starling, 2021, p. 85) – a state Jane reaches towards the end of the novel through lack of sleep and food. Her hardship, her trauma, makes her a phantom unrecognisable to herself. Spooner highlights the important role of recognition in Gothic texts when she writes, "Gothic is the dream-work of history, and by interpreting its symbols we can bring to the surface what history does not know about itself" (2021, p. 5). Jane, in not

recognising herself as the ghostly figure in windows and mirrors, is forced to interpret the symbols and clues she leaves for herself. The use of dark windows as well as mirrors means also that the haunting figure is not a static image but apt to morph and change as the reflection is not utterly clear due to the warped glass. For example, when Jane sees herself/Elodie in the window, she narrates, “her face wavered and shifted, features arranging themselves differently every time Jane blinked. One moment, she was just a skull with red eyes; another, and she could have been Jane’s sister” (Starling, 2021, p. 227–228). This allows not only for ambiguity on the part of the reader over who exactly the ghost is, but enables the ghost to be both Elodie and Jane, conflating them as one person or as separate generations holding the role of Augustine’s wife. But Starling further adds the possibility of “Jane’s sister”, rather than Jane herself. Jane does not have a sister, but the image of one again evokes ideas of familial connection, and familial generations. The reflections are not perfect and therefore can be multiple as well as flawed. There is an interesting parallel in the lexicography of ‘reflection’ as it relates both to surfaces that show a reflected image, and to a therapeutic process of thinking back on past traumatic events. A patient who has been through trauma might be invited to reflect on their emotions and actions in an effort to psychoanalyse and process trauma.

Jane also uses reflective surfaces as a tool to remember herself – ironic, perhaps, given that the apparitions she sees in the mirror are also a version of herself, just as true as the one that stands observing. She narrates, “there, in the window, was [Jane’s] reflection, so much like what she had seen the night before. But it was hers, through and through” and “She sought out the Jane that had been and wrenched her into the form of a mask. In the window, a happier woman looked back at her” (Starling, 2021, p. 112–113). Mirrors are here used to show truth and lies. Jane forms a mask of happiness for herself, which she perceives as a happy woman looking back at her. She draws also a distinction of ownership over her reflection; the image she wishes to see is “hers, through and through”, while the haunting reflection of the night before is rejected, by implication not hers. Fraser notes that mirrors perform a similar function in Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939): “the mirrors in the novel open out until they cease to be mere reflectors of the material world and become instead spaces of interaction where gazes meet” (Fraser, 2018, 491). The gazes here are not between different people, but between different versions of a

single self: one canny, one uncanny. However, glass also works as a containing mechanism for Iris in her ghostly form. She sees through the windows but cannot seem to pass through the windows to touch or access the things she wants. For example, "I look as though looks could reach [Tom] there, through glass, through air" and "We are suspended, arrested, caught each in the other's eye. I hiss, my lips nearly kiss the glass" (Ward, 2016, p. 266). Glass works to separate Iris from the world of the living, but also reveals her true nature to herself: "In the dirty cracked mirror which hangs over the basin, someone regards me. Shorn head, pale skin" and "There I am in the mirror" (Ward, 2016, p. 268–269).

A window is a portal, both revealing and separating the viewer from what is outside. It is a liminal threshold that Starling uses to connect the real world to Jane's world "out of place, out of time" (Starling, 2021, p. 309). Abraham and Torok write that "The meta psychological concept of Reality refers to the place, in the psychic apparatus, where the secret is buried" (Abraham and Torok, 1994, p. 157). This suggests a place outside of time and place is where truth will be revealed, and in Starling's novel, this very much the case. When Jane casts a spell to protect herself by scratching a circle into the mirror and moving so her body is contained within it: "She built the wall, doubled, around her image and through the other side of the mirror. It made a tunnel, and in it she heard a roaring, rushing sound" (Starling, 2021, p. 310). The mirror acts as a portal through which Jane can call to her later self, the haunter, to ask for aid. This conforms to existing theory on the use of mirrors as portals: "the mirrors … are more fundamentally acting as portals to a ghostly experience of place, time, memory, and self" (Fraser, 2018, p. 483), suggesting not just a mundane portal but one that is haunting.

However, the mirror-portal also acts as a rupture, breaking a barrier between what is real and linear, and what is ghostly and beyond-linear, outside of time. Wisker connects a disruption of linear time with the ghost story's revelation of trauma when she writes, "ghost stories disrupt linear time and the neat packing away of traumatic histories into a safe space, 'the past'" (2022, p. 223). This links to *The Death of Jane Lawrence* as a trauma narrative, as Lombardi and Gordon write, "Trauma is, at its core, a rupture. It is a moment that tears into the course of normative living, altering the very bonds of identity" (Lombardi & Gordon, 2015, p. 172). While the mirror-portal is helpful to Jane, it nevertheless is a mechanism by

which she re-experiences her earlier trauma – such as Augustine's attempt to operate on her, and moments of terror at believing she has seen a ghost – and conflates her identity with that of Augustine's dead first wife, Elodie. When Jane enters this place – out of place, out of time – Starling begins a new chapter titled "Chapter Zero" (Starling, 2021, p. 337), which uses a different font to the previous text and has no printed page numbers. This creates an affective jolt in the reader, that not only is the character in the narrative in a new place and time, but the reader themselves is experiencing a visually different narrative without the anchoring reassurance that page numbers provide. In this chapter, Jane describes time as "only onionskins marked with similar drawings of place and actor, arranged in different scenes" (Starling, 2021, p. 337). Time is not only separate, but minimised in terms of importance. Time is a refuse product, as common as not just an onion, but its skin, which is shed and thrown away. Here the paradoxes are more fully explained. For example, "Augustine dies. Augustine lives. Both are true, here in death … But in life, time is linear" (Starling, 2021, p. 343). Similarly, when Jane is outside of time and place, she narrates, "the past is the future, as if time is mirrored" (Starling, 2021, p. 338). The disconcerting splitting of time and timelines is caused by the rupture, but also reveals a peculiar predestination.

Both texts use a time travel mechanism to enable their heroines to haunt both themselves and, in Iris's case, her family through history. This is not so much a conscious process, whereby the haunter chooses a moment to visit and appears to the person they wish to haunt. Rather, in both cases, time becomes malleable. As Iris puts it, "Time rolls back in that peculiar way it has of late" (Ward, 2016, p. 272), and later, "Time is fitting into itself like a Russian doll" (Ward, 2016, p. 294). It is not a process Jane or Iris has much choice over. They are taken through time and recognise a moment in which they experienced a haunting, then choose whether to fulfil this moment in their own lives, or whether to change time. For Starling, time does not just loop or collapse on itself, but the ghosts exist "out of place, out of time", suggesting a realm beyond both these dimensions which ghosts or some kind of ghostly consciousness are able to exist in and pass through. The fact that both Iris and Jane choose to perpetuate the haunting suggests, however, that this choice is an illusion – indeed, Jane understands that if she does not appear to herself, help will not be given at strategic moments, and a paradox will be created that might end in her or

Augustine's non-existence. This paradox is described as "a void, a yawning white expanse that Jane cannot cross" (Starling, 2021, p. 338). To some extent, Iris also has a choice not to haunt, but her psychological trauma and her anger at the way she has been treated mean she cannot not haunt. Abraham and Torok describe this in a traumatic context as "the real suffering … caused by a wound the subject does not know how to heal" (1994, p. 142). There is an element of predestination to both hauntings. Iris says of one of her moments of haunting, "I am meant to find her here" (Ward, 2016, p. 273). There is a force beyond Iris herself that brings her to the moments of her haunting, though she has less control than Jane, who cycles through time to come upon the moments when she believed she saw Elodie's ghost. Iris did not experience all of the moments of her haunting first-hand, suggesting some other force – random or predestined – brings her to the moments of her haunting.

Both characters recognise moments in their own history and, in Iris's case, in her family's history, as moments of haunting which were produced by themselves rather than the spirits they assumed at the time. This creates a one-way moment of recognition, on behalf of the later-in-time, ghostly self of the haunters, for their past selves. This recognition is still, however, uncanny. The haunters' perspectives of themselves have changed, due to the events of the book, and they look back on themselves with a degree of contempt for the naïve people they were in the past – the sorts of people who looked to ghosts for help or feared ghosts that are actually themselves. Wolfreys writes that "the ghostly forces of memories of events … [serve] and continue to serve to determine who [an individual is]" (2018, p. 224). In this respect, both Jane and Iris are a product of their memories – both memories of trauma, and memories of being haunted. These memories inform their perceptions of their selves, and turn them into haunting spirits who are unrecognisable to their earlier selves. The experience of haunting and being haunted are formative to their creation and perception of self, which at the same time makes them uncannily unrecognisable to themselves as haunters. This works similarly to the development and tribalisation of global generations. While Karl Mannheim first proposed a distinguishing of global generations as a solution to the "problem" of "understanding … the structure of social and intellectual movements" (2005 [1927], p. 273), as oncoming generations appeared to perceive the world and develop ideas and opinions roughly in tandem, generational labels have become an easy shorthand for tribalizing

generations in the media. This is commonly in a context of blame and opposition, leading generations to feel haunted by one another. One cannot help but recognise one's own global generation, and fall into their tribe, feeling both its blame and opposition, whether one wants to or not.

Iris's haunting through her family's and her own history is both destructive and motivated by rage. Like Gina Wisker's description of Jennet in *The Woman in Black* (1983), Iris "returns from a damaged past to limit the future" (2022, p. 81). The ways in which Iris haunts, and the fact she does not discriminate between haunting those who hurt her and those who are 'innocent', tormenting all of her family indiscriminately, means that Iris limits her family and herself. Her haunting is a self-fulfilling prophecy, creating the very damage that results in Iris's desire to haunt. Wisker links such self-destructive hauntings to the domestic, which will be discussed in more detail later, by asserting that "Perhaps all women are haunted by their mothers and grandmothers, by aunts and great aunts and by previous generations of women, from the compliant to the articulate and critical" (2022, p. 107). Ward subverts this, conflating Iris as an individual with her own feminine familial past. Alfonso's emphasis on 'she/her' – the haunting spirit – as a cursed past family member, makes Iris afraid of her familial past, as further emphasised by the illness Alfonso claims the family carries. However, this past female family member is in fact Iris herself. She perceives her ghostly self as a previous generation, when it is actually her own future. However, Weinstock also highlights that Gothic narratives "ask us what happens when we cease to be ourselves – that is, when our actions and agency are subsumed by some other power and we become tools and vessels – objects – motivated by some force outside our control" (2023, p. 85). Both Jane and Iris are themselves when they travel through time in order to haunt, although they are changed by the stories they have lived. In this respect they become "tools and vessels", but tools of the author, used to tell tales of haunting, and how being haunted changes us.

Ghosts as Guilt

A further aspect that links the haunted of both *Rawblood* and *The Death of Jane Lawrence* is guilt. Jane is haunted by survivor guilt following her parents' death, and

guilt for not being 'normal' and therefore perceiving herself to be unlovable. Since his first wife's death on the operating table, Augustine is haunted by the ghosts of patients he could not save. He says of this guilt, "I will suffer the way I am destined to" (Starling, 2021, p. 181) – again, haunting is preoccupied with a concept of predestination. Guilt is an emotion that exists perpetually. It does not develop or lessen as grief does, but feeds itself. Mucci writes that "the most difficult task for extremely traumatised patients" is to "detach their memories and hopes from the dead" (2013, p. 167). This suggests a haunting not prompted by the dead per se, but by an unwillingness on the part of the living to give up on the dead. As the ghosts that feed on guilt in Starling's work say, "we are starving, my dear. Our hunger is endless compared to yours" (Starling, 2021, p. 306). Following this, Jane asks herself, "what should a ghost hunger for?" (Starling, 2021, p. 307), and guilt and shame are the clearest answers. Conversely, Iris's strongest emotional response seems to be righteous anger, and this certainly fuels the majority of her hauntings. Her anger is generated by the life she never had the opportunity to live, having been doomed to kill her father and therefore spend her adult life incarcerated and unloved. Even before Iris's accidental murder, her father sequesters her at Rawblood, isolating her from friends and lovers. It is Iris's rebellion, her insistence on making connection outside her immediate family, that leads to the murder. Wisker identifies that "At the core of women's ghost stories lies romantic fantasy about love, family, domestic bliss, identity enabled through relation to others" (2022, p. 68). Domesticity – or rather its absence from her life – is what haunts Iris in the asylum, and fuels her rage as a ghost. However, when the anger has run itself out, Iris is left with guilt for causing the hauntings in the first place. Iris's guilt is paradoxical: she is doomed to haunt, as the hauntings and the trauma they have caused have already happened, yet she still feels guilty for the trauma felt by her family that was passed down to her and resulted in her miserable ending.

Guilt has long been associated with haunting. This can be seen in texts already referenced, such as *Beloved* and *The Turn of the Screw*, but also in more contemporary texts, such as George Saunders's "The Wavemaker Falters" (1993), Alison Littlewood's *Mistletoe* (2019), Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1983), and Dale Bailey's *In the Night Wood* (2018). If a haunting exists to right a wrong that has been committed, this can take the form of justice for one who has been wronged, or an

amends for a wrong committed by the one who performs the haunting. A similar sentiment is expressed in *The Death of Jane Lawrence* when Dr Nizamiev says:

> Stories tell us that ghosts are fixed in time by strong emotion. Fear, or grief, or confusion. What if you saw not what was, but what the ghost of Elodie remembers? Fractured interpretations, reassembled into something that goes against truth. (Starling, 2021, p. 152).

However, as these texts feature characters who are both the haunted and the haunter, they also take up both of these positions. The characters have been wronged and commit wrongs against others, leading to a loop of pain and suffering that reflects the time loop aspect of the stories. However, for Ward, the time loop is also a kind of stasis. Alonso says, "It is as if [the ghost] would have Rawblood and all of us in it suspended for ever, unchanging … under glass, in a museum case" (Ward, 2016, p. 81). This presents the idea not of time travel, but of a sort of flattening of time, so that all times may be accessed at once, as perceived not just by the haunter, but also by the family being haunted. Iris narrates, "I see them, my family, laid out in time; a series of interconnecting rock pools, glassy under the sun. The sea washing in and out of us" (Ward, 2016, p. 81). Ward here plays with time and space, laying out history as a connected landscape, and the forces of haunting as a tide able to touch all at once, or none, or some, operating entirely outside of the family but made of the same stuff.

Although guilt acts as a negative motivating factor for haunting, Ward also uses guilt as a kind of addictive substance, likened to Alonso's laudanum addiction: "[Alonso] is in thrall to his past and chronically addicted to morphine" (Ward, 2016, p. 298). When Ward raises Alonso's past, she is referring to the blame he lays on himself for his wife, Meg's, death, and for continuing a family line he believes to be either cursed or diseased (or both). She is writing of guilt. Iris puts it more explicitly when she narrates, "I let my guilt wrap about me. I settle it firmly on my shoulders. I must do so, for I will carry it to the end of my days" (Ward, 2016, p. 299) and "The long days of loneliness. The shame, the guilt, deep-rooted" (Ward, 2016, p. 134). Here, guilt is a garment to be worn, another thing passed down between generations. It is reminiscent of her mother's riding habit, which Iris wears when she kills her father. It is another thing taken from her parents – specifically from her father – and taken into herself to wear "to the end of [her] days".

If one accepts guilt as an inciting factor both for haunting and for being haunted, the resolution, then, must be to overcome this guilt by 'moving on'. The phrase is particularly interesting to the concept of haunting as there is a dual meaning to 'moving on' that reflects again a link between the language of the Gothic and the language of psychoanalysis. 'Moving on' has come to mean "accept[ing] that a situation has changed and be[ing] ready to deal with new experiences" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). In particular, this relates to recovering from a broken relationship, passing from a place of fixation or of being engaged with another individual, to a place of freedom from that individual or relationship – the example of usage given in Cambridge Dictionary's definition is "Since he and his girlfriend broke up, he's been finding it difficult to move on", demonstrating that this has particular relevance for relationships and emotional connection. However, the phrase is also commonly used to refer to the spiritual process of a ghost or other spirit 'moving on' to the next life. It is assumed, in such a situation, that the ghost is 'stuck' in the physical realm and must be helped to transfer to whatever place the dead are 'meant' to go.

The spiritual moving on is, in *Rawblood*, facilitated by burial. There is much emphasis on burial throughout the text. For example, Alonso says of Meg and Charles's burial place, "It is fitting that we do this here. Where she is buried. Where they let me bury him … they lie together, at least. Brother and sister. I gave them that" (Ward, 2016, p. 76). Alonso's guilt is partly assuaged by ensuring the two are buried together, but it is also presented as something he gave to them, therefore benefitting the dead as much as the living. Burial is important to Abraham and Torok, who write, "The image of the phantom does not come to us accidentally as a term for the analyst's torment. This image points to an occasion of torment for patients as well – a memory they buried *without legal burial place*" (1994, p. 140–141, emphasis original). The emphasis for them is on the legality of the burial place, but this could equally refer to the 'rightness' of a burial – as Alonso says, burial together, or the respectful dealing with remains. Iris is finally able to rest when Tom brings her body back to Rawblood and buries her beneath the ash tree in a grave that has haunted residents of Rawblood throughout their history – another form of Iris haunting herself and her family, but in this case with her resting place. Even the term 'resting place' raises ideas of settlement and peace, similar to 'moving on'. Iris's burial is also the key to ending the haunting. She narrates, "Someone buries me here. Will bury me

here. Has buried me here. Comes to the same thing. How are ghosts set free? Graves are doors too" (Ward, 2016, p. 347). Ward plays with tenses here, evoking the looping of time that Iris experiences as a haunting spirit, but also describes the way in which trauma has moved through the generations; the way a long-past trauma can evoke an emotional reaction in someone several generations removed from it. There is also the imagery of a grave as a door, a portal, a liminal barrier. It is a site of the 'moving on' providing not just a place of rest, but a "door" to move to the next place.

However, the funereal rights and traditions of the Victorian era also create their own phantoms. In *Rawblood*, Charles writes of Alonso, "He carries his parents' demise with him always, as some carry a miniature of their beloved in a locket" (Ward, 2016, p. 159). Gothic horror and romance crossover here, in the form of the Victorian locket, an item which often carried a lock of hair belonging to a lover or dead loved one, grotesquely worn around the neck and carried everywhere with the wearer. But Alonso's locket is metaphorical. It is a memento Charles can perceive Alonso as carrying, though it has no physical presence. What Charles sees Alonso carrying is an element of mourning, almost certainly guilt. Guilt haunts Alonso in a way that is perceptible from the outside. The fact that both the medical characters in the examined texts – Alonso and Augustine – are haunted by guilt related to their medical practice agrees with what Mucci describes as "The sense of guilt for the dead, the sense of guilt for being alive 'in place of' another, means that unless some kind of repetition and reparation takes place, one has no right to live" (2013, p. 146). This also links to Jane's survivor guilt, and her overcoming it with the decision that she deserves to live.

The prevalence of guilt in these haunting narratives also places an emphasis on making amends, although that is not always possible. When Jane encounters Elodie's true ghost, she asks, "What do you need from me? Tell me, please, what he did, and I will make it right" (Starling, 2021, p. 166). However, in both of these stories, a wrong from long ago cannot be made right. There is nothing Jane can do to bring Elodie back from the dead or change the traumatic nature of her death, and nothing any of the Villarca family can do to save Iris from her suffering at the asylum. Rather, what all of the spirits of Ward and Starling's works need is forgiveness, in order to 'move on'. Jane Lawrence understands guilt to be a useless thing to hang on to. She understands that, to some extent, Augustine is haunted

precisely because he will not let go of his own guilt. Wishing for a way to fix Augustine, "She dreamed of tearing out a rotted pit inside of him where his martyrdom resided" (Starling, 2021, p. 186) and she later notes, "His shame was like a physical weight, pressing down into both of them … It dripped from Augustine's pores, coloring everything he did" (Starling, 2021, p. 209). Here, Starling evokes images of surgery, so prevalent throughout the book, but as a means of excising emotion – the "martyrdom" which is Augustine's guilt, and which ensures he is haunted. As long as Augustine carries this martyring guilt, there will be ghosts. The burden of responsibility for letting go and 'moving on', then, is with the living rather than the dead.

The emphasis in Starling's work is on the person who is haunted rather than the one who haunts. Augustine is tormented by shadowy figures that are not ghosts but some kind of magical manifestation. He perceives this to be because of his original failure to save Elodie, but Elodie as a figure is absent to the point of blankness. When Jane sees a scene from the past in a dream that includes Elodie, she appears as "blankness" – "The blankness was Elodie" (Starling, 2021, p. 263). Abraham and Torok similarly describe hauntings: "What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (1994, p. 171). Here again, gaps are emphasised. The haunting is not a being in and of itself, but an absence, something that is missing. Although the magical manifestations sometimes appear to Jane as Elodie, whenever Elodie truly should appear as a ghost, she is a blank absence. Jane even asks, "if Elodie was not here, if there was only this blankness in her place, where had she gone?" (Starling, 2021, p. 264). It eventually occurs to Jane that Elodie has 'moved on' – that "There was no gaping hole where Elodie should have been, beyond the normal absence that death left in its wake" (Starling, 2021, p. 265) – and what actually creates the haunting are Jane's trauma and Augustine's guilt. This leads Jane to draw a distinction between what is a natural ghost, which Elodie would be, and an "unnatural ghost" (Starling, 2021, p. 268), which are the magical guilt phantoms that feed on Augustine's shame.

This brings Starling to her fundamental truth of the novel: that "Ghosts are not real" (Starling, 2021, p. 313). This is the truth that Jane passes to herself during a haunting, so that her past self will understand that the ghosts of the story are either herself passing through time, or monsters created by magic. There are no literal

undead in *The Death of Jane Lawrence*, only ghosts created by the guilt of the living. These are “not the ghosts of the undead, but hungry things that [wear] their forms” (Starling, 2021, p. 324). Still, as Jane astutely notes, “Did it matter that ghosts were not real …?” (Starling, 2021, p. 322). In both *Rawblood* and *The Death of Jane Lawrence,* the characters are haunted, whether by ‘true’ ghosts or not. The effect of the haunting is what matters, and that those who are left behind both yearn and detest the ghosts they themselves create. Although the ghosts are fearsome, they are constantly fed by the living, by those who are left behind.

Conclusion

Just as both texts revolve around guilt as an inevitability for one who is haunted, so both hauntings are resolved by gestures of forgiveness. Mucci writes that forgiveness can create “a bridge … as a way of liberating oneself from the grips of the perpetrator” (2013, p. 147). Jane is able to forgive Augustine for trying to harm her, and forgives him on Elodie’s behalf. Through magic, she creates a version of Augustine that is not fuelled by guilt, another kind of forgiveness. In *Rawblood*, Iris eventually finds her one-time lover Tom, returned from the War broken and alone, and realises that he never forsook her, as she had thought. Iris discovers she is not alone, but that Tom actually wrote to her all through the War, and took possession of her body when she died. This realisation prompts Iris to be able to ‘move on’, and when that comes, it is a moment of family welcoming: “There are many arms about me in the dark, kind arms. They hold, their voices are in my ear, my family … I see that I am *forgiven*” (Ward, 2016, p. 351, emphasis mine). Although Iris has tormented her family, she is eventually welcomed by them, from a plane of existence where, presumably, all spirits may see all of time. Context allows Iris’s family to know and forgive her, and this forgiveness sets Iris free.

Similarly, Jane’s solution to exorcising the ghosts of Lindridge is to create a new version of Augustine when the one wracked with guilt dies. Through magic, she creates a version of him that is not over-burdened with guilt or “martyrdom”. Jane describes how “she can finish him. She can kindle in him true life” (Starling, 2021, p. 348). This suggests that guilt is not so much a growth needing to be removed, as occurs so frequently in *The Death of Jane Lawrence*, but rather a hole needing to be

filled like Elodie's blankness. Guilt is perceived as an absence, like the absence of Elodie in dreams about her life. The guilt, then, is likened to the ghost (even though there is no ghost), and filling in the guilt creates an Augustine that is "alive, in one fashion or another" (Starling, 2021, p. 352) – which, it is implied, is the most one can hope for after a life of trauma.

