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SPECTACULAR TRANSIENTS: TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD AND THE
FANTASTIC

by

MELISSA BOBE

A dissertation submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in English

Written under the direction of

Michelle A. Stephens

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

JANUARY 2019

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Spectacular Transients: Traumatic Childhood and the Fantastic

By MELISSA BOBE

Dissertation Director:
Michelle A. Stephens

This dissertation considers narrative representations of the child as it exists in contexts of conflict. The project looks specifically at contemporary speculative fiction in order to conduct this examination: Guillermo del Toro's *El laberinto del fauno*, Tarsem Singh's *The Fall*, Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, Rosario Ferré's "La muñeca menor," Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*, Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue*, Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, and Helen Oyeyemi's *White Is for Witching*. Bringing together theories of the gothic and the fantastic, psychoanalysis and trauma theory, and visual and memory studies, the dissertation proves that speculative narrative functions as a unique genre where that which resists representation is imagined, articulated, and explored. Furthermore, the project contends that the relationship between childhood, trauma, and the fantastic is one of shared imaginative space and experience within the pages and frames of these narratives. The dissertation first argues that trauma-inducing events posit children at the margins of their fictional worlds, where they inevitably encounter the also-marginalized fantastic. Then, the project demonstrates how trauma that children inherit from parents who have survived catastrophe alters the quotidian nature of their day-to-day such that it becomes fantastic. Subsequently, the

dissertation asserts that in the face of mass trauma that unites entire collectives, descendants are haunted by the experience of those generations that precede them, and their experience of time and everyday life are violently disrupted by a restless traumatic past. Ultimately, the dissertation finds that the traumatic imaginary of these contemporary fictions propels fantastic narrative into a new period, one that finds the horrors of traumatic pasts and the potential of fantastic emergence in response to trauma contained within the interior of the narrative self. The children of the new millennium, unlike their predecessors, do not fear gothic monsters or feel the need to go out in search of the fantastic; they find within themselves those monstrosities that echo back the call of the unsettled and unsettling as it continues to haunt their narrative realities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The warmest of thanks to Michelle Stephens for the years of consistent support, feedback, advice, and lovely conversation. I'm so grateful to have learned from you and gotten to know you through this process, and I appreciate all of the time and energy you put in with me over these last several years. Thanks also to Evie Shockley, Stéphane Robolin, and Rebekah Sheldon for serving as the committee on this project, and for your collective guidance on revising the document over the last few crucial months of the process. A note of gratitude to Abena Busia, as well, who along with Michelle, Evie, and Stéphane helped me prepare to begin writing the dissertation during my exams. The project would never have taken shape without the four of you and that rigorous year of growth, for which I continue to be grateful.

There are many people at Rutgers to whom I am grateful. A huge thank you to Paul Bielecki and Ann Jurecic for their years of guidance in teaching—my students and I are the better for you and the time and care you gave in helping me grow as a teacher. Thanks also to Richard Miller, Lynda Dexheimer, and Trinyan Mariano for wonderful contributions to my teaching at Rutgers and beyond. Gratitude to Marianne DeKoven and Cheryl Wall for consistent mentorship and support, especially during coursework years. So many thanks to the English graduate office, particularly Courtney Borack, who saved me in this process repeatedly (thanks to Charlotte, too, as I know she helps inspire the work you do, Courtney!). Gratitude to my peers in Lynn Festa's dissertation workshop, and to Lynn herself—I learned so much from everyone and was glad for the chance to write and grow together. Also, many thanks to Lyn Di Iorio and my classmates at the

Graduate Center for a fruitful change of scenery during that time I was at CUNY and Rutgers simultaneously: it was a magical semester in so many ways.

I thank friends whose presence at Rutgers brightened my time there: Nadia Alahmed, Luc Barton, Suzanne Boswell, Megan Brovan, Miya Carey, Lauren Choplin, Corey Clawson, Isaac Cowell, Emily Coyle, Phedra Deonarine, Adebe DeRango-Adem, Bakary Diaby, Mark DiGiacomo, Kathryn Goldstein, Elizabeth Greeniaus, Alina Gregorian, Jason Gulya, Alexis Haynie, Dan Herbert, Jessica Herbert, Beth Hightower, Stephanie Hunt, Christina Jen, Melanie Kelliher, Carrie Kholi, Becky Makulowich, Ariel Martino, Julie McIsaac, Bernie Mendoza, Tasia Milton, Nina Narang, Lizzie Oldfather, Amadi Ozier, Andrew Pankratz, Caro Pirri, Nimanthi Rajasingham, Donavan Ramon, Charlotte Rose, Mike Sobieski, Elliott Souder, Jamison Standridge, JD Thomas, Carolyn Ureña, and Dara Walker. The conversations over coffee and piles of student papers were more meaningful than many of you know. To Robert Palmer and Erik Wade: thanks for the time in the tunnelbridge. I couldn't ask for better friends or memories.

To those friends in academia at large whose continued support helped see me through to the end, I offer gratitude for midnight texts and regular doses of sanity. Kate Schnur and Omari Weekes, I hope you know how much I appreciate the love: I never would have made it without the two of you. Also much gratitude to Jonathan Alexandratos, Rachel Altvater, Tracy Bealer, Emily Berliner, Cesar Bustamante, Kelly Centrelli, Samantha Chiu, Dalia Davoudi, Barbara Emanuele, Jason Fishedick, Mary Ellen Holden, Jess Iannuzzo, Sharon Jackson, Susan Jacobowitz, Panagiota Lilikaki, Camille Lofters, Emily Macchia, Nadia Misir, Rajiv Mohabir, Andrés Montoya-Castillo, Aaron Muller, Tristan Naraine, Ilaria Papini, Megan Pindling, Ann Podracky, Anne Posten, Sadia Rahman,

John Rice, Cheryl Spinner, Rani Srinivasan, and Chana Tropp for their glowing friendship, a happy reminder of what the wider world of the academy can look like.

Thanks also to my teachers and mentors from Queens College who continued to support me long after I'd left their classrooms: Jeff Cassvan, Hugh English, Richard Pisciotta, Veronica Schanoes, John Troynaski, and John Weir, thank you for always welcoming me back whenever I needed to visit my roots.

A note to my students: as skillfully as some of you manage to stalk your faculty on social media, I doubt that any of you will find your way here. That said, in case one of you does and is reading this now, you should know that the opportunity to teach you and learn from you was easily the best thing about my experience in the academy, and I'm grateful for every moment I had with all of you in the many classrooms I've taught in.

To my friends and family, I'm grateful for endless love and lifelines that extend well beyond the years in this program. Some of you I've already thanked above; those I haven't named yet include: Maureen, Jen, Marissa, Cat, Emily, Jess, Shifa, Ginalysse, and Kristen. I'm privileged beyond belief to have a family of friends who have been there for me no matter what; your support and friendship has meant everything.

Eva and Sara, this is the one book I won't ask you to read, but you should know that like the others, it wouldn't have happened without the two of you and the magic for which I am grateful every single day. Thanks for the inspiration, the wisdom, and the faith; I am honored to write alongside you and to call you my dear friends.

Mom and Dad, you've already demanded a copy, and so I hope it makes you smile when you open to this page and see me say that I count myself as exceptionally lucky to have the two of you as lifelong support that made every achievement to this point

possible. You are the greatest teachers I've ever known, and it is your example that led me to my most important accomplishments. You taught me not only how to be a teacher, but also why teaching matters, and I hope that I have honored what is now a family tradition that I am incredibly proud of. Thank you for giving me the most important gifts I have.

Danny, my love, it has been with excitement, anticipation, and pure joy that I've watched you also turn towards that family tradition. You tell me every day that you are proud of me; I hope that you know that every day, it's you who I see shining a light into the world that truly makes it better. You are already an incredible teacher, and once you've reached your "on-paper" goals, I know that the path you're working so hard to forge right now will open up into a wide and beautiful future. I'm grateful to get to travel forward with the best person I know; here's to many more years of us kicking down the doors and shining the light with all our hearts.

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Introduction

Glimpsing the Impossible: Childhood, Trauma, and the Fantastic

If you made this other world
 It begs the question
 Did you also make yourself?
 -Rasputina, "Coraline"

Haunting and Trauma

Accounts of haunting range across social and political boundaries, and the nature of such accounts is mysterious as it is self-reflective: haunting is inherently metatextual, as it is passed from one generation to the next in the way the phenomenon itself is supposed to function. But whether haunting can exist in reality is a question perhaps best answered by narrative forms that are not empirical, but rather heretically speculative. Though challenges to its veracity may be inherent and unavoidable, so, too, is the nature of haunting widely known and clearly designated by those who create and pass on narrative material about it. Like other gothic experience—sublimity, horror, excitement—haunting is embodied in both the tale and the telling, making it recognizable to myriad and heterogeneous audiences as those who offer their accounts include familiar touchstones. Whether describing haunted homes and other uncanny spaces, the manifestation of ghosts and spirits, or objects linked to spectral occurrences, tellers of haunted tales nearly always speak of turmoil, dispossession, or woe, a kind of “bad romance” that is linked to the haunting in question. This underscores that there is a psychological aspect to these experiences, one that points to something after the fact of a matter that remains unsettled.

Thus, it seems impossible to speak about haunting without also gesturing to the unresolved, that “unfinished business” that functions as its provenance.¹

I begin this project with a discussion of haunting because of the significance that irresolution plays in the context of trauma narratives, and because of the parallel lines that set haunting and trauma on either side of a gothic and temporally unique narrative mirror.² Haunting narratives deal with the indirect: resolution that is lacking, answers that

¹ Theorists whose work on haunting is relevant to this understanding of that phenomenon include: Apprey, Maurice. “Representing, Theorizing and Reconfiguring the Concept of Transgenerational Haunting in Order to Facilitate Healing.” *Trans-generational Trauma and the Other: Dialogues Across History and Difference*. Sue Grand and Jill Salberg, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; Corbin, Megan. “The Museum of Memory: Spectral Presences and Metaphoric Re-memberings.” *Espectros: Ghostly Hauntings in Contemporary Transhispanic Narratives*. Alberto Ribas-Casasayas and Amanda L. Petersen, eds. Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2016; Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008; Holland, Sharon Patricia. *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000; Peeren, Esther and María del Pilar Blanco, eds. *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2010; Peeren, Esther and María del Pilar Blanco, eds. *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013; Ribas-Casasayas, Alberto and Amanda L. Peterson. “Theories of the Ghost in a Transhispanic Context.” *Espectros: Ghostly Hauntings in Contemporary Transhispanic Narratives*. Alberto Ribas-Casasayas and Amanda L. Petersen, eds. Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2016; Richardson, Judith. *Possessions*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005; Sconce, Jeffrey. *Haunted Media*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000; Wooley Martin, Karen. “Apparitions and Absence: Spectrality in Contemporary Novels of the Disappeared.” *Espectros: Ghostly Hauntings in Contemporary Transhispanic Narratives*. Alberto Ribas-Casasayas and Amanda L. Petersen, eds. Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2016.

² Those trauma theorists whose work is most relevant to the understanding of trauma that I engage in this project include: Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; Erikson, Kai. *A New Species of Trouble: The Human Experience of Modern Disasters*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994; Erikson, Kai. “Notes on Trauma and Community.” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Cathy Caruth, ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995; Grand, Sue. *The Reproduction of Evil*. New York: Routledge, 2002; Grand, Sue and Jill Salberg, eds. *The Wounds of History: Repair and Resilience in the Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma*. New York: Routledge, 2017; Gump, Janice. “The Endurance of Slavery’s Traumas and ‘Truths.’” *Trans-generational Trauma and the Other: Dialogues Across History and Difference*. Sue Grand and Jill Salberg, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; van der Hart, Onno, Ellert Nijenhuis, and Kathy Steele. *The Haunted Self*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006; van der Hart, Onno and Bessel A. van der Kolk. “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma.” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Cathy Caruth, ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995; Herman, Judith L. *Trauma and Recovery*. Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2015; Orange, Donna. “Healing Haunted Memories: From Monuments to Memorials.” *Trans-generational Trauma and the Other: Dialogues Across History and Difference*. Sue Grand and Jill Salberg, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010; Schwab, Gabriele. “Writing Against Memory and Forgetting.” *Literature and Medicine* 25.1 (2006): 95-121; Silverman, Sandra. “The Colonized Mind: Gender, Trauma and Mentalization.” *Trans-generational Trauma and the Other: Dialogues Across History and Difference*. Sue Grand and Jill Salberg, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016.

are missing, and what manifests in response to such a void. Additionally, haunting, like trauma, is persistent. The unresolved yields incessant effort, though whether that effort can lead to resolution is circumstantial at best. This is in no small part because again, like trauma, hauntings are non-normative and non-linear in nature; one can look to any number of ghost stories and determine that a spirit is not necessarily preoccupied with taking action in the way a living person might. While the ghost in question may well exist because of something it did not complete while it was alive, it is no longer a living person and therefore does not desire things in the way it would have done as a living person. The afterlife is indeed restless, but the focus of that life after death has shifted, and the unresolved is reconfigured in a context to which the previous life may not relate. And yet, the ghost persists.

Trauma functions in much the same way as this persistent specter: the person who experiences trauma is without question altered after the event that catalyzed it, and though the manifestation of traumatic experience may or may not be helping that person through the aftermath of the catalyzing event, the alteration prohibits cessation.³

Hauntings and the aftermath of trauma also have in common a curious obscurity encompassing their origins. These origins are always contained in the past: that event which resulted in a traumatic psychological state, that unresolved problem that created a haunting. And while access to that which happened yesterday is fraught, there is one

³ Cathy Caruth offers the following definition in *Unclaimed Experience*, her seminal 1996 work on the subject: “trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight—thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing” (91-2).

archive in particular that those who wish to exorcise a ghost or heal a state of trauma will look to: memory. Retaining relevant data that relates to the unresolved matter in question, navigable by terms that are not always easily apparent or available, *memory* functions as a source for access to the unsettled and unsettling past, the closest thing to events that are no longer themselves within grasp due to the passage of time. Depending on circumstance, memory can be private or collective, comprehensive or faulty, accessible or latent. And while life writing and other forms of narrative attempts at storing memory might be themselves linear, memory itself is often anything but.

There has long been discussion of the politics, limits, and corollaries of the public remembering of atrocities that have resulted in collective trauma: what should or should not be remembered; how remembrance is made possible or proven impossible; what the uses of remembrance might be for present and future generations.⁴ The idea of traumatic

⁴ Memory studies scholars whose work is relevant to my engagement of that field include: Collenberg-Gonzalez, Carrie. "Cinema and Memory Studies: Now, Then and Tomorrow." *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Connerton, Paul. *How Modernity Forgets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Connerton, Paul. *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; Erll, Astrid. "Media and the Dynamics of Memory." *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Memory*. Brady Wagoner, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017; Erll, Astrid. *Memory in Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012; Hirsch, Marianne and Valerie Smith. "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction." *Chicago Journals* 28.1 (2002): 1-19; Ivacs, Gabriella. "Digital Trauma Archives." *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; Olick, Jeffrey K. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge, 2007; Olick, Jeffrey K. "Sites of Memory Studies." *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; Olick, Jeffrey K., Vered Vinitzsky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds. *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Rigney, Ann. "Cultural Memory Studies: Mediation, Narrative, and the Aesthetic." *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; Shevchenko, Olga, ed. *Double Exposure: Memory & Photography*. New York: Routledge, 2017; Shevchenko, Olga. "'The mirror with a memory': Placing Photography in Memory Studies." *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; Straub, Jürgen, ed. *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005; Xu, Bin. "Disaster, Trauma, and Memory." *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, eds. New York: Routledge, 2016; Young, James E. *The Stages of Memory*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016.

residue accumulating on the descendant generations of those who have experienced a catastrophic event runs parallel to and intersects with this debate about remembrance, and the attempt to describe this phenomenon has been taken up by many scholars. Marianne Hirsch adds the term “postmemory” to this vocabulary of residue: “descendants of victim survivors as well as of perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of *memory*...in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can* be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event” (3). The phenomenon of the transfer of memory from one body to another occurs frequently in another genre outside of trauma and memory studies: popular science fiction, a sub-genre of speculative fiction.⁵ Speculative fiction includes content that falls at once within aspects of both the fantastic and memory work: narratives of mind melds, complete genetic memory, and super-empathic ability are recognizable hallmarks of the genre that represent the potential connections between these two aspects. As a result of this apparent link, the challenge of committing to conventional language a traumatic event is met by the extent to which fantastic occurrence is able to stretch the realm of what can be considered possible. Thus, speculative fiction provides insight into not only the elusive aftermath of a major traumatic conflict, but also to those subsequent conflicts that are at once catalyzed and contextualized by the parent event.