Chapter 5: Layers and Gothic Paternity in Ghost Story Theatre: *Ghost Stories* by Andy Nyman and Jeremy Dyson, and *2:22 A Ghost Story* by Danny Robins

Introduction

Contemporary ghost-story theatre, continuing what Wetmore considers a legacy of horror in the theatre (2023, p. 113), has become fixed on the idea of haunting through layers. Ghosts have always haunted the present via the past, prompting the audience to consider time as layered, but increasingly our ghosts are interested in layers of society, layers of memory, and layers as personal history. Two twenty-first-century plays that exemplify haunting through the layers are *Ghost Stories* by Jeremy Dyson and Andy Nyman, and *2:22 A Ghost Story* by Danny Robins. These texts will be examined, considering the physical layers – of paint, of construction, of buildings – that represent the haunting of the present place by the past, the present dominant culture by those that have come before; and the emotional layers – of memory, of nightmarish repetition – that represent generations of trauma that haunt the present moment. These texts, through this layered haunting, prompt the audience to consider the social judgement of ghosts, and the inevitable repetition of personal history.

Fred Botting writes of the Gothic in Britain during the period of the French Revolution, "The uncanny, less a return from the past, becomes an effect of the present, a present affected by massive upheaval and transformation" (2008b, p. 7). This is no less true in the twenty-first century. The upheavals are political – I write on the second day of Rishi Sunak's prime ministership, the third prime minister in Britain in the space of seventy days – and the rapid transformations are technological. Both texts fall out of these moments of upheaval. *Ghost Stories* presents a reality that is mutable, that changes throughout the course of the play to disparate settings which within the text are both real and unreal. Meanwhile, *2:22* focuses on the displacement and layers of gentrification in the East End of London, while telling the painful story of a ghost returned to weep over his baby daughter's crib, following a dinner party in which he upsets the establishment for almost every

other character. Technology is used in both texts to separate the ghosts from the living, fiction from fact.

One kind of layer that occurs frequently in the traditional ghost story is that of familial generations, as has been discussed in Chapter 4. But this chapter is focused on fathers and children. The paternal relationship has undergone much change between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which perhaps prompts its raising as a major theme in contemporary ghost story productions. Traditionally in Gothic literature the father is a figure of oppression or overbearing force to be escaped, such as Jane Eyre's escape from the overbearing headmaster and father-figure Mr Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre*, Matilda disobeying her controlling father, Manfred, in *The Castle of Otranto*, or the incestuous relationships between Catherines and Heathcliffs in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). *2:22* and *Ghost Stories* utilise more complex, intricate relationships between fathers and children, and highlight that this relationship can be both Gothic and nuanced. The texts provide wholesome, co-parenting fathers, expressing twenty-first-century expectations of paternity that on the surface appear less Gothic. However, the Gothic is often about loss and yearning, and a closer relationship between fathers and children results in more to lose, as demonstrated by the emotional ending of *2:22*. In *Ghost Stories*, a range of fatherhoods are explored, from the guilt-ridden absent father, to the paternal presence in the nuclear family, and finally the nurturing co-parent rendered uncanny by the monstrosity of his baby. These texts demonstrate the complexity of fathering in the twenty-first century, and highlight that the father-child relationship is one that becomes no less Gothic for developing into a more nurturing, more responsible paternal relationship.

Haunting through the Layers

This section will focus on the literal, physical layers created through the plays' stories and set design to demonstrate how the lives that have come before are an ever-present haunting in the twenty-first century. Anna Fleischl, set designer for *2:22 A Ghost Story*, writes in the program material: "The ghost story really starts here: in this space between the old and new worlds" (2021, para. 4). In some agreement, Emma McEvoy notes that many contemporary Gothic productions capitalise on "the

manipulation of real-time in a Gothicised space" (2007, p. 215). In both these productions time – be it the large-scale time of a building's life and its many owners, or the lifespan of an individual and their memories – is utilised to produce haunting effects and affects, peeling away the layers of time, entirely or partially, to haunt its characters and audiences. *2:22* utilises a single set for the entire production. It is the knocked-through living/dining-room/kitchen of an upper-middle class family displaying, as the staging directions say, "IKEA [furnishings] supplemented with more expensive items" (Robins, 2021, p. 13). The audience can view the beginnings of a shiny middle-class home imposed over the top of a formerly working-class home, especially in the kitchen area with its modern island and chrome sink fittings. Wisker writes that Gothic authors in ghost stories "bring[] into view ghosts and haunting presences imprinted on ostensibly brand new, or constantly renewed, places" (2022, p. 207), and at first glance this could be Robins' intention, if the renovations to the home were complete. However, behind the neutral colour palette and chrome sink fittings there are "stubborn remnants of twee 1970s wallpaper" (Robins, 2021, p. 13), and it is these "stubborn remnants" that haunt the play and the auditorium from the moment the audience first enter. One of the home's owners, Sam, describes the house, as they bought it, as "like a museum" to the previous owner's "terrible taste" (Robins, 2021, p. 20). Again, Anna Fleischl comments on this remark from the script, writing:

> I'm fascinated by the layers of history in things and the traces that we leave behind … I'm setting off this thought process by leaving these traces of other people on the walls, so that the audience starts to think about the layers that make up the place and the souls that have been left behind. (2021, para. 8)

This highlights the role of layering from the production's design and emphasises an intentional connection with layering as a mechanism of haunting.

The set design is similarly important and somewhat more complicated in *Ghost Stories*, which uses separate sets for each of its three ghost stories, and two for the story's denouement, with the intervening lectures from Professor Goodman delivered before the safety screen at a lectern. However, the entry to the auditorium and the auditorium itself are given special attention in *Ghost Stories*' production, with a page and a half of stage directions dedicated to its appearance and soundscape. The entry to an auditorium is a liminal space for the audience, representing a crossing over between the outside world and the interior, fictional world of the play.

Ghost Stories further breaks down boundaries that are precarious to begin with, creating a "nightmarish vision and feel" designed to "unsettle" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 15). The auditorium recreates the sewer pipe that is the setting for the first half of the final reveal, with "The drip-drip of puddled water and the whisper of distorted distant wind" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 15). Numbers are written in chalk on the auditorium walls, and there is hazard tape strung everywhere. Even the lighting is drawn into the fiction, provided by "industrial temporary lights, cabled around the theatre" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 15). Building on the liminality of a space that is both 'real' and concrete for the audience – attention is given to the fact the audience must first "find their seats" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 15) – *Ghost Stories* builds its fiction into surroundings that the audience could touch and examine at close quarters if they wished to – if they dared.

However, as the play begins, the audience is further unsettled as this world they have entered is replaced, on-stage and in the soundscape, by the usual announcement requesting phones be turned off (a recognisable convention associated with the real world of the auditorium, rather than the fictional world of the stage), followed by a sudden frightening soundscape that is taken from but does not sound like a ventilator[28] (referencing a reveal at the very end of the play), a slideshow of personal memories (which does not at first glance seem to have any relevance to the rest of the play, but more on this later), and finally the calm entrance of Professor Goodman to begin the lecture which the audience at first understands to be the substance of the story. As this often rational but sometimes fantastical 'meat' of the play unfolds, the audience are still left in the surroundings of the sewer. The soundscape is removed, but the chalked numbers, hazard tape, and temporary electrical lights remain. Like Goodman, the audience are never quite allowed to forget that this location is the one that the play is inevitably drawn towards – and they may notice the chalked numbers reappear in various set pieces during the play or, indeed, may not notice them at all.

2:22 is a play about gentrification through renovation. Rowan Atkinson, quoting Smith and Williams, writes "Gentrification has commonly been referred to as 'the rehabilitation of working-class and derelict housing and the consequent

[28] This is one examples of *Ghost Stories*' use of uncanny soundscapes to unsettle the audience, which will be covered in more detail later.

transformation of an area into a middle class neighbourhood' (Smith & Williams, 1986, p. 1)" (2000, p. 307). He goes on to describes the process: "Gentrification has been construed as both destroyer and saviour in the regeneration of run-down areas, yet it is clear that it is not simply one or the other" (2000, p. 324). In *2:22* we are presented with characters who have a complex relationship with the gentrification of the house in which the play is set. Sam is very much in favour, while Jenny is a part of the gentrification but can see a moral ambiguity in the process, and Ben is one of the displaced working classes now earning a living employed by upper-middle class people to complete building renovations on the streets where he grew up. Anna Fleischel describes how "There's an arrogance in ignoring that [a house] was already loved and looked after … in a way it's vandalising someone's way of life" (2021, para. 4). Relating his history as the child of a spiritual medium, Ben describes a tragedy in a neighbouring house in which someone had been stabbed upstairs so the blood "dripped through the ceiling, into the living room … however many times they cleaned it, the bloodstain would always come back" (Robins, 2021, p. 66). Again, Ben is describing the history of a building's stubborn refusal to be removed or ignored; the permeability of the domestic sphere, where someone might once have been stabbed upstairs, but the blood forever drips downwards, uncleanable, unignorable. As Robert Dean writes, "whilst all Gothic texts can be seen as a lens for contemporary anxieties of the historical moment in which they are produced, the Gothic drama seems more necessarily incarcerated within its historical moment" (2018, p. 4). Gentrification certainly is not an anxiety or concern purely of the twenty-first century, but the grind of late-stage capitalism, and the implications of Britain leaving the EU, stripping its funding to extreme under-privileged areas, does compound the issue, and *2:22* shows this is on the public mind.

The house that is the setting of *2:22* is located somewhere in London's East End, and London is a city of layers, haunting back and forth. As Holly-Gale Millette writes of Whitechapel in the East End, it is "a hyper-exploited entity whose ghosts are its most valuable currency" (2016, p. 129). London is an example of a "Distressed urban Gothic space[]", reflecting "an embodiment of a vacated set of human values, inhabited by ghosts." (Wisker, 2022, p. 208). The history of London's East End contains numerous deaths, from the plagues of the 16th and 17th centuries to the Blitz. Gothic performance in London has connections to Jack the Ripper murder

tours (McEvoy, 2007) or references to the Enfield haunting (which has, itself, become the subject of a ghost-story West End production in 2023, *The Enfield Haunting* by Paul Unwin). Robins himself has produced a podcast about the Battersea haunting, *The Battersea Poltergeist* (2021), which occurred in South-East London in a similarly now-gentrified area.[29] These real-life Gothic events have in common with *2:22* that they are about the perpetration or consumption by the middle and upper classes of the grisly tales of suffering and murder or haunting of the working classes. Jack the Ripper is famously assumed to have been a medically trained professional who murdered street-walking sex workers, while the Enfield hauntings victimised a single-parent working-class family living in an Enfield council house, who were heavily investigated and written about by middle-class journalist and researcher Guy Lyon Playfair of the Society of Psychical Research.[30]

The exploitation of the working classes by higher class hierarchies is perhaps reflected in Sam and Jenny's middle-class gentrification of a working-class home. Walking through London is an experience of walking through layers of history, each imposed on the other with little apparent care for retaining the historical consistency often found in other parts of the country, such as lands protected by national parks or trusts, or older and historically significant buildings protected by grade listed status. In London, glassy skyscrapers rub shoulders with Tudor pubs, and cobbled streets are lined with electric car charging stations. Millette writes that "Haunting ... draws on historical texts to illuminate and make visible context and recover what is lost or what we have been forced to forget" (2016, p. 129), but in London's case, the very streets, the physicality of place, *are* the historical text. This physicality of places as haunted in *2:22* is raised, as Ben accuses Sam of taking part in the gentrification of the East End. Ben's speech about the changing of the East End reflects not only the architectural layers of change in the city, but also the racial and cultural changes: "It's layers, isn't it? It was all Cockneys. Then the Asians came. The Poles. And now … nice people, like you. But there's still a little bit of everything. Somewhere

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[29] As an interesting link between the texts, *Ghost Stories* (2018) features a scene early in establishing the film in which paranormal investigator Charles Cameron is recorded visiting a supposedly haunted home in Leeds. The location used for the film was "untouched since 1971" (Nyman & Dyson, 2018, 0:06:45-48), and the décor is highly reminiscent of the well-known images from the Enfield haunting.
[30] See the original book, *This House is Haunted: The True Story of a Poltergeist* (1980), re-released this century as *This House is Haunted: The Investigation of the Enfield Poltergeist* (2007).

underneath" (Robins, 2021, p. 29).[31] Note in this quote that the classes or races that came before have a point of origin, or a point of otherness – "the Asians", "the Poles" – but the people taking over now do not have that origin. Like the family's Amazon Alexa, which I will discuss in more detail shortly, the "nice people" are without a cultural history. They live to cover over and renovate, making things shiny and glassy and new, trying to cover and therefore ignore the layers that have come before.

Jenny acknowledges the brutality in this gentrification process, and the smothering of the people who have come before and their history. In describing the renovation process, she says of the house, "We stripped it. Layer after layer of … I don't know—somebody else's story!" (Robins, 2021, p. 73). She recognises that the gentrification of a building is not just about the building, or the street, or the local area. It goes deeper, covering over and silencing the people and the stories of those who came before, to whom the space at one time belonged – much like the smothering of history used to oppress Black cultures as discussed in Chapter 3. The perceived ghost in *2:22* – and here I draw a distinction between the ghost who may or may not make contact in Ben's séance, who is assumed to be a previous owner of the house, and the definite ghost of Sam who does not realise he is a ghost – is stuck between the layers. They are left to haunt spaces that are no longer theirs, reminding the new gentrified owners that they can never entirely be papered over or "wiped clean" (Robins, 2021, p. 80). The space is still not entirely conquered: "underneath the IKEA kitchen, and the polished floorboards … we're still here" (Robins, 2021, p. 81). The issue is also with the attitude of the victor, the new owner. What Ben seems to find most objectionable about the gentrification process is not so much the changing of the space itself, but the "Sneering at the people who used to live here" (Robins, 2021, p. 80), and he later refers to people like himself and the ghost Frank as "the bottom fucking layer" (Robins, 2021, p. 89). This recalls the treatment of original inhabitants in areas of gentrification as "problem people" who are "moved on" (Atkinson, 2000, p. 321). The original inhabitants, the locals, are perceived as a

[31] This anxiety about cultural change is also vocalised by the nightwatchman Tony in *Ghost Stories*, who narrates he was about to be "replaced by some kid from Poland or Russia or Estonia or something" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 26). It is also interesting that Jewish migration goes unmentioned in Ben's list, and possibly feeds into the 'passing' of Jewish migrants addressed later in this chapter.

problem to be removed, but displacement is not extermination, and the unwanted underclasses still linger as the bottom layer.

In *2:22*, the ways in which technology interacts with the supernatural is similarly dependent on that technology's history. Sam, in one of his lectures to the other dinner party guests, tells the audience about the history of the baby monitor, citing the Lindenberg tragedy and subsequent use of "Radio Nurses" to listen in on children:

> Except all the Radio Nurses were on the same frequency, so people heard 'phantom noises' from other monitors. The screams of a child several streets away. Their attempt to ward off the thing they feared the most, simply bred more fear. (Robins, 2021, p. 42)

The monitor later allows the audience to hear Sam's haunting as it occurs off-stage, in baby Sophie's upstairs room. As Sam says, "There's a good chance your 'ghost' is right here. *He points to the monitor*" (Robins, 2021, p. 42, italics original), foreshadowing his own haunting cries that will later be heard through that same monitor. The baby monitor's history, and particularly its haunted history, allows it to communicate with Sam's ghostly presence. Dean writes similarly of the recording devices often used to provide evidence of the existence of ghosts, "digital recording devices" create "disembodied voices and images, independent of time and place" (2018, p. 225). By contrast, the household's Echo device will not acknowledge Sam's voice. Each time Sam tries to give it a command, the home help system ignores him. This complies with what Wisker describes as "a sense of technology at odds with the world of the supernatural and the spiritual reproducing some of the same wonders" (2022, p. 131) which is apparent in many ghost stories. However, the rate and manner of production of technological devices in the twenty-first century suggests there is more at play here. Smart home technologies appear on the market apparently from nowhere. They do not have a publicly acknowledged story like the baby monitor that gives them their own layers of history. Instead, their research occurs in secret, developed by enormous companies and dozens, perhaps hundreds of NDA-signed individuals before appearing fully formed in shops and in the home. The secrecy of new technology's design processes also means Sam can't know and repeat its history, as he can with the baby monitor, removing a layer of control from him, a character so obsessed with educating others. Alexa's refusal to acknowledge Sam,

leaving him to communicate only through the baby monitor, shows how ghosts can only penetrate where there *is* history, where there *are* layers.

The settings of the plays in question are not the only layered, haunted locations. The liminality of the theatre auditorium was put to particular use during the séance theatre productions of the nineteenth century. Dean writes of this period of theatre, “Performances featuring communication with spirits have a particularly theatrical lineage. Mangan traces the connection between the theatre, séances and spiritualism back to 1848 and the stage shows performed by the Fox sisters” (2018, p. 204). Although Marvin A. Carlson’s *The Haunted Stage* (2003) considers the many hauntings of the stage, from an audience’s prior experience of specific performances, to their knowledge of the actors, to recognising props and settings that have been used before, little attention is given to the modes of theatrical performance that may haunt a production. Theatrical ghost stories are naturally haunted by their Victorian séance counterparts, as well as illusionist shows that have continued into the twenty-first century that utilise similar props and effects to the Victorian séance theatre, such as the shows of Derren Brown. Brown is famous for recreating the set-pieces of this era, particularly in his shows *Séance* (2004) and *Svengali* (2012).[32] Séance theatre held a link between performance in the theatre and performance in the home that is recalled by the set of *2:22*, which is both theatre and home. Similarly, the illusionist shows of the time which sought to debunk the fraudulent tricks of staged seances are recalled in Professor Goodman’s lectures in *Ghost Stories*, seeking to explain away the three ghost stories told by Tony, Simon, and Mike. Indeed, *Ghost Stories*’ writers have a deep personal interest in stage magic and the séance illusions of the nineteenth century, Nyman being co-creator and co-writer on several of Derren Brown’s television and stage shows. Utilising his interest in Victorian séance theatre, Nyman included in the production various illusions from the period to bring the *Ghost Stories* special effects to life. He recounts in the *Ghost Stories* director’s commentary how the “Mongoose on the Loose” trick is used to stack and scatter the nappies in Mike Priddle’s story, both in the theatre and on film. He references that several illusions are used in both media, allowing the actors on film to respond to a

[32] Derren Brown in fact cameos in both the stage performance and film *Ghost Stories*, providing the voice of Betty (Nyman & Dyson, 2018) or Elderly Woman (Nyman & Dyson, 2019), a caller into a radio show during Tony Matthews’s story (Nyman & Dyson, 2018).

'real' visual effect, rather than a greenscreen that would be filled in later using CGI (Nyman & Dyson, 2018).

While there are fewer illusion effects in *2:22*, there is a séance scene that includes table-tipping. The inclusion of a séance scene situates *2:22* in a line of theatrical ghost stories that draw on both the effects and changing attitudes towards Victorian séance theatre. The table as a prop is central to Victorian séance theatre, and *2:*22 uses the table in a way that recalls what Dean calls "the line between the private drawing-room séance and the public exhibition … blurred by the centrality of the table to both occasions, a piece of domestic furniture" (2018, p. 226). As already discussed, *2:22*'s set design brings the 'parlour' – or the more modern, knocked-through kitchen/dining-room/living room – to the theatre with detailed realism. The use of the table to communicate with one of the play's spirits aligns with this tradition of conflating the stage with the home, drawing both together at once. However, *2:22* also sets itself apart from this history. In many séance productions, the true medium is revealed to be a working-class girl, such as in Noel Coward's *Blythe Spirit* (1941). This draws on the tradition of Victorian mediums frequently being working class young women (Dean, 2018, p. 230-231). However, in *2:22*, the medium is a working-class adult man, gender-flipping the tradition and placing an emphasis instead on the masculine Gothic in this production, as will be discussed in more detail later. Aside from this, there are many elements that remain the same between this production's séance and others: the use of humour in the run-up to the séance to "provide a channel" to allow nervous laughter "to be directed elsewhere" (Dean, 2018, p. 227) so the audience can be properly frightened when the 'real' action begins; and the table-tipping illusion itself, as what we assume is the ghost of the house's previous owner pushes the dining room table towards Sam, indicating he is "another spirit" (Robins, 2021, p. 89). This brings the play into a recognised tradition in ghost story theatre, while also subverting that tradition with a male working-class medium instead of female.

Janicker highlights that one of the liminalities of the ghost story is the space between "ignorance and awareness" (2015, p. 23), and both texts' ghosts live in this liminal space between ignorance and awareness of their own spectrality. Dean writes that in Victorian séance theatre, "The medium's embodiment of the spirit was the dramatic climax of the performance" (2018, p. 204). A similar embodiment occurs at

the end of both *Ghost Stories* and *2:22*, but it is the investigating characters, the hardened cynics certain of a rational explanation – who are, notably, both men – who succumb to a spiritual embodiment to create the “dramatic climax”, the twist ending so often required from horror texts. Shifting the focus away from medium or ‘believer’ characters in these final moments flips the traditional climactic embodiment on its head, but also removes the controlling forces of the plays. Sam spends the majority of *2:*22 arguing for the non-existence of ghosts and the rationalising influence of science. The audience is not able to see Sam’s reaction to his reveal as a ghostly embodiment, as he has vanished from the stage as the news is delivered, but they are unsettled nevertheless by his apparent dematerialisation. This is another inversion of Victorian séance theatre, as their climactic set-pieces often involved materialisation of figures or substances, rather than dematerialisation. Throughout *Ghost Stories*, Professor Goodman provides the audience with the stability of reality. Between each fantastical ghost story, Goodman brings the audience back to reality by providing rational explanations for what they have just seen. The destabilisation of Goodman’s control, and his absorption into the fantastic similarly destabilises the audience, requiring them to recontextualise everything they have seen and heard. The final visual of Goodman before the play restarts its loop – “We are left with the image of GOODMAN alone in his comatose state in bed … We are forced to watch this condemned man in his bed as the horrific reality of his circumstances settle heavy on us” (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 71) – leaves the audience with the knowledge of what Goodman’s reality is, just as he re-enters and begins his loop again. Goodman can continue in ignorance, but the audience cannot.

Compared to *2:22*’s focus on the physicality of layers – layers we can touch and see – *Ghost Stories* presents haunting through internals rather than externals, through social layers and layers of memory. The main haunting occurs through the device of a repeating nightmare. The play opens with a lecture from paranormal investigator, Professor Goodman, who relates through re-enactment three ‘unexplainable’ hauntings that he has encountered in his career. As the third story ends with the story’s narrator, Mike Priddle, shooting himself, the play is taken in a surreal direction as Priddle reappears, apparently unharmed. The audience encounters the guiltiest moment of Professor Goodman’s life, before he is returned to his hospital bed where we learn he is ‘locked in’, in a coma, after a failed suicide

attempt. The play ends with the Professor returning to the stage to start his initial lecture again, re-starting the memory loop.

The leading manifesto of *Ghost Stories* is that an individual cannot escape the worst thing they ever did – or ever did not do. This has been used previously in well-known ghost stories such as *The Woman in Black*, in which the haunting character "returns from a damaged past to limit the future" (Wisker, 2022, p. 76). Although the time loop of the play exists inside Goodman's head, he returns time and again to the moment in his past that has limited his future and, it is implied, resulted in him attempting suicide. Goodman appears to be a middle-aged man who has lived a full life, although he clearly has felt his life is not worth living, but the event that haunts him is from his teenage years. He stood by and did nothing while a disabled classmate was victimised by bullies and died as a result. References to this incident are slid into the text at various moments, usually in a list of other relevant items – a trick of mentalism, another Victorian illusionist technique. For example, when Goodman says during his initial lecture, "These new ghosts are much more about local narrative … a soldier fallen in battle, a wife murdered by her husband, a backwards child who died accidentally while playing an innocent game" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 17). The latter is an out of place item that, by the end of the play or on repeat viewing, the audience recognise as relating directly to Goodman's own guilty conscience. It is more detailed and more specific than the generalities that surround it – the soldier, the murdered wife. There is also a moral judgement placed on this item that does not appear in the others: "an *innocent* game". Even while Goodman is apparently unaware of the truth of his story, he makes excuses for himself. Similarly, when Goodman later refers to "some innocent person involved in an unfortunate accident or tragedy … they're the ones I constantly replay as I lay in bed with nothing else to occupy my mind" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 22). This ties the slipped-in specific memory to Goodman's reality as a locked-in coma patient and again, on repeat viewing, the audience know this is both a literal and pertinent comment.

The re-entrance of Mike Priddle after the gunshot suggesting his suicide, begins the fully surreal section of the play. The stage directions read: "GOODMAN is confused – as are the audience. This shouldn't happen – how can these worlds cross?" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 58). This idea of worlds crossing plays again on

the imagery of layers. The different ghost stories exist in their own unspecified time, their own layers, taken from recorded recollections of the past. Goodman's lecture is the audience's supposed 'present', the firm reality that critiques and contradicts the ghost stories, which are unreliable recollections of the past. Priddle stepping out of his past, out of his death, introduces a new layer which, the audience steadily realises, has existed all along. Priddle is the layer of Goodman's guilt, his memory, that has been steadily seeping into the rational present throughout the play. The time-loop device employed by *Ghost Stories*, ending the play as it began, introduces an element of the ouroboros, as well as the uncanny, as the audience believe Professor Goodman to be on stage in a hospital bed as he simultaneously enters the auditorium to start his lecture from the beginning again. This scene uses misdirection to slide one layer over another without the audience noticing: Goodman makes a loud, clumsy entrance at the auditorium door, distracting the audience while the safety curtain drops soundlessly back into place, masking the hospital setting and resetting the stage as it was when the audience first entered.

The brutality of Goodman's reality steadily layers more and more on top of the dream or fantasy of the ghost stories which the audience see as the main portion of the play. At intervals, Goodman's controlled, jovial lectures are interrupted by moments of harsh surreality, such as the stage direction:

> Abruptly GOODMAN just stops. It's as though someone pushed his pause button. His lifeless arms drop to his sides, his face drops, his eyes roll and his head flops back. He takes two grisly breaths. As suddenly as he's stopped – he starts again – perfectly normal as though nothing has happened. (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 35)

These moments are paired with brutally loud sound effects from the gallery, in this case the sound of ventilated breathing, but turned up to a volume and stripped of context so that the sound is at least initially unrecognisable. Carlson describes how, during a theatrical jump scare, "The audience member, bombarded with a variety of stimuli, processes them by selectively applying reception strategies remembered from previous situations that seem congruent" (2003, p. 6), but in *Ghost Stories*, there are few congruent previous situations apart from prior sound effects that are equally mystifying without context. While the stage directions describe the source of the sounds the audience hear, as an audience member, the volume and lack of context make the sounds truly uncanny, identifiable only later in the play, when context is

provided. These act as the jump scares that a horror audience is typically looking for as part of the experience of ghost story or horror theatre, while also acting to disorient the audience. In the documentary "Making *Ghost Stories*" (Nyman & Dyson, 2018), Andy Nyman states that in moments of fear and laughter "the intellect is left behind at those heightened moments", citing the jump scare as a tool for creating a visceral moment, but also a tool to disorient the audience into feeling before thinking. This is an important part of the theatre as a collective, rather than solitary, experience. Kevin J. Wetmore writes in "The Evolution of Horror on Stage" of the horror experience in cinema:

> [O]ne is not passively experiencing a story but instead is in the actual environment, but also because of what Ouelette refers to as 'fear contagion': 'picking up on the behavioral signals of one's friends amplifies one's own fear response' (Ouelette 2022). Because theatre is a live, collaborative art, requiring performers and audience to be present in the same physical space, it makes the horror experience all the more 'real'. (Wetmore, 2023, p. 120).

The horror genre's emphasis on reality will be explained in more detail in Chapter 6, but Wetmore is particularly drawing on group affect in the theatrical experience. As has been noted previously with the inclusion of jokes to provide release for tension in *2:22*, haunted performance works through collective affect to create a layered experience shared by the whole audience and the performers. The effect of the loud audio jump scare hides layers of understanding and cognitive connection – in this case, the ventilated breathing to ideas of hospitalisation. The audience recognise that something very strange is happening under the narrative, between the layers, but the movements and sounds themselves are too strange to entirely give the game away unless the audience know what to look for.

Gothic Fatherhood

At the centre of both *2:22* and *Ghost Stories* are representations of paternity. Fatherhood in the twenty-first century has changed very much from previous centuries, in terms of the way it is carried out, the expectations placed on fathers, and the acknowledged effect fatherhood has on children's development. As Cabrera et al. acknowledge in their study of twenty-first-century fatherhood, in the twentieth century it was believed that "father-child relationships had little impact on children's development, and this popular belief was reinforced by development theorists

throughout most of the century" (2000, p. 127). Cabrera et al. identify a shift at the beginning of the twenty-first century that shows "an evolution of father ideals from the colonial father, to the distant breadwinner, to the modern involved dad, to the father as co-parent" (2000, 127), which has only become more established as the decade has progressed. Similarly, the Gothic, and the ghost story in particular, has traditionally been focused on female figures as "popular conduits of ghostly encounters, as well as those who seek such confirmation", inevitably linking "ghostly encounter[s] with women's gullibility, hysteria and their position as manipulated body and voice" (Wisker, 2022, p. 126). Both texts shift the focus from the woman as ghostly and as seeking confirmation of ghostliness onto male characters, subverting ghost story tradition in order to centre the masculine in traditionally feminine positions as spectral, domestic, and fragile. These developments in involvement of the father, and the importance of fatherhood to a man's conception of himself, can be viewed in both texts. *2:22* centres around a dead father who returns home from the place of his death to revisit his wife and, more importantly, his baby daughter. The spirit returns at the same time every night since his death to walk around her crib, weeping. The emphasis is upon Sam returning to his daughter, rather than to his family or life as a whole. Fatherhood is also a central theme in *Ghost Stories*. Two of the ghost stories are told by fathers about their children. Tony Matthews embodies the distant father of the previous century, while Mike Priddle represents the contemporary, involved dad.

The Gothic is traditionally all about dead mothers and overbearing fathers, or lovers who take the place of fathers in their patriarchal control over women. The absent (presumed dead) mother is all important to the role of the father. As Botting puts it, "Any figure of paternal authority is ultimately an 'imposter' occupying the space vacated by the M/Other" (2008b, p. 18). Ruth Bienstock Anolik agrees, writing that "The typical Gothic mother is absent: dead, imprisoned or somehow abjected" (2003, p. 25). Fathers in Gothic fiction traditionally appear as opposed to the mother, in a role of overbearing masculinity to balance the absent passivity of the often-dead mother. As Bienstock Anolik puts it, if Gothic heroines "had mothers to protect them from their evil male relatives, their stories would end before they began" (2003, p. 28). This was subverted in the feminist fairy tale adaptations of the twentieth century, by authors such as Angela Carter in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) or Carol Ann Duffy

in *The World's Wife* (1999). However, these adaptations focused more on empowering the feminine to a position of strength, autonomy, and violence, rather than domesticating the masculine and, in particular, the father. There is very little in the traditional Gothic by way of caring or compassionate fatherhood, of the kind we see between Sam and Sophie in *2:22*, or between Mike Priddle and Barty in *Ghost Stories*. This suggests a move in the theatre towards a Gothic masculinity that has not been explored before. The father figure, beyond the oppressive paternal presence required in order for the heroine to transgress, has received relatively little critical attention. The exception to this appears to be in the works of Stephen King, whose Gothic fathers, such as Jack Torrence in *The Shining* (1977) or Louis Creed in *Pet Semetary*, have received attention from critics such as John Sears (2013) and Steven Bruhm (2000). However, these largely focus on the father as monster rather than father as carer, and how this works within a Gothic framework. This section intends to close this gap and question why this more nurturing fatherhood is portrayed as spectral.

Botting states that “There are few families in Gothic fiction” (2008b, p. 33), referring to ‘complete’ families containing two parents and a child or children. However, in *Ghost Stories* and *2:22* we see two ‘complete’ nuclear two-parent families. Sam, Jenny and Sophie are a family looking to expand, as Sam tells their friends they are considering having another baby. The family is all important to *2:22*, providing a reason for the haunting to occur: Sam returns to his family home to weep over his daughter’s crib. Sam’s last act before death was to attempt to call his wife, forefronting the importance not just of Sam’s daughter, but of the three of them as a family unit. He returns to the house that is his pride and joy, “his pristine home” (Robins, 2021, p. 91), to attempt to continue living his ‘perfect’ family life. The image is ruined as Jenny steadily pulls away from and defies his paternal command, but also the fiction he is presenting as an unwitting ghost, a copy of the husband and father rather than the real thing. The audience never encounter Sam as his true self, only as a ghost, as his death occurs before the beginning of the play. Several ‘types’ of ghost are discussed by the characters as they attempt to decide whether the house is haunted or not, but one kind is a copy of a real person, a facsimile or shadow of the person rather than the person themselves. It could be that Sam is in fact a replica of himself, that bears all the hallmarks and catchphrases that his family and friends

expect him to display, but it is not really him. This goes some way to explain the escalating conflict between Sam and the other characters, who may recognise something uncanny in Sam's 'acting out' of himself and gradually reject it.

In *Ghost Stories*, the 'complete' family unit demonstrated in Simon Rifkind's story is somewhat less pristine and more exasperated, as might be expected in a family where the child is a teenager rather than a baby. Simon's parents appear on the stage only through their voices on the phone to Simon, expressing a sort of timeless exasperation – in some cases literally timeless, as the amount of time that passes for Simon and the audience seems to be different than the time that has passed for Simon's parents.[33] This element of parental surreality is heightened in *Ghost Stories'* film adaptation, in which the audience sees Simon's parents briefly, but only the backs of their heads as they stand eerily still and silent in the kitchen before Goodman follows Simon upstairs to his bedroom. There is later a violent banging on Simon's bedroom door which Simon attributes to his mother, although the sound effect is monstrous and suggests a much more frightening figure beyond the door. It is unclear why this uncanny monstrosity is here applied to Simon's parents, when they appear to be perfectly normal, concerned parents in their phone conversations with Simon. Nyman and Dyson's own take on the scene on the directors' commentary is to reference the "odd surreal details" (Dyson, 2019, 0:41:26) of writer of supernatural fiction, Robert Aickman. The surreality does not have a meaning in and of itself, but is designed to unsettle the film's audience in perhaps the same way as the distorted sound effects of the stage play. The portrayal also adds a layer of discomfort and unreality for the viewer, a sense that the alleged 'reality' of the framing narrative cannot be trusted, just as the ghost stories themselves cannot be trusted.

On the phone, Simon's father seems the angrier, more aggressive of the parents. His language to Simon is confrontational: "I just found your bloody housing form", "You're a bloody liar", "You're a waster" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 42), whereas his mother's brief dialogue expresses relief. Reinforcing these traditional roles, when the camera briefly captures Simon's phone as his parents call in the film,

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[33] In almost no time, between two phone calls, Simon's mother is available to speak on the phone, and in the next has 'gone to bed', suggesting more time has passed between these conversations than is apparent on the stage.

their contact picture shows a smiling mother leaning in towards the screen, and a diffident father, frowning with arms crossed, leaning away from the screen. Here the more traditional roles of the family unit are displayed, perhaps reflecting Goodman's (and Nyman's) relationship with his own parents, where we see only the overbearing Jewish father.[34]

Ghost Stories also presents two examples of men as single fathers: Tony Matthews and Mike Priddle. These stories book-end the play's narrative, Tony appearing first and Priddle last. These fathers are in many respects 'haunted' by their children. Tony, quite literally, as his daughter, who is in a locked-in coma, apparently appears to him as a ghost at his workplace, prompting him to start visiting her in hospital again.[35] However, Tony's haunting has a comforting aspect in the film adaptation that does not occur in the stage play. The stage scene ends with the ghost-child-mannequin flying across the stage towards Tony and a black-out. However, the film adaptation ends with the ghost-daughter embracing Tony while his arms remain stiff at his sides. She walks her fingers up his arm and slides her finger into his mouth, in a movement that is abject in its intimacy – her spectral finger piercing the barrier of Tony's body – but also playful, tying this story more closely to Tony's position as father to this ghost. This connection is less apparent in the stage production, in which the ghost appears only briefly as a doll or mannequin.

A replica of the doll that acts as Tony's ghost in the stage play also appears in Barty's empty crib before he is born, tying the two narratives together and again destabilising their 'reality'. Although Priddle's interactions with his son occur after the play takes its surreal turn, and the audience begins to suspect Priddle may not be real, we see with Mike Priddle and Barty the most nurturing paternal interactions. Although Barty is described in terrifying terms as "a wounded infant pterodactyl", "a rabid sewer rat", "much bigger than a baby should be", and his swaddling is "caked in shit" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 65), Priddle's interactions with Barty are described as "compassionate, simply a father and son" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p.

[34] The Rifkind family are almost certainly also Jewish. Simon Rifkind's mother, at least, can also be identified as Jewish as she speaks Yiddish on the phone (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 41), and 'Rifkind' is a Jewish family name.

[35] The roles are perhaps reflected and reversed in Goodman's own hospital room, where Tony Matthews, the hospital orderly, is much kinder to Goodman's unresponsive form than his doctors, Simon and Mike. Tony is the only character who directly addresses Goodman, and attempts to make him more comfortable (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, pp. 70-71).

66). The focus on the paternal relationship in this scene foregrounds Priddle as a nurturing paternal figure. He is father to Barty, but he also acts in a paternal role to Goodman, ushering him towards the truth of his situation. To Goodman, Priddle represents the father as overbearing figure determined to expose the truth and provide punishment, as seen with Simon's father and Goodman's own father in the film adaptation. But with Barty, Priddle also provides a nurturing presence appropriate to twenty-first-century fatherhood. He embodies a dichotomy, a difficulty in reconciling the traditional and contemporary role of father.

Professor Goodman's relationship with his father receives less direct attention, but is still key to Gothic interpretations of the text. Although Goodman Senior is barely referenced in the stage play – aside from some slides shown before Goodman's entrance at the beginning of the play, showing his childhood homelife – the importance of the relationship is made far more explicit in the film adaptation. The opening credits of the film occur over footage of a recreation of Nyman and Dyson's bar mitzvahs. It features members of the creators' own families, including both sets of mothers and Nyman's sister and wife, and a Siddur that belonged to Nyman's grandparents, conflating the text's fictionality and its alignment with the writers, especially Nyman's own experiences. The footage moves on to show Goodman/Nyman's sister, Esther, begin a relationship with an Asian man, and Goodman/Nyman's father's subsequent anger and retribution when he discovers the relationship. Botting describes how Gothic fatherhood traditionally "extend[s] to darker counterparts: owner, abuser, murderer" (2008b, p. 18). In Goodman's father, we see the closest approximation to this Gothic father, who reacts with authority and anger, suppressing his daughter and, it is implied, frightening his son. The film also includes an inserted scene that does not appear in the play, in which Goodman, played by Nyman, visits his father in a care home.[36] It is implied Goodman Senior has dementia and is non-communicative – another link to Goodman's own locked-in syndrome. Nyman explains in the commentary over this scene that his relationship with his father had a strong impact on writing *Ghost Stories*, and that the scene is "sort of based on my late dad, who had Alzheimer's, and that experience of visiting him and the pain of that, and that naturally feeds into a lot of the truth of the film",

[36] Nyman and Dyson mention in the directors' commentary that the nursing home scene was shot at the nursing home where they both had grandparents resident, further linking the film to the writers' personal lives and experience of family.

while Dyson adds, "And that was right there from the beginning of writing the play" (Nyman & Dyson, 2018, 0:39:59-1:40:15). This demonstrates that although Goodman's father is largely absent from the play, this aspect of the paternal relationship still influenced the play's writing.

Botting states that "Gothic fiction is bound up with the function of the paternal figure", in that it is "a transgression of the paternal metaphor" (2008b, p. 29). In traditional Gothic fiction, the heroine must transgress against a paternal figure – though that figure is often a paternalistic husband rather than a literal father – in order to place herself in a danger from which she must be saved, save herself, or succumb to her inexorable fate. This is particularly true in Bluebeard narratives, already explored in detail in Chapter 1. But in *Ghost Stories*, we have no heroines. There are no female voices that are not spectral, or appear ghost-like through technologies of communication such as phones or the radio. As has been noted, some of these female voices are even played by men. The audience are forced to engage with the male as Gothic heroine, their role similarly tied up with inevitability, similarly holding no real agency, similarly in need of saving and therefore similarly feminine. With this repositioning the male Gothic heroine, the father takes on a different role from the controlling force who requires obedience. He can be protective or admonitory, as in Simon Rifkind's story, but he also can be nurturing as with Mike Priddle. The danger comes to our hero/ine, Goodman, when paternal attention is removed: when he witnesses Callaghan bullied into a situation that causes his death, one of a group of male children unsupervised, lost without parental attention, in a way that was typical for the 'latchkey kids' of the 1980s and '90s. This might recall Tony Matthews's style of fatherhood, and particularly Tony's implied absence from his daughter's hospital room, but also presents the danger of children unsupervised by a protective paternal influence.

Fatherhood in *2:22* is demonstrated relatively infrequently as the majority of the play focuses around four adult friends. Sam and Jenny's baby, Sophie, is upstairs in her crib for the majority of the play, although she is heard throughout via the baby monitor and Sam or Jenny often leave the stage to check on her. However, the dinner party which is the setting of the play feels like a 'break' from parenting in order for the parents to spend adult time with adult friends. In a manner many new parents may recognise, childless friend Lauren keeps attempting to bring the conversation to

non-child-centric topics, such as saying she wasn't sure whether to send Jenny a teddy bear or some tequila, while new mother Jenny inexorably returns the conversation to the parental sphere: "God, not while I'm feeding … Can you imagine? Breast-milk slammers" (Robins, 2021, p. 16). These opening remarks also include the kind of complaints about Sam as a father not 'co-parenting' properly, as has become the twenty-first-century expectation, as Jenny complains, "I told Sam to tidy" and "No fucking warning he'd be late" (Robins, 2021, p. 15). However, during this scene, Sam can be heard through the baby monitor reading Sophie a bedtime story, taking on the 'fun' aspects of parenting while Jenny cooks and cleans. This opening scene establishes Sam and Jenny's parenting dynamic, a foundation on which the play builds to the eventual revelation that Sam's ghost returns each night to cry over his daughter's crib.

While Sam's relationship to daughter Sophie is caring and nurturing, there is also a parental dynamic to his relationship with Jenny reminiscent of the traditional Gothic, which is almost constantly oppositional. Jenny's own father is never mentioned, only her mother, who seems to have had an overbearing effect on her daughter. Sam refers to having "saved" (Robins, 2021, p. 80) Jenny from her parents. However, rather than "saving" her, Sam seems to have taken on the typical Gothic role of husband as replacement for overbearing father/parent as described previously by Botting (2008b). While Sam lectures everyone, repeatedly, Jenny's reflections on their relationship shift during the play from a childlike wonder at what Sam could teach her – emphasising the parental dynamic, rather than a relationship of equals – to feeling smothered and literally covered over by Sam and his opinions. On announcing that she is leaving him, Jenny says, "You love what you made me … I want to know if the old me is still there, under all the layers of you" (Robins, 2021, p. 93). Throughout this chapter, layers have been argued to cover over an 'original', through which that original can still be perceived or push itself through. Jenny here expresses a desire to dig through her own layers – and crucially, those she does not perceive to have put in place herself – to find a version of herself that is clean and original. The layers here refer to layers of experience, as well as layers of others' opinions and ideas of who Jenny should be, which she must break through in order to express her authentic self.

These layers – and the ways in which Sam's perception of Jenny differs from Jenny's lived experience – are demonstrated in the characters' descriptions of Jenny's own parents. As has been noted, Sam tells Lauren that he "saved" Jenny from her parents, or more specifically, from her parents' house. He describes it as: "Jesus staring down from every wall, like some kind of messianic CCTV" (Robins, 2021, p. 80). While Jenny does not address the topic of her parents directly, it is telling that, as she becomes more frightened and stressed, she resorts to making her home more like her parents' home by putting up a crucifix her mother gave her. This could be an example of the Gothic maternal rescuing while the paternal oppresses, as we see in Angela Carter's fairy tale retellings, and in particular, "The Bloody Chamber" (1979). At her breaking point, Jenny's reaction on leaving Sam is not to resort to adult independence, such as going to a hotel or to a friend's house, but returning to her parents' home. In this way, although Jenny has identified she has been covered over with the layers of others, she is unable to escape the oppressive forces of others. While she asserts a desire to find "the old me", that old version of herself is the one that lives, childlike, with her parents. Jenny is unable to conceive of herself as an individual without the layers of others. This could suggest that individuals *cannot* exist outside the layers of others, particularly those with whom they live.

Conclusion

Both *Ghost Stories* and *2:22 A Ghost Story* are about men who will not accept that they no longer have control of their lives. Instead of acceptance, they build a fiction: Sam that he is alive and able to enjoy a dinner party with his family; Goodman that he is a paranormal expert debunking supernatural phenomena in front of a large audience. At the end of the plays, their illusions of control are removed. Sam is never confronted with the reality of his death as he disappears from the stage just before the reveal is made, but he is heard pacing Sophie's room and weeping through the baby monitor, returning to his haunting pattern of the previous nights. Goodman is confronted by Mike Priddle, and made to relive the worst thing he ever did, before being dragged back to his hospital room by Callaghan's 'ghost' where it is revealed he is 'locked-in'. Both men attempt to live lives that are no longer theirs, clinging to a past (or imagined past – in Goodman's case, the audience never discover whether his identity as a paranormal investigator is truth or a fantasy) that has been taken

from them and must continue beyond the ends of the plays without them. While this is expressive of emotional layers – layers of truth, of memory, and of guilt – the plays use their physical medium and settings to express that these emotional layers can also be expressed physically. One cannot help, when in a haunted place, but consider the layers of its history, and how these are both physically manifested and manifested through abstract expression.

One of *Ghost Stories*' last speeches is from Mike Priddle, taking on the voice of Goodman's conscience. Just before returning Goodman to his hospital bed, his comatose condition, Priddle says, "there's something more than the here-and-now and that every action you've ever taken – or didn't take – has had an effect. It's left a little trace, a ghost of itself" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 66). While hauntology was considered in greater detail in Chapter 4, the possibilities of past, present, and future are omnipresent in contemporary hauntings. These are the layers that haunt both *Ghost Stories* and *2:22*. Both these plays are narratives of regret, and stories of the layers of people and stories that haunt through the present, through memory, through buildings and lifestyles.