⁵ The hard sciences have made some small progress in research on genetic memory of late, as well. Several articles appeared in December of 2013, detailing research conducted at Emory University in which lab mice were seen to have an inherent aversion to a specific smell to which their parents and even grandparents had been exposed to during traumatic stimuli. This held true for mice that had never even met their predecessors who had experienced said trauma and accompanying smell. There is still much speculation as to how this phenomenon occurs, but research into genetic memory with more complex animals closer to the cognitive level of (and including) humans continues to be explored.

Atrocious pasts must be related in extraordinary ways, because they fall themselves so far outside the ordinary. Given the repetitive quality of traumatic manifestation, it is clear that conventional linear life writing will be resisted by the slippery and extreme psychological condition of traumatic memory. But repetition is also related to the assertion that memory can be transferred: if memory moves across individuals, it is then repeated across a particular population. It then seems possible that extreme forms of memory such as traumatic memory, if catalyzed by an event extreme and violent enough to disrupt the mind's efforts towards smoothly linear narrative, can move from one body to another, in no small part as a result of the fact that it was never incorporated into the chronology of more ordinary, non-traumatic memories of the individual in the first place.

So, then, must conventional employment of memory be put aside in an effort to process that which challenges our typical means of comprehension. As Hirsch writes, “nearly seventy years after Adorno’s contradictory injunctions about the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz, poetry is now only one of many media of transmission...For better or worse, these various genres and institutions have been grouped under the umbrella term ‘memory’.” (2) These “media of transmission” look beyond the simplistic question of whether it is possible or even “barbaric” to represent something; they attempt representation regardless, and prompt new questions about what such representation yields, what is preserved and what novelty develops, and what those in the present make of an unremitting past. That which resists representation becomes that which is not only represented, but extraordinarily so: *spectacle*, as both that which may be beheld and that which is remarkable to behold, takes the stage for such phenomenal representation. The fact that the media mentioned include spectacular

forms—testimony, oral history, performance, photography—underscores that traumatic memory is distinct from normative memory in terms of form, the latter of which is represented in conventional ways reflecting the interiority and linear narrativity that characterizes it. Performative, spectacular media reflect the external, excluded nature of non-normative traumatic memory; furthermore, they allow for that movable quality through which memory might be transmitted. This points to the transient nature of traumatic experience: it is at once obscure and mobile, fleeting and persistent, unspeakable and repetitive.⁶

Thus, the language utilized for narrative recording of non-normative memory must reflect the convergence of these three significant qualities explored thus far: trauma, the fantastic, and the spectacular. This brings me back to the concept of haunting, which, among its speculative kindred, is a phenomenon that is undoubtedly spectacular in its manifestations and sensory impact (think of the eerie translucent quality of apparitions, the bangs and slams of poltergeist, the extreme cold caused by the presence of a ghost). Hirsch's extensive terminology for traumatic residue also includes the term "haunting" as a reference to Gabriele Schwab's theories on the persistence of trauma across generations. For Schwab, the term, utilized as a verb, is helpful as she applies it using trauma as its subject: "What I call 'haunting legacies' are things hard to recount or even

⁶ Theorists who engage visual studies in conjunction with spectacular representation that are relevant to this project include: Belting, Hans. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014; Cartwright, Lisa. *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008; Cartwright, Lisa and Marita Sturken. *Practices of Looking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies*. London: SAGE, 2016; Silverman, Kaja. *The Threshold of the Visible World*. New York: Routledge, 1995; Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2004; Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Sturken, Marita, Douglas Thomas, and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, eds. *Technological Visions*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004; Warren-Crow, Heather. *Girlhood and the Plastic Image*. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2014.

to remember, the results of a violence that holds an unrelenting grip on memory yet is deemed unspeakable...The legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations” (1). Avery Gordon also notably makes use of the term; however, while Schwab’s definition seems to hinge on the representation of things unspeakable, Gordon is preoccupied with the varying degrees and natures of that representation, and the possibilities such layers might present: “What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known...Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future” (xvi). This temporal muddying is evident at the most local levels of traumatic aftermath. By looking to both Schwab and Gordon, we can trace the movement of trauma as it resists conventional expression and simultaneously expands from the individual, to the family, to a larger collective demographic. It is by recognizing this expansion that we are able to understand the suppositions of trauma as belonging at once to both individuals and collectives. In the wake of the systematic oppression, devastation, and/or attempted annihilation of an entire population, the intimate space occupied by individual families within that population is warped by the residue of the destructive acts that have occurred. This distortion becomes the proverbial earth from which subsequent generations must rise; those children who are nurtured in the aftermath of a trauma are reared in a space of temporal displacement and disruption as a result of the volatile, unceasing nature of the residue made manifest by the initial cataclysm.

If we are to consider how trauma is transmitted from one individual to another, and if we understand that transmission to move through commonalities (from a memory studies perspective, through families and/or those collectives made up of many families), then we must think about the recipient of that transmission: the individual that sits in the role of child. This project engages fictional children as a means by which to examine how representations of trauma and its transmission manifest in extraordinary ways within narratives that seek to create such representations. The perceived contradiction of utilizing sociological and psychological theory in studies of fictive characters is undermined as established fields of literary analysis that are relevant to both those theories and the literature are engaged. Furthermore, representations of childhood will always prove challenging because children are so infrequently mainstream producers of material that is about them.⁷ As a result, by placing readings of childhood alongside studies in the fantastic, this project attempts to reconcile the imagined and imaginary with what reflections and echoes of the real and relevant it might generate in relation to both representations of childhood and representations of the traumatic.

While children are discussed subjectively by scholarship in memory studies—the child as witness, the child as survivor, the child who will testify, the child who will remember—the adult frame that dominates the perception of childhood experience of trauma never entirely fades away. In an effort to understand the effects that trauma has, the individualities and lived experiences of children are overshadowed by the childhood

⁷ Childhood studies scholars Allison James and Adrian James write: “Child-focused research is not simply about doing research about children; it must adopt methods and ethical procedures that respect children as research participants in their own right, and adhere to this value throughout the research process” (*Key Concepts* 10). This effort on the part of scholars who feel the way in which James and James do has gained some attention in the field; however, it is not necessarily a dominant perspective.

memories of the adults who were once themselves children in danger. This seems to suggest that the possibility for intergenerational empathy is undercut, or at the very least hindered, by the extreme realities of traumatic aftermath. It demonstrates the tenuous relationship between harrowing experience and the narrative of memory, as representation can overwrite experience or the two can chaotically converge.

One might expect that imaginative narrative would then easily offer context and a space in which the traumatized child might begin to emerge as a recognizable individual, one who is not constantly Othered by the adults who speak for her but who is able to narrate her experience in and on her own terms. But scholars Allison James and Adrian James remind us that “there is an important sense, however, in which all children are seen as vulnerable...because of the perceived innocence and lack of competence of children ...It is clear that to some considerable extent such a view is valid...What is more problematic, however, is the idea that all children are vulnerable...and that all children, therefore, need the same level of protection...” (132-133). Perceived vulnerability draws a fine line between actually aiding an individual and removing the subjectivity of that individual in an effort to keep them safe. Such perception also always demonstrates a hierarchy of power, for the party who views the vulnerable party as such is by default in a position to enforce said protection, and as such holds a position of authority over they who are perceived as vulnerable.

Relevant to critiques like that of James and James on perceived vulnerability, other subfields of childhood studies that look to the analysis of fictive representations of children as they exist in narrative have pushed back against readings that reduce the child

to an object representing innocence.⁸ What these related subfields of childhood studies have in common is an understanding of a represented figure of a child that is inherently shallow in light of its adult-designated qualities; that is, in the case of both perceptions of the child as completely vulnerable and/or paragons of sexless innocence, more imperfect and subjective aspects of childhood are overwritten by these adult constructions. This dissertation examines how the child in fiction is desubjectified by those textual adults in her proximity by the very efforts they make to protect her; protective gazing at the child is understood to also be *projective* (in the sense that it overlays the viewing adults' own childhoods on top of the child caught within that gaze), *scriptive* (in the sense that such an overlay begins to overwrite the personal narrative and thus the individuality of the child beneath it), and as such, objectifying. Not dissimilar from the context of Lee Edelman's work, which focuses on how the figure of the child is taken up by adult agents aiming to use the specter of a disastrous future in order to manipulate the present,⁹ this project considers how disasters in the present—trauma-inducing conflicts and extreme events—contribute to the narrative marginalization of children represented in contemporary literature and film.

Building upon what has been established by those scholars who have read narrative children as tools of an adult-authored agenda towards particular societal influence, the subsequent readings in this project aim to demonstrate how adult-child relations in contemporary narratives continue to include adult impositions on the subjectivity of the

⁸ Scholars Kathryn Bond Stockton and Steven Bruhm's work on queer childhoods and childhood sexuality have achieved this by taking positions against protective assumptions of vulnerability and the stripping away of subjectivity via the excising of the child's sexuality from that child's identity. See: Bruhm, Steven and Natasha Hurley, eds. *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2004; Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *The Queer Child*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009.

⁹ See: Edelman, Lee. *No Future*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004.

child at their center. The project deliberately engages narratives from the past fifty years of literature and film. While several of those seminal works that read children in literature look to older literary classics,¹⁰ the decision of this project to focus on contemporary narratives hinges on more recent strides that have been made by writers and filmmakers to create narrative children that are not only credible, but relatable, even by the standards of contemporary children themselves, in spite of the fact that they are not the intended audience for these texts.¹¹ That relatability and credibility are not outliers for creators of narrative to achieve, in the sense that they are what have been afforded the fictional counterparts of adults for a much longer period of time than they have been offered to child consumers of narrative.¹² However, in creating fictive children with additional depth and distinction, contemporary writers of narratives that focus on child characters as subjects allow for a distinction of those characters from their literary predecessors as well as those adult characters that exist within their own respective texts. In the narratives that

¹⁰ For example, Edelman's text referenced in the previous footnote looks to narratives by Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Alfred Hitchcock. Steven Bruhm's collection mentioned in the footnote that precedes the Edelman includes essays that read narratives by Henry James and William Friedkin.

¹¹ While this project does not focus specifically on children's literature, the project has been created with an understanding that at this moment, a children's market dominates publishing and drives much of the profits of the industry as it exists today. Young adult fiction's inception coincides with the historical origins of this project: both the earliest texts that I employ and the start of the young adult genre reach back to the second half of the twentieth-century. J. D. Salinger's 1951 book *The Catcher in the Rye* marks for many the start of that genre; for others, it is Harper Lee's 1960 *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, it is S. E. Hinton's 1967 novel *The Outsiders* that popularized young adult literature such that it came into the mainstream (see: Rudd, David. *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2012). With J.K. Rowling's 1997 release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, young adult and by default the larger children's market, particularly in speculative subgenres, exploded into a resurgence of the genre that we are still experiencing at this moment (also see: Levy, Michael and Farah Mendlesohn. *Children's Fantasy Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). That climate is significantly the context into which adult authors and creators who choose to write fictive children must craft their narratives.

¹² It is also important to remember that children's literature is itself a particularly young field; and, while again this project is focused on fictive representations of children in adult-targeted literature, the development of child characters as subjects has occurred alongside the emergence of literature targeted towards children. Consider 19th century bildungsroman, for instance: could Jane Eyre and Oliver Twist have had the developed narrative childhoods afforded them without E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King"? Those coming-of-age novels also might claim influence over texts from the Golden Age of children's literature by such authors as George MacDonald, Lewis Carroll, and Charles Kingsley.

this project reads—specifically, fictions that present the child protagonist in contexts of major conflict—those fields of trauma theory and psychoanalysis are applied in such a way that the subjectivity of the child as challenged by adult intervention and imposition reads as central to the main action of the narratives in question.

The subjectivity of the child protagonist and the challenges it faces then function as central to these narratives in a way that is unique to this period of the past fifty years in narrative. The rationale behind my application of trauma and psychoanalytic theory to narratives that represent childhood through child protagonists can be explored further by looking to a notable example of such readings from psychoanalysis: the dream of the burning child from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*,¹³ later taken up by Lacan¹⁴ and then by contemporary trauma theorist Cathy Caruth.¹⁵ The dream of the burning child occurs when a father, who is sleeping in the room next to his child's corpse, dreams of his son saying, "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" And he wakes to find that a candle set near the child's body has slipped and set the funeral bedclothes on fire (93). Taking both analysts' readings of the dream and its significance in stride, Caruth initially says,

The relation between the burning within and the burning without is thus neither a fiction (as in Freud's interpretation) nor a direct representation, but a *repetition* that

¹³ Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. A. A. Brill, trans. New York: Sterling, 2010.

¹⁴ Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Alan Sheridan, trans. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.

¹⁵ This project is indebted to psychoanalysis in three critical ways: firstly, in its engagement with narrative childhoods and childhood studies, the project aims to engage psychoanalytic theory and concept in order to better read the child subject as she is marginalized by an adult-dominant world. Psychoanalysis foregrounds much of our contemporary understandings of childhood, and its intersections with trauma theory are significant in how this project will read children in contexts of upheaval and conflict. Secondly, as a project that fixates on speculative fiction and narrative, psychoanalysis proves crucial as a means by which to understand the fantastic; theories on the uncanny in particular are extremely important to my engagements with the gothic and the magically real. And finally, this project's readings of narratives that focus on collective memory and traumatic incidence across populations critically takes up the functions (and sometimes, the limitations) of psychoanalytic practice as it applied to narrative representations of traumatized individuals and groups. Thus, the field functions both as applied theory to the readings in the project, but also appears in the texts that are themselves read and is therefore also readable as part of that oeuvre explored here.

reveals, in its temporal contradiction, how the very bond of the father to the child—his responsiveness to the child's words—is linked to the missing of the child's death. To awaken is thus precisely to awaken only to one's repetition of a previous failure to see in time. The force of the trauma is not the death alone, that is, but the fact that, in his very attachment to the child, the father was unable to witness the child's dying as it occurred. *Awakening*, in Lacan's reading of the dream, *is itself the site of a trauma*, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility of responding to another's death. (100) Caruth's focus on repetition here connects back to her initial definition of the

phenomenon of trauma, which has to do with the inability to incorporate the impossible (the traumatic) into conventional narrative. She raises a critical point in looking to the futile efforts of the father's mind to break with the passage of time (we think perhaps of time travel, an effort to manipulate the temporal) and go back in order to correct a fatal failure. Caruth continues,

The transmission of the psychoanalytic theory of trauma, the story of dreams and of dying children, cannot be reduced...to a simple mastery of facts and cannot be located in a simple...knowledge that can see and situate precisely where the trauma lies...What is passed on, finally, is not just the meaning of the words, but their performance... 'What is it that wakes the sleeper? Is it not, *in* the dream, another reality?—the reality that Freud describes thus—that the child is near his bed...takes him by the arm and whispers to him reproachfully...Father, don't you see...that I am burning?' The passing on of the child's words transmits not simply a reality that can be grasped in these words' representation, but the ethical imperative of an awakening that has yet to occur. (112; qtd. translation 145-6)

While Freud, Lacan, and Caruth at different points offer various explanations as to what that yet unrealized awakening might be, I would posit that it is in fact the recognition of the child beyond its relationship to the parent as representative of a personal failure; that is, the imperative in question is to begin viewing the child as distinct from the traumatic relationship that, though unquestionably and understandably bereaved, nevertheless privileges the parent rather than the lost child as a subject. To utilize the child in the equation as a representative of some dormant aspect of the parent is to overwrite his subjectivity as a facet of his father's psyche.