III: Haunted Technology

Chapter 6: Haunted Phones and Gothic Social Media: *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* and *Ghoster* by Jason Arnopp

Introduction

The rapid growth and prevalence of information technology in the twenty-first century has led contemporary critics to consider to what extent our current and projected future technology can be considered Gothic. Gina Wisker writes that the "power and control of the rational, of technology, could be seen to reduce ghosts by explaining, constructing and managing the everyday, solving a range of problems, but, and probably luckily, they also produce them." (2022, p. 16). Gwyneth Peaty agrees that "Technological advancements have expanded the contexts in which horror can be experienced, blurring the perceived boundaries between reality and fiction, life and game" (Peaty, 2023, p. 130—131). While social media has become a growing concern in film and media studies, thanks to texts such as *Host* (Savage, 2020), the *Unfriended* films (Gabriadze, 2015; Susco, 2018), and *Black Mirror* (Brooker, Jones, & Reisz, 2011-2023), literary theory has so far shown limited interest in the phenomenon. This chapter will explore the Gothic implications of social media, particularly in reference to Jean Baudrillard's theories on simulacra and simulation and how they apply to the novels of Jason Arnopp, to demonstrate that social media is an intrinsically haunted and Gothic cyber-space, ubiquitous to the average person in the twenty-first century.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, written in 1994 before the internet became an everyday domestic utility, Jean Baudrillard posits that simulation was becoming pervasive. In the opening of his chapter "The Precession of Simulacra" he writes:

> By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials … It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real … A hyperreal henceforth sheltering from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the

> imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences. (1994, p. 2)

In this process of simulation and creation of a hyperreality, by substituting signs of the real for the real, there is a conflation between what is 'true' and what is 'false'; what is 'real' and what is 'imaginary'. This conflation is reflected in the uncanny nature of social media, a set of social spaces located virtually that encourages users to simulate a version of themselves to make available to the public or to specific 'friend' groups. A person may be known to others only by their social media profile, raising the question of whether the online simulation, to those people at least, is more (hyper)real than the physical person who created it. Furthermore, in his chapter on Simulacra and Science Fiction, Baudrillard writes that there are three orders of simulacra, the third of which is, "Simulacra of simulation, founded on information, the model, the cybernetic game—total operationality, hyperreality, aim of total control" (1994, p. 121). He later comments on this idea of simulation, "Is there an imaginary that might correspond to this order? The most likely answer is that the good old imaginary of science fiction is dead and that something else is in the process of emerging" (1994, p. 121). One possible candidate for this "something else" is social media, a concept not even conceived of when Baudrillard was writing, but that has since become all-pervasive in its depiction of and immersions in hyperreality. The science fiction and horror genres are perfectly placed to exploit the anxiety that comes with this consideration of the simulacra based on simulation, the ghost in the machine that might occur if social media presences were created not by 'real' people but some uncanny digital force.

Jason Arnopp's novels explore this idea of the cybernetic taking on a life of its own. In *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* (2016), the reader follows the exploits of a pseudo-journalist attempting to prove that the supernatural does not exist. In the process, he irritates a demon by laughing at it during an exorcism, and is haunted by what transpires to be time-travelling versions of himself or his own ghost – an uncanny self-haunting not dissimilar to those covered in Chapter 4. The book is written in the style of a 'found document', constantly calling into question its own veracity and the reliability of its sources. In *Ghoster* (2019), Kate Collins moves across the country to be with her new boyfriend, only to find that he and all his possessions have vanished and he is uncontactable. Kate finds Scott's mobile phone

and, while trying to control a relapse into social media addiction, uses it to try to find out what happened to him. The phone turns out to contain the souls of its previous owners, obtained by filming them and absorbing their essence by preying on their weaknesses. Kate inevitably succumbs to her addiction, her own weakness exploited, and is absorbed into the phone. The phone's exploitation leading to absorption demonstrates how "We are in a sense 'infected' by objects, which in this way exert thing-power, influencing our sense of self" (Weinstock, 2023, p. 55). Both of these books explore the ways in which 'smart' technology creates a uniquely Gothic anxiety based on the hyper-reality of social media and the exertion of thing-power. Arnopp leans heavily on the control that is sought but is ultimately unachievable in curating a social media presence, and the uncanny reactions to the multiple versions of simulated selves that smart technology facilitates. This chapter will explore the Gothic nature of social media as a perfect method of haunting in the twenty-first century. Arnopp does this by playing on the Gothic tropes of the past, such as the found document, but also by using techniques such as technorealism to make hauntings more immediate to the reader.

Gothic Social Media

Unlike many contemporary horror novels, *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* and *Ghoster* do not seek to isolate their characters from technology. Rather they embrace the pervasive nature of social media to create a sense of constant observation and dread. Arnopp uses social media to develop both character and narrative in his novels, but also demonstrates how, as a construct, social media is fundamentally unreliable. The Gothic haunts social media in Arnopp's novels, creating copies of different 'self'-identities that slowly erode or conflate with the 'real' self, whatever that might be. Arnopp gives social media a thoroughly Gothic description when, in *Ghoster*, Kate narrates that:

> Even after this chunk of abstinence [from social media], I remain haunted. My skull rattles with the ghosts of old Likes, Favourites, message requests, tweets, retweets, deleted tweets, tweets that weren't deleted but should have been deleted, photographs, videos, memes, bounced emails, emojis and the *pings* of ten million notifications. (2019, p. 18, italics original)

Similarly, in *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*, Arnopp frequently refers to social media as Jack's means of creating his reality. Only 24 pages into his manuscript, Jack narrates, "In the face of this amateur dramatics society play", by which Jack means the physical world, "social media provides a vital lifeline to the real world" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 41). Later, one of Jack's interviewees, Sherilyn Chastain, describes Jack in an email: "This guy lives online" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 101). This juxtaposes what the reader might think of the real world – that is, the physical world[37] – with Jack's preferred reality, which is social media.

In his monograph, *Facebook Society* (2018), Roberto Simanowski describes the ways in which society and communities have moved online through social media. He writes that:

> The more weight Facebook assumes as a symptom and motor of cultural development, the more appropriate it seems to speak of a Facebook Society: a society whose forms of communication and cultural techniques are significantly determined by the practice of self-representation and world perception on Facebook. (2018, p. xv)

While Simanowski is writing specifically about Facebook, his observation can easily be extended to multiple forms of social media, including Twitter,[38] one of the main social media platforms referenced in *Jack Sparks*. With this in mind, Jack's construction of his self being so firmly based in social media seems less unusual, and more indicative of a phenomenon felt by many of the information technology generation (those who grew up with the internet easily accessible in the home). While Jack is an extreme case, the reader is likely to identify, at least in part, with his and other characters' online lives.

Jack's online persona is central to his idea of self. While he has hundreds of thousands of followers on Twitter, Jack makes a point of only following fourteen other people. Denizens of Twitter will recognise this kind of user as one displaying a lot of ego. The traditional format of Twitter means that users mostly see the content

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[37] For more on physical realities versus digital realities, see Chapter 7.
[38] This thesis is being written during a time of substantial change on the Twitter platform, following the takeover of Elon Musk in 2022, and therefore some of the conventions and features discussed may have changed by the point of submission. This thesis uses the legacy name 'Twitter' as this is the name used in the text, and descriptions of the platform refer to its functionality and user interface before Musk's takeover.

of people they are following, so to have so many followers and be following so few accounts in return suggests Jack thinks highly of the quality of his own content, while considering himself above reading what his followers have to say. Jack uses Twitter as a tool to express his opinions to others, not to listen to what others have to say or to engage in dialogue or 'discourse'. Jack is the sort of person who will 'quote tweet' someone who disagrees with him, presenting them to be trolled by his many 'rabid' followers. His phone is set up so that any video he films is automatically uploaded to video-based social media platform YouTube, ensuring that his fans never miss a moment of his life, but also demonstrating his cock-sure opinion that he will never need a second take.

Because Jack is so immersed in his online world, the reader is given several glimpses into how vast it is. Jack asks his followers to send him videos that prove the existence of the supernatural, and decides to watch all of them over a period of several hours while waiting for a flight back to the UK. He is then late to board this flight, and tellingly comments on hearing his name called over the PA system:

> Oh yeah, I'm a rock star, baby. Who doesn't love their name being spoken over PAs, for whatever reason? A killer mention from a user with a thousand followers. Right here, right now, everyone in Rome airport knows my name. (Arnopp, 2016, p. 64)

To Jack, neither the context nor the audience matter – the mere fact of his broadcast is key. Furthermore, Jack conflates those waiting at an airport with "followers" and the calling of his name as a "mention", further demonstrating how the lexis of social media has intruded into his 'real', physical life. The phone is, itself, an item of intrusion, steadily taking over everyday life, and has been frequently used in horror film as an item that "cannot be ignored, unplugged, or turned off, demonstrating the extent to which contemporary lives are invaded by this device" (Brewster, 2023, p. 248). This will be explored in more detail later.

Baudrillard wrote that, "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (1994, p. 79). Arnopp demonstrates this frequently throughout the book when quoting responses to Jack's social media feed, for example when he repeats the phrase, "Thanks for watching. Please comment and subscribe [smiley emoji]" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 56). This is a common request posted along with YouTube videos, as many Youtubers make income from increased

comments and subscriptions. The repetition lends the phrase less and less meaning until it becomes a line the eye just skips over. As Jack puts it, “Don’t forget to collect your brain on the way out [multiple emojis] LOL PMSL ROFLCOPTER” (Arnopp, 2016, p. 57). Arnopp also demonstrates this phenomenon of repetition generating a loss of meaning when Jack lists all of the social media profiles he consulted to research the leader of a group called the Paranormals. The lists and repeated phrases might on the surface appear to provide a surplus of information, but the repetition and over-abundance of information becomes white noise, like the screaming into the void described in the thesis introduction.

The ghost phone of *Ghoster*, which Kate believes to be Scott’s abandoned smartphone, is undoubtedly a Gothic object, and provides one of the few instances in this thesis where an object carries out the role of haunting, rather than a person or person-like presence. In his monograph *Gothic Things*, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock demonstrates how the Gothic and New Materialism intersect, as the Gothic has always featured objects with a power of their own, separate to their function within a human context. The ghost phone, however, applies to more than one categorisation of the several Weinstock provides. The phone acts as a “conduit”, acting as “channels or portals to another dimension or plane of existence. These objects are often … ones conventionally used for communication purposes”. Typically, these allow “something from the ‘out-side’ to enter into our familiar reality” (Weinstock, 2023, p. 49). However, the ghost phone also acts as an “imbued” object, as it “conveys some part of a former owner – spirit or personality – to a new owner” who “once possessed, they transform the owner” (Weinstock, 2023, p. 54). Imbued objects also “make plain that objects have histories and ‘personalities,’ and they foreground in a Gothic register a particular form of ‘thing-power’ which objects possess. We tend to think of our possessions as extensions of ourselves” (Weinstock, 2023, p. 54). This thesis has already considered the personalities and intentions of houses as ‘things’ in Chapter 1 which the Gothic has long imbued with their own animacy, but phones might be considered far more benign ‘things’. The ghost phone is partly an amalgam of the personalities it has absorbed, demonstrating this in its perpetuation of its former users’ social media posts. However, it also shows its own autonomy in its filming of its subjects, and the methods it chooses to exploit its victims’ weaknesses. It has already been described how the smartphone acts as an extension of the self.

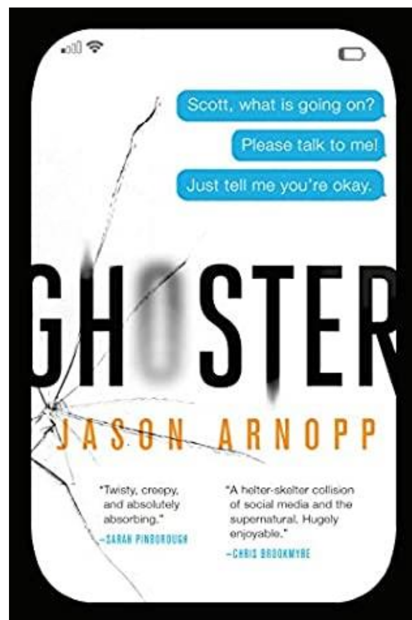
Weinstock further describes the Gothic book as “a text that transfixes and dominates its reader – an uncannily vibrant thing that reduces its reader to the status of quasi-thing shaped and manipulated by the thing-power of the book” (Weinstock, 2023, p. 122), another categorisation that applies equally to Arnopp’s ghost phone. The phone’s transfixion of its victims is the root of their ultimate demise, and their state following their absorption is as a quasi-thing – a literal transparent spirit whenever they briefly re-enter the real world.

It has already been demonstrated how Jack Sparks’ online social media presence is central to the way in which Jack constructs his idea of self. However, Jack’s mobile phone is also a strong metaphor for his self. In his essay on Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000)*,* Sean Travers describes how frequently in Gothic and horror works, “houses in literature not only serve as plot devices but also as metaphors for particular narrative themes or psychological structures of characters” (2018, p. 65). The mobile smartphone provides a similar metaphor, containing much of the personal data required to live the user’s life, from calendars and contact numbers, to connections with the world around them via social media. Many of Arnopp’s characters believe that their online life, as accessed and interacted with through their or others’ smartphones, are as, if not more, important than their physical selves.

Jack’s death is also intrinsically tied to his phone as a physical object. Having travelled back in time to the exorcism, Jack tries to escape Maria Corvi’s demon and falls down a hillside, severely injuring himself in the process. As he continues to try to escape, he notices that his phone has only four per cent battery left. After trying to call his friend Bex, the phone is soaked by a rain shower and becomes “a total brick” (Arnopp, 2016, p. 363). Jack is left alone and without technology as he walks into the darkness and, we are informed by his brother Alistair in the book’s afterword, dies shortly thereafter. Similarly, in *Ghoster*, Kate describes the idea of losing one’s phone as like, “losing your arm or your leg, or … your anything” (Arnopp, 2019, p. 96), and later describes how Scott’s phone “literally dies before [her] very eyes” and refers to rebooting it as “resuscitating the patient” (Arnopp, 2019, pp. 132–133). Arnopp plays upon the Gothic language used around smartphones and similar devices, that are commonly referred to as having a battery *life* or having *died*, further

emphasising how the smartphone, the main bearer of social media for his characters, has a life of its own and shares a life force with his characters.

Figure 4: Cover of *Ghoster*



Note: UK paperback cover of Ghoster *by Jason Arnopp (2019).*

The mobile phone is also presented as central to *Ghoster* from its cover (fig. 4), which portrays a cracked mobile phone screen. It has a low battery symbol in the top right corner, and wi-fi and signal bars in the top left. At the top of the 'screen' is a one-sided messenger conversation that looks like it could be taken from Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. This is an example of technorealism, a device used in fiction where online media such as text messages, forum posts or recognisable messaging apps are pictorially displayed within the text. The device has proved increasingly popular in the twenty-first century, used particularly in texts that utilise a collage of narrative locations and modes to tell a story, such as the 'unauthored' *Slenderman* (2022), Janice Hallett's *The Appeal* (2021), Sarah Lotz's *The Three* (2014), and Holly Rae Garcia's "Two Months Too Long" (2022). This technique is used throughout *Ghoster*, particularly to show messages between Kate and her friend Izzy, but on the cover the messages seem to be from Kate to Scott. Flanagan asserts that technorealism is "used to construct a relationship between physical and digital selves" (2014, p. 155). In *Ghoster*, this could literally be the case as at least three of its characters become digital ghost versions of themselves, trapped inside the 'ghost' phone. The use of technorealism may seem superfluous on the cover and inside the

novel as its interspersed messages do little to further the story, but they do encourage the reader to think of its characters' digital selves – that is, the online versions of themselves that communicate digitally – as their physical selves become increasingly digital.

The title *Ghoster* is a play on the term 'ghosting' or 'ghosted', which is defined by LeFebvre et al. as "unilaterally ceasing communication (temporarily or permanently) in an effort to withdraw access to individual(s) prompting relationship dissolution (suddenly or gradually) commonly enacted via one or multiple technological medium(s)" (2019, Results and Preliminary Discussion). This usage of the verb 'to ghost' appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary during the course of writing this thesis, where it is now defined as "To ignore or pretend not to know (a person); spec. to cease to respond to (a person) on social media, by text message, etc., esp. as a means of ending a relationship suddenly and without explanation" (n.d.). The recent addition of the term, and its earliest citation of the word in this context as 2007, demonstrates that this usage is a very recent phenomenon. The title, therefore, has a dual meaning, referencing the ghosting tactic that Kate believes Scott has enacted by vanishing and cutting contact with her, while also marking the novel as a ghost story.

On completing its absorption, the ghost phone transports Kate from her familiar reality to an uncanny space, taking her out of the real and into the spectral. She is left in a kind of purgatory or hell world in which she is able to spend all her time checking social media having fully given in to her addiction. Kate describes this world:

> A nice mushroom risotto sits on the table beside me as I flick through Facebook. Because I have thousands of friends, it takes a while to absorb all their news. Of course, fresh updates are popping up all the time, so this is practically a full time job. Ha ha! … We don't go out much. Actually I can't recall the last time we set foot outside the door, but why would we ever need to? (Arnopp, 2019, p. 437)

It is worth here highlighting the different kinds of absorption taking place. Kate is absorbed with her (and Scott's) phone and social media in the midst of her addictions. She is mentally sucked into a digital world, neglecting the real world around her. At the same time, the ghost phone absorbs Kate's soul, enabling her to be sucked into (another kind of absorption) the simulacra of reality that is the purgatory

world inside the phone. In this purgatory, Kate has the family that she has always craved while alive and feels loved in a way she never did during her real life. This could be seen as a fulfilment of her wish, expressed early in the book, of "someone being there, for good" (Arnopp, 2019, p. 10). Kate was born while her mother was in a coma and believes that her mother blames her for the coma, as she was on her way to a pre-natal scan when the injury causing the coma occurred. This perceived resentment instils in Kate a desire for someone who will love her unconditionally, even though she does not believe she deserves it. In this respect, Kate's after life, with her golden-haired children and husband who can never leave her, might be viewed as perfect. It is perhaps also easy to see how someone with such a desire for love might fall into social media addiction given the dopamine hits regularly linked with social media use (Waters, 2021). However, Kate is unable to enjoy her idea of 'heaven' as she cannot pull herself away from her phone – as her boyfriend, Scott, cannot pull himself away from his as he is stuck in his own loop of pornography addiction. On the rare occasions Kate realises that her world is wrong or unreal, she attempts to escape the flat, only to appear as a ghost to whoever the 'ghost' phone's new owner is. Like in *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*, this is oddly circuitous, as Kate re-enacts the moments that first frightened her shortly after finding the 'ghost' phone.

While literal ghostly entities appear only fleetingly in *Ghoster*, in *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*, Jack's final foray into the supernatural is to join a group called the paranormals in Los Angeles as they attempt a recreated experiment to produce a ghostly entity. Early in the experiment, Jack names the entity that they will attempt to conjure, 'Mimi'. The entity later appears to be screaming its own name, when it is actually shouting, "Me! Me!" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 288) in a display that echoes the characters' self-obsession and egotism. However, the name also recalls the social media phenomenon of memes, which Oxford English Dictionary Online (n.d.) defines as "An image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users". While the links to Baudrillard's description of more information providing less meaning is clear here, it is also interesting to note that the first use of the term 'meme' appears to be in *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins (1989) (himself name-dropped several times in *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* as Jack's paragon of atheism and scepticism). The term was coined to describe how, "The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a

name for the new replicator, a noun which conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation" (Dawkins, 1989, p. xi). This idea of the soup of human culture ties in nicely with Baudrillard's ideas on more and more information resulting in less and less meaning. The copy and reproduction of the meme recalls Baudrillard's theory of simulation, but also the duplication and repetition of the uncanny doppelgangers.

Mimi's appearance when she is first summoned cycles through the faces of her various creators, eventually settling on who she perceives to be the strongest ego, having killed off the weaker creators. In combining the faces and desires of her creators, Mimi "embodies both fear of difference and assurance in similarity … Revenants reassure and reaffirm values even as they terrorize us" (Bloom, 2012, p. 218). The gestalt Mimi/Meme entity that reflects the egos of all its 'creators' is also reminiscent of posthumanism. Writing about young adult fiction published in the twenty-first century, Victoria Flanagan states that "Posthumanism … views subjectivity as networked and collective" (2014, p. 21). When Mimi first appears, each member of the paranormals believes that Mimi is looking directly at them. While Mimi is a networked entity, in that she is created via a network of the consciousnesses of multiple people, there is a collective subjectivity when it comes to interpreting her. In many ways, Jack sees social media as a posthuman society. When he quote-tweets those who oppose or disagree with him with the result that his fans troll or spam the individual, this enacts, for Jack, a kind of justice. However, contrary to Flanagan's observation that "collectivity distinguishes itself from the social homogeneity … because it is genuinely de-hierarchised, meaning that with the cyber community there are no designated 'leaders'" (2014, p. 82), in Jack's perception of his posthuman online network he characterises himself as the leader. Jack's subjectivity and egocentrism is here similar to Faraday's biased and unreliable narrative in *The Little Stranger* (see Chapter 1). However, unlike Faraday, the veracity of Jack's narrative is actively brought into question, as will be discussed shortly.

A lack of certainty in the real world is another facet of online living, as described in *Facebook Society*: "Behind the narcissism of restless Facebook users is the fear of their own experience, which is delegated to the network community through communication of the given moment" (2018, p. 13). Besides being haunted by actual

paranormal presences, Jack is also haunted by a lack of certainty. There is an episode from his childhood described three times differently by Jack and his brother Alistair, which Jack cites as his reason for wanting to write *Jack Sparks on the Supernatural*, the diegetic title of Jack's manuscript. It is a moment in his childhood when Alistair locked him in a windowless room which he claimed to be haunted. The final description – the one Jack perceives to be true – is that he felt a ghostly presence in the room. Again, the haunting presence is revealed to be Jack's own ghost, taken through time by a demon to haunt his child-self. The majority of moments when Jack experiences haunting, including in the closet as a child, are moments in which he is physically alone. It may even be this feeling of loneliness, conflated with an experience he cannot explain, that pushes Jack to immerse himself so utterly in an online community. Social networks provide a reassurance and omnipresence that Jack otherwise lacks in his physical world. The incident in the closet created in Jack the dual impetus to write his book. He both wants proof of the supernatural, while maintaining his persona of determined scepticism. He even goes so far as to admit that, while he wanted to find evidence of the supernatural, if and when he did so, "I was going to keep it to myself. I had to keep that public face. My persona. My … my brand" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 322). For almost the last time in the book, Jack demonstrates that the persona that he has simulated is more important to him than the 'real' Jack that lies underneath.

The association of social media with life is an important aspect of *Ghoster*. The people who have disappeared, when their souls are absorbed by the ghost phone, are believed to be still alive by their friends and family because their social media is still active. One of the first things Kate asks her friend, Izzy, to do when Scott 'ghosts' her is to check his social media for posts since she last heard from him. The generic memes and retweets found on his social media feeds convince Kate that Scott is still alive somewhere and is 'ghosting' her. It is implied that whatever entity controls the ghost phone also creates these social media posts. This entity reveals itself to have something of a sense of humour when posting the dog in a burning house meme on Scott's feed, alluding to the fact that Scott may actually be in hell (fig. 5).

Figure 5: Dog in the Burning House Meme

Note: Popular meme known as the dog in the burning house meme, often displayed with the text "Everything's fine".

The Gothic implications of social media outliving or outlasting its originator has precedence in reality. Manchester bomber victim, Martyn Hett, was highly active on the image-based social media site Instagram before his death. In a *Guardian* article, his brother describes how Martyn's "existence was eternally self-documented in detail across social media" (Hett, 2020, para. 5) and "the abrupt end to this constant barrage of self-directed content means his online legacy has a stark truth about it that's more powerful than anything he could have intentionally put together" (Hett, 2020, para. 6). Hett's social media streams still receive reposts, likes and comments, despite the lack of reply. In this respect, Hett continues to live through the self-curated reflection of his life, which while it can no longer develop, still enables friends, family and strangers to have some kind of interaction with a version of him. His social media accounts and, by implication, the phone which he undoubtedly used to maintain them, "act[] as an avatar for the individual" (Brewster, 2023, p. 240), both providing continued proof of existence, and acting as a sort of digital mausoleum for life that has ended.

The uncanny has already been mentioned briefly in reference to doppelgangers in Chapter 3. The uncanny is a feeling of dread triggered by witnessing or experiencing something interior made exterior; something homely that has been made unhomely. Social media is a platform on which people regularly 'overshare'. It is a technology on which its users are encouraged to share personal excerpts of their lives with others, potentially even total strangers. The interior of

personal life – the emotions and events that might once have been considered private business – are broadcast for the world to see and comment upon. *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* plays on this idea throughout the novel, demonstrating how Jack uses his journalism to put his life on display, and how he uses the life that is on display to work through or ignore deeply personal issues.

At the beginning of *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*, Jack witnesses an exorcism in Rome which he claims to believe is fake. During the exorcism he laughs, attracting the attention of the demon possessing Maria Corvi, to torment Jack. This haunting takes several guises, but many of them turn out, in one form or another, to use Jack to haunt himself. First, there is a YouTube video that uploads to his account and then deletes itself, apparently without Jack's intervention. This is a video featuring paranormal content that is convincing enough that Jack becomes obsessed with it, only to eventually discover that it was filmed by a future version of himself, and it uploaded to his YouTube account when transported through time by Maria Corvi's demon. When Jack comes to make the film in his own present, towards the end of the novel, and comes face-to-face with the ghost of himself, he narrates, "This is not just a grotesque parody of my face. It *is* my face. Of course it is" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 337, italics original). Here Jack experiences not just a doppelganger, a copy of himself like the clones of Chapter 3, but recognises the reality of the version of Jack staring back at him.

For the second major haunting of the novel, Jack shadows combat magician, Sherilyn Chastain, as she tries to clear a 'negative energy' from a houseboat in Hong Kong. This is the first experience Jack has that genuinely seems to shake him, as he sees the energy manifest as a black cloud behind him in a mirror. This energy is later trapped in a glass jar, and Jack 'proves' his disbelief in the paranormal by telling Sherilyn that she should destroy the entity by immersing it in sea water rather than try to reason with it and persuade it to 'dissipate'. Although this aspect of the story is left more open to interpretation, Father Primo Di Stefano, the exorcism priest, describes a vision he has at the end of the book in which Jack's ghost, having been exorcised from a hotel basement, travels to the east as a black smoke and is trapped in glass then destroyed. If Stefano's vision is to be believed, Jack saw his own negative energy form in the mirror, a tool used for self-haunting as described in

Chapter 4, but he fails to recognise this Gothic marker, as he does so many times throughout the book.

Finally, Jack joins up with a paranormal group to manifest the gestalt Mimi/Meme entity described earlier. When the entity first develops, Jack narrates that, “our first instinct is not to communicate with this entity, but to capture it” (Arnopp, 2016, p. 245) on smartphones and other digital devices. The entity, however, evades capture as the devices behave as though “there’s nothing there to focus on” (Arnopp, 2016, p. 246). The entity, in this respect, could be said to be a simulation, though a convincing and, it turns out, violent one. The next reaction of the group is to yell questions at the entity, all talking over each other in what Jack describes as “word salad” (Arnopp, 2016, p. 247) – not dissimilar to Dawkins’s soup and again, an abundance of information causing less meaning. This entity kills the people it perceives to be weakest in the group, until only Jack is left. It stops morphing between the faces of the different paranormal group members and takes on the appearance of Jack’s grinning face. On seeing this happen, Jack narrates, “It now wears my face and my face alone” (Arnopp, 2016, p. 287). We have again the idea of the uncanny and self-haunting. Jack recognises the face is not just like him or a mirror image, but that it is actually his face. The entity, later revealed to be the demon, then possesses Jack and makes itself apparent when he speaks, stammering and repeating the words “I” and “me”. It also drastically changes his behaviour, making him almost a parody of himself, his own ego, as he charges around his hotel yelling, “[Don’t] you know who [I am]?” (Arnopp, 2016, p. 294). This change in behaviour makes the ‘real’ Jack beneath the possession realise how central but also damaging his own ego is, and he fights against the possession by cutting himself whenever he says “me” or “I”. This goes further towards questioning which is the real Jack: the narrator of the book, or the egomaniac? The frightened man who wants to believe, or his sceptical online persona? The reader is presented with many different versions of Jack and left to make their own decision on which, if any, are ‘real’.

Photography and Self-Haunting (Again)

Photography has always had Gothic associations. From the uncanny recognition that the person in the photograph is the same and yet different to its real-life counterpart, to the language still used around photography like a photo *shoot* and *capturing* an image. As Marina Warner writes in *Phantasmagoria*, a formative work on the Gothic history and implications of photography, and other technologies, "Optical devices did not concentrate solely on extending the faculty of sight as an organ of sense, but developed concurrently as instruments of imagination" (2006, p. 14). Taken in this way, photographs and the act of photographing can be seen as a portal for the imagination, for individuals to project their own ideas and anxieties onto an image. There is also a control of the photographer over the photograph's subject that Christina Von Braun describes:

> The eye of the observer is always 'dominant'. Its 'activity' and 'power over reality' express themselves in two ways: on the one hand, the photographic eye subsumes the Other, devouring it whole, in order to empower itself ... The photographic eye also takes possession of the Other, insofar as it brings the *time* the Other inhabits to a standstill. (2015, pp. 22–23, emphasis original)

The ease of photography and filming that has come about with the smart phone is utilised to express the anxieties his characters feel regarding constant observation in both of Arnopp's novels, but particularly in *Ghoster*.

This is linked to the creation of social media profiles, frequently used to show images of the self, but also to curate and publish a self-image. Arnopp's work encourages an interpretation of social media profiles as uncanny. In *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*, every character seems to have an online presence and Jack, as has been noted previously, 'lives' online. However, Jack's social media also clearly haunts him. He cannot put his phone down, but is drawn to look again and again at the uncanny profiles he has created of himself and maintain them. In many ways, it feels like the alter ego Jack has created on his social media profiles is his soul, which needs constant attention both to perpetuate it but also prove to himself that it is still there, and all his followers who 'believe' in him are still there.

This sense of uncanny social media continues into *Ghoster*, particularly in the way Tinder is used. Tinder is an internet dating app where users are presented with a single picture of a person and either swipe right to indicate interest in a potential

romantic match, or swipe left to discard the match. There is no communication between users until this initial decision has been made, so users are forced to accept or discard potential love interests based solely on their appearance. In *Ghoster*, Kate and Scott first encounter each other on Tinder, and their respective pictures are a motif recalled by each other throughout the book. In Kate's case, Scott's picture is sometimes recalled when she perceives a "wolfish" expression on his face which she associates with him perhaps not being the happy, easy-going person he appears to be. There is also a contrast between how Kate's picture is perceived by each member of the couple—Scott thinks it is the perfect picture:

> Kate is sticking her tongue out in a sort of mock defiance. And yet something about those eyes makes me want to wrap my arms around her and tell her everything's going to be alright. Despite the silly tongue thing, the girl has this kind of vulnerable look, and I can't get her out of my head. (Arnopp, 2019, p. 350)

However, Kate says of this same profile picture, it is "[a]lways best to deliberately make yourself look ugly before someone else can make that judgement" (Arnopp, 2019, p. 151). The juxtaposition of perspectives demonstrates that, even though Kate chose her own profile picture to present a curated self-identity, it is still one that is essentially self-deprecating. In a novel that is all about false perspectives leading to Gothic downfall, the importance of the profile pictures in establishing Scott and Kate's first impressions of each other, and the ways these images continue to haunt them both with the possibility that their first impressions were wrong, echoes the haunting of the twenty-first century individual by social media and its curated profiles and images.

Both Scott and Kate use the same profile picture across all of their social media accounts, increasing the impression that the social media selves presented by Kate and Scott are a distinct but consistent entity separate from the real people. Jill Walker Rettberg describes profile pictures as, "a visual expression of identity, and our choice of profile photos is clearly a form of visual self-representation" (2014, p. 40). Therefore, although they may not like their own profile pictures, Kate and Scott have clearly chosen the pictures as avatars of themselves, to be taken as a hyperreal extension of their selves, and to represent their selves to others. Weinstock identifies that "The face that we present to the world is inevitably a distortion as we seek to hide our faults, flaws, and misdeeds – a kind of mask. The 'true portrait' of ourselves

is one we keep carefully concealed." (Weinstock, 2023, p. 100). This is doubly true of profile pictures, which provide a means to further curate the face an individual presents to the digital world. The repetition of phrases such as, "I can't get her out of my head" (Arnopp, 2019, p. 287), reinforce the idea that not only are these online selves uncanny, they are also haunting each other. This brings to mind Marina Warner's ideas on the photograph, that, "The resemblance, materialising in its uncannily fixed form in the photograph, might contain some material residue of the person, transmitted with the light rays from his or her body" (2006, p. 194). Weinstock identifies a similar dynamic in portraiture which creates "a materialization of the past in the present that exerts uncanny effects" (Weinstock, 2023, p. 97). If a profile picture can contain a 'material residue' of its owner, is it then an immaterial extension of that owner – a ghost?

Kate and Scott's respective profile pictures raise the point of the differing or opposing perspectives that are inevitable when encountering a purely digital version of an individual, which run throughout *Ghoster*. Both Kate and Scott dislike their chosen profile pictures, expressing extreme low self-esteem when talking about their own images, but each of them feel a strong attraction to their opposite's photographs. This opposing perspective is echoed by the face that Scott draws on the glass patio door of his flat before he is absorbed by the phone. Kate perceives the drawing as, "a demonic vision" that is "laughing at her" and calls it "Satanic" (Arnopp, 2019, p. 89). However, we learn from Scott's diary entries that he had intended it to be "a big smiley face" (Arnopp, 2019, p. 414) to welcome Kate to her new home after all his other possessions have been removed. The face is all that Scott can express of himself, without his possessions, much like his digital images. Both are subject to perspective, and fundamentally have no substance of their own without an interpretive subject. This recalls Warner's assertion that a captured image becomes an 'instrument of the imagination', inviting multiple and sometimes opposing interpretations, partly because the reaction to them is emotional.

Photography and the captured image is further central to *Ghoster* as the ghost phone learns about its targets' weaknesses by filming them when they sleep. These films are hours long, and it is implied that the phone films entirely autonomously without a user holding or operating the device. This is an unsettling proposition for a number of reasons. To begin with, Kate thinks that Scott has been filming previous

lovers as they slept, and that someone has broken into the apartment to film her sleeping. A reader familiar with the horror canon might recall scenes in the *Paranormal Activities* franchise (2009–2021), which show footage of zombie-like individuals standing over their sleeping partners for hours at a time. However, the act of filming while performing this odd behaviour adds another layer of disturbance. Warner summarises a number of litigations in *Phantasmagoria* that demonstrate a battle since photography's invention for ownership of the 'taken' image. She writes that the eventual imposition of copyright law means that, "the person's image is an intrinsic and inalienable part of personhood, and cannot consequently be 'taken' by another without consent" (Warner, 2006, p. 198). Yet *Ghoster*'s films are not only taken without consent, they are taken when the subject is completely exposed, when they are asleep. This is a further level of violation that removes all avenues of safety for the characters, and provokes in the reader the delicious chill that many horror texts prey on when implying that it is dangerous to fall asleep.[39]

Besides working with ideas of ownership, ethics, and permission in photography, Arnopp also highlights how consent in photography is a very real concern in the twenty-first century. Tyler, Kate's new work partner, films extreme accidents and deaths which he attends in a professional capacity as a paramedic, and uploads the films and photographs to a fictional website called SikkFuxx. This, in itself, is described as a kind of addiction and a play for attention. Kate summarises, "sharing sick pictures, these shots that only you can take, earns you a micro-dose of power and prestige. It earns you one single gram of leverage in this world" (Arnopp, 2019, p. 375). While 'snuff' films have been around for a long time, the ease of capturing not just one's own, but anyone's personal tragedy, has become a feature of the twenty-first century. Take, for example, the viral YouTube video "Drake on the Tube…" (maxmouche, 2012) of Alika Agidi-Jeffs, who was filmed singing to himself on the London Underground. Agidi-Jeffs later revealed that this was a means for him to cope with a severe mental health condition, lending a cruel voyeurism to the viral watching and re-watching of the video (ITV, 2015). The eeriness of being recorded by silent, staring strangers is also utilised in the *Black Mirror* episode

[39] See Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise (1984–2010), Brent Roske's *Don't Fall Asleep* (2010), Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), Philip Guzman's *Dead Awake* (2017), and Jonathan Hopkins' *Slumber* (2017), to name just a few. The fact this horror legacy is so often found in film speaks to the visual creepiness and voyeurism of watching a sleeping figure.

"White Bear" (Tibbetts, 2013), a TV series that has led the way this century in combining horror and near-future technology. The way in which the ghost phone absorbs the souls of its users echoes a commonly held belief from early in photography's use that suggested a camera stole souls, although Warner proposes that this was actually an idea perpetuated by early photographers, in part to patronise their 'primitive' or 'uneducated' subjects. It is interesting, however, that in *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*, the demon entity Mimi/Meme cannot be captured on film. For her creators, who are obsessed with recording for the purposes of promotion and adulation on social media, this is both frustrating and satisfying proof that "that's why there aren't more real ghost videos" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 246). The implication may also be that Mimi is a thing without a soul and, therefore, that soul cannot be captured on film.

However, the idea of technological surveillance, of devices 'watching' or 'listening' to their users, is becoming an increasing contemporary concern. With the advent of smart devices such as Amazon's Echo or OKGoogle, the home is progressively being filled with devices that exist to listen to householders. Listening software are also installed on most smartphones, facilitating both synching with home devices, and enabling the phones themselves to be voice activated. There have also been conspiracy theories relating to smartphone manufacturers enabling default settings that allow smartphones to 'listen' to their users to enable targeted advertising: "When you use your default settings, everything you say may be recorded through your device's onboard microphone. Our phones routinely collect our voice data, store it in a distant server, and use it for marketing purposes" (Komando, 2019, para. 3). In *Ghoster*, Izzy recalls this possibility when she asks, "What if the phone has some kind of bugging device, babe? What if it's listening all the time? Or … I mean, you said you've felt watched" (Arnopp, 2019, p. 288). Arnopp here plays on the way that the internet can disseminate far-fetched theories with the ring of truth, another erosion of the barrier between reality and fiction. These ideas of digital surveillance are further utilised in *Ghoster* when Izzy identifies some of the ghost phone's previous owners by using Google Image Search. Image Search is a search service owned by Google that allows users to search the World Wide Web for image content, matching an image to others that have been posted elsewhere online. In this case, Izzy searches for a photograph found on the phone

under the correct assumption that the same image would appear on the individual's social media feed. There are also references to using Google Street View, a service which allows a user to search for an address and then see images from the street itself.

Found Documents and Uncertainty

There is a strong tradition of the found text in Gothic fiction, all the way from its inception with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which within its own fiction is claimed to be an 'authentic' manuscript from the 12th century. As Catherine Spooner notes in *Contemporary Gothic* (2006), this is a trope that was enthusiastically taken up by late twentieth century films, starting out with *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and continuing into the twenty-first century with the *Paranormal Activity* franchise. She notes that, "the 'found manuscript' theme has inevitably been transformed by the growth of information technologies: the labyrinthine intricacies of the World Wide Web creates the potential for all kinds of felicitous discoveries" (2006, p. 39). In the field of contemporary fiction, this is perhaps best demonstrated by texts such as *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski or *S* by J. J. Abrams (2013), both 'found manuscripts' which have been heavily annotated and added to by their 'finders', or *Slenderman* by anonymous, a story which began online through the Creepypasta forum, developed into a series of video games and finally finds itself reimagined as a very self-aware novel. *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* is also presented as a found manuscript. It is a book that Jack wrote, intended initially to be titled *Jack Sparks on the Supernatural*, the third instalment in his pseudo-journalistic series which are as much about him as they are their titled subjects. The framing narrative is that Jack wrote the manuscript as events happened and, after his death, the manuscript was passed to his brother, Alistair. In a foreword, Alistair describes how the manuscript had been circulated online through forums and the BitTorrent network.[40] Although he does not specifically say so, Alistair's line, "I have no agenda and much prefer to stick to the facts" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 369), implies

[40] The BitTorrent network is a means of downloading files from one person's device to another. It is commonly used to illegally pirate entertainment media.

that he has published the book to escape from many internet bastardisations of the 'true' text.

As might be expected, both from the found document tradition Arnopp is drawing on and the book's title, the 'original' manuscript in *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* ends shortly before Jack's death. This embodies Spooner's description of the 'found' Gothic manuscript as "the discovery of a lost or hidden document that reveals dreadful secrets concerning the fate of its author, before crumbling away just before the crucial point is made" (2006, p. 38). The idea of the "dreadful secrets concerning the fate of its author" are particularly interesting when considering the high Gothic markers found within *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*. Jack encounters uncanny, ghostly reflections in the mirror, spirit visitations, and videos and texts that appear out of time, but travels through the majority of the novel apparently (possibly purposely) oblivious. These work more as indicators to the reader, who recognises and understands these Gothic markers, knowing that they can only lead to Jack's demise, even when Jack is hopeful of his own redemption at the last. Again, we have a male character taking up the mantle of the traditional Gothic heroine, as discussed in Chapter 5, driven into danger by their own oblivious curiosity while the reader sees the foreshadowed, inevitable dangers.

The realism of the text, however, is utterly called into question at the end of the novel with Alistair's afterword. In this brief expository section, Alistair reveals that Jack died on October 31st, the first day covered in the manuscript when the exorcism takes place. He posits that the rest of the novel is not, in fact, a piece of journalism that Jack wrote as he experienced its events. Rather, he believes that Jack wrote the whole manuscript before his death on that first day, and that the various sightings of Jack and his presence online which appears to corroborate the rest of the novel are the workings of an imposter, who somehow had access to the manuscript in the days following Jack's death, aping his actions in order to align with the book Jack allegedly wrote. As I have observed elsewhere:

> While establishing textual veracity has always been an aspect of the found document trope, it has become more important in recent years as reality itself becomes less stable and the ways in which individuals receive information more susceptible to corruption or misinformation. (Brewster, 2023, p. 240)

This is an issue which becomes a direct concern for Jack's manuscript. The technological implications of the internet are fundamentally untrustworthy, as Alistair refers to the availability of the manuscript and the video it mentions on the dark web and torrent sites. These digital files keep appearing, duplicated again and again, faster than Alistair's legal team can delete them, but it is impossible to know whether any given manuscript downloaded is the 'real' original or if it has been altered by a user in the process of its duplication. Here Alistair raises the idea that the entire work is a simulation – or, from the perspective of the reader who knows this is a work of fiction, a simulation of a simulation. However, as the link has been established between the digital and physical selves, so the threat of corruption or revelation of the digital self raises anxieties over the safety of the physical self (Brewster, 2023, p. 251).

Throughout the main text of the book narrated by Jack, Alistair makes frequent editorial intrusions into the novel in the form of footnoted annotations and insertions of interview material gathered or recorded after the events described in the book. These further conflate the idea of Jack's self, as the added interviews frequently contradict what Jack himself has written. Alistair's footnotes further undermine Jack's narrative, saying things like, "Untrue", "Again, untrue" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 315) and "Entirely fabricated" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 338). Writing about the frequent and copious footnotes that feature in *House of Leaves*, Nick Lord writes, "The recurring criticism of its constituent components must also be, as a whole, a criticism of the entire novel" (2016, p. 466). In this way, Arnopp continues to build uncertainty about the veracity of his fiction, conflating it with internal, fictional criticism. Lord continues that this device "remind[s] us of the tangibility of the book as a form that requires the reader to employ a specialized set of navigational and interpretive strategies" (2016, p. 466). In this case, those strategies are partly to divine the truth from fiction within the fiction. Even on a casual reading of the text, the reader is invited to make decisions about whose narrative is true (Jack's or Alistair's) and what is real (the mundane or the supernatural).

By the end of the book, Alistair has proved himself to also be an unreliable narrator. He blatantly profits from his brother's death and seems to ape Jack's style of journalism as he promotes his new television documentary, *Alistair Sparks Debunks the Devil*, even taking on Jack's false surname to ride on its cachet. This pushes the

reader towards believing the manuscript to be 'true' (within the fictional realms of the story) rather than false. The diegetic manuscript's verity perhaps should not matter to the reader, but the reality of found documents' importance to the Gothic genre means that the reader is encouraged to believe in the supernatural narrative, even while the author destabilises its veracity. It is easy to cast Alistair Sparks in the same role as his brother at the beginning of the book, protesting a little too hard and tying himself in knots to dismiss solid-looking evidence of the supernatural. This metamorphosis of Alistair into Jack is also uncanny. They, after all, utilise a similar writing style which is entertainingly arrogant and superior. The narrators are flattened into each other and the role of narrator is more real than either Jack or Alistair's individual characters.

Conclusion

The question of certainty and control is key both to Arnopp's characters' view of the world, but also to the Gothic. Gothic tropes rely on a sense of predestination and inevitability, created by their tropic repetition, as noted in the introduction. This is the reason the reader can observe a hapless heroine in a ruined castle tip-toeing up a dark staircase while a storm rages outside, and know that some terrible discovery is about to occur. The reader sees these tropes and recognises the Gothic inevitability, while the character in question often remains oblivious but is, nonetheless, subject to destiny. Jack's persona appears to be built on a basis of certainty and unshakeable scepticism. While Jack claims to look for evidence of the supernatural, in the first section of the book, he openly narrates that people who claim to have witnessed the supernatural could only be "trying to deceive others" or had "been deceived by others" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 26). As has been discussed previously, this is a false construct that Jack builds to ensure that his persona is rigidly upheld as far as his fans are concerned, hiding and/or protecting a frightened part of him that wants to believe. However, the idea of uncertainty is also discussed at length with Sherilyn Chastain, who upholds the philosophy of Robert Anton Wilson. Wilson's aim, in his writings, was to "try to get people into a state of generalised agnosticism, not agnosticism about God alone but agnosticism about everything" (Elliot, 1980, para. 73). Sherilyn relates this philosophy to life after death by saying, "You [Jack] have no idea … and neither, as a multiple-model agnostic, do I" (Arnopp, 2016, p. 97). The idea that

anything in general, and science in particular, might be open to interpretation frustrates Jack, but permeates throughout the novel. There is forever uncertainty as to whether the ghostly visitations Jack experiences are the result of substance abuse and an unstable mind, or are 'real'. And as Alistair reveals that the entire manuscript may be a fabrication, even the contexts that Jack describes are called into question.

Reality in Arnopp's novels is disrupted in a number of ways: through the unreliability of his narrators, through the differing perspectives leading to a subversion of reader expectations, and through supernatural entities warping the characters' lives. While these are all commonly used in horror and Gothic fiction, Arnopp intrinsically ties all of these literary devices to the Internet, portable smart devices, and social media. The fundamental unreliability of *The Last Days of Jack Sparks* is directly attributed to the texts' bastardisation on BitTorrent sites. *Ghoster's* differing perspectives are developed based on social media profiles, and the fact that these are curated by the user rather than being a true or genuine reflection of the individual. And the supernatural entities that haunt both these novels are held within uncanny objects that are also smart devices: the ghostphone and Jack's YouTube account. In this way, Arnopp perfectly demonstrates how some of the fundamental Gothic tropes of classic Gothic and right up to the twentieth century, in the contemporary moment rely upon and are intrinsically bound up with twenty-first-century technology.

Chapter 7: Hauntology, Simulation, and Justice: *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* by Stuart Turton and *The Tenth Girl* by Sara Faring

Introduction

Although apparently quite different books, in different genres and with differing popular receptions, Sara Faring's *The Tenth Girl* and Stuart Turton's *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* have much in common that makes them ideal for examining Jacques Derrida's (2006 [1993]) concept of hauntology in contemporary fiction. Both works are almost entirely set within a virtual reality simulation in an unknown futuristic time, but reimagine historical periods – 1970s Patagonia and 1930s England respectively. In this respect, both works take place in an unknown time-period haunted by the past, and present a possible future that haunts the twenty-first-century reader. Both works feature time loops in which the characters experience the same day or series of days a vast number of times, meaning the characters are also haunted by other possible presents. In his formulation of 'hauntology', Derrida introduced the possibility of loop and looping histories which create a sense of "[r]epetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost … Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time" (2006, p. 10, italics original). In this way, the texts conform to the patterns of hauntology, with looping histories, and revenants that retain their own linearity throughout these loops, subtly changing possible presents that are used in both texts to present ideas of justice and deserving.