Representations of children that rely on adult understandings of children and childhood frequently obliterate the individuality of child subjects, in no small part because all of those deep emotional constructs harbored within the adult psyche are grafted onto the form of the child, a figure familiar in its similarity to the adult's own past, but distantly and incompletely related to the present that has replaced and forgotten the experience of that past. We can glean the unintentional erasing qualities of the adult gaze as Caruth looks closely at one particular reading of Lacan:

'I, too, have seen, seen with my own eyes, opened by maternal divination, the child, traumatized by the fact that I was going away despite the appeal, precociously adumbrated in its voice...I have seen it let its head fall on my shoulder and drop off to sleep, sleep alone being capable of giving him access to the living signifier that I had become since the date of the trauma' (63, translation modified)...With the description of his own recollection of the trauma of his child, Lacan seems to suggest that the child inherits, in effect, the traumatic lapse, or absence, of the father...Indeed, while he sees 'with [his] own eyes,' the father does not, in effect, see, and does not see as an ordinary father; for his eyes, he says, have needed to be 'opened'...as he puts it, 'by maternal divination'. (110)

As Caruth points out, Lacan's perspective on the child is not even his directly; it first passes through a maternal lens before he can draw his conclusions. But this entire passage is not about what it claims to be about: the child. Lacan doesn't begin with, "My child, too, has been seen"; he begins and ends with his views, his understandings, himself. This reading might at first seem reductive and inevitable—from whence does the adult gaze extend if not from the adult himself? However, the potential for relatable influence is there; indeed, the noted persuasion of the mother suggests that the gaze can take empathetic cues as much as it can script onto the subjectivity of another. If Lacan's eyes in this instance are said to be opened by the mother's understanding of the child, then it is possible for that opening to be incited by the child's understanding of itself. But if such possibility is to be entertained, the adult approach to viewing of the child first

must change; and, I would argue, the problem in the above scenario is not that the father's eyes are closed, but that his perspective is inaccurate as a result of being incomplete. There is a clear effort towards affection on the part of the father, but that affection is one aspect of recognition and it does not allow for a full viewing of the child as an individual. Without an understanding of the child as a subject separate from its concerned and doting parents, the view of that child becomes projective where it ought to be receptive, scriptive where it should be attentive, oppressive where it must be empathetic.

This fantasy from psychoanalysis introduces a narrative of the extraordinary, a term which applies to the literature that will be analyzed in this project: speculative fiction. Speculative fiction is the genre of focus for this project because of its ability reflect and work through the nature of extreme psychological content: specifically, events, mind-states, and legacies of trauma. Fictive representations and the role of the child are as crucial in understanding the transgenerational and perpetual nature of traumatic aftermath in narrative as is the function of speculative fiction. This project looks at narratives in which children are situated in close proximity to great conflict and instances of the fantastic. In so doing, I aim to trace a point of origin for traumatic persistence, one which demonstrates the essentiality of the child—as individual, as subject, who experiences, who perpetuates—as well as the categorical necessity for and inevitable manifestation of the fantastic as it emerges by virtue of an impactful and violent event. Notably, children and the fantastic are often dismissed in the same breath by proximate adults (as will be evidenced in the first chapter of the project, where child characters are discouraged by parents from reading and engaging fantasy due to its apparent childishness): that which is

fantastic belongs to the realm of childhood, and only children would be so naïve as to believe in the veracity of the fantastic. However, when ordinary representation fails—when something is beyond describing, when atrocity in its excess creates lived experience that quotidian analysis falls far short of grasping—the only possibility is for those modes, sites, and subjects that have conventionally been dismissed and that nevertheless persist as existents to emerge forward and pick up where conventional epistemologies have reached their limit. It is "the stuff of children" that proves critical in effective representations of the traumatic, that which resists rendering and challenges narrative.

Viewing Fantastic Childhoods

This project engages contemporary literary and filmic representations of fictive children as relevant narrative forms that work to similar effect. The practice of producing photographic or cinematic images of children in situations of conflict is, as observed by memory scholars, useful in soliciting adult concern and, as a result, necessary action. In so doing, however, the adult effort to connect emotionally with the perceived individual child offers only a partial recognition and often an obliteration of that child's individuality. Visual studies scholar Lisa Cartwright observes

the model of identification that has presided in film theory for more than two decades...has been tacitly based on the idea of feeling what the other feels, imagining oneself to be the other. I argue...that empathetic identification, in which I do not necessarily feel the other's feelings or imagine myself in his or her place, but rather recognize and even *facilitate* the otherness of the other, is a crucial but overlooked aspect of identification that deserves to be considered in film theory. (2)

Indeed, this empathetic identification, as Cartwright has coined it, seems especially relevant in the case of visual narratives that focus on children, precisely because of the

risk of projection that Hirsch discusses. What Cartwright underscores is that it is not necessary *to take the place of* the observed individual in order to access her emotional/experiential repository; to do so would be a clear exercise in futility. However, what she demonstrates is necessary is the acknowledgment of the individual as such; that is, as an entity independent of the viewer who is at risk of obscurity by the oppressive force of an over-eager gaze, a gaze that projects what is inside rather than viewing what is outside.

For an empathetic connection like the one Cartwright posits to occur, it is critical that adults relinquish their own projective gaze in favor of an effort to take up the gaze of the child. The power differential as represented by the text in this project suggest that such an empathetic effort yields productive and, indeed, fantastic results in regards to the narratives' ultimately challenging that power structure. Whether or not a truly empathetic experience on the part of the adults in the texts is completely possible, the attempt itself is full of potentialities. Ellen Handler Spitz says in her book *Illuminating Childhood*:

Whatever membrane it is that separates us from childhood, from the young people we know and love, and from the fading photographs of ourselves as children and our parents and grandparents, our brothers and sisters, it may be permeable but it is not transparent. Aspects of children's lives whisper of worlds we can no longer reach. *Through the looking glass. Over the rainbow. Second to the right and straight on to morning.* Yet we must try. (2)

These allusions to children's fantastic literature gesture to where the child's gaze is located and thereby perhaps accessible: at the convergence of childhood, subjectivity, and the fantastic. Spitz's assertion that time plays a critical role in access to the fantastic, that when an individual is able to reach non-normative spaces hinges on their proximity to childhood, demonstrates that there is a clear link between the child subject and the fantastic. The narratives referenced are early examples of a relatively new sub-canon

within literature that makes an effort to treat the child as a subject: children's literature, which is specifically for children and often about them, aims to provide narratives that are not intended for an adult reading public. Those men who authored the texts to which Spitz refers either maintained close friendships with the children for and based on whom they wrote (in the case of Lewis Carroll and J.M. Barrie). Imperfect though their efforts may have ultimately been, Carroll, Barrie, and Baum all definitively attempted through narrative to represent children as distinct from the adult contexts and perspectives surrounding them. Their novels go so far as to directly address the oppressive weight of the adult gaze on the child, with protagonists spirited away to other worlds that allow them to escape that gaze, however fleetingly. And through the transmission of their fantastic works to a real-world child reading public, these authors can be said to be attempting access to the child's perspective by thinking first of their audience rather than those adults under whose care they fall. Empathy, like trauma, thus proves to require modes of expression existing above and beyond conventional boundaries; in the context of children's literature, that mode of expression results in an entirely new genre.

But this project does not examine literature that is written for children. Rather, it reads texts that work to represent children that are recognizable as individuals outside of the gaze of the adults around them, even as those adults control and complicate their lives, challenge their subjectivity, and ignore their relevance. Delving into the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century, this project considers the work of adult authors who create fictive adults that behave in ways similar to these authors of children's narratives, to the extent that they make a notable effort to relate to those children in the text and in so doing, access the perspective of those children. As those scholars who consider societally

taboo aspects of childhood by examining its sexuality step into territory that is controversial because there are those who believe sexuality is not for children, this project reconsiders how an adult audience might participate in the projective gazing that its narrative counterparts enact on the fictive children in their midst, and how those narrative adults who attempt to relinquish that projective gaze might invite adult viewing audiences to do the same. Looking at children's literature means looking at representations of childhood that have been created with the child's subjectivity (and even approval) in mind; looking at adult fiction that represents childhood might mean something similar, but it can also mean looking at children who are represented as objects instead of subjects.

Child Generations and Gothic Trauma

While efforts towards empathy are critical in an effort to address and even challenge the power dynamics between individual children and adults, I argue that there exists a significant parallel between more intimate, familial structures and broader generational structures. This relationship between the familial and the transgenerational is made clear as we consider again the way in which trauma is at once persistent and mutable. An individual child whose parent has experienced conflict is not dissimilar from a collective generation of children whose parents experienced conflict. Trauma can manifest in the individual, and it can manifest across a collective made up of individuals. While there are contrasts between trauma at the local level (within an individual's experience, in intimate relationships, within specific families and households) and in broader spheres (experienced through identity markers such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity), it is also

critical to identify and investigate those parallels that unite the two, so that we might better understand how trauma is impacted by context and magnitude. While an individual might house a haunting, the ghosts of a past trauma-inducing event can sweep across a broader group, settling into the many in as unsettling a manner as it possessed the one.

This layered and collective experience of haunting is, as many of the texts I will discuss in this dissertation show, not a passive reminder of a past that can be cleanly separated from the present. It is a volatile, violent inevitability that shakes and disrupts contemporary generations. As the child who is reared by the parent who has been traumatized will surely internalize that trauma, so, too, will descendant generations carry the weight of the burden forced on their parent generation. Parent-child relationships, then, whether at the local or collective level, are fraught with traumatic aftermath, and this, of course, affects greatly the quality of those relationships. Gabriele Schwab tells us that “unless it is worked through and integrated, trauma will be passed on to the next generation...[which] will...display symptoms that do not emerge from individual experience but from a parent’s, relative’s, or community’s psychic conflicts, traumata, or secrets...as if an individual were haunted by the ghosts, that is, the unfinished business, of a previous generation” (102). The child who inherits the “business” of the parent will not necessarily desire resolution in the same way the parent might; this is a point of great tension in the relationship between generations living in the aftermath of a traumatic event. In narratives that represent traumatic experience, that psychic unrest presents in ways that the text is able to literalize, particularly within speculative genres.

In addition to inheriting this trauma, the child generation will grapple with its own contemporary reality as it is invaded by a violent past. Resentment, confusion, frustration,

and anger are all likely responses, as the individual in the present is pushed out of her own timeline and pushed into a space of irregular temporality and spectral irresolution. Her response is not only to the traumatic past, but to its presence in her own present: the pervasive nature of the violent past may cause it to manifest in subtle and quotidian ways, quietly disrupting formative interactions between parent and child that result in dysphoric relations. Basic parenting conventions—offering comfort and soothing, teaching self-care, the passing on of tradition—become distorted, and the child resents what she recognizes as false or ineffective: because of the parent trauma, comfort and self-care seem impossible and hypocritical, and tradition becomes a burden rather than a celebratory heritage. Representations of the home and family, of childhood and parenthood, of the engagement between generations are marked and haunted by that which haunts and does not rest within the family space. The day-to-day becomes infused with the relentless past; narratives of childhood and the individual become stories of trauma and those generations across which it perpetuates.

It is apparent that narratives intending to reflect the exceptional nature of trauma must themselves be extraordinary, and modes of the fantastic are frequently employed by creators of narrative in an effort to represent that which resists normative articulation. Given its dominance over such phenomena as haunting, the gothic in particular emerges as a sub-genre of the fantastic that will allow for traumatic experience to be portrayed. Historically, the gothic has represented the so-called Other and, whether or not the intent of its authors, provided those marginalized characters in its pages with a depth and

relatable potential that they would likely not find in other narrative fields.¹⁶ While older canonical texts fell short of giving these figures full subjectivity, more recent gothic books and films have built on the foundations of their predecessors and given rise to narratives in which the marginalized are not only visible, but in which they have come forth from the margins in order to gain a fullness of voice and empathetic capacity that places them in the center of their respective texts.¹⁷ As with children's fantasy literature, the gothic as a genre has functioned to posit audience at the forefront of its pursuits: long considered low-brow, vulgar, and potentially harmful to impressionable minds by the reigning lords of the literary elite (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women were perceived to be at such risk; in the twentieth century, concerns shift towards younger readers), gothic literature has sought the approval not of the erudite but rather of a mass reading public seeking popular entertainment over formal educational content.¹⁸ It is then no accident that those populations subject to systemic oppression and exclusion from elite positions of power—including within scholarship and literature—have contributed to the continued thriving of the gothic tradition, not only as consumers, but notably as producers. Women helped build the gothic, as Ann Radcliffe's expansive

¹⁶ Though the genre arguably begins with Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, I would suggest that it is really with Matthew Lewis's 1796 *The Monk* and Ann Radcliffe's works (1789-1826) that the emergence of such developed antagonists, antiheroes, and literary monsters begins to occur.

¹⁷ Aside from those narratives that this dissertation will engage at length, one might also think of such contemporary gothic classics with detailed character development as Stephen King's 1974 novel *Carrie*, Anne Rice's 1976 *Interview with the Vampire*, Jewelle Gomez's 1991 *The Gilda Stories*, Andrew Fleming's 1996 film *The Craft*, Tananarive Due's 1997 *My Soul to Keep*, and Octavia Butler's 2005 *Fledgling*.

¹⁸ For literature that traces this reception history from Walpole's novel into the twentieth century, see: Armitt, Lucie. *History of the Gothic: Twentieth-Century Gothic*. University of Wales Press, 2011; Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. New York: Routledge, 2013; Davison, Carol Margaret. *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764-1824*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009; Killeen, Jarlath. *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1825-1914*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010; Townshend, Dale and Fred Botting. *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2004. For a playful literary critique on the attitudes towards gothic and women's fiction at the turn of the nineteenth century, see: Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

oeuvre indicates, and in the twenty-first century, it remains a sub-field in which people of color and women have been able to lead, even against a backdrop of a still white male-dominated publishing world.

Project Genre and Structure

Genre fiction, including speculative fiction, has had to fight to be viewed as legitimate within the academy despite (or perhaps as a result of) being consistently and massively popular with a reading public. In the forty years during which the texts this project includes were published, the literary academy has undergone significant if gradual demographic changes, allowing for genre fiction to be considered worthy of critical study. Keeping in mind Toni Morrison's notable contention regarding the term "magical realism,"¹⁹ as a Western white academy's understanding of what the rest of the world might simply term experience, and considering the number of women writers who have found a home in genre fiction as opposed to how few are given access to the elite world of literary fiction, it is perhaps unsurprising that the emergence of accepted scholarship focused on contemporary popular genre fiction has mirrored an equally gradual evolution in what kinds of literature major publishing houses are choosing to accept and promote.

Scholars who have published in the past several decades about speculative fiction very much have legitimacy on the brain.²⁰ Ann Swinfen published an entire volume of criticism titled *In Defense of Fantasy*, in which she argues,

¹⁹ Davis, Christina and Toni Morrison. "Interview With Toni Morrison." *Présence Africaine* (1988): 141-150.

²⁰ In a 1986 essay in *Aspects of Fantasy*, William Coyle posits: "In A.D. 2222 when (or if) historians assess the literature of the late twentieth century, the most obvious trend is certain to be the diminished prestige of realism, which dominated the literary imagination for about seventy-five years" (1). In the same light, Neil Cornwell writes in the 1990 publication *The Literary Fantastic*: "In the twentieth century...the fantastic has, arguably, reached a position in which it is increasingly itself becoming 'the dominant', as it continues

All serious fantasy is deeply rooted in human experience and is relevant to human living. Its major difference from the realist novel is that it takes account of areas of experience—imaginative, subconscious, visionary—which free the human spirit to range beyond the limits of empirical primary world reality. In a sense, then, fantasy provides the writer with greater scope to construct his own scheme of morality, his own time structure, his own political and social order. But at no time does this apparent freedom permit the author to escape from contemporary reality. (231)

In other words, what expands for the fantasy writer—or reader, or even protagonist—are not the limits of reality, but rather the means by which that reality might be approached and dealt with. In simpler terms, it may be helpful to recall that remarkable quotation: “Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.”²¹

This dissertation discusses the child in contexts of conflict and traumatic aftermath. I utilize speculative fictive narratives as exemplary of how traumatic narrative necessitates extreme storytelling forms, focusing in particular on the fantastic and the gothic. These genres emerge as a site in which the impossible—the traumatic, that which cannot take representation; the magical, that which cannot be—is narratively constructed and engaged. Furthermore, I consider the effects of trauma on the fictive child as both an individual and as a generation, leading the central argument of the project to develop in scope from the intimate to the expansive. By bringing together trauma theory, psychoanalysis, and memory and visual studies, I consider how time, space, and magnitude shape traumatic experience in speculative contexts, and ultimately consider how new approaches to such experience result in a shift in both literary and psychological analyses of traumatic narrative.

to develop not only its dialogical, interrogative, open and unfinished styles of discourse but also a strong social, political and ethical thrust” (211).