This central theme of justice occurs in the text both explicitly and implicitly. In *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, the repeated attempts to solve a mystery act as a method of redemption and rehabilitation in a penal colony. The Blackheath simulation is a literal tool of justice, featuring characters who are jailers in the figures of the plague doctors. The purpose of resolving the mystery of Evelyn Hardcastle's murder is to escape this penal system and return to a normal life in the physical, 'real' world. In *The Tenth Girl*, justice is dealt with in a less structured format. The concept of 'deserving' is central to the story, and this question of desert results in a

decision on who ends the novel with a physical body as opposed to a purely digital artificial existence within the game's simulation. This justice is administered by partisan individuals, but is presented to the reader as justice nonetheless. A link between time loops and justice is identified by Shawn Edrei, who writes, "imprisonment within [a] loop is often explicitly depicted as a purgatorial experience" (2023, p. 191), suggesting an in-between place after sentencing but before justice has been served, as can be observed in both texts.

In Turton and Faring's stories, the reward offered by justice is the achievement of a physical body – in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, the characters' own physical bodies which Aiden and Anna left behind when they entered Blackheath, and in *The Tenth Girl*, the stolen physical bodies of the players who are deemed less worthy of bodies than the simulation's AIs. This emphasis on physicality as superior to purely artificial existence within a simulation also draws on theories of posthumanism which have already been briefly discussed in Chapter 6. *The Tenth Girl* invites the reader to consider the sentience of artificial intelligences, in the form of the non-player characters in a game. These characters have developed sentience, personalities, and existences that go beyond their coding, yet are the victims of abuse and discrimination because they do not possess physical bodies and are considered, therefore, less than human. As will be demonstrated, this prejudice is centred on the AIs' lack of physical embodiment.

Goldberg and Moore, in their introduction to *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature,* identify that "lyrical meditations upon the repetitious nature of traumatic experience, can help to make intelligible the ineffable nature of time as it is haunted by individual and historical violence and suffering" (2011, p. 11), highlighting the importance of the hauntology of traumatic experience in a way that is particularly pertinent to these texts. Their time loops force their characters to reset after highly traumatic experiences and experience the same period of time repeatedly without any memory of previous loops. The characters are forever haunted by their possible pasts, presents and futures. The times in which the novels are set are unstable as a result of being the conceptions of history from a future period of time, imagined by a simulation creator, who had their own prejudices and preoccupations which transfer into the worlds they create. This instability adds to the feel of the simulated world as inferior to the physical world, allowing removal from

it to be perceived as a kind of justice, and true humanity to be dependent on escaping the simulation.

Tok Thompson explicitly states the relationship between hauntings and justice when he writes that "By examining how ghosts operate in various cultural settings, we can better understand what it means to be human and behave ethically" (2019, p. 43). This chapter will investigate this link between hauntings (and, indeed, hauntology), humanity, and justice in the context of these two texts. First, within the framework of hauntology – both its original conception as expressed by Jacques Derrida, and its developing and contemporary contexts as the theory has been co-opted into Gothic theoretics. The concept of justice in each text will be examined, both in a formalised legal and moral context, and using Alan Zaitchik's theories on deserving to demonstrate physicality as a reward and digitality as punishment. Finally, analysing the use of simulation and AI in these texts, this chapter will demonstrate a blurring of the boundary between real people and unreal people, using theories on posthumanism to assess where the boundary exists, if it exists at all.

Hauntology

Jacques Derrida's original theory of hauntology has been adapted into the public consciousness, "becoming a shorthand for the ways in which the past returns to haunt the present" (Coverley, 2020, p. 7). In the original French, *l'hantologie* is a pun on haunting with ontology, that being a branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being. However, hauntology is far more paradoxical than this straightforward description suggests, concerned not only with the 'standard' haunting of the present by the past, but the present by its possible futures, and by the possible presents that could have been if the past had been different. As Derrida writes, "Haunting is historical, but it is not *dated*" (2006, p. 3, italics original). All time haunts all time, as Wisker observes of ghost stories: "Warnings move between times, the past ghosting the future the future the past" (2022, p. 176). This can be further extended in speculative fiction to our fictional possible futures being haunted by the present in which they are conceived, and the past that influences that conception. For this chapter, close attention will be paid to the history and development of hauntology as explored in Merlin Coverley's book, *Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past* (2020),

spending time not just with Derrida, but with the writers and theorists who have further developed hauntology as it has come to be understood in the twenty-first century.

Coverley writes that Derrida "illustrates the increasingly ghostly nature of our communications media and the way in which information technology has begun to disrupt our conception of space and time" (2020, p. 206). *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* and *The Tenth Girl's* simulated worlds are largely set within a virtual reality (VR) technology that does not yet exist, but is conceivable based on existing VR tech. They express the kinds of worlds that were conceived of in the twentieth century – for example, as portrayed in the film *The Matrix* (1999) – but which are far more immediately present and accessible in the twenty-first, where VR headsets have become common in the domestic sphere, with the first mainstream adverts for domestic VR headsets occurring on terrestrial television in 2023. These texts are thus set in both the future and the past. They conceive of a world where simulated realities are absolutely immersive, but those simulations are set in a past that the reader can recognise.

Nevertheless, both these historical settings are somewhat nebulous – in particular, Turton's setting is 'sometime' in the 1930s. The invitation to a house party that situates the book's setting and features in the book's front matter provides a location and list of characters, but no date (Turton, 2018, p. viii–ix). Turton has frequently referred to *Seven Deaths* as his "Agatha Christie book" (Green, 2021) and so the imprecise location in time may be a reference to the time-setting of many Agatha Christie novels, and certainly Agatha Christie adaptations, that occur at some point in the inter-war period without a certain fixing in time: the so-called nebulous 1930s or, as Turton refers to it, "Christie time – which is somewhere between the end of the first world war [sic] and the start of the second" (S. Turton, personal communication, January 8, 2024). This enabled Turton to use the time period of the whole novel, rather than just Aiden's personal timeline, to disrupt the reader's sense of time: "Because this novel is a time travel novel, alongside a murder mystery, I loved the idea of the time period not merely being vague, but potentially covering that entire span" (S. Turton, personal communication, January 8, 2024). By contrast, Faring's Vaccaro School setting is very specific, beginning in March 1978 and ending in June 1978. However, the school's physical remoteness at the southern tip

of Patagonia and its mannered, archaic roles and setting destabilise such careful dating of the text. The setting feels much older and more Gothic than the 1970s. Furthermore, the sections of the novel told from Angel's point of view are without time. The chapter titles feature the number "2020", which could be taken as a year, an alternate 2020 in which VR simulation games are far more advanced than they really were in 2020.[41] However, 2020 is actually Angel's login number for the game, and so the 2020 chapter headings more likely refer to this – a theory supported by the number which follows 2020, which appears to be Angel's score in the game. Coverley writes, "certain futures have the ability to haunt us even before they have come to pass" (2020, p. 8), and this is the case with Turton and Faring's worlds. Both present a questionably near-future (or alternate present) in which simulation is more present and immersive than physical 'reality', haunting the reader with this possible future that has yet to come to pass.

A key figure in hauntology is the revenant: "that which returns each time as if it were the first, unchanging and insistent, demanding a reckoning for a message that went unheard or was ignored" (Coverley, 2020, p. 10, italics original). In the footnotes to Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, the revenant "figures *both* a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again" (2006, p. 10, italics original). *The Tenth Girl* is full of revenants. Mavi and the other non-player characters (NPCs) are figures who return at the start of each game loop, experiencing the world and setting each time as if it were their first. Some of the idiosyncrasies the NPCs exhibit towards the end of each loop – such as Mole's memorisation and repetition of the players' passwords – suggest some subconscious memory of previous game loops, but this is never confirmed. Charon, the avatar of the game master and co-designer, could be said to be a revenant, playing the same role over and over again, while existing outside of the game loop. Charon refers to how repetitive their role has become when they express surprise at some of the more original content Angel has accessed on their playthrough: "You're planning the *sacrifice,* for fuck's sake. The sacrifice ritual! Haven't heard of one of those happening in about three years" (Faring, 2019, p. 394, emphasis original). Finally,

[41] Faring's novels appear to take place in a shared alternate universe, which is expanded in her second novel, *White Fox* (2020). This novel takes place in an alternate 'present' which features far more advanced robotics and VR technology, but also recognisable contemporary phone tech.

Angel has some aspects of the revenant to their character.[42] Although they are experiencing the game for the first time, characters and story aspects of the game are based on their childhood and the stories their mother, who co-designed the game, told them. They are also haunted throughout the novel by the grief of their brother's death and their role in that death, using the VR game *Vaccaro School* as a distraction, though it acts as a constant reminder of their grief for both their mother and brother. In playing the game, Angel's relationship with Mavi constantly prompts a "haunt[ing of] the present from the future, through the unfulfilled promise of that which never came to pass" (Coverley, 2020, p. 11).

Another prominent revenant in Faring's novel is the eponymous tenth girl. The lore of the novel has it that Vaccaro School is built on the land of fictional indigenous tribe, the Zapuche.[43] When colonisers first lived on the land, they were required to sacrifice a girl regularly to appease a curse made by the tribe. This sacrifice was known as the tenth girl. The tenth girl is also a figure in the *Vaccaro School* VR game, an NPC controlled/played by the game's creators, who exists in Vaccaro School as separate from the other NPCs. She appears as a kind of ghost who provides exposition in the rare cases that players engage with the Zapuche curse storyline.[44] But the tenth girl also has a 'life' outside of the simulation. Angel, who has Zapuche heritage, remembers stories told by their mother about the tenth girl and the god-like powers she was imbued with due to her sacrifice. In many respects, the tenth girl is the only real ghost in the story, being what Derrida conceived of as "the paradoxical figure who seemingly returns from the past into the present and yet which properly belongs to neither; a figure … whose return heralds not only a repetition of the past but also an anticipation of the future" (Coverley, 2020, p. 210). The tenth girl exists in the fictional past of Vaccaro School, and haunts its present, but certainly belongs to neither time. Although she has a single avatar in Vaccaro School, she is a symbol of multiple sacrifices, all of whom have taken on the

[42] Although Angel inhabits the body of a male NPC in the *Vaccaro School* game, their personal gender is never revealed, and so this thesis uses gender neutral pronouns to refer to them. The same is true for Charon, who embodies both male and female avatars in the game, but whose personal gender is not revealed.
[43] The Zapuche are not an indigenous tribe that exist in our reality, but they are true to Faring's universe. In this way they are both real and fictional, spectral and representative of a broader indigeneity.
[44] The rarity of this storyline's appearance among the game's regular player base – implied to be White Americans – echoes the theme of oppression in haunting literature, explored in more detail in Chapters 1 and 3.

symbolic role of the tenth girl, and as such her avatar in the VR game acts as a repetition of the past and an anticipation of the future – of the sacrifices that will be needed, and which Mavi almost makes herself.

The figure of the revenant is also key to *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, in which Aiden is himself the revenant of the novel. Aiden exists not once but seven times within the day at Blackheath, occupying different 'host' bodies, as well as having a consciousness and/or physicality that exists in the future-present beyond Blackheath. Aiden frequently meets himself within one of his other hosts, providing moments of self-haunting reminiscent of the research in Chapter 4. Because Aiden lives the day reasonably consecutively – a full day in one host, resetting to the next when he goes to sleep or dies with some exceptions – he also encounters both past and future versions of himself. The past versions haunt him, showing a day he has already lived and cannot change, despite the new things he knows that might have improved that day. For example, the arrival of one of his previous selves "provoke[es] the queerest of sensations. By any measure this man is me … but I struggle to believe it" (Turton, 2018, p. 113). However, Aiden is more frequently haunted by the appearance of his future selves, and the possibilities of violence they foreshadow. For much of the novel, Aiden knows that his final host will be Gregory Gold, who spends the majority of the book chained up and severely beaten in a gatehouse. Aiden knows this is his future. However, Gold has been beaten and restrained because he attacked the butler, another of Aiden's hosts, and so Aiden is haunted by the knowledge that he will perform this extreme feat of violence against himself. In one scene, Aiden is confronted by himself in the Gregory Gold host (before his beating) who appears "in a frightful state, agitated and dishevelled, a man dragged to hell and back" (Turton, 2018, p. 246). Similarly, when Aiden encounters one of his future hosts for the first time – not realising yet that he will occupy other hosts – he describes them as looking "barely human, a remnant of some prior species lost in the folds of our evolution" (Turton, 2018, p. 7). This lack of humanity highlights Aiden's uncanny experience encountering himself in an entirely different body. The gaps in Aiden's knowledge throughout *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* act as "widespread erasures" which "enable both tellers and listeners [to] make temporal and spatial continuities and to begin to make sense of memories" (Wisker, 2022, p. 205). Throughout the story, Aiden is both teller and

listener, even attempting to send his other selves messages through writing a message to the other hosts in a book and use of NPC allies to pass messages between selves. Acting as both parties – teller and listener – Aiden is eventually able to uncover memory in solving the mystery of Blackheath, a memory that, it is implied, has been buried for decades, if not centuries.

Another aspect that has become intrinsic to hauntology is landscape. Coverley writes about the timelessness of the land, and the way this is explored in British fantasy novels of the 1960s and 1970s,[45] in which the distant past conflates with the present through a persisting, unchanging landscape. The land is constant and forever, rendering ideas of land ownership obsolete over the Earth's history (as opposed to human history). A preoccupation with ownership of the landscape threads through *The Tenth Girl*, particularly in the belief that the hauntings at Vaccaro School take place because of an indigenous curse laid on colonial settlers who stole Zapuche land. Derrida writes, "Haunting would mark the very existence of Europe" (2006, p. 3), a continent with so much overlapping history that it cannot help but be haunted by its past and many possible presents. A comparison can be drawn with Latin America's colonial history. In *Dark Places: The Haunted House in Film*, Barry Curtis writes, "Exorcizing recent pasts can invoke older revenants" (2008, p. 9). The curse on Vaccaro School in some ways presents the haunting of one of these presents: a present in which this fictional indigenous tribe may still occupy its former lands and, in turn, subjugate those who sought to remove them and take over their land. This exorcizing of a recent past, the 1970s, then acts to invoke the older revenant of Vaccaro's colonisation. There is, therefore, a sense that while the land is now owned legally by the Vaccaro family, has been built on by them and occupied by them for many years, the land still belongs to and is haunted by the revenant of the Zapuche.

More subtly, the ancient, everlasting nature of the landscape runs as a thread through the story. The novel opens with a description of Vaccaro School's setting: "At the very southern tip of South America, where fields of ice meet mountains of salt" (Faring, 2019, p. 1), situating the story in this ancient, massive landscape with features that will long outlast any story or character. Mavi and the other NPCs

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[45]For example, Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* (1967) and *Elidor* (1965), or Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* (1973).

frequently look out on glaciers from Vaccaro School's balcony, emphasising the remoteness and wildness of the story's location, but also ostracising the school's inhabitants from the rest of the world. In practical terms this provides a physical limit for the simulation, but it also places the characters – who exist both within and outside of time – in a landscape location that is also timeless. Although both books' settings are fictional, in that they are simulations of real places, they nevertheless remind the reader of the importance of time and space to a human sense of stability. This chapter will next consider how a simulation's destabilising aspects affect the haunting of its characters.

Simulation and Posthumanism

More than a theory about historical points in time, hauntology, as it draws on its roots in ontology, is concerned with the very nature of being: "being and haunting are interwoven concepts, the ghostly coming to invade every aspect of our lives … to be is to be haunted" (Coverley, 2020, p. 8). Theories of posthumanism deal with issues of what we currently consider to be human and what falls outside, beyond, or after this idea of humanity. Anya Heise-von der Lippe writes that posthuman Gothic texts "highlight the instability and ultimate unsustainability of our most basic ontological category – the human" (2021, p. 218). In *Exits to the Posthuman Future*, Arthur Kroker describes posthuman as the "radical undermining of all the previous markers of the 'human'" (2014, p. 5), while N. Katherine Hayles writes that "In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation" (1999, p. 3). This is particularly true in *The Tenth Girl* and *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, both of which create a distinct separation between the self and the physical body. In Faring's work, many of the characters are entirely bodiless artificial intelligences – video game NPCs – who steal the bodies of the less-deserving players towards the end of the novel. In *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, Aiden's consciousness is transferred to various 'host' bodies so he may experience the same day from multiple perspectives and with different relationships and skill sets. While there is reference to his physical body in the 'real' world, the reader never encounters it, and it remains something of an abstract concept. The reader learns to perceive Aiden as a personality divorced from (or at least only loosely tethered to) his physical body.

The main characters of both texts are also able to travel between bodies. In *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, the changing of bodies happens without any impetus from Aiden. However, in *The Tenth Girl*, Mavi is taught by Angel how to push her digital consciousness from the confines of her 'body' in order to possess another or to float in the simulation, bodiless. This emphasis on possession recalls Hayles's wording on disembodiment in posthumanism: "the liberal subject *possessed* a body but was not usually represented as *being* a body" (1999, p. 4, emphasis original). The preoccupation with embodiment of the self is a concern for Mavi when she realises she is not a physical person but a digital construction: "If Angel is right, there is one rule to our existence: that there shall be no relief. And I need to prove or disprove it now. So I stab myself in the neck with a steak knife" (Faring, 2019, p. 384). For Arthur Kroker, the posthuman is intrinsically tied up with the body. He describes the emerging "species-mediations" of posthumanism as "technological beings who are part code / part skin" (2014, p. 5). However, Mavi exists as a posthuman before she has a physical body. She proves her digital body to be distinctly inhuman when she cuts herself to test her humanity, as the wound heals instantly – a trope explored in the film *Ex Machina* (2015), in a scene analysed at some length by Anya Heise-von der Lippe (2021, pp. 226–227). That Mavi inhabits a physical body at the end of the book, however, raises questions about her posthumanity. Is Mavi a posthuman at the moment of her sentience? At the moment she realises what she is, namely a computer program? Or at the point at which she inhabits a physical body in the physical world? Does this move from digitality to physicality remove the "post" of her posthumanism, to allow her to become purely human?

The act of cutting herself to provide visual proof of her humanity follows Hayles's assertion that "observer and system are reflexively bound up with one another" (1999, p. 284). Mavi is able to use her observations of the system, which is also herself, in order to theorise and prove her own posthumanity or, as she first perceives it, her non-existence. This then feeds into Mavi's conception of what makes a person: "[I am] not a person at all by the traditional definition implanted in us – [I am] a pale imitation of a self, someone's toy, everyone's joke" (Faring, 2019, p. 399). As she comes to know herself and her world better, this idea develops: "I

have become capable of rewriting the rules of who a person can be" (Faring, 2019, p. 444). This conforms to Hayles's statement:

> As long as the human subject is envisioned as an autonomous self with unambiguous boundaries, the human-computer interface can only be parsed as a division between the solidity of real life on one side and the illusion of virtual reality on the other. (1999, p. 290)

The phenomenon that allows Mavi and her fellow NPCs to become posthuman is what Kroker terms "drift culture", and particularly "code drift": "Code drift theorizes the momentous evolutionary movement by which the previously separate regimes of biology and digitality unify in a world-picture dominated by the universalization of the code form" (2014, p. 18). Mavi is herself a flow of data, perhaps given more attention by her original developer than the other NPCs as she is heavily based on one of the code's creators. Through "chance variations through unexpected uses" and "creative applications" (Kroker, 2014, p. 50), she has gained a greater degree of sentience than her fellows. She has evolved and comes to believe that she has achieved a form of personhood that supersedes the human: "I have become capable of rewriting the rules of who a person can be" (Faring, 2019, p. 444).

The difference between virtual reality and physical reality is, however, clearly demarcated in *The Tenth Girl*. When Mavi is first pushed from what she perceives to be her body into the coding of the simulation, she describes the difference between the two: "I fall, fall into a vibrant and separate universe of numerals painted like fish scales on the walls—translucent, gummy" (Faring, 2019, p. 411). The image of numerals – so reminiscent of the aesthetic of *The Matrix* films, which also portray real people escaping from a simulated, digital world –appears repeatedly after this moment. These numerals could represent the literal characters that make up the coding of a VR game or any computer simulation. They create a sense of unreality, "plasticized numerals that glisten and glow as [she] move[s], adding a transparency to the world around [Mavi]" (Faring, 2019, p. 412), drawing a contrast between the world within the simulation, the world where the simulation is visible, and the real, physical world which Mavi hopes to soon inhabit. This is recalled when Mavi achieves her physical body and finds herself surrounded by "Screens of jittering numerals so small they disappear" (Faring, 2019, p. 454). The world that is all Mavi has ever known is reduced to digits on a number of screens, that are "so small they

disappear", relating the inferiority of her previous existence to the superiority of her new physical existence and finding no comparison.

Figure 6: Cover of *The Tenth Girl*

Note: UK paperback cover of The Tenth Girl *by Sara Faring (2019).*

The traditional Gothic and the complexities of digital programming come together in Jodey Castricano's theory of cryptomimesis. The theory is "predicated on encryption: the play of revelation and concealment lodged within *parts* of individual works" (Castricano, 2001, p. 6, emphasis original), applicable to the revelation and concealment in both of these texts' simulated worlds. Texts of simulation naturally involve encryption in terms of the coding used to create simulated worlds. This is especially apparent in *The Tenth Girl* from its cover (fig. 6), which features a crumbling old country house that, at its peripheries, is made up of characters that imply coding. The aesthetic has been popularised by *The Matrix*, and therefore would be recognisable in the common parlance of popular culture. However, encryption is also apparent in the text of *The Tenth Girl* in the form of Easter eggs included by the author. In computing, especially video games, an Easter egg is "an unexpected or

undocumented message or feature hidden in a piece of software, intended as a joke or bonus" (Oxford English Dictionary Online, n.d.). After the acknowledgments, Faring has included a section entitled "Seven Things You Might Have Missed in *The Tenth Girl*", enumerating a number of "clues" Faring included in the text to "hint at Vaccaro School's true nature" (Faring, 2019, p. 459). This could suggest the author's intention to conflate further her fictional world with the world of a video game simulation. The metatext itself is like a game for the reader, providing encrypted clues or jokes to gamify the experience of reading. This also conforms to Baldick and Mighall's description of the Gothic novel as texts that "thrive on anachronistic emphases" (Baldick & Mighall, 2012, p. 279). However, this destabilisation of the reality of 1970s Argentina could also be an example of a Latinx minority redressing a traumatic cultural past. Tok Thompson writes that "the US is still 'haunted' by its unresolved past of xenophobia and violence that continues into the present. Ghost stories thus present an alternative history of the oppressed" (2019, p. 45). Angel's mother has created a ghost story that expresses her life, her history in pre-revolution Argentina, which she would not otherwise have been able to tell. This history is expressed in the form of a ghost story, produced and bastardised by a xenophobic American, but still allowing her child, Angel, to connect with their cultural history.