²¹ This quotation is often attributed to G. K. Chesterton; however, many say that though the content belongs to Chesterton, the words are a paraphrase we can credit Neil Gaiman with, who includes this quotation before the start of his equally remarkable 2002 novel *Coraline*.

The first chapter, “Mise en scène: Fantastic Emergence and the Projective Gaze,” examines the subject of the marginalized child gaining access to the fantastic by way of three contemporary films: Tarsem Singh’s *The Fall* and Guillermo del Toro’s *El laberinto del fauno*, both released in 2006, and Benh Zeitlin’s 2012 debut feature-length film *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. I discuss the adult gaze as marginalizing in its doubly-projective state, and I think through the absence of maternal figures and the failures of parental surrogates as contributing to the conflicts these children face as part of their marginalization. The chapter also discusses the crucial role of storytelling and the hazards of seeking comfort for fantastically located girls. I conclude the chapter by looking to the potential that the child’s gaze presents for mitigated adult access to the fantastic, which is restricted from the latter unless, I assert, there is a true effort to empathize with the child which interrupts the double-projection of the adult gaze. Though full access to the fantastic cannot be claimed by adults in these films any more than full autonomy can be achieved by the children, there is the potential for transient visual access to occur as a result of such an empathetic project.

The second chapter, “Disappearing as a Doll: Familial Traumatic Legacy,” looks to Rosario Ferré’s 1976 story “The Youngest Doll/La muñeca menor” (translated: 1991) as a case study for a phenomenon I term “the quotidian fantastic.” The quotidian fantastic refers to the ordinary and the day-to-day becoming infused with the fantastic as a result of an unresolved conflict that enacts familial trauma. By analyzing Ferré’s story, which examines two generations of two families and the burden placed on the second generation of these families by the first, I observe the way in which an individual’s trauma can thrust itself upon another. This chapter makes extensive use of Freud’s theories of the uncanny

and Wendy Faris's theories of the fantastic in order to contextualize the quotidian fantastic within my larger discussion of transgenerational trauma. The close focus on the individual child subject in relation to her contemporary world that was utilized in the first chapter here expands so that the study of traumatic experience expands to include a family unit.

The third chapter of the project, "Traumatic Inheritance: Gothic Legacy and Somatic Phantasy," reads texts in which the descendants of a major traumatic event that impacted a racial/national collective grapple with traumatic disruptions that are directly tied to their identities. I consider how trauma takes on gothic forms notable in their extreme hazard and volatility, as the child generation does not have direct access to the source traumatic event and is therefore subject to less predictable psychic and temporal disruption. The novels engaged here include: Octavia Butler's seminal 1979 work *Kindred*; Phyllis Alesia Perry's 1998 debut novel *Stigmata*; Yvonne Vera's 1996 novella *Under the Tongue*; and Bessie Head's semi-autobiographical *A Question of Power*, published in 1973. Here, I put gothic studies in conversation with trauma and memory studies, and I challenge the field's history of favoring a white-authored Euro-centric canon, as relevant interventions by emerging postcolonial gothic scholars are making radical shifts within the field at present. Furthermore, I explore the limits of psychotherapy in regards to traumatic occurrence, as both Perry and Head demonstrate ways in which the fantastic extends to places that psychoanalytic practice may not be able to reach.

The final section of this project offers a concluding postscript about monstrosity and where narratives of the twenty-first century seem to be headed in regards to this project's overall themes. I choose to focus on Helen Oyeyemi's 2009 novel *White Is for Witching*,

as it not only includes aspects of my arguments across all three chapters of the dissertation, but also takes a solidly millennial position amidst the texts I've chosen to work, one that suggests that the monstrous resides within as much as it does in the world around us. This sets our gaze forward in questioning where the fantastic and traumatic are headed in terms of representation and narrative, and how impending generations and literature will approach their connection to one another.

Chapter One

Mise en scène: Fantastic Emergence and the Projective Gaze

So the children forgot about it, for what troubles a grown-up will never trouble a child.
-P J Hogan, *Peter Pan*

Girls, the Fantastic, and the Doubly-Projective Adult Gaze

This project begins with an eye to the experience of an individual child in the midst of a conflict that is extreme and impactful enough to result in traumatic experience for those in its proximity and context. By examining narratives that utilize fantastic spaces and elements as their authors build a story around the spectacle of a child in conflict,²² this

²² This project is rooted in studies of contemporary narrative and thus looks to fictive representations of children in literature and film. For useful examinations of actual children in contexts of conflict outside of narrative within childhood studies subfields that consider the sociological, the anthropological, and the psychological, see criticism by: Appell, Annette Ruth. "The Myth of Separation." *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 6.2 (2011): 291-299; Bickford, Tyler. *Schooling New Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017; Bragg, Sara, Mary Jane Kehily, and D. Buckingham, eds. *Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; Carpenter, Charli. *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones*. Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2007; Chinn, Sarah. *Inventing Modern Adolescence*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008; Cregan, Kate and Denise Cuthbert. *Global Childhoods*. London: SAGE, 2014; Douglas, Kate. *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010; Flores, Jerry. *Caught Up: Girls, Surveillance, and Wraparound Incarceration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016; Gallacher, Lesley. "Young Children's Spaces." *The SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Research*. A. Farrell, S. L. Kagan, and E. K. M. Tisdall, eds. London: SAGE, 2015; Gallacher, Lesley and Mary Jane Kehily. "Childhood: A Socio-Cultural Approach." *Childhood: A Cross Disciplinary Approach*. Mary Jane Kehily, ed. Bristol: Policy Press, 2013; Gozdzia, Elzbieta M. *Trafficked Children and Youth in the United States*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016; Gozdzia, Elzbieta M. and Marie Louise Seeberg, eds. *Contested Childhoods: Growing Up in Migrancy*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017; Hamilton, Walter. *Children of the Occupation*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013; Hardgrove, Abby. *Life After Guns*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017; Hodgson, Lucia. *Raised in Captivity*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1997; Hunleth, Jean. *Children as Caregivers*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017; Jones, Nikki. *Between Good and Ghetto*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009; Kehily, Mary Jane. *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*. Bristol: Open University Press, 2008; Kehily, Mary Jane, ed. *Understanding Childhood*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2013; Kromidas, Maria. *City Kids*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016; Lareau, Annette. *Unequal Childhoods*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011; Lopez, Vera. *Complicated Lives: Girls, Parents, Drugs, and Juvenile Justice*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017; Marten, James. *The History of Childhood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018; Montgomery, Heather. "The Dynamics of Culture." *Challenging Child Protection*. Lorraine Waterhouse and Janice McGhee, eds. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2015; Pufall, Peter B. and Richard P. Unsworth, eds. *Rethinking Childhood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003; Schaffner, Laurie. *Girls in Trouble with the Law*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006; Siegel, Jane A. *Disrupted Childhoods*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011; Wells, Karen. *Childhood Studies: Making Young Subjects*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2017.

first chapter aims to understand the relationship between the child subject,²³ the fantastic, and the conflict that enacts trauma. Such an engagement will include considerations of how the child subject in these narratives accesses the fantastic; what the fantastic permits the child subject that the so-called real (or non-fantastic) world does not; how adults in the child subject's context attempt to separate her from the trauma-enacting conflict; and how adult protective efforts, on the part of both adult characters within these texts and adult audiences who consume these narratives, ultimately result in the marginalization of the child subject. Thus, the subsequent arguments presented here will engage studies in childhood, the fantastic, and trauma theory, as well as relevant subfields of these broader areas of focus.²⁴ This will furthermore allow the project to establish how childhood figures alongside trauma and the fantastic.

This chapter exclusively reads films that feature a female child protagonist as the child subject in question: the character of Ofelia in Guillermo del Toro's *El laberinto del*

²³ Scholars of note who also engage the child subject as it exists in relevant fictive narrative contexts, analyzing literature and film as this chapter does, include: Bernstein, Robin. *Racial Innocence*. New York: New York University Press, 2011; Bruhm, Steven and Natasha Hurley, eds. *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2004; Duane, Anna Mae, ed. *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2013; Edelman, Lee. *No Future*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004; Kent, Kathryn R. *Making Girls Into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003; Lury, Karen. *The Child in Film*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010; Ohi, Kevin. *Innocence and Rapture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Pifer, Ellen. *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000; Schanoes, Veronica L. "Fearless Children and Fabulous Monsters: Lewis Carroll, Angela Carter, and Beastly Girls." *Marvels & Tales* 26.1 (2012): 30-44; Singley, Carol. *Adopting America: Childhood, Kinship, and National Identity in Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *The Queer Child*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009; Vallone, Lynne. *Disciplines of Virtue*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995; Wojcik, Pamela Robertson. *Fantasies of Neglect: Imagining the Urban Child in American Film and Fiction*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016.

²⁴ Subfields that are examined in the course of the chapter include: psychoanalysis as it relates to childhood mechanisms of comfort/soothing and to intersubjective spaces in a context of empathetic effort; theories of food and consumption in childhood and children's literature as they relate to fairy tales and to; film studies and theories on the gaze, plasticity, and identity in the context of on-screen narrative.

fauno,²⁵ the character of Hushpuppy in Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, and the character of Alexandria in Tarsem Singh's *The Fall*. The films discussed were all released at the turn of the twenty-first century, and they are narratives that were predominantly marketed towards adult viewing audiences.²⁶ The decision to include adult-targeted narratives in a chapter focused on children is not unrelated to adult perspectives on childhood addressed in the following pages, as well as the impact that adults, both within and outside of texts discussed, have on the children's existence in these narratives. Furthermore, the spectacular nature of traumatic representation hinges in

²⁵ I use del Toro's original title in Spanish rather than the American English translation *Pan's Labyrinth* because the latter is both inaccurate and a misreading of the film itself (furthermore, this inaccurate translation has led to critics misreading mythologies into the narrative that don't actually exist in the text itself—see Barry Spector's 2009 review of the film for an example of this). The character of the faun is not named Pan, nor is he meant to embody or allude to that mythic figure; indeed, the faun's lack of a name in the narrative marks him as Other in a way that contextualizes him as essentially part of the fantastic space of the story, even as he sometimes slips into non-fantastic spaces in the overall world of del Toro's film.

²⁶ For critical work invested in issues of children and conflict as they are represented by fictive work targeted towards child audiences, see scholarship by: Abate, Michelle Ann. *The Homicide Tradition in Children's Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013; Botelho, Maria José and Masha Kabakow Rudman. *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors*. New York: Routledge, 2009; Bradford, Clare. *The Middle Ages in Children's Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; Bradford, Clare, Kerry Mallan, John Stephens, and Robyn McCallum. *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; Capshaw Smith, Katharine. *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006; Capshaw Smith, Katharine and Anna Mae Duane, eds. *Who Writes for Black Children?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017; Coats, Karen. *Looking Glasses and Neverlands*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007; Flanagan, Victoria. *Into the Closet*. New York: Routledge, 2013; Hateley, Erica. "Sink or Swim? Revising Ophelia in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 38.4 (2013): 435-448; Hunt, Peter. *Understanding Children's Literature*. London: Routledge, 1999; Kohl, Herbert R. *Should We Burn Babar?* New York: The New Press, 1996; Mendlesohn, Farah. *The Inter-Galactic Playground*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2009; Mendlesohn, Farah. "'Now Let Us Put Away Childish Things': Games, Fantasy, and the Elided Fantasy of Childhood." *Extrapolation* 50.1 (2009): 33-44; Nikolajeva, Maria. *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers*. New York: Routledge, 2009; Paul, Lissa and Rosemary R. Johnston, eds. *Children's Literature and Culture of the First World War*. New York: Routledge, 2015; Reynolds, Kimberley. *Radical Children's Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; Rose, Jacqueline. *The Case of Peter Pan*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992; Seelinger Trites, Roberta. *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000; Seelinger Trites, Roberta. *Twenty-First Century Feminisms in Children's and Adolescent Literature*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018; Tribunella, Eric L. *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009; Windling, Terri. *The Armless Maiden and Other Tales for Childhood's Survivors*. New York: Tor Books, 1996; Zornado, Joseph. *Disney and the Dialectic of Desire*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

no small part on the mode of representation utilized. If narrative is to be conveyed, its author must decide on a particular form; the storytelling of spectacular content is no exception. Spectacle, or that which is impactful enough to demand to be beheld by a captive audience, encompasses both the extreme and performative aspects of traumatic experience. Thus, visual narrative as a performative model is one significant mode through which the spectacular can convey traumatic experience.

The three films discussed here relate in that they feature three preadolescent girl protagonists who find themselves within a power structure that already privileges adults as central and children as marginal; furthermore, large-scale conflict has risen around them that those adults, who understand themselves to be central, have decided should not concern children. These contexts of conflict nevertheless impact the lives of the children in their proximity.²⁷ In these particular narratives, the authors have created adjacent fantastic spaces which also exist at the margins of the centralized adults' purview. The girl protagonists access and interact with these fantastic spaces and their inhabitants as a means by which to confront the trauma of the conflict that adults erroneously believe they have sheltered the children from. Though the girls do not manage to undermine or rewrite the power structure in which they must exist, they ultimately are able to achieve assertions by the close of their respective narratives that demonstrate efforts towards agency; even if these are not successful recoveries of autonomy, they do allow the girls a voice from the margins that points to their subjectivity.

²⁷ For a look at other examples of the fictive child subject in contexts of conflict as she appears in contemporary films that I am not including in this project, see Debbie Olson and Andrew Scahill's 2014 anthology *Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema*.

In Guillermo del Toro's 2006 film *El laberinto del fauno*, Ofelia, an avid reader of fairytales, travels with her pregnant mother to the mountains in civil war-torn Spain during the 1940s.²⁸ Waiting for them there is Captain Vidal, Ofelia's mother's new husband and the father of the baby.²⁹ Ofelia finds a friend in Mercedes, who works in the captain's house. Soon after her arrival, Ofelia follows a fairy through the nearby woods into an underground labyrinth and discovers a faun who tells her that she is the reincarnation of a lost fairytale princess named Moanna, and that she must complete three tasks in order to reclaim her throne.³⁰ The faun's tasks are dangerous, taking place in fantastic spaces at the edges of the already terrifying war-torn mountain world; del Toro literalizes the monstrosities of war in actual monsters that Ofelia must face as she works to complete the tasks. Worse, Ofelia is orphaned when her mother dies in childbirth with

²⁸ For analyses of the historical-political climate represented by the film, much of which is rooted in the settings/aesthetics of del Toro's work, see scholarship by: Bergero, Adriana J. "The Spanish Past in Transnational Films. The 'Otherlands' of Memory." *European Review* 22.4 (2014): 632-641; Deaver, Jr., William O. "El laberinto del fauno: una alegoría para la España democrática." *Romance Notes* 49.2 (2009): 155-165; Gómez-Castellano, Irene. "Lullabies and Postmemory: Hearing the Ghosts of Spanish History in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 14.1 (2013): 1-18; Sánchez, Francisco J. "A Post-National Spanish Imaginary. A Case-Study: Pan's Labyrinth." *The Comparatist* 36 (2012): 137-146; Tsuei, Kam Hei. "The Antifascist Aesthetics of *Pan's Labyrinth*." *Socialism and Democracy* 22.2 (2008): 225-244. In particular, Sánchez's essay, along with a 2009 article by Mercedes Camino titled "Blood of an Innocent," considers how gender in the film allows for a discussion of the narrative's political environment and history of violent war.

²⁹ Janet Thormann's 2008 essay "Other Pasts: Family Romances of *Pan's Labyrinth*" engages in an expansive reading of the family as it relates to Ofelia's development throughout the film.