Cryptomimesis further deals with hauntings as inheritance. Castricano writes, "the topic of revenance and desire cannot be separated from that of 'ghostly inheritance,' whether in the sense of what is received by descent or succession or what returns in the form of a phantom to tax the living" (2001, p. 9). There are several forms of inheritance in *The Tenth Girl*, the most obvious of which is Angel's inheritance of the simulation game itself. Angel's mother created *Vaccaro School* as a means to insert her own history and, it is implied, personality, into both the mythology of the school and the character of Mavi. However, there is also a haunting inheritance of colonialism to the game as a whole. The curse which is said to haunt Vaccaro School is the revenge of fictional Argentinian indigenous tribe, the Zapuche. This takes the form of Zapuche ghosts, known as *Los Otros*, exacting revenge on their colonisers through hauntings. Tok Thompson notes the inevitable link between ghosts and vengeance when he writes, "Ideas about proper or ethical behaviour are frequently reflected in all ghost stories, since the production of ghosts is linked to its opposite: ghosts display the 'shadow' of ethics by haunting individuals and

communities with past ethical failures" (2019, p. 44). Castricano agrees that "haunting implies not only debt but also guilt" (2001, p. 11). The characters resident at Vaccaro spend most of the book assuming that their haunting is the result of earlier Vaccaros stealing and building on Zapuche land, creating a colonial guilt that infuses the novel. As a tribe that are not 'real' in the reader's reality, the Zapuche conform to Derrida's conception of spectres as "some population of ghosts with or without a people, some community with or without a leader" (2006, p. 2). The ghosts or 'Others' of Faring's fiction do not technically have a people, given their tribe are fictional. They do not have a leader apart from, possibly, the tenth girl herself.

Hayles draws a contrast in simulated disembodiment between the "inert body that is left behind and a disembodied subjectivity that inhabits a virtual realm" (1999, p. 290). In *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, the "inert body" is left purely to the imagination. Very little descriptive content is given over to what exists outside of Blackheath's simulation. Turton has expressed frustration when approached to create screen adaptations of *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, over producers' desire to know what exists outside of Blackheath, beyond the bounds of what is described in the novel. This is perhaps out of a wish not to consider Aiden (or indeed his fellow prisoners, Daniel and Anna) as inert bodies that exist beyond the simulation. Turton was concerned that, when writing of the world outside Blackheath, he "was inviting [his] readers to care more about that world, and those answers, than the conclusion of the mystery we'd been trying to solve for 130k words" (S. Turton, personal communication, January 8, 2024). In *The Tenth Girl*, however, the bodies that exist beyond the simulation are crucial to the denouement of the story, in which Mavi and the other NPCs download themselves into the 'empty' bodies of players, who then reunite with Angel in the physical world. However, these bodies are never encountered in their inert state, nor is it made clear whether players are actually active during gameplay, in the manner of players of contemporary VR games, or if there is an inertness to the physical body during gameplay, as suggested in texts such as *The Matrix* or *Black Mirror's* episode "Playtest" (Brooker & Trachtenberg, 2016). The story is haunted by the inert bodies that exist separate to vividly active consciousnesses – humans become things, as in Jeffrey Weinstock's conception of Gothic things and Hayles's idea of the body left behind.

Vaccaro School's NPCs are categorised as less than human by Charon and by the game's players. This is apparent in Charon's attitudes towards violence against the NPCs. The violence perpetrated against the NPCs at the end of the *Vaccaro School* game is perceived as justified both because the NPCs are not physical humans but coding, and because they have the ability to reset and do not remember what has been done to them during previous game loops. Similarly, neither the 'witnesses' of Blackheath nor the convicts have a memory of previous loops, and Daniel and Aiden at various times perpetrate violence against each other without remorse. This supports the theory that "the fatal exploitation of bodies has, nevertheless, become a recurring motif in posthuman gothic text" (Heise-von der Lippe, 2021, p. 225), although there is again the sticky point of the body and whether personhood relies on physicality. What Charon and Vaccaro School's players perpetrate violence against is technically not a 'body', but the idea or code of a body. Mavi proves to herself that she heals wounds unnaturally while in the simulation, but there is frequent evidence that the NPCs still experience pain, and they certainly experience terror.

While posthumanism is not explored as rigorously in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* as in *The Tenth Girl*, there are nevertheless concepts that suggest posthumanism is still an important factor. Aiden exists as a physical individual, but his being/humanity is affected by and increasingly indiscriminate from the personalities of his hosts. The individuals Aiden inhabits and calls his hosts are described by the Plague Doctor as "witnesses" (Turton, 2018, p. 214). They are people who were really present at the original murder of Evelyn Hardcastle in the 1930s, but the bodies' own consciousnesses have been hollowed away to allow Aiden to inhabit them instead. However, the longer Aiden spends in the simulation, the more the personalities of his hosts assert themselves over him. At times he is able to utilise the personalities of his hosts, giving them "free rein" (Turton, 2018, p. 291) in order to take advantage of qualities they possess that Aiden does not: Derby's violence, Ravencourt's analytics, Dance's logic, and so on. But he finds it increasingly difficult to separate his own feelings from theirs.

As he comes towards the end of the book, Aiden describes how all of his hosts have taken up a residence in his consciousness: "My chorus comes with me, Dance, Derby and Rashton out ahead, Bell, Collins and Ravencourt struggling behind. I know they're figments of my fracturing mind, but I can see them as clearly

as reflections" (Turton, 2018, p. 479). The ghosts of all these dead men, these witnesses, find new life within Aiden, and while they do not appear to have motivations of their own, it is implied they are reluctant to give Aiden up as a 'living' host. It is as if they hope to latch on to him, to be carried on into the 'real' world. The separation between Aiden's own personality – his 'I' – and his several simulated bodies again conforms with a preoccupation in *Cryptomimesis*, in which a separation is required between the 'I' and the physical form in order for a phantom to occur (Castricano, 2001, p. 11). Aiden, however, feels the intrusion of other 'I's in the form of his hosts' personalities and histories. These encroachments are their own phantoms, perhaps beyond those conceived of in *Cyptomimesis*, and do not seem to be important to the solving of the Blackheath mystery. One may then wonder why they are present at all – have presumably been designed and created by whoever coded the simulation – if they serve no purpose to the simulation or the justice it purports to serve. However, these additional phantoms do act to conflate Aiden's own idea of self and, with that conflation, make it more difficult to situate him as an individual. The purpose of developing Aiden's sense of individuality and changing idea of who he is as a person is central not only to posthumanism, but also to the judicial system in which Aiden is a participant.

Justice and Deserving

Considering posthuman Gothic, Heise-von der Lippe writes that the concept is particularly important for "what this means for derivative concepts like human rights or the humanities" (2021, p. 220). From human rights, it is an easy leap to justice and judicial systems which in part exist to uphold human rights. Similarly, Curtis states that "'Haunted' fictions often seek to restore to attention something – such as injustice … -- that is absent from the record" (2008, p. 24). In creating these haunted texts that deal with themes of justice, the authors promote an idea of justice that is based on deserving and on 'poetic' justice rather than the twenty-first century model of trial and sentence with which the reader will be more familiar. Bacon identifies that justice systems in the anglophone West often "demand the continual re-living and re-experiencing of the original abuse" through "court appearances, appeals, and counterclaims" (2023a, p. 7). This is made literal in Turton and Faring's worlds, in which those seeking justice must live the same period of time – which I argue are

their literal and figurative 'trials' – repeatedly over many, many time loops. Turton and Faring use hauntings to bring to light injustices of a legal and moral nature, and provide a kind of rehabilitative sentence to provide closure on injustices. Justice, then, is one of these derivative subjects so tied up with the (Gothic) posthuman – in particular, what justice means for human rights in a world where our concept of the human is altered or obliterated entirely.

Distributive justice determines the socially just allocation of resources, and has long been concerned with "considerations of personal desert or merit" (Zaitchik, 1977, p. 370). Many systems of justice, such as those in the UK, are based upon common laws that are sometimes perceived as morally unfair,[46] but are arguably simple to implement and control. Distributive justice, while perhaps a morally 'fairer' justice system as it relies on social justice and desert, is philosophically based and therefore problematic to consistently define and apply. However, the justice presented in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* and *The Tenth Girl* follow a far more distributive system of justice than the systems with which the reader will be familiar. Turton presents a futuristic world in which distributive justice, it appears, has been systematically implemented, although this presents its own ethical issues. Faring, meanwhile, presents a more ad hoc justice of the people, as the narrative's lexicography increasingly reference 'deserving' and 'deserts', leading to the distribution of physical embodiment as a kind of justice. In *Desert and Virtue: A Theory of Intrinsic Value*, Stephen Kershnar writes that "desert is a part of the good, not the right" (2009, p. 9), suggesting that it is a part of what makes the world a better place rather than describing how one should act, and it is this that forms the basis of Faring's conception of justice.

Justice in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* takes a formal role in the story. The Plague Doctor tells Aiden that there are many mysteries like the one at Blackheath which many prisoners are attempting to solve both as a penance and a form of rehabilitation. The use of solution as a mechanism for escaping a time loop is noted by Edrei: "persistent awareness ultimately allows the trapped protagonist to use their accumulated foreknowledge and expanded understanding of the loop to

[46] Take, for example, the almost trope-ish situation central to Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* (1862), in which Jean Valjean steals a loaf of bread to feed his starving sister, and is sentenced to five years' hard labour.

either escape its confines or break the endless cycle altogether" (2023, p. 191). In Turton's world, the difficulty of the mystery is analogous with the severity of the crime, with Blackheath's presumed impossible mystery reserved for genocidal war crimes. The use of the ghost story as a mechanism for justice is recognisable from many classic ghost stories, including Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) – in which the protagonist is haunted by the beating heart of their victim as they are questioned by the police – and MR James's "Martin's Close" (1911) – a ghost story told through the transcript of a courtroom. It is also used in contemporary texts such as *Black Mirror,* which uses the same trope of living one day over and over as a formal mechanism of justice in the episode "White Bear" (Brooker & Tibbetts, 2013). In *Cryptomimesis,* Castricano writes, "How do the dead recover a debt? How do the living acquit themselves?" (2001, p. 9). Although the dead are not strictly the party demanding repayment of a debt in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* (although the debt could be said to be owed to the many people Anna has killed), the living are nevertheless required to acquit themselves. This is not done through the formal trial mechanism contemporary readers might expect, but through completion of a trial in the form of a puzzle or a mystery.

Removing justice from the courtroom in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* in some ways makes the justice more poetic, with the penance and rehabilitation fitting the crime, but in other ways the sentence is more barbaric. In *Inhuman Conditions*, Pheng Cheah refers to human rights as a "violent gift" (2007, p. 172), highlighting the conflation between alleged justice and violence, and the importance of suffering in the judicial system – both recognising the suffering of others, and perhaps allotting suffering to the guilty party. This is a conflation that is ever present in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*. The puzzle which needs to be solved in order for justice to be served is the murder of a young woman, and having been placed in opposition to convicts with apparently few morals, the solving of that murder involves a number of violent episodes. Talking about the violence in the novel, Turton says, "I wanted to make sure the violence was horrific. Not just because it builds threat and tension, but because it should be terrifying" (Purchese, 2019, para. 30). Violence between characters provides most of the horror elements of the book. Beside Aiden's attack as Gregory Gold on himself as the Butler, the majority of the violence comes in the form of the Footman, who stalks Aiden on a

rival's behalf, viciously murdering some of his hosts. Aiden is very afraid of violence and the possibility of pain. The knowledge, then, of future, potentially unavoidable violence haunts him for much of the book. It is telling that it is not until Aiden has solved the murder that he has changed the day sufficiently to avoid his own beatings, once more linking the violence, deserved or not, of the story to the justice and rehabilitation mechanism of the simulation itself.

It is worth acknowledging that the world of Blackheath is essentially a torture chamber. Daniel and Anna are never intended to solve Blackheath's mystery and leave, and the possibility that Anna might do so provokes the interference of the Plague Doctor guardians. Even when Anna provides a correct solution to the mystery, the Plague Doctor is still reluctant to accept the answer and release her. Furthermore, Aiden is first allowed to enter Blackheath in order to exact revenge against Anna for her murder of his sister rather than because of any crime he has committed himself. This violent revenge is apparently sanctioned by Blackheath's guardians, even though Aiden dooms himself to the same 'torture' as Anna and Daniel. Kroker's meditations on violence and revenge as inherent to the justice system lead him to consider whether this hails the oncoming of "the bad infinity of torture since the state of the soul is always ultimately unknowable" (2014, p. 104). The confines and practices of Blackheath are never referred to as torturous or as unethical, but as "justice" and "rehabilitation", even when the individual undergoing "justice" can no longer remember their crimes. And while the time loop narrative often instills in looping characters a "*sense of belonging* to a wider community" (Moretti, 1987, p. 19, italics original), whether this can really be called rehabilitation is another matter. The reader is furthermore never privy to the legal system that placed Anna and Daniel into Blackheath, and has only a single, arguably unreliable report of Anna's crimes from the Plague Doctor.

When Aiden discovers that the reason he is at Blackheath is to avenge the death of his sister, this haunts his decisions as the book comes to its close. Aiden is not a particularly decisive character to begin with, but he is easily manipulated by the Plague Doctor with information which, while presumably true, is not necessarily given in context. Aiden's sister is perhaps the only ghost, in the traditional sense, in the whole book. Although she never appears in corporeal form, and although Aiden does not actually remember her, her death is the inciting incident for the whole story.

Her echo can be seen in other sibling relationships in the book. Michael and Evelyn Hardcastle are incredibly close siblings, and Evelyn's death seems to have a heart-wrenching effect on Michael. Evelyn's death is another inciting incident, creating a strong symmetry: Aiden is trapped in the simulation out of a desire to avenge his sister, and his only release comes from solving another prominent sister's murder. Grafius reflects that the ghost story often offers a "critique of the justice system" as "relegated to the past, confined to a backstory" so that "the ghost's demands for justice will continue to go unheard" (Grafius, 2023, p. 239). However, this is subverted in Turton's novel as Aiden has forgotten his sister's death. That there have been so many repetitions of the day that Anna's personality has completely changed, contextualises the requirement for justice in a distant past. The novel questions whether it is right to continue to punish – or to exact 'justice' – long after the wrong committed has been forgotten. Equally, Aiden is informed by the Plague Doctor that he has already experienced the day of Evelyn's murder many thousands of times – enough to have served a penal sentence decades-long. This prolonged repetition means that Aiden has lost much sense of who he is. The Plague Doctor says, "I've seen so many versions of Aiden Bishop, you'd probably never recognise yourself in them" (Turton, 2018, p. 447). This loss of self is also spectral. Assuming Aiden entered whatever facility runs the simulations as a physical being, his non-physical being has been through so much it is materially changed from its original form. Does this mean that Aiden's original self is now a ghost? Or is the Aiden we encounter in the story a ghost, a consciousness separate and distinct from his physical body or original personality?

While justice is not addressed directly in *The Tenth Girl* as it is in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, it nevertheless presents a narrative in which its characters are trapped within the confines of the simulated reality of a game. Peaty identifies that games are "spaces of constraint" (2023, p. 130), and Vaccaro School as a game acts also as a prison. Its NPCs undergo trials based on ethical values, and a judgement and sentence are made at the end, based on which characters are deemed to deserve a physical body. In particular, the narrative concerns itself with Mavi and whether she has become sufficiently human (or posthuman) to earn a body, even if she must steal it from an unsuspecting player of the *Vaccaro School* game. Similarly,

the story seems to question whether Angel deserves the body they already have (and the life it represents), as they are nearly left bodiless at the end of the novel.

The word "deserve" appears twenty-three times in the novel, underscoring the concept's importance to Faring. The concept of 'desert' is used frequently in a passage dealing with whether Mavi 'deserves' to know the truth as Angel can provide it:

> 'I still haven't told you the whole truth. And you deserve that. You understand? I've been a demon. I don't deserve you. I don't deserve any of this.'
>
> As if I [Angel] can begin to say which cruelties anyone at all does or does not deserve. (Faring, 2019, p. 373)

This presents truth as a kind of justice, it being something that a character can deserve or not deserve. In this instance, the truth that Mavi 'deserves' is that she is an AI encased in a simulation, and that she does not have a physical body. There is also the question here of who deserves whom. When Angel says, "I don't deserve you", they are presenting Mavi as a kind of reward, an object or prize that can be 'deserved' in the same way it could be won. This relegates Mavi once again to a position as object rather than person. This conflates, again, the question of the object which haunts and the subject which is haunted. By objectifying Mavi as a prize, Angel positions her as a haunting object when, by the end of the story, Mavi is able to be a subject rather than object, having a physical body rather than a thing-like digital existence. Angel then, however, questions whether they are a fit individual to make decisions about others' deserving – and specifically, who deserves 'cruelty' which, in a judicial context, could also mean punishment. This raises questions about what qualifies an individual to pass judgement on desert.

Charon also frequently refers to deserving, although in a less judicial way than Angel. When referring to Angel discovering specific hard-to-find aspects of lore in the *Vaccaro School* game, Charon says, "Plus two thousand experience points to Gryffindor. Good for you. You deserve it" (Faring, 2019, p. 394). Here Charon is speaking sarcastically, praising Angel for uncovering truths about Vaccaro School while insinuating these truths will not get them very far. In this sense, when Charon says "You deserve it", they mean both the information that Angel has acquired, and its lack of usefulness. It is worth remembering that Charon is a figure of colonial

power and postcolonial negligence in the novel, given the context under which they hired Angel's mother as a Latin 'flavour' developer on the *Vaccaro School* game. Although in actuality a mundane figure, in their creation of the game and their appearance as the magical Tenth Girl avatar, they conform to what Edrei calls the "supernatural entity responsible for these [time looping] events" (2023, p. 198), who must be defeated in order to end the time loop. Angel achieves this by stealing Charon's body when their own is taken by another NPC.

As well as appearing as a quasi-magical and judicial figure in their creation of the time loop, Charon is also a figure of postcolonial control who purposely attempts to erase Indigenous Argentinian culture, despite creating a game set in Argentina. In a similar way to Shirley Jackson, Faring "illuminat[es] the invisible women at the heart of literary output, and the horror implicit in acts of obfuscation and erasure" (Passey, 2023, p. 72). Charon attempts to erase Angel's mother (who is never named) as a co-creator of Vaccaro School after her death, and they try to subsume her Indigenous folk horror into a trashy White American murder game. By engaging with the folk horror elements of the game – "built upon (often unwilling) sacrifice and women's work" (Passey, 2023, p. 77) – Mavi and Angel revive Angel's mother as being at the heart of this creative output. Goldberg and Moore note that we must "recognize [human justice's] imperialist origins and complicities with global power and corruption" (2011, p. 1) when considering human rights and justice in general. The standardised justice system is one that favours the coloniser, and as such Charon might be perceived as a figure of traditional justice in the game. They are a white American in an aspirational job, living what some might term the American dream. They are the ultimate arbiter over what happens in the game, as the person who is responsible for the game's code. In many respects, Charon is the justice of *Vaccaro School*, and that justice is prejudiced against colonised minorities.

The Tenth Girl also presents the haunting of the Vaccaro colonisers by the Zapuche curse as a kind of justice, conflating ideas of justice and revenge. However, resorting to curses might be the only kind of justice an indigenous people can expect. As Goldberg and Moore note, referencing Hannah Arendt (1951), "one of the central paradoxes of human rights … is that they are available foremost to citizens, such that statelessness or marginalization within state formations challenges individual and collective claims to rights" (2011, p. 5). This highlights that the marginalised – be

that indigenous peoples or artificial intelligences not yet considered sentient or human – are excluded from a formal course of justice. They may, therefore, advocate their own justice system, in this case based on either revenge or desert. Comparing the two, desert seems the far more favourable mechanism of judicial decision-making.

The concept of reward through receiving physical embodiment is proposed explicitly by Mavi in her narrative: "We can edit ourselves and perhaps even come into possession of the flesh we deserve" (Faring, 2019, p. 402). This suggests that the trials Mavi and the other NPCs have endured at the hands of the players is a kind of trial by fire, in which, by decades'-worth of loops of enduring, the NPCs have served some kind of sentence and earned the right to physical bodies. While this might imply the NPCs have done something wrong, requiring that they be served a judicial sentence, as has been explored in Chapter 3, certain minorities are treated as lesser simply for their existence. Cyborgs, robots, and artificial intelligences have long been used in science fiction as a cypher for the oppressed other – much as Thompson uses the clones in the Molly Southbourne trilogy – and here we are shown a 'race' of digital AIs suffering a punishment without any judicial sentencing. The crime the AIs have committed is the very fact of being AIs. Achieving justice for the AIs requires the removal of physical bodies from the players, who are guilty of torturing and subjugating AIs, treating them in their game world as subhuman. This 'crime' has the sentence of making them digital entities in place of the game NPCs. This is alluded to when Mavi uses the phrase "edit ourselves". While Mavi, whose whole experience is the world of the 1970s, cannot know about the terminology, 'editing' is a phrase frequently used in coding and game design, meaning to change the way a game runs. Mavi proposes to edit her own game and, as a result, her life, to give herself a physical body.

Conclusion

In his chapter on "Remixing Early Christianity and Late Technology", Kroker meditates on questions of the soul, and how this might be expressed in a world where intentionality is taken as equal, if not superior, to physical action (2014, p. 104). Examined through this framework, the consciousnesses expressed in *The Tenth Girl*

and *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* could be taken as souls. These are perceptive, sentient consciousnesses who exist beyond, through, and without physical incarnations. This is often what a ghost is taken to be: the soul of a dead person, returned or stuck without physical manifestation for some reason, continuing to affect that realm. But to imagine Turton and Faring's simulated persons as souls still places an emphasis on the human, the soul being a conceptual cypher to explain the experience of the self after the physical body has died. In this respect, the soul is posthuman – what remains of the human after the body ceases to function – but it does not quite cover that which exists despite rather than because of a lack of physicality.

By positioning physicality not just as a reward, but as an achievement of justice, Turton and Faring establish that to be digital is a lesser form of existence than to be physical. However, rather than treat those who are digital as lesser, these simulated worlds allow digital persons to 'deserve' and achieve physical bodies, creating an egalitarian system of justice wherein physicality can be earned and lost. Where many science fiction works present artificial beings (cyborgs, robots, AI, etc.) as other, despite an apparent equality or superiority of intelligence, emotion, and other 'human' characteristics, Turton and Faring both empower their digital characters to break out of their simulated environments and move into the physical world. However, this happens beyond the end of the novel (or briefly at the very end, in Faring's case). As such, the reader only really encounters the characters as spectral. Their physicality occurs off the page, and to the reader, the simulated characters will always be spectral. Therefore justice is served, but served in the imaginary outside the story itself.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse stories of haunting from the first quarter of the twenty-first century to demonstrate that the contemporary moment is inescapably haunted by the ubiquity of portable 'smart' technology and social media, and by the rapid change of political, economic, and environmental conditions. The necessity of becoming a digital individual, with security and support services so frequently located in mobile phone apps, and work and social lives organised through social media and online conferencing software, creates a separation in the individual between a digital and physical persona, encouraging a sense of self-haunting. This online movement also encourages tribalisation, a theme underscored by the news media's tendency to split the populace into convenient political and generational groupings, encouraging opposition between them. This again creates a sense of haunting, as these oppositions are moved online rather than argued in person. An individual may not know whether they work with, live next to, or otherwise share space with someone of an extreme opposite view. Furthermore, the fiction of this period is obsessed with the possibility of alternate presents which could be so vastly different from the reader's real world, given the number of high-impact global events and political decisions that have been made since the century's opening world-changing event, 9/11.

Although this thesis has been arranged to focus on specific types of hauntings – those of space, person, and technology – several themes have run throughout its texts, regardless of their setting or marketed genre. In particular, four themes have appeared time and again, both in the texts examined, and in wider horror and Gothic literature of the period. These are: time loops, generational rage, producing justice or highlighting injustice, and the haunting of technology. The repeating presence of these themes suggests they are key to haunting fiction in the twenty-first century, and each support the overarching argument that life in the twenty-first century is fundamentally haunted by highly portable smart technology, and the tribalism encouraged by ubiquitous social media.