³⁰ For critical readings of the film as a fairytale itself, see works by: Bacchilega, Cristina and John Rieder. "Mixing It Up: Generic Complexity and Gender Ideology in Early Twenty-first Century Fairy Tale Films." *Fairy Tale Films*. Paul Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix, eds. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2010; Gavela-Ramos, Yvonne. "Monstrosity and the fairy-tale tradition in *El laberinto del fauno* and *Camino*." *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 9.1 (2012): 3-18; Hanley, Jane. "The walls fall down: Fantasy and power in *El laberinto del fauno*." *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 4.1 (2007): 35-45; Kotecki, Kristine. "Approximating the Hypertextual, Replicating the Metafictional: Textual and Sociopolitical Authority in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*." *Marvels & Tales* 24.2 (2010): 235-254; Lukasiewicz, Tracie D. "The Parallelism of the Fantastic and the Real: Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth/El laberinto del fauno* and Neomagical Realism." *Fairy Tale Films*. Paul Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix, eds. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2010; Lury, Karen. *The Child in Film*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010; Miller, T. S. "The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths: Escaping Escapism in Henson's *Labyrinth* and Del Toro's *Laberinto*." *Extrapolation* 52.1 (2011): 26-50; Orme, Jennifer. "Narrative Desire and Disobedience in Pan's Labyrinth." *Marvels & Tales* 24.2 (2010): 219-234.

her younger brother, and Captain Vidal is revealed to be a veritable monster who tortures and murders with apathy. Ofelia attempts to rescue herself and her brother from both Vidal and the faun's final test, and for her efforts, the former brutally murders her. Mercedes, who has acted as a spy for the guerillas, takes the infant boy as her own out of love for Ofelia, and the guerillas kill Vidal. Although the conclusion of the film offers a fairytale vision allowing viewers the option of thinking of Ofelia as not dead but Moanna restored to her father's underworld kingdom, the dark tones of the spaces portrayed throughout del Toro's film are difficult to forget, even in the shining splendor of a fairytale throne room. Indeed, Ofelia and del Toro's parallel fixations on fairytales that are evident throughout the film posit a grim conclusion to a tale about the starkness and permanence of extreme violence and tragedy.

Tarsem Singh's *The Fall*,³¹ also released in 2006, brings viewers to the turn of the twentieth century in California, where an imaginative girl named Alexandria recovers from a fall in a hospital, surrounded by adults whose daily lives are at first her sole form of entertainment. Just as Ofelia befriends Mercedes in del Toro's film, Alexandria has a chance meeting with stuntman Roy, who is recovering from a fall of his own while struggling with suicidal ideation. Roy begins to tell Alexandria an elaborate story, and the story-world becomes a fantastic space into which Alexandria locates all of the familiar faces from around the hospital, including herself and Roy, who are the heroes. Unlike del Toro's film, which makes extensive use of computer-generated imagery in order to

³¹ Singh's film was not a box office success upon its release, and the film has remained somewhat obscure, with few scholars and film critics offering readings of it and not much of a cult following to speak of. However, the film has gained some recent attention over a decade after its release, and its obscurity contributes to the positive retrospective it benefits from now: in a 2018 article for *Tor.com*, Molly Templeton writes with reverence of Singh's decision to finance the film himself when he couldn't get backing elsewhere, and Singh's oeuvre more generally is beginning to get the attention that his earlier films missed.

portray fantastic spaces, the vibrant colors and stunning sites of Singh's film are the result of his decision to film on-location in over twenty countries.^{32 33} Akin to this effort towards a kind of visual authenticity is Singh's decision to bring onboard Catinca Untaru to portray Alexandria: young enough to lose her two front teeth right before filming began, the actress had to be taught that co-star Lee Pace's name was actually Roy, and the character's imperfect English was a result of Untaru's own status as a young English language learner.³⁴ Singh's film has a dual preoccupation with storytelling and authenticity, which gestures to the veracity of the story-world in *The Fall* and the impact of the fantastic on the overall world of the film.

Six years after del Toro and Singh's films were released, Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* entered theaters, launching the career of actress Quvenzhané Wallis, whose role in the film led her to achieve the distinction of being the youngest Academy Award Best Actress nominee in the award's history.³⁵ Wallis portrays Hushpuppy, who

³² For a detailed discussion of how Singh avoided CGI and used on-location settings for his fantastic landscapes, see Dave Kehr's 2008 article in *The New York Times* "Special Effects From the Real World."

³³ In a 2012 article titled "Media Heterotopia and Transnational Filmmaking: Mapping Real and Virtual Worlds," Hye Jean Chung considers how Singh's on-location filming serves to turn a disparate real world into a cohesive, intimate filmic space: "What makes *The Fall* significant to discuss as a media heterotopia is the way locally and globally scattered production sites are edited to accentuate their seamless integration, thus creating the illusion that they are adjacent or in the same space, even as they are used to create an overall effect of transnational mobility" (95).

³⁴ Singh seems to make efforts towards not just authenticity, but also towards a kind of fairness to Untaru by creating a world on set that was as much on her terms and level of comprehension as possible. This effort resulted in Pace and Singh deceiving the entire cast and crew into initially believing Pace to be paralyzed, as his character Roy is. When Pace was revealed to be able to walk, those workers on set registered the same surprise as Untaru.

These efforts fall in the context of an uncomfortable reality of including children as actors in the making of films: there is always the risk (or some scholars will insist, the fact) of exploitation. For extensive considerations of this issue, see the final chapter of Karen Lury's *The Child in Film*.

³⁵ As with the casting of Untaru in Singh's film, Zeitlin's casting of Wallis results in the inclusion of an unusually young child with a major role in a contemporary film. In her 2018 book *Where No Black Woman Has Gone Before*, Diana Adesola Mafe underscores the rarity of a character like Hushpuppy being included in a major motion picture: "black girls (like their adult counterparts) are rarely the center of a cinematic narrative, rarely featured on a film poster, and rarely visible in the imaginary worlds that speculative fiction brings to life...The fact that Hushpuppy is a very young child is especially unusual" (94).

lives with her father Wink in a Louisiana bayou community called The Bathtub. As with Singh's film, scenes of The Bathtub often make use of dramatic sets and lighting and sound elements rather than relying completely on CGI in order to provide a fantastic aspect to the film. Zeitlin's use of Hushpuppy's narration also adds the same fairytale/storytelling quality that both del Toro's and Singh's movies include.

Hushpuppy's father suffers from illness and alcoholism, and she has to fend for herself during periods of his absence. She learns about prehistoric beasts called the aurochs and the glacial thaw resulting from global warming from her teacher Miss Bathsheba, who warns Hushpuppy and the other children of The Bathtub that when the ice melts completely, the aurochs will be released. Zeitlin's film fixates on the threat of climate change and the wake of natural disaster: in the middle of the film, a devastating storm results in the mass death of wildlife in The Bathtub and threatens the community's way of life.³⁶ Neighbors gather together, including Wink, to destroy a nearby levee in an effort to restore their home, resulting in government intervention. Hushpuppy and three of the other little girls in her community venture out into their world and encounter the aurochs,

³⁶ Critics particularly focused on the film's thematic focus on climate, ecology, and threats to the twenty-first century environment include: Barnsley, Veronica. "The postcolonial child in Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 51.2 (2016): 240-255; Brox, Ali. "The Monster of Representation: Climate Change and Magical Realism in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*." *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 49.1 (2016): 139-155; Cecire, Natalia. "Environmental Innocence and Slow Violence." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 43.1 (2015): 164-180; Hartnell, Anna. "Writing the Liquid City: Excavating Urban Ecologies after Katrina." *Textual Practice* 31.5 (2017): 933-949; Lloyd, Christopher. "Creaturely, Throwaway Life after Katrina: *Salvage the Bones* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild*." *South* 48.2 (2016): 246-264; Spoth, Daniel. "Slow Violence and the (Post)Southern Disaster Narrative in Hurston, Faulkner, and *Beasts of the Southern Wild*." *Mississippi Quarterly* (2015); Yaeger, Patricia. "*Beasts of the Southern Wild* and Dirty Ecology." *Southern Spaces: A Journal About Real and Imagined Spaces and Places of the US South and Their Global Connections*, 13 February 2013.

and Wink on his deathbed sees his daughter return victorious from her fantastic confrontation with the beasts.³⁷

Perhaps the most obvious contrast among all films is the primary settings in which they occur: Los Angeles in the 1920s, the Spanish countryside in the 1940s, and an early twenty-first century American bayou. But each film notably utilizes a secondary location, one to which only the girl protagonist has full access. Those secondary locations are adjacent to, but distinct from, the primary settings of the three films, and they are locations that can be categorized as *fantastic*. For the purposes of this chapter, the fantastic is understood as a space that functions at the margins of the dominant real-world space of the text, with the inhabitants of, portals into, and impacts of that marginal space also falling under its category of fantastic. More specifically, the fantastic spaces presented by these filmmakers are constructed by two significant commonalities among the films: the marginalization of the girls who can access those spaces, and a form of imaginative storytelling that incorporates the girls into the structure of the story. Thus, we see narrative fantastic space merge with narrative fantastic experience in what becomes a metatextual project for all three filmmakers. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the adult-dominated real-world settings that exist centrally against the marginal fantastic spaces are all home to some form of conflict that is focused on and controlled by the adults in the films. The girls, though obviously affected by these conflicts, are denied access to them by the adults in question; as a result of their being children, they are deemed irrelevant to the struggle at hand, no matter its impact on them. How adults view

³⁷ Tavia Nyong'o reads the significance of a mythic arctic beast as it stands in a narrative that portrays disastrous climate change in a strikingly provocative essay titled "Little Monsters: Race, Sovereignty, and Queer Inhumanism in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*."

the children around them thus decides what children are permitted to engage, and where they are located in an adult-dominated setting.

The adult gaze in these films is therefore a palpable presence as it is fixed on these girl protagonists, both in terms of those adults under whose authority they exist within their respective narratives and those adult viewers who are watching the films. There is a plural development of this gaze, layered as it is engaged by fictive textual adults, actual extra-textual viewing adults, and the adult filmmaker whose perspective constructs the text itself. And the context for these children is significantly one that involves conflict, because that is at the core of their marginalization: in an effort to keep them from what is perceived to be an adult matter, the dismissal of these girls is the result of a gaze that recognizes them as at once irrelevant and in need of protection from that which does not concern them. Considering how adults view child victims represented visually in photographs, Marianne Hirsch posits that

the visual encounter and identification with the child victim occurs in a triangular field of looking. The adult viewer sees the child victim through the eyes of his or her own child self... The adult viewer who is also an artist shares the child viewing position with her own viewer, who also enters the image in the position of child witness... The adult also encounters the child (the other child and his or her own child self) both as a child, through identification, and from the protective vantage point of the adult looking subject. Identificatory looking and protective looking coexist in uneasy balance. (Hirsch 165-66)

Here, Hirsch unpacks that plural aspect of a projective gaze that is at once protective and identifying.³⁸ This plurality produces a temporal play that allows the viewer to inhabit their own adult and child selves simultaneously. Beyond that temporal distortion Hirsch discusses where the adult gaze that collapses the adult self into its own childhood, I posit

³⁸ Isabel Alvarez-Sancho applies Hirsch's theories of postmemory to del Toro's film in her 2016 essay "*Pa negre y los otros fantasmas de la postmemoria: El 'phantom' y los intertextos con La plaça del Diamant, El espíritu de la colemna y El laberinto del fauno.*"

that the gaze marginalizes the child subject in another, more subtle manner: as the protective impulse formed by the perspective of the textual adults in these narratives puts the girls at the margins alongside the fantastic, so does the projective aspect of identifying with that child undermine her subjectivity.

The adult gaze as identificatory is therefore to be understood as more sympathetic to that adult viewer from which it extends than it is empathetic towards the child that it focalizes. This is because, in an effort to identify and relate to the child, the adult viewer moves away from understanding the child subject as an individual and instead projects past memories where that subjectivity needed to be observed. Whether the adult posits their own childhood past or a protective adult present upon viewing the child subject, the act is still projective. It thus scripts a different representation onto the child than that which the child experiences herself. The child that is seen by the adult is inevitably made invisible, or at least, she is obscured, as the adult gaze impinges on her experience with its own referent past and present experiences. Such projection results in the scripting onto and obscuring of the fictive child subject by the adult audience viewer, an obscuring that mirrors the marginalization which is enacted by those fictive adults within the narrative who have deemed the world of conflict in which the child is caught to be beyond that child's reach.

Given this layered projection of the adult gaze, what becomes of the child protagonist herself, the subject who exists under the scriptive erasure of that gaze? As can be concluded by their common experience of marginalization, the fantastic and children have in common their designation as two aspects of a narrative that are less significant or complete than the adult-dominated center that perceives them as such. As a result of this

shared dismissive marginalization, the two come together organically, with the child gaining access to a fantastic space that, aptly, sits adjacent to—or at the margins of—the adult-centered conflict/world.

For Hushpuppy, Alexandria, and Ofelia, these liminal spaces fit into the frame of a story. Hushpuppy narrates throughout *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, telling us repeatedly that “once there was a Hushpuppy and she lived with her daddy in the Bathtub.”³⁹ *The Fall* opens with a still frame that reads in large letters “Los Angeles” and then beneath it, in smaller font, “Once Upon a Time,” preparing viewers for the storyworld that will be tucked inside the narrative of Roy telling Alexandria a story. Ofelia’s familiarity with fairytales proves critical once the fairies from the pages of her books appear before her in life, and equally so when the faun’s instructions to her appear on what had been blank pages of a book. The inclusion of storytelling and stories within these fictional narratives allow the filmmakers to enact another adult move of projection; this one, however, allows for a playful metatextual slippage in which the stories within the texts are reframed by the fictive children of the films themselves, even as we viewers are aware of the adult men that have created the girls’ characters in the first place. And as our storyteller filmmakers are responsible for the inclusion of the imaginative fantastic elements in these texts, the girls’ access to fantastic adjacent spaces comes as a result of not only their marginalization, but also of their participation in the act of creating narrative.⁴⁰ Through

³⁹ Diana Adesola Mafe reads Hushpuppy’s narration as a pushback against the kind of exploitative ethnographic stereotyping that scholar bell hooks believes the film to be guilty of: “Hushpuppy effectively interrupts the ethnographic spectacle, rendering it a pseudo- or faux-ethnography, by functioning interchangeably as voice-over narrator, active screen subject, and returner of the gaze...*Beasts of the Southern Wild* inverts that [ethnographic] model by hinging entirely on Hushpuppy’s voice and individuality” (96).

⁴⁰ E. Charlotte Stevens writes a thoughtful consideration of how both verbal and visual communication critically impact storytelling in Tarsem Singh’s film, which she reads as the central narrative aim of the text in her 2016 article “Telling the (Wrong) Story: The Disintegration of Transcultural Communication and

this imaginative act, these girls are able to enter fantastic domains over which they have definitive (though limited) control. And these fantastic locations are not at all to be understood as escapist destinations that will spirit the girls away from their adult-controlled worlds of conflict: they are spaces to which the girls have temporary and/or fleeting access, a transient encounter of girl and fantastic world. The relationship the girl is proven to have with her environment is thus reciprocal: if she can contribute to the fantastic world by inhabiting and thus becoming a part of it—even transitorily so—then she herself becomes changeable, a mutable site of fantastic adjustment, and a creator of narrative that reflects the fantastic as she has known it.⁴¹

That these sites are accessed as a result of a shared marginalization between the child protagonist and the textual fantastic elements of each film gestures to how an experience of exclusion from and abandonment by an adult-dominated center functions as a significant catalyst for the fantastic encounters the girls experience. But the experience of abandonment is not unique to the protective dismissal of the girls by the adults who are preoccupied with each text's central conflict. All three child protagonists also share the experience of some form of separation from one or both of their parents. Hushpuppy is raised by her father, who has his own house separate from hers, and she only has vague memories of her mother, some of which are imagined from Wink's stories. Ofelia's

Narrative in *The Fall*." In a similar vein, Jennifer Orme looks to how storytelling functions as crucial to survival in *El laberinto del fauno* in her 2010 article "Narrative Desire and Disobedience in *Pan's Labyrinth*." Two critics who read *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, Patricia Yaeger and Kette Thomas, consider how that film's mode of storytelling both upholds and undermines (pre)existing myths that it engages. See their respective works: Yaeger, Patricia. "Beasts of the Southern Wild and Dirty Ecology." *Southern Spaces: A Journal About Real and Imagined Spaces and Places of the US South and Their Global Connections*, 13 February 2013; Thomas, Kette. "With an Eye on a Set of New Eyes: Beasts of the Southern Wild." *Journal of Religion & Film* 17.2 (2013).

⁴¹ Heather Warren-Crow's 2014 book *Girlhood and the Plastic Image* speaks to this malleability of girls—which she refers to as "plasticity"—as they are specifically represented in contemporary cinematic media, recognizing them as "full of endless morphological potential" (2).

father is absent and her mother has remarried, but it is clear the sadistic captain has no interest in acting as Ofelia's caregiver; instead, he contributes to the growing rift between Ofelia and her mother. And Alexandria is separated from her mother due to her stay in the hospital, during which we discover that her father was murdered when thieves burned her family's home. Furthermore, there is the threat of loss that occurs within the films' plots: Hushpuppy loses Wink to his illness at the end of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, and Ofelia's mother dies during childbirth in the middle of *El laberinto del fauno*. The parental abandonment these girls experience, as well as their awareness of the potential for future loss, points to the fallacy in the adult logic of dismissing them from present conflicts; indeed, they have all survived the loss of a parent already, suggesting that they would have had to have established coping mechanisms in place by the time each of the narratives begins.

Those coping mechanisms often manifest as the child protagonists seek out comfort in the forms of affection and food. The adults that they turn to are flawed surrogate parent figures, who offer limited caregiving to the girls. In *El laberinto del fauno*, Mercedes acts as this surrogate when Ofelia's mother becomes too sick with her pregnancy to pay attention to her daughter.⁴² In *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, Hushpuppy finds surrogates for her absent mother in Miss Bathsheba, her schoolteacher, and later in a cook at a floating bar-restaurant. And in *The Fall*, Roy acts as a surrogate for Alexandria's dead father. These surrogates often deliberately draw the girls' attention to their imperfections as caregivers, underscoring that the girls are always ultimately going to have to learn how

⁴² Critic Mercedes Camino also reads the character of Mercedes as the unsung heroine of del Toro's film in her 2009 essay "Blood of an innocent: Montxo Armendáriz's *Silencio Roto* and Guillermo del Toro's *El laberinto del fauno*."

to fend for themselves. The girls turn to these surrogates for affection in the form of storytelling and also the offer of food, which gestures to the relationship between adult-child interaction, hunger, and agency. Childhood studies scholar Susan Honeyman writes, “Like Pinocchio, children who necessarily depend upon adults for allaying their own hunger are also vulnerable to what, even in the most benevolent cases, can be considered ideological control” (5). This control may also be exercised through the distribution and/or withholding of forms of comfort such as acts of affection and demonstrative care, in much the same way that food is given as a treat or withheld as a punishment. Similar to Melanie Klein’s demonstration of the young child’s recognition of the breast as both a positive and a negative object, both food and comfort serve as a reminder that the child’s agency is at once a possibility and also a fallacy.⁴³ Ultimately, it is the adult’s power that is reaffirmed, regardless of whether the experience benefits or robs the child. The meting out of food and/or comfort is a glaring reminder that the potential autonomy of a child is inevitably impeded by the adults who dominate the world in which she must exist, even with her temporary journeys into the fantastic adjacent spaces that offer brief respite.

That checking of the girls’ autonomy is a central theme and a consequence of her marginalized status in the three films. The central conflict of the story, the scriptive adult gaze, the dismissal of adult authorities: all of these combine to separate child protagonist and individual agency. As she is displaced and pushed to the margins, the girl protagonist does not retain the right to where and how she will exist; that, the three filmmakers seem

⁴³ In J. M. Barrie’s children’s classic *Peter Pan*, Tinkerbell and her fairy companions reflect an earlier stage of child development in which the mother’s breast is either a totally positive or a totally negative object, but never both: “Tink was not all bad: or rather, she was all bad just now, but, on the other hand, sometimes she was all good. Fairies have to be one thing or the other, because being so small they unfortunately have room for one feeling only at a time” (Barrie).

to suggest, is the nature of childhood. If agency cannot ever be fully realized by these girls, however, the films also seem to suggest that they can at least attain moments of powerful self-assertion. Such climactic points in the films are tied to the presence of great monsters with which the girls eventually come to some sort of impasse, a challenge through which our small heroines must prove that they are on the same level with fantastic beasts. That the confrontation that offers the girl protagonist a moment of self-assertion is one in which she finds herself up against something fantastic in nature demonstrates how the shared marginalization of the two can yield radical results not anticipated by the adults who dominate the central space of the narratives.

These climactic confrontations notably occur in the purview of the adult gaze, which recognizes the self-assertive pushback of the children against their lack of autonomy. They also serve to reveal an obfuscation of that adult gaze's projective impact: if the adult cannot fully see the child present because she has been pushed to the margins and/or overwritten, then that adult also cannot glean the contraposed monster nor understand its implications for the potential of the fantastically-located little girl. And so, in her encounter with the monster, the child fleetingly takes back her subjective individuality by forcing on the adults in question an enigma of access: since they cannot see her as the individual that she understands herself to be, they also cannot see the fantastic realm at the edges of their own conflict-driven world. This might be of little consequence to the adults, provided the fantastic had no bearing on their lives and world. In all three films, however, the fantastic readily and devastatingly impacts the adults in their exclusive central space, acting pervasively and undeniably on them from the margins. The adults, then have no option but to turn to those same children they had

dismissed, seeking access to and comprehension of those fantastic forces with which they must reckon.

Accessing the Fantastic

If we understand the fantastic in these films as the marginal space that exists adjacent to the real-world central space of the narrative, as well as those inhabitants, elements, occurrences, influences, and portals which belong to that marginal space, it helps to think through how the construction of the fantastic influences the means by which the girl protagonists of the texts will ultimately access it. In her *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn creates a taxonomy of four types of fantasy literature: portal-quest fantasy, intrusion fantasy, liminal fantasy, and immersive fantasy. Her taxonomy is particularly useful in its focus on where the fantastic in fantasy texts exists; as this project reads the fantastic marginal spaces in the three films, an application of Mendlesohn's categories allows for further consideration of the significance of location in the context of fantastic access. Mendlesohn writes of her four fantasy types: "In the portal-quest we are invited through into the fantastic; in the intrusion fantasy, the fantastic enters the fictional world; in the liminal fantasy, the magic hovers in the corner of our eye; while in the immersive fantasy we are allowed no escape" (xiv). She also indicates that liminal fantasy is rather rare among the four categories. However, liminal fantasy proves dominant in the case of Singh, Zeitlin, and del Toro's films. That "hover[ing] in the corner of our eye" highlights the close proximity adjacent fantastic spaces have to the girls that access them, even as they are mostly undetectable to supervising adult authorities. That the fantastic is peripheral in these three narratives demonstrates how marginalization is locatable as both

a space and a condition; when the girls slip in and out of fantastic space in these narratives, it is because the filmmakers have placed them at the edges of both the adult-dominated narrative contexts (i.e. the central, real-world conflicts of the films) and at the edges of the actual spaces in which they live. Ofelia visits the forests around Vidal's house, wild and undomesticated spaces full of fantastic potential; Alexandria moves through halls and back rooms of the hospital without anyone paying much notice to the small girl roaming about; Hushpuppy examines the small and overlooked aspects of her world, playing in the earth and listening to the heartbeats of the animals that at times only she seems to mind. These ignored and overlooked peripheral spaces perpetually lead to the fantastic in the three films.

A distinguishing attribute of liminal fantasy as Mendlesohn has defined it is the general lack of shock that characters display in response to the appearance of fantastic elements or occurrences in the text. Although the films are otherwise fictive narratives based in non-fantastic real worlds in which fantastic occurrence does not necessarily belong, the apparition of the fantastic draws no articulation or response of surprise at what should be unexpected from the films' protagonists; a more salient reading of this reaction (or lack of reaction) on the part of the protagonists is that, rather than bizarrely exhibiting no responses of disbelief, the girls feel no need to suspend disbelief in the first place. *El laberinto del fauno* and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* fall clearly into this category of liminal fantasy narratives where little girls encounter creatures from fantastic worlds and never question how their encounters are possible.⁴⁴ *The Fall* is something of

⁴⁴ Del Toro's film is tricky because it acts as intrusion fantasy and, at the end, desires/offers the arguably false promise to become portal fantasy. This occurs when the faun points Ofelia to the entrance to her kingdom, just before she is murdered, and then we see a vision of Ofelia in that kingdom, though whether she has magically escaped death and left her body behind, wandered into a version of a paradisiacal

an outlier in the category because the fantastic and the quotidian are more neatly separated from one another, most obviously because the fantastic elements are self-contained within the story that Roy is telling Alexandria. Nevertheless, the effects of the story-world on Alexandria in the everyday world of the hospital are extreme in a way that gestures to the fantastic: the matter-of-fact way in which Alexandria imagines the ordinary world of the hospital *into* the story-world mirrors the blurred separations we see Hushpuppy and Ofelia experience in their narratives, with all three girls reading these fantastic-ordinary encounters as a matter of course and nothing to disbelieve.⁴⁵ This lack of a need to suspend one's disbelief is recognizable in a category of text that is gestured to by the films, though the films themselves do not fall within that genre: children's fiction. From the (non)reactions of the girls in these films, we can understand that the absurdity and bedlam an adult might read into the apparition of the fantastic is almost mundanely legible if the individual reading that apparition still belongs to childhood. For an adult, the fantastic is an outlier, an extreme, an impossibility; for a child, it simply makes sense.

These are not narratives created for children, though; they are narratives about children and the fantastic, and as such, the experience of shock, though not adhering to

afterlife, or has simply become the stuff of a bittersweet fairy tale whose teller did not want his audience left inconsolable is left ambiguous. The film hints at being portal-fantasy earlier, as well—its very fond of doorways into overwhelmingly fantastic spaces—but it never quite commits to the category. I would argue that Ofelia's extremely strong narrative perspective—the lens through which viewers see most of the film—prohibits the text from falling into the category of intrusion fantasy and sets it solidly as liminal. Ofelia is not simply unsurprised by the fairy's initial visit to her; she is expectant, a quality which we see often attributed to children and their ideas about the fantastic and magic in their worlds. They don't wonder at the magic that appears, but rather wonder instead what has taken it so long to show up.

⁴⁵ It's important to note that I am not reading *The Fall* as portal fantasy, though Mendlesohn articulates *The Wizard of Oz* as such (28), a text which might on the surface seem aptly comparable with Singh's film. However, Dorothy, in both the book and the film versions of her narrative, is considerably older than Alexandria; in fact, Alexandria is the youngest child discussed in the entirety of this dissertation. This is significant because it means that Alexandria's experiences of both the real world and the story-world exist in a fluidity that is dependent on conceptions rooted in her young age.

the fantastic elements of the text, does exist for the protagonists as child characters in adult-targeted texts about serious conflict. Each protagonist experiences a learning curve of sorts, a micro-level *bildung* that has to do with her management of the fantastic encounters when she begins to have them. These factors are not mutually exclusive; the protagonist's agency is on the line in her interactions with the adult-controlled world that views her as irrelevant, or at least not relevant enough to be impactful. That world is the location of the conflict that shocks her: the storm, the violence of the militia, the drive of a friend to self-destruct, all shaking Hushpuppy, Ofelia, and Alexandria and all seemingly conflicts that extend beyond their purview. What these inclusions of climate change, war, and suicide offer the narratives are extreme, real-world adult thematic elements that parallel the fantastic spectacles in the films. They allow the filmmakers to bridge narratives about childhood with thematically adult content in organic ways that lead to fantastic inclusion that is organic to the texts.

But it is deeply significant that the fantastic is not out of reach for the girl protagonist. Though the fantastic has in recent narrative history been dismissed by adult readerships as "the stuff of children" and, as such, children (both in and out of texts) and the fantastic experience a recognizably similar marginalization, the fantastic nevertheless is not easily navigated by these girls. Access in and of itself does not necessitate comprehensive, immediate knowledge; rather, the fantastic in its marginality recognizes a kindred spirit in the little girl that it encounters. And then comes the process of getting to know one another. The idea of children as innately intuitive in their interactions with the fantastic or that they are somehow organically aligned with magical creatures simply by fault of their being children is effectively debunked in these films. These girls must experiment, fail,

and learn how to work through fantastic encounters— they are hardly naturals and decidedly human in their trial and error, something that children in narrative, as in life, are not necessarily characterized or recognized as. Their access comes as a result of their being children, but not because children are magical beings; it is rather the convergence of the marginalized that posits the child protagonist as a navigator and eventual utilizer of the fantastic, and the child's willingness to encounter the fantastic, that grants her some semblance of agency, some declaration of her own needs and will.

When and how do these girls begin to encounter the fantastic, and what are the terms of their access? Initial encounters in the films seem to hinge on loneliness; that is, all three girl protagonists are actively shooed away by the adults who have an important conflict to deal with and no time for children. At the same time, the girls are in a prolonged state of separation from adults and interactions that they long to be a part of. It is not the comfortable (or comforted) and content child who encounters the fantastic; it is the child who has already been told that she is less important to her caretakers than the events that eclipse her. The agency of the child that the fantastic space appears to offer is not only wrapped up in her desire for a way to express her wants and needs as separate from adult prescriptive supervision. The reclamation of her subjectivity, of a space in which she is herself relevant to the concerns of her surroundings, becomes a possibility stemming from her isolation and abandonment, as they are what push her towards the fantastic margins of the narrative.

The marginal, then, becomes a meeting place for the rejected, a fantastic site where textual elements including characters encounter one another in the context of their expulsion from the center, which is preoccupied with its own trauma-inducing conflicts.

The more individual trauma that the child in question experiences through the act of being so dismissed accompanies her as she moves into fantastic space. As such, questions of intersubjectivity inevitably arise. If there is a communal experience at the psychological level whereby the psychologies of all parties involved are at risk due to some great traumatizing conflict, for the adults in the narratives to dismiss the children from sharing in this risk effectively denies them intersubjective experience. However, the fantastic elements in the narratives manifest in such a way that they mirror the conflicts to which the girls are denied access.⁴⁶ Thus, the fantastic serves to reassert the children's involvement in and right to that communal experience by acting as a vehicle that grants them parallel access. Jessica Benjamin posits that the "meaning of the third derives, after all, from the geometric metaphor wherein the third point creates a space rather than a line" (123). In other words, by complicating through parallelism the relationship between not only the child protagonist and the adult-dominated conflict at the center of the texts, but also between the child and the adult authority itself, the fantastic space encapsulates the intersubjective potentiality that is critical in allowing the child protagonist to have an acknowledgeable self in her conflicted context. This expansion to a three-dimensional psychological space of experience underscores the possibility for agency that the fantastic epitomizes. It does not provide autonomy for the girl characters in question. Rather, it takes the flat, non-communal relationship that the adult authority has futilely attempted to assert through dismissive marginalization and allows the child protagonist in her

⁴⁶ Scholars sometimes read this mirroring as metaphor; for example, in his 2016 article, William O. Deaver, Jr. reads the entirety of del Toro's film as an allegory for Spanish democracy. However, reading the parallels within the fantastic spaces of these films as metaphor would cast the fantastic as not tangible or impactful in the ways that the central real world of the texts is portrayed. This is at odds with all of the filmmakers' projects; if the fantastic were mere metaphor, then the space in which the girls encounter it would not function as they do to provide tangible moments of self-assertion. The fantastic is given by Zeitlin, del Toro, and Singh much more credence and gravity in the films than metaphor would merit.

marginalized state a clear relationship with the traumatic experiences that are relevant to her life and the lives of those around her.⁴⁷

This shift in the position of the girl in the context of a larger narrative world also demonstrates how she stands to potentially reshape conventions of adult encounters with the fantastic. Arguably the most breath-taking moment of Zeitlin's film occurs when Hushpuppy and her three girl companions emerge from the sea to face down the mammoth aurochs. We first see glimpses of these arctic beasts at the beginning of the film, as Hushpuppy imagines them, sitting in the Bathtub schoolhouse, listening to her teacher Miss Bathsheba talk about the thawing of the polar ice caps and the subsequent freeing of the frozen, ancient aurochs. But the apparition of these beasts coming free of their icy bonds as we see it play through Hushpuppy's mind is very different from the sight of four girls standing down the same bestial phenomenon towards the film's conclusion. Context tells us that the girls have come upon these fantastic beasts in the flesh and not in the mind. Their minds, rather than focusing on how to conjure such an epic monstrosity, are instead fixated on the material realization of a mythic equal, a monster in which Hushpuppy recognizes her own potential for strength and survival. Here is the familiar trope of the young adventurer who sets out to prove his self-worth by facing down a Jabberwock-like monster. But unlike her legendary predecessors in the mythic archive of fantastic epics, Hushpuppy does not slay the auroch but instead participates in a mutual act of looking, a visual duel of powerful gazes that recognize the stalwart nature of their respective opponents. This kind of dueling reflects a deeper

⁴⁷ This chapter's concluding engagements with the possibility of limited adult access to the fantastic further relate to Benjamin's characterization of the third as "the place where self-regulation and mutual regulation meet enabling differentiation with empathy, rather than projective confusion" (128).

wisdom than that offered by adult heroes with blades drawn, thirsting for blood. If Hushpuppy were to slay the beasts, their power would no longer mirror her own. It is enough to bravely face down this monster, which will continue to exist as a symbol of her own potentialities. Instead, she applies her childhood lens to a mythological tradition and revises her own narrative so that it will suit child, rather than adult, conventions. This narrative alteration demonstrates a notable moment of self-assertive behavior for a girl protagonist that is possible because of fantastic confrontation.