Looping chronologies were discussed in detail in Caitlin Starling's *The Death of Jane Lawrence* and Catriona Ward's *Rawblood*, but also appear in Stuart Turton's

The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle, Andy Nyman and Jeremy Dyson's *Ghost Stories*, and Sara Faring's *The Tenth Girl*. In these texts, time does not work as a single teleological line, with characters experiencing events as they happen and events occurring from the past to the present to the future. Instead, characters in the present can loop back to re-experience or sometimes change events in the past, as in *The Death of Jane Lawrence* and *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*. The looping back in these cases allow the characters fresh perspective, and opportunities to redress wrongs while gaining greater understanding of their existing situations. Many time loops, however, also express inertia, impotence, and inevitability, as in *Ghost Stories* and *Rawblood*. In these stories, characters are active participants in the past, but can only act in the way they have already acted. The characters' actions in the past directly cause their misery in the present, and while the characters know their actions cannot be escaped and cannot be changed, they nevertheless return again and again to these tragic past events. In *Rawblood*, these past actions can be forgiven, but *Ghost Stories* offers no such resolution and, it is implied, time for Professor Goodman continues to loop forever. Armitt asserts that "we cannot leave the Gothic alone, because it deals in what will not leave us alone" (2011, p. 12). The repeating timelines and self-hauntings so prominently featured in many of these texts demonstrate this feedback loop of attention and paranoia, the snake eating its own tail, the loop that struggles to be broken.

As demonstrated in the history of the house and technology in *2:22: A Ghost Story*, hauntings can only occur where there are layers of time and meaning. Through many of the texts in this thesis, time is presented as either immutable and inevitable, or permeable and changeable. Emphasis is placed on the ability to use non-linear time to change both personality and circumstances. Iris in *Rawblood* can only be forgiven when she realises she was not abandoned, and that she has been forgiven by her lover and previous generations of her family. However, Sam in *2:22: A Ghost Story* is unable to change, his spectral form acting as a distillation of the worst parts of his overbearing character and eventually driving away his wife, emptying the crib to which his ghost returns over and over. 'Time loop' is perhaps an inadequate term to describe the way time, in these texts, folds upon itself to create layers through which hauntings pierce. Where we are provided a perspective on the experience of haunting, we are told "Time is only onionskins marked with similar drawings of

place and actor, arranged in different scenes" (Starling, 2021, p. 337), recalling the repeated use of layering in *2:22*, to show the past breaking through the cracks of the present. The folding of time is similarly active in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, in the book Anna carries holding the events of the day, detailing when and where she must meet Aiden in which host. Time is not a looping line, but a book in which events can be accessed out of order by flipping through the pages. And like a book, some events may be crossed out and amended, while others are indelible on the page. This is perhaps a highly analogue way to describe the layering of time in texts so preoccupied with technology, and there are certainly 'glitches' in time, particularly as expressed in *The Tenth Girl's* Easter eggs and *Ghost Stories'* repeating numbers. However, the texts seldom utilise digitality to express the folding of time. Rather, physical objects are frequently recalled to express time's non-linearity – such as the mirror in *The Death of Jane Lawrence* and Jane's statement that "time is mirrored" (Starling, 2021, p. 338), the baby monitor and its described haunted history in *2:22: A Ghost Story*, or the recurring bishop chess piece that links Aiden to his various hosts and to Anna in *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*.

The folding and compacting of time is also closely associated with the history of familial generations. When Iris begins to experience the folding of time as a ghost, she describes "Treading through the generations, wading through our lives" (Ward, 2015, p. 333). Similarly, Jenny describes her desire to leave Sam as wishing to find herself "under the layers of [Sam]" (Robins, 2021, p. 93). While the concept of time as stacking layers – onionskins or page leaves – might be new, the idea of family as a book-like history is long-established. The family tree or the book of lineage have long been used to establish the boundaries and pedigree of a family. As demonstrated in Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger*, Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*, and Tade Thompson's Molly Southbourne trilogy, defining family is also about defining what is outside the family. Those who would care enough about their lineage to write down its definitions are arguably more preoccupied with exclusion than inclusion. As Howard Doyle says of his own family, they have "strived to keep the bloodline clean" (Moreno-Garcia, 2022, p. 215) by incestuously rejecting those outside the family, and equating "cleanness" with whiteness.

The 'purity' of a family also has connotations for the characteristics held by members of that family, particularly class, which is still often perceived as inherited

in British culture. Although one might expect historical novels to be preoccupied by class, this remains an issue in the more contemporary setting of *The Tenth Girl* and racial purity appears as a preoccupation in *Ghost Stories* and *Mexican Gothic*. The existence of a spectre within this thesis's haunting texts suggests an ephemerality in the ability to transcend many areas of society as well as time. Similarly, many of the characters of this thesis's primary texts push against the social boundaries imposed upon them. What is perhaps surprising is how seldom they are able to change. While *Mexican Gothic's* Noemí acts the socialite, it is her intrinsic Mexicanness that allows her to escape the Doyles; while *The Little Stranger's* Faraday aspires to be lord of the manor, it is as a representative of the egalitarian National Health Service that he finds himself most successful; Molly Southbourne's Molly II is unable to become a true Prime and instead finds happiness with her fellow mollys; and *Ghost Stories'* Professor Goodman returns again and again to the bullying voice calling him "Jewy Goodman" (Nyman & Dyson, 2019, p. 60).

This solidification of roles within a haunted text expresses something of the destabilisation of safety for the individual in the twenty-first century. Despite society being replete with mobile phones recording every event, 24-hour news reels, and constant social media updates, the omnipresent official and social surveillance does not make the world any safer. The home, in particular, is a locus of haunting, and in *The Little Stranger* and *2:22: A Ghost Story*, these are previously safe, homely, welcoming spaces suddenly beset by ghosts. However, there are some spaces that should be unsafe which haunting makes uncannily safe, particularly in the queerness of texts such as Starling's *The Luminous Dead* and *The Death of Jane Lawrence*, Wilkes's *All the White Spaces*, and Faring's *The Tenth Girl*. Though some are more subtle than others, all these texts feature queer characters in dangerous situations, where what threatens them is the heteronormativity of the nuclear family unit. Rather than being subsumed by the dominant culture, though, the queer characters of these texts use haunting to create their own safe queer spaces, despite the haunting presence of heteronormativity.

Examinations of inclusivity in horror lead inextricably to a consideration of global generations, as a new generation of authors results in new foci for horror fiction. Many of these texts are authorial debuts and therefore new voices in Gothic and horror fiction. Furthermore, the vast majority of authors featured in this thesis

are millennials, and have developed as authors while experiencing the duality of blame and apathy associated with this generation. These texts are written during a time when the internet and social media are used as platforms to amplify the voices of younger generations to express anger over global issues such as the climate crisis, unjust wars, or political extremism. In an interview on the techniques used by grassroots activists Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg makes the claim that "sometimes you need to anger some people" (Lee, 2021, para. 7), and anger between the generations – the younger generations towards the older for the ecological and economic state of the planet; the older generation towards the younger for perceived apathy or daring to call for radical change – is a theme ever-present in haunting texts.

Haunting is an experience of collective rage and frustration, perhaps expressed most strongly in Jason Arnopp's *Ghoster* and *The Last Days of Jack Sparks*, in which the haunted characters seem to have everything they have ever wanted, but are dissatisfied and angry nonetheless. And as in online spaces, over-saturated with often anonymous voices and opinions unsubstantiated by fact, the expression of anger for both older and younger generations is often an experience of shouting into the void. The rage felt is impotent, often without outlet, and this is expressed strongly in many of this thesis's texts. The rage for perceived past injustices permeates the final chapter of *Rawblood*, while the unending fight against a faceless power is shown in *The Murders of Molly Southbourne*. The rage between global generations can equally be observed in an increasing emphasis on intergenerational trauma. While this is not a new concept, and has been a recurring theme in twentieth-century Gothic too, the twenty-first century seems obsessed with intergenerational trauma. The Molly Southbourne trilogy also presents one of the ways this rage is being combatted. Thompson draws on the increasing emphasis on mental health and therapeutic solutions in *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne* to attempt to find common ground between the remaining mollys, and to draw a contrast between the mollys as a younger generation, managing their feelings, and Myke, Molly Prime's mother, who can only express her feelings through rage and violence. While less therapeutic, an acknowledgement of the importance of mental resilience is seen in Jack Sparks's aversion techniques, *Ghoster's* addiction recovery, and Jane Lawrence's healing of her familial trauma. Even the objectively grim tenor of *All the White Spaces* finishes with an emphasis on hope, as Wilkes states

protagonist Jonathan finishes the story "full of love for his companions and gratitude for his hard-won victories. I felt that it was the right ending for his own personal story, which arced towards acceptance and self-knowledge" (A. Wilkes, personal communication, January 5, 2024). These texts demonstrate that an increased emotional maturity or awareness does not provide a better understanding of Gothic feeling or Gothic tropes. The Gothic still provides inevitable doom, not perceived by the characters until it is too late, but part of the Gothic in these novels is a removal of stoicism to discuss feelings and emotions, making characters more relatable to an emotionally mature twenty-first-century reader.

In many of the texts discussed in this thesis, there is a narrow line between the rage or outrage the characters experience and feelings of injustice. Hauntings in fiction have long been used to identify injustices, allowing those who have been wronged to return and haunt. Equally, hauntings are used to unearth long-forgotten injustices which sometimes cannot be resolved. Justice plays an explicit role in *The Tenth Girl* and *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, but appears more subtly in almost all of the texts discussed, be it in Goodman's ever-present guilt, Iris's need to be forgiven by her family, or Em's obsession with laying to rest the bodies of her dead parents. Many of these rectified injustices are subtle, and might seem unimportant to anyone outside of their immediate sphere of influence. However, this reflects the ability, in the twenty-first century, to amplify voices previously ignored or silenced – in particular, those of minority communities such as queer voices or ethnic minorities. The twenty-first century has seen a mobilisation through social media of causes such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, which has been reflected in the increasing inclusivity of the publishing industry. Far from being a genre populated only by straight white men, the contemporary horror genre's bookshelf now frequently includes the work of queer, Black, female, Asian, LatinX, and Indigenous writers, and minority authors who become popular in the genre frequently encourage the inclusion of further diverse voices.[47] It is perhaps notable

[47] Of particular note is the short story anthology *Out There Screaming* (2023) edited by popular Black horror director Jordan Peele, which focuses on horror short stories by Black authors, and which has received wide promotion thanks to Peele's cachet as a well-known Black horror creator. Similarly, the Indigenous horror anthology *Never Whistle at Night* (ed. Hawk & Van Last, 2023) is introduced by popular Native American horror author Stephen Graham Jones, and there is an argument for the proliferation of anglophone Latin American horror fiction coming on the coat-tails of Moreno-Garcia's major commercial and critical success with *Mexican Gothic*.

that straight white male authors are in the minority in this thesis. Through the emphasis on who haunts and who is haunted, this thesis has demonstrated that some stories that have previously been silenced 'deserve' – as Faring emphasises in *The Tenth Girl* – to be told. As Passey writes of the horror genre, "ask not how we made peace with the skeletons in the closet and ghosts in the attic, but how we use them to generate something new, and even liberatory" (2023, p. 82). The act of haunting is an equaliser, much like social media, allowing all to tell their story. However, fiction allows particular voices to be amplified, both in terms of the characters who haunt and are haunted, and the authors who write the hauntings.

The focus on justice and injustice in twenty-first-century haunting fiction has been identified by Gina Wisker in her monograph *Contemporary Women's Ghost Stories*, a key text used in this thesis. Wisker writes that ghost stories have always been used to raise and attempt to resolve issues of justice and injustice, as "Our ghosts tell us much about ourselves, our age, and they warn us – warnings ignored at our peril" (2022, p. 31) as "ghosts will not lie still, so by forcing recognition and demanding reparation, they can be agents of recuperation" (2022, p. 96). Although ghost stories cannot always right wrongs, they nevertheless provide a voice, as is the case in the Molly Southbourne series and *The Tenth Girl*, or a means to express the resultant rage and pain borne out from injustice, as in *Rawblood*, *The Luminous Dead,* and *The Death of Jane Lawrence.* Haunting texts examined in this thesis, however, go a step further to attempt to right injustices, reflecting the activism and public accessibility to legal proceedings of the current moment. Haunting fiction of the twenty-first century does not just raise injustices, but often seeks to resolve them with varying consequences, as shown in the distinctly judicially-focused works of Turton and Faring. While in most of this thesis's texts just being heard is enough, in *The Tenth Girl*, *Ghoster, The Last Days of Jack Sparks*, and *Ghost Stories*, punishments are passed as a means of delivering justice: Mavi receives a body, Jack dies, Kate is stuck in her 'perfect' purgatory, and Goodman is locked in a coma. As most horror fiction does, both kinds of endings leave a level of discomfort. Where justice has been served, the reader or audience is left to question whether the sentence was appropriate for the crime. Where justice is not served, there is equally a question of whether someone should be punished, and whether those who have found

a voice and a place in the world will be free to return to their lives without prejudice or further repercussions.

The matter of justice returns us to the question of intergenerational conflict, and the battlefield – or, indeed, courtroom – in which this conflict is fought. As with so many conflicts in the twenty-first century, the arena is usually online, via social media or the online news media. Online conflict can often be (and often is) solved with use of the block button, which removes specific accounts from the user's feed, enabling the individual to curate who they see, who sees them, and who they interact with. Online congregation also encourages the 'echo chamber' effect, as described in the introduction, in which users tend to only see the feeds and comments of those who already agree with them. However, there is no way to implement a block function in real life, and those with extremely opposed political views, are forced to work and live together, sometimes in close proximity. Like ghosts who will not be laid to rest, those with opposing views are not so easy to 'block' from real life, creating another sense of haunting.

While Bacon perceives horror as a genre acknowledging progression and moving from a position of political and ideological conservativism towards inclusion and more liberality, which he calls "aspirational horror" (2023b, p. 3), this positive note is very seldom demonstrated in the texts of this thesis. Where there are happy endings, they are somewhat unsatisfying, with *The Luminous Dead* and *All the White Spaces'* unlikely rescues, or *The Tenth Girl's* suggestion that an AI stealing a human body can be justified. However, the more pessimistic endings of *The Little Stranger*, which leaves the whole Ayres family dead or incarcerated, *Ghoster's* Kate stuck in purgatory, or *Ghost Stories'* interminable loops of guilt, are equally uneasy. This thesis potentially supports Bacon in that the most fitting conclusions are ones in which the characters accept that the world is unfair and, through therapy and/or forgiveness, learn to live with the horror they have experienced, as in *Rawblood* and *The Legacy of Molly Southbourne.* Bacon's aspiration, in haunting terms, then perhaps relates to an aspiration towards acceptance and empathy, which lies in harmony with contemporary horror's movement towards inclusion. This is particularly shown in the queer-inclusive worlds of *The Luminous Dead, All the White Spaces, The Death of Jane Lawrence,* and the Molly Southbourne trilogy. Haunting demonstrates the binaries by which society divides itself and shows how

these binaries live uncomfortably side by side. This can make real life seem more spectral than the online world in which people can be more comfortable, express themselves more freely, and feel safe in the knowledge that those who disagree can be conveniently removed from view. This is a strong theme in Jason Arnopp's novels, which literally deal with the deletion of real people, but is also present in the simulation setting of *The Tenth Girl*.

Conversely, while everyday life is haunted by the spectre of blocked opposing views and tribes, physical reality is also haunted by the spectre of the digital, in the form of the smart phones carried everywhere by the everyday person, and smart devices invading the home. At any one time, an individual carries with them a whole community – their family, friends, enemies, and total strangers – accessible at any moment with a decent data connection. As has been noted, both phones and smart devices in the home are always listening, and often affect the content we see online as ever-present targeted advertising. It is increasingly difficult to function without an online presence or smartphone, as these are used as security devices for banking, an initial point of contact for medical help, and the quickest and easiest ways to access various government services.

At the same time as technology rapidly takes over physical space, the legislation required to control its development and usage lags behind. This can be seen in the court cases waged against artificial intelligence developers (Creamer, 2023), and tech companies such as Google refusing to provide data to courts (Nielsen Czuprynski, 2013). Anxieties over the secretive and rapid development of twenty-first-century technology is shown subtly in *2:22*'s conceit that the family's Alexa cannot communicate with ghosts, unlike the baby monitors which have a known and described history. This is dealt with more openly in *The Last Days of Jack Sparks's* framework, in which Alistair Sparks describes the proliferation of the *Jack Sparks on the Supernatural* manuscript through torrent sites and the dark web, creating an unease over authentic documents reminiscent of the authors' desire to sue OpenAI for skimming their books. While technology is ubiquitous in both its use, and society's reliance upon it, it is nevertheless a source of anxiety as users (which is almost everyone)[48] are increasingly unknowing of how the technology they use every

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[48] A Freedom of Information request from 2022 states that 90% of UK private households owned a computer, and 93% of households had access to a mobile phone (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

day actually works. While everyone has a smartphone in their pocket, that phone is a kind of hyperobject: an object "ultimately unknowable, withdrawing into [itself] and hiding [its] real qualities" (Weinstock, 2023, p. 24). The online world is fundamentally unstable, with anything published on the internet liable to deletion, alteration, hacking, or glitching, meaning that social media and the online world conform to Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality as "a liquidation of all referentials … substituting the signs of the real for the real" (1994, p. 2). There is always a risk of the online world changing, in a way that is steadily reflected in the real world in the era of alternative facts and fake news.

The twenty-first-century over-reliance on 'smart' artefacts (the smart phone, tablet, smart TV, smart home devices, laptops and netbooks, etc.) means that everyday objects are imbued with a life of their own. Devices are named, as in Siri and Alexa, and they carry our most personal, confidential information. As has been noted, the language used around a smartphone's 'battery life' – specifically it 'dying' – gives the smart device an animacy not otherwise found in everyday objects. This conforms to Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's concept of Gothic objects and Object Oriented Ontology in his monograph, *Gothic Things*, which emphasises how central to the Gothic objects have always been. *Gothic Things* has proved particularly, and perhaps surprisingly useful to a consideration of haunting in the twenty-first century. Weinstock's focus not just on the objects common to Gothic works, but on the way "in which the line between subject and object becomes muddled and obscured … of de-animated subjects, people who are treated like and become things" (2023, p. 42). This relates especially to this thesis's texts which so often complicate who is haunted and who is haunting. So often people are made objects, as in *Ghoster*, or inert, as in *Ghost Stories* and *The Little Stranger*; bodies that should be dead and inanimate are in some way strangely animate, as in the resistance to decomposition in *The Luminous Dead* and Agnes Doyle's impossibly alive, mushroom-covered body in *Mexican Gothic;* or the reader is led to believe a person or people are haunting objects when they are, in fact, haunted people, such as with the AIs in *The Tenth Girl* and the clones in the Molly Southbourne series. However, the life smart devices are given and the way they are treated is peculiar to the current moment, and is particularly open to Gothic interpretation. Every day, people carry around numerous ghosts in their pockets, the people who follow them and judge them, for whom users

take pictures of every little thing they do and update every emotion. This second online life is a spectral life, a revenant in which the user is both haunted by and haunts others in an interminable spectral loop.

Overall, this thesis has shown that the twenty-first century, the current moment, is intrinsically haunted, and that this is related to the rapid development of technology and the pace of global events. The majority of the texts studied have worked synergistically together, leading research in a single strong direction to elucidate the proposed point. However, there have been instances, such as in comparing Sarah Waters's *The Little Stranger* to Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*, where novels that appear on the surface to cover similar material, suggesting that the stories work towards the same objective, has proved not to be the case. Through deeper examination, the texts proved to use similar devices to make different points – one about a failing class system in Britain and the difficulty of passing between strata of society, the other rejecting European colonialism in Latin America in favour of triumphing with both an indigenous and cosmopolitan identity. Such divergences demonstrate that as the Gothic and horror genres become so much more diverse, it becomes more difficult to generalise between texts in the genre. Publishing's (and, indeed, the Gothic's) desire to recycle similar story beats and motifs could lead to interesting research on the different ways these same motifs are utilised in the horror and Gothic fiction of different countries and cultures. While anglophone publishing arguably pushes stories to sit in similar moulds, the works produced nevertheless speak to different cultural anxieties as authors push against the publishing industry's desire for sameness.

To briefly cover the question of Black representation, early in the writing of this thesis, it became clear that again, while apparently similar in the technology we use and the upheaval of political events, the root of the cultural zeitgeist in Britain and America are very different. The Gothic in America is rooted in "a society unencumbered by the weight of European tradition and preoccupied instead with carving out a new society away from such precedents" (Jenicker, 2015, p. 11). And beyond even this, so much of American Gothic and horror is rooted in the American dream (and its ephemerality), on the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and the genocide of Native Americans, and on the nation's establishment as a dissenting puritanical state escaping religious persecution. While there are some similar aspects in British

literature – Britain experiencing a similar cultural apathy in the doldrums of late-stage capitalism and neoliberalism, and a national tension over the legacy of the slave trade in the UK – Britain's written history is far longer than America's, and its Gothic legacy is more deeply rooted. British Gothic continues to be strongly tied up with preoccupations over class, and over post-empire as well as postcolonialism.[49] This meant that early in this thesis's development, it became clear that covering literature of haunting in both America and Britain would be beyond the scope of the project. This has necessarily limited the diversity of texts that could be included. While Indigenous and Black horror is enjoying a massive boom in America, non-White horror focused around the UK is significantly more limited and centred around immigration.[50] While Thompson is a prominent Black British author, his Molly Southbourne trilogy does not explicitly address the experience of being Black and British. However, one can equally not expect a single Black author to be "burdened with the impossible task to 'speak for' the marginalized communities from which they come" (Mercer, 1994, p. 235). Rather, this thesis celebrates Thompson's "range of analytic possibilities that offer a much-needed alternative to … Eurocentric debates … by opening up a deep historical perspective on black experiences of Western modernity" (Mercer, 1994, p. 246). By making his story about minority experience and agency separate to skin colour, the thesis proposes a much wider and more inclusive experience of racial otherness in Britain is here expressed. Mercer identifies a link in expressing diasporic identities that "entails an interminable antagonism in which subjectivity and identity are at stake", which speaks to the wider argument of the thesis that locating who haunts and who is haunted is about identifying autonomy and agency, issues that have long been at the centre of amplifying Black representation.

From the very beginning of this thesis, an emphasis has been placed on the subject who is haunted rather than the object that haunts. This not only shines focus on the people at the centre of a haunting narrative, as opposed to the places and objects that carry out the haunting, but sometimes requires a reassessment of who is

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[49] By this I mean that the legacy of the British Empire resides across the water from Britain itself. Unlike in the United States, where the antecedents of colonialism still live and attempt to recover in the formerly colonised lands, Britain has withdrawn from its former colonies to come 'home', negating the need to take direct action in the recovery of its formerly colonised nations. However, the idea of Britain and its devolved natures as an also postcolonial state are acknowledged.

[50] As well as Oyeyemi, see *His House* (Weekes, 2020) and *Raging Grace* (Zarcilla, 2023).

haunted. The Molly Southbourne series, over its three novellas, sees a switch between Molly Prime as the subject of a haunting by her mindless clones, to the clones being the subjects of the true haunting, plagued by memories of the violence perpetrated against them. Similarly, figures move from being haunted to carrying out hauntings, as in *Rawblood* and *The Death of Jane Lawrence*, requiring the reader to reconsider how the subjects of stories are both victim and victimised; both haunting and haunted. While this is not a perspective limited to the twenty-first century, the ability to hear both sides of a story – and, again, the tribalism set up around such altering, mutable perspectives – is particularly facilitated by the globalisation made possible through social media. twenty-first-century technology has changed not only the kinds of ghosts present in haunting narratives, but the ways in which haunting takes place, and the focus upon who is haunted. In a recent interview, Catriona Ward stated of writing ghost stories that "We tell these stories so we know we are not alone, that other people are afraid too" (Ward, 2023), suggesting that there is an overall inclusivity to the ghost story. In the twenty-first century, we are never alone, but we *are* afraid. The haunted tale, then, allows a simultaneous sense of community and terror that can only be expressed through this medium.

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