The films make it clear that the fantastic is tangible in such a way that it is not imagined, though it is not a part of the adult-dominated real world of the narratives. However, moments in which the marginal fantastic seeps into that real-world center, when slippage between the real and the fantastic occurs, are not random or permitted to occur without limitation. While the aurochs are not restricted to Hushpuppy's imagination, their apparition can only occur under certain terms; they are not free to roam about the known world, independent of her influence. Scholar Patricia Yaeger reads the rules of the fantastic in the film as directly related to its work with mythology. She writes of Hushpuppy:

Nurtured, imperiled, the child creates a wild set of gods: demiurges, mother figures, aurochs, and sirens to inhabit a world dangerous and ecstatic. She forces us to ask: what myths do we need to live in an era of global warming where every coastal community may soon look like the Bathtub?...her measured voice endows the film with a new mythos that addresses a world we have broken: a human cosmos that may be dirtied beyond repair. (1-2)

Yaeger's assertion that the mythologies presented by the film originate with and are propagated by Hushpuppy comes with a recognition of the relationship between those mythologies and the fast-moving, adult-polluted world in which the child and her aurochs are swept up. The aurochs come free in the arctic as a result of the melting of the polar

ice caps. The fantastic world, then, is impacted heavily by vicissitude in the adult-centered real world. However, it is the child that these beasts seek out and the child, as Yaeger notes, who narrates the world of the film. Adults may have broken the world, but a girl is directly responsible for the necessary myths that have come forth in the wake of that breaking.

Thus, if the needed mythology emerges as a result of the child's assertion of herself within these narratives, then fantastic access in the adult-dominated world—those moments of slippage when the fantastic margins come forth into real-world space—can logically be tied to the presence of that child. In other words, if the girls encounter the fantastic at the margins of their narrative worlds, then it is reasonable to think that the fantastic might move into the center when the girls happen to be located there, moving forward to meet them. This apparent link between the presence of the child and appearances of the fantastic is evident in del Toro's film. When both the fairy and the faun come to Ofelia, it is clear that she is the only one who can see them, even as their instructions to her seem to shape the events of the adult-centered real world around Ofelia. One scene in which the impact that the fantastic has on the real world as Ofelia is present there occurs when the mandrake root in the bowl of milk under Ofelia's mother's bed is destroyed. The mandrake was a gift from the faun to Ofelia to help ease her mother's difficult pregnancy; indeed, as Ofelia fed the mandrake drops of her own blood, it seemed that her mother's condition steadily improved. When Captain Vidal finds Ofelia under the bed, tending to the root after he'd attempted to keep her out of her mother's room, he is enraged and throws the mandrake root into the fire. Though it is clear through del Toro's use of camera focalization that only Ofelia can hear the

mandrake screaming as it burns up, her mother immediately relapses and goes into a labor that ultimately proves fatal. Then, at the film's conclusion, when Vidal is chasing Ofelia to the labyrinth, he finds her in the midst of an argument with the faun, who is standing where the captain sees nothing but empty space. Ofelia sees both real and fantastic, and viewers understand this because they are given access to her focalization; they also understand that adults within the narrative are not able to glean all that the child sees, with their inability to see the fantastic also represented on the screen.

The limited presence of fantastic entities in the films are thus demonstrative of the cruciality of the child who joins the fantastic to the real. Here, the child's desire to encounter the fantastic is significant. Just as Ofelia meets with the faun frequently because she wants to see him, she also runs from a child-devouring monster that she unintentionally wakes from his slumber over a forbidden feast, shutting him out of the real world when she escapes from the fantastic realm. Although it is clear that she never has complete control over the fantastic—she surely had no desire to wake a sleeping monster that would devour her fairy companions—she is still given some ability to mitigate the reach of the fantastic in the adult-dominated real world, likely because they are both considered insignificant by that real world. This relationship is delicate; were she to attempt to control the fantastic, the girl would be reproducing the same kind of agency-cancelling relationship that the adult authority enacts upon her, and ineffectually so. The contact between girl and fantastic is much more productive than it is restrictive or limiting; its priority is possibility through access, rather than control via inhibition.

Alexandria's access to her fantastic story-world comes in part from her ability to coax and to bribe (or by means of her own acquiescence to being bribed by) Roy into telling

the story. This would suggest that narrative is also a metatextual means of access to the fantastic in these films, with the prominence of fantastic tales sometimes acting as portals to the fantastic in the filmmaker's tales. However, the fantastic story-world the audience sees in *The Fall* is one located in Alexandria's imagination, with Roy's voice narrating the action that occurs there. This is made obvious early in the film, when Roy is describing the story's full cast of characters, and he comes to the Indian whose wife is "the most beautiful squaw" in the world. Alexandria, a Romanian immigrant child evidently unfamiliar with terminology used to describe Native Americans by residents of the United States, pictures a beautiful woman wearing a vibrant sari and her lover, both clearly meant to be from the country of India; the playful contrast between language and the visual continues with the word "wigwam" and sets featuring Indian architecture. This apparent misunderstanding between the child and her surrogate adult caregiver in the film is actually a subtle marker that the visuals in the fantastic story-world are a result of Alexandria's focalization; even as Roy's narrative guides her through that world, the appearance of it does not come from him. As critic E. Charlotte Stevens writes,

The transformation which occurs between verbal discourse and visual representation allows the filmmakers to play with the idea of intended and understood meanings...*The Fall* foregrounds the imprecision of language as a form of communication and the possible slippage inherent in sign-systems, which are dependent on cultural background and context, and therefore lead to the problems which occur when attempting to communicate across cultures. (31)

When Stevens discusses "culture," we can assume she means national/ethnic difference that contributes to the kinds of misunderstandings occurring between Roy and Alexandria such as the above example. However, Roy and Alexandria also belong to different cultures in the sense that he is an adult man, and she is a girl child. That distinction deeply informs both characters' perspectives as they relate to the story-world in which

they are both engaged, and the film has decided that visual material is the territory of childhood. We see further evidence of this as the film progresses, and people Alexandria encounters in her quotidian experiences— a nurse, an ice delivery man, an orchard-worker, and a hospital orderly—are recognizable as comprising the main cast of Roy’s narrated story. Also significant is the fact that Alexandria’s story-world does not use the same intrusive or liminal tactics we may observe del Toro and Zeitlin utilizing in the other two films. While it may appear that this, then, is a film with two separate and adjacent narratives—even a narrative and the adjacent extended metaphor of a Dorothy-in-Oz-like dream in which “you were there, and you were there”—Singh’s film resists this simple comparative classification. Though Alexandria’s imagined world does not obviously allow her the same kind of slippage between the two spaces that Hushpuppy and Ofelia experience, the story-world has real and compelling impact on her, resulting in consequences that both she and Roy must grapple with. Those consequences speak to the veracity of the story-world in much the way the mandrake in the fire underscored the influence of the fantastic in del Toro’s film. A story, Singh suggests, becomes a fantastic site that intrudes on the world into which it is spoken; the fantastic material of narrative becomes a contender in real-world events that critically impact those who bear witness by telling or hearing the tale.

The Role of Storytelling

The metatextual aspects of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *The Fall*, and *El laberinto del fauno* gestures to the significance that story and storytelling holds for the filmmakers and their respective narratives. The role of storytelling in these films relates to fantastic

access and emergence as it specifically occurs in narratives that feature child protagonists. Telling stories to children as a participatory and imaginative act is a familiar form of entertainment, a way of passing time for both teller and listener. However, Zeitlin, del Toro, and Singh suggest that stories serve as much more than entertainment; they are at once the transmission of memory and experience, they are extended metaphors, they are teaching tools, coping mechanisms, warnings, conversations, expeditions. Writing on del Toro's film, Jennifer Orme claims that "the relationship between characters and various types of narrative is key to survival, both of the stories themselves and of the characters who tell them" (219). At the heart of this important communicative act of storytelling, then, is a critical collaboration, one that suggests story cannot exist outside of intersubjective communal production. As Karl Kroeber articulates in *Make Believe in Film and Fiction*, "Story has been important in every known culture because it is the primary mode of enabling people to imagine together productively" (47). If we struggle with the question of the child protagonist's marginalization by adult authorities in her vicinity—the same adults who are dismissive of her in their perception of her as irrelevant to their sphere of conflict—when the act of storytelling emerges, suddenly the power dynamics that exist between the child and the adult are disrupted. This disruption occurs because the product—that is, the story itself—cannot exist without the participation of both the adult teller and the child listener. The story needs a means by which to manifest (in the telling) and an audience to receive it (in the listening). Furthermore, there exists in these texts (particularly in *The Fall*) the listener's potential to shift from passive participant who receives and imagines the shape of the story to a more

disruptive, creative participant who interrupts and corrects the adult storyteller as the story progresses.

Critics who engage theories of storytelling often turn to rhetorics of make-believe, which, like the fantastic, is often delegated as the territory of children by contemporary adult culture. Philosopher Kendall L. Walton draws a link between children's games and representational art through the common thread of make-believe, asserting that "both involve *fictional worlds*" (379).⁴⁸ Kroeber, building on Walton's theories on make-believe and storytelling, posits that, "When we say a movie tells a story we are using 'tells' metaphorically, because our language has not yet absorbed the concept of purely visual narrative. The point needs advertisement, because it is easy to misapply to motion picture narrative criteria appropriate only to verbal storytelling" (45). But what happens when such "verbal storytelling" occurs within the context of a motion picture? Does that not undermine this idea that the "misapplied criteria" only belongs to verbal stories and not to films? Lee Pace, who portrays Roy in *The Fall*, discusses in an interview Alexandria's focalized imaginings of Roy's story: "This little girl has never seen a movie before, and so the way she imagines the story is totally pre-cinematic." Thus, Singh's striking visualizations, which we know from the discrepancies with Roy's narration are meant to come from Alexandria, are meant to precede the cinematic imagination. While Kroeber seems to place film in a progression where it falls beyond orated narrative in a

⁴⁸ Walton tells us, "Children are active participants in make-believe, and they belong to the worlds of their games...It might appear that appreciators of representational art, by contrast, merely stand back and observe fictional worlds from the outside...In addition to the world of the work, there is a world of the appreciator's game. And the appreciator belongs to *this* world. What is most distinctive about my approach is its emphasis on appreciators' participation in games of make-believe" (379-80). In other words, simply by default of being the "appreciator"—listener, audience—of a story, one is adopted into the world of the story, a phenomenon that is literalized by Alexandria as she imagines herself, Roy, and the people in her day-to-day interactions into Roy's story.

more advanced and “pure” position, Pace’s discussion of a character who does not yet have access to visual narrative (in the same way that character also does not yet have the literacy necessary to access written narrative) figures the “pre-cinematic” as the story that is more alive with emotional possibility, more authentic to the intimate and the subjective. Although viewing audiences must work with cinematic narrative in the consumption of these films, the puzzle of a simultaneously oral, aural, and imaginative narrative experience that is caught within the frames of a movie compounds with the child, her fantastic narrative engagement, and the myriad levels and challenges of access that present themselves among child protagonist, adult authority, and adult cinematic viewer.

If narrative is the site on which adults and children attempt to find common ground, and where they (mis)understand one another’s culture and perceptions, then narrative manipulation becomes a possibility in the interactions between the two. The story told to Alexandria in *The Fall* acts as something of a bargaining chip; critic Hye Jean Chung tells us, “It is gradually revealed that the tale is a ruse for Roy to befriend Alexandria so that he can persuade her to help him end his life, just as the whole film is a ruse for the filmmaker to show spectacular views of remote regions of the world” (94), reminding viewers that Singh, like Roy, has his own motives for telling his story as he does. In this way, the adult filmmaker aligns himself with the central adult character in the film, designating storytelling as a role specifically for adults.

For Alexandria, though, the story becomes more than mere entertainment and a way to receive attention from a well-liked adult. As the film progresses, we see her beginning to navigate her own world by means of the story that Roy tells her. This goes beyond

Alexandria's visual application of familiar faces from her life into the imagined story (the most significant of which is her decision to substitute her father as the hero of Roy's story with a projection of Roy himself, marking him as a surrogate parent in Alexandria's estimation). She also conflates the real world with the story-world on multiple occasions, prompting Roy to sometimes correct her as he corrects her spoken English, which slowly improves throughout the film. The latter occurrence seems tied to her conversations with and hours spent listening to Roy, a reminder that children develop language and narrative skills through listening and repeating narrative itself. This pedagogical aspect of Alexandria and Roy's relationship reveals an exploitative facet of Roy's storytelling that is directly tied to (il)literacy and access: Alexandria's pre-literate state is what makes her the perfect thief in Roy's elaborate suicide scheme. She knows her letters but cannot read words, making her just literate enough to identify and steal a bottle of morphine without being able to recognize and thus repeat to other adults the name of the drug itself. Furthermore, her imperfect English and tendency to confuse words contribute to her dismissal by the adults who never suspect that she might play a role in something so dangerous. Marginalization of the child in this case is tied to literacy, and the consequences of the adult gaze as it scripts its own perceptions onto a child present as dangerous.

That danger becomes apparent when the child protagonist's need for affection through story drives her directly into an attempt at adult action. Roy's exploitation of her partial literacy leads to Alexandria's second fall, which takes place in the hospital. In an effort to get more pills for Roy and thus engage him again in storytelling, a distraught Alexandria climbs up onto a medicine chest in an attempt to reach the bottle of morphine that has

been specifically placed beyond the reach of children. Struggling to balance with one arm already in a cast, she slips and cracks her head open on the floor; her delirious thoughts in the midst of pain shift from distressing images of Roy's leg being shattered in the story-world and other morbid fantasies to memories of her father's death at the hands of thieves who raided her village and burnt her home. Story easily slips into memory, and the connection that Alexandria has drawn between her father and Roy is rooted in the helpless realization that the men that she loves as caregivers endure severe physical injuries caused by traumatic events. Even with her inability to read with the fluency possessed by the adults around her, Alexandria's traumatic interior experience after her fall in the hospital demonstrates how visual connection within narrative can exist in a child's world as tangibly and devastatingly as it can in an adult's.

Once a child has gained those literacy skills that the adults in her proximity have, the ways in which she reads do not yield to adult perspectives; regardless of the access of literacy, reading remains subjective and specific to the person enacting it. Unlike Alexandria, Ofelia is already an avid reader when audiences first meet her; and, much as Alexandria's illiteracy leaves her to be taken advantage of and ultimately endangers her, Ofelia's knowledge of fairytales often proves life-saving. Her enjoyment of reading is also cause for complaint among the adults around her. Her mother chides her at the beginning of the film: "I don't understand why you had to bring so many books, Ofelia. We're going to the country, the outdoors." Looking at the book her daughter carries more closely, she adds, "Fairytales. You're a bit too old to be filling your head with such nonsense." The trope of the child who reads fantastic literature having her choice in literary genre criticized by the adults around her who wish her to relinquish "childish

things” is a familiar one. However, it is interesting that the fantastic literature of which the adults around Ofelia are critical is directly responsible for providing her with the knowledge that ultimately helps her to subvert their authority, which, in the case of Captain Vidal, often proves violent and potentially lethal. Jennifer Orme asserts that this is because

Unlike Carmen, who dismisses stories as nonsense by telling Ofelia that she is too old for fairy stories and must learn that magic is not real, Vidal attempts to control story through silencing other tales and repeating his own. For Vidal, a powerful political figure, the combined narrative of paternity and masculine pride and valor is a particularly potent master narrative, one he repeats over and over again and attempts to impose on others by rejecting alternative interpretations and versions. (230)

With an adult like Vidal in her midst, Ofelia the reader is at risk because of the deviance of her perspectives, her readings of narrative. The same skill that allows her to survive repeatedly imperils her throughout the film; knowledge of the fantastic also means an understanding beyond what adults have access to, and that threatens the power structure of a world that upholds the authority of adults over children.

Ofelia’s efforts to save her mother with the mandrake root given to her by the faun is one example of how she uses her knowledge of the fantastic to yield it to her own ends. Another such instance is her use of the chalk the faun gives her to create doorways. The first time Ofelia uses this chalk is in an effort to complete the second of the faun’s three tasks, which leads her to the child-eating monster that almost kills her. However, the second time she uses the chalk, she is working under no instruction from the faun. She has been locked in her bedroom and separated from Mercedes, who has served as a surrogate caregiver during the difficult pregnancy and consequent death of Ofelia’s mother. Ofelia uses the chalk not only to free herself from the locked bedroom in which the adults have imprisoned her, but also to take her brother from Vidal, whom she

cleverly drugs using sedatives she stole from her mother's doctor. Again, unlike Alexandria, Ofelia is fully aware of the potential effects of the medicine she has taken; she is using adult knowledge that she is presumed to be ignorant of to her advantage in conjunction with that very presumption of her ignorance. Her escape and attempted rescue of her little brother are a direct result of her ability to harness the magic that the faun and her fairytales have pointed her towards and apply it in pertinent situations. Her savvy is underscored by the way she applies adult knowledge of which she is a silent, unnoticed observer, and uses adult assumptions about the limits of childhood knowledge against the corrupt adults in her proximity. In this way, Ofelia seamlessly bridges the fantasy of the literature she reads with the fantastic space she moves into and out of as she navigates the dangerous conflicts the adults around her engage in. She is able to access forbidden domains, such as the captain's bedroom where her brother is being kept, just as she is able to enter the fantastic realm of the faun, using these points of contact to her advantage and drawing on her literature-based knowledge of fairytales as a guide. Ofelia demonstrates how access to the fantastic and to narrative are not enough for a girl protagonist to survive extreme conflict; she must learn how to utilize that access in ways that will ultimately help her. The films demonstrate that this learning is a process; the girls do not always succeed in avoiding harm, even as they engage the fantastic and narrative in efforts to do so.

The knowledge that the girl protagonist must gain through narrative does not always have to do with navigating the world of adults in such a way that allows her to subvert their authority, however; sometimes, she learns through story and storytelling truths about herself and where she stands in the greater world. For *Hushpuppy*, stories are

points of contact for two ephemerality in her life: the aurochs and her deceased mother.

We first see the aurochs appear on the screen when the local schoolteacher tells the children about the freeing of the beasts from their arctic prison of ice. Miss Bathsheba engages in many classic gestures of storytelling: she lengthens her words, allows her voice to crescendo and decrescendo as she moves about dramatically, pointing for emphasis to the tattoo on her outer thigh of old cave paintings with simple line representations of the mighty aurochs. She says,

This here is an aurochs: a fierce, mean creature that walked the face of the earth back when we all lived in the caves. And they would gobble them cave-babies down right in front of the cave-baby parents. And the cavemans, they couldn't even do nothing about it because they was too poor and too small. Who up in here think that the cavemans was sittin' around crying like a bunch of pussies? Y'all better think about that, cause any day now, fabric of the universe is coming unraveled. Ice caps gonna melt, waters gonna rise, and everything south of the levee is going under. Y'all better learn how to survive, now.

The listening children are wonderstruck; though Hushpuppy is our protagonist, we may guess that it is not solely her mind reaching out to these great beasts, but also the minds of the girls with whom she will eventually confront them who sit beside her, listening in awe at the myth their teacher weaves for them.

Miss Bathsheba's dramatic narration gestures to another significant aspect to storytelling: the person who narrates the story inevitably impacts her listener alongside the story she tells. Roy used this influence to manipulate Alexandria into bringing him what he wanted, just as the faun tried to do using the fear of Ofelia never regaining entrance to her fairytale kingdom. In Zeitlin's film, it is critical that Hushpuppy learns of the history of the aurochs and the threat of the melting ice caps from one of the two women who stand in as surrogates for her dead mother. Hushpuppy's narration of her own place in this cosmic timeline answers the warning words of Miss Bathsheba, as we

hear her say, “Way back in the day, the aurochs was king of the world. If it wasn’t for giant snowballs and the Iced Age, I wouldn’t even be Hushpuppy. I would just be breakfast.” Miss Bathsheba’s dramatic storytelling sparks Hushpuppy’s imaginative visualization in the same way her father’s stories of her mother bring to mind memories of scenes that predate Hushpuppy herself. Women’s voices surround Hushpuppy as she journeys towards that climactic confrontation with the arctic beasts: the voices of Miss Bathsheba, of a cook at the floating bar-restaurant, and of her remembered but fragmented, faceless mother. And, of course, there is Hushpuppy’s voice, present throughout the film, narrating for viewers her own story as she listens to the voices of these women and joins with the other girls in the Bathtub, progressing boldly forward into hazard and uncertainty. Girlhood is guided in *Beasts of the Southern Wild* by women’s voices and by confrontation with beasts, both transient in the lives of the girls who learn to progress forward by hearing and in turn making narrative of their own.

It is Hushpuppy who narrates the one memory of her mother that viewers of the film are permitted to see, although her father’s telling of this memory which is solely his (as Hushpuppy has not yet been born during the action of the memory) acts as a narrative frame. Wink begins the story and he concludes it, but Hushpuppy guides us through the actual images, beginning, “Back when Daddy used to talk about Mama, he said she was so pretty, she never even had to turn on the stove. She’d just walk into the room, and all the water starts to boil.” Though this adult exaggeration is meant to underscore Wink’s passion for Hushpuppy’s mother, for Hushpuppy herself the woman’s waist, hip, and hand in view barely graze the stovetop and flames light up under pots. We know that these visuals belong to her because while Wink is fully visible sitting in a nearby chair,

Hushpuppy's mother is mostly viewed from her waist to her hips as she walks, about eye-level for a child Hushpuppy's age. And, of course, this is the part of a mother's body that a young child is most likely to cling to, as she visually does here.

This memory that pre-dates Hushpuppy becomes part of her narrated history, just as the memory of the ancient aurochs she receives from Miss Bathsheba is incorporated into her discussion of the history and composition of "the universe." Critic Diana Adesola Mafe considers Hushpuppy's narration as one of the revolutionary aspects of the film's young protagonist:

The fact that Hushpuppy relates her own story in her own words affords her that authoritative voice typically reserved for an adult, white, and often male presence... Although she is implicitly talking to the viewer, her words are an internal monologue that functions independently of an audience... The camera follows her, rendering her its subject, but also regularly cuts to her perspective so that the viewer sees what she sees. Hushpuppy is the documenter rather than the documented... (100)

The fragmented storytelling that the film employs is based on Hushpuppy's perception of life and existence as fitting together in a fragile mosaic of sorts. As she tells us, "The whole universe depends on everything fitting together just right. If one piece busts, even the smallest piece, the entire universe will get busted." This interconnectivity that Hushpuppy describes as she looks to the world of ecosystems around her has been cause for environmentally-conscious critics to applaud Zeitlin's film, but it also speaks to Hushpuppy's own relevance in an adult-dominated world. Through her narration, Hushpuppy takes ownership of her small piece of the universe and is able to trace herself into the fabric of the world around her, even as she is being pushed to the margins by those who would leave the Bathtub to drown, and even as her father's alcoholism works against his own motivations to keep her safe and teach her how to take care of herself. Her determination to recognize herself as not a footnote in history but as the focus of her

own story implies radical possibility in the act of the child who not only listens to a story, but who demands to tell one herself.

Storytelling as an act thus offers the girl protagonist an understanding of her place in the world, subversion of the adult authority, a means by which to engage the fantastic, among other productive possibilities. Scholar Patricia Yaeger finds the necessity of “myth making for the twenty-first century” in *Hushpuppy*’s storytelling, but what myths does a child of the Bathtub need who hears her mother’s loving voice years after she has gone? Yaeger’s article, focused as its title implies on the “dirty ecology” of the film, considers the narrative’s relationship with dirt in its examination of the mythological potentiality there: “*Beasts* begins with a child making a dirt nest for a half grown chick, reminding us that even though primates may have started in the treetops, our home is in the dirt.” This cruciality of dirt as it exists in narrative is reflected in del Toro and Singh’s films, as well as Zeitlin’s. Ofelia must destroy the clean dress her mother has made for her in an effort to feed stones to a toad so that she can retrieve a key, deep in the revolting muck inside a tree the toad has parasitically made its home. Another film that acknowledges threats to the natural world, in *El laberinto del fauno*, Ofelia is told that the toad must also be thwarted in its parasitism, for the great tree in which it resides is dying as a result. This task is given to her by the faun, a first step in the intricate quest to restore Ofelia’s royal status. Her mother’s disappointment in Ofelia’s destruction of the dress she spent so long sewing for her is mirrored in Ofelia’s own desperation to restore the closeness she had with her mother before coming to Vidal’s home. Children’s forays into dirt, whether they be playful or desperately serious, are points for severe disapproval among adults. The captain’s militant, aristocratic disgust with Ofelia’s dirtied state is not

dissimilar from the attitude of the doctors and nurses of the emergency clinic that the Bathtub's residents are taken to against their will, where, among the treatment of life-threatening conditions, the neatening up of Hushpuppy's physical appearance is given priority. Mess, earth, and dirt must be eliminated, though this is the generative material from which story in the form of life comes forth; adult concerns over cleanliness seem to belie, then, the sanitary defense of their efforts.

Children, in spite of an adult demand for cleanliness, know well the productive potential of dirt. In *The Fall*, the heroes that navigate Roy's story are at one point desperately lost in their quest to find the villain. The mystic that travels with them steals the map from a young Charles Darwin, and despite Darwin's protests that the map is poisonous, devours it in a courageous effort to help his fellow heroes find their way. Doing so leads them to a lush, green valley in the middle of endless desert, where the poisoned mystic is surrounded by men who rise from the dirt in the center of the valley; covered in mud, they chant, clap, and dance him back to life as Darwin jots down the proper directions that have risen in tattoos all across the mystic's body. If "our home is in the dirt," so is the chart that will lead the story forward, despite the disapproval and disappearance of parents, caregivers, and convention. The extreme and grotesque representations of dirt in these films not only point to a truism that transcends adult authoritative cleanliness—a cleanliness that is tied to the marginalization of children and stems from a dismissive adult impulse to keep up appearances in times of great conflict—but they also suggest that filth, mud, dirt, and earth may hold necessary comforts that will act as stabilizing agents for those children whose stories are tied to loss and powerlessness.

Absent Mothers/Seeking Comfort

In her own dwelling separate from her father's, Hushpuppy keeps a sports jersey on a wall, a smiling face scrawled above it in crayon. When Wink departs for a stretch of time and she is left alone, we see Hushpuppy take the jersey down, rest it in a chair, and converse with a voice coming from the jersey that is meant to belong to her deceased mother. At one point this voice sings to her: "You're good/you make me happy," and it becomes evident that Hushpuppy's imagined relationship with the voice that comes from the jersey is largely based on a desire to not only know, but also please her absent parent.

The girls in these three narratives have all been separated from their mothers. Relationships with paternal figures range from at best, affectionate but inconsistent and prone to violent outbursts (in the cases of Hushpuppy and Wink, and Alexandria and Roy) and at worst, abusive and frightening (in the case of Ofelia and the captain). In the absence of their mothers, the girl protagonists seek out comfort in forms specific to childhood; one of the most significant forms of that sought-after comfort is food. Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott equates weight with overall well-being, seeing a diminishment in either or both as an indication of emotional strain (98). This recognition of somatic engagement with negative stimuli in children is significant in and of itself, but Winnicott's focus on weight gestures to why food and eating are central elements in stories about childhood. Childhood studies scholars Allison James, Anne Trine Kjørholt, and Vebjørng Tingstad posit that "From the moment children are born, their responses to food and eating practices are shaped by the ways in which they interact with others...eating practices and meals reflect and constitute intergenerational relations,

discipline, the transmission of value and norms, morals, emotional expressions and so on” (3). This social aspect of food and eating underscores Winnicott’s concerns over the implications of a diminished intake of food during formative years. During that same section of Zeitlin’s film during which Wink has disappeared for a stretch of time, Hushpuppy as narrator says that if he does not return soon, “I’m gonna have to start eating my pets.” And indeed, it is during this time, when she hears her mother’s voice singing to her from the jersey, that we see her attempting to cook a can of cat food for herself on a stove without understanding the potential hazards of her actions. The burning cat food eventually leads to a fire in her home; the effort to take on an adult activity of cooking, an activity that is also an act of caregiving, in the absence of an adult has led to disaster in Hushpuppy’s home. As the girl protagonists turn to those adults who remain with them to provide the nourishment they might have received from their mothers, the politics of childhood reveal a critical aspect of comfort that is solidly based in food and eating.

On the most basic level, children in and out of narrative are dependent upon adults because they lack the ability to feed themselves, mostly because food is kept under the control of adults. Susan Honeyman writes, “Myth reflects that the most vital, and thus powerful, means of manipulating human bodies is through food. Food is also the currency of childhood, our first initiation into the string-pulling power of parenthood” (54). Food, then, can be understood as intrinsically tied to agency. However, food also represents the possibility for affection: *The Fall*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, and *El laberinto del fauno* all feature moments in which those surrogate caregiver adult characters offer the girl protagonists food and/or comfort as a means of establishing an

interpersonal relationship. The offering and/or withholding of food and/or comfort underscores the pre-established power dynamics that are in place, with those keepers of nourishment and affection firmly rooted in the central space of the text, which they continue to dominate. However, within that power structure exist varying kinds of interpersonal relationships between adults and children, and the children are able to gauge to what degree an adult is an ally or a danger in part by what is offered or withheld by that adult.

The establishment and evolution of adult-child relationships in scenes that contain food and eating are prevalent across the three films; six scenes in particular stand out as notable examples of comfort-seeking on the part of the child protagonists. These scenes include: Alexandria's theft of communion wafers from the hospital church; Roy offering Alexandria chocolate and then improving his offer with the promise of more storytelling; Wink teaching Hushpuppy to "beast" the crabs she is going to consume; Hushpuppy's meal and dance with a cook at the floating bar-restaurant Elysian Fields; Ofelia being denied dinner by her mother; Ofelia stealing two grapes from the banquet set before the child-eating monster. In analyzing these scenes closely, I aim to demonstrate how the surrogate caregiver characters and the food that the girl protagonists encounter engage them in an active role of comfort-seeking, catalyzed by the temporary or permanent absence of their mothers. Furthermore, these analyses will help in the continued examination of the girl protagonist's agency and understanding of herself as an individual, questions of which arise throughout these food-related scenes.

In *The Fall*, Alexandria's repeated thefts drive much of the action of the film, most significantly when she steals morphine for Roy to get him to continue the story.

However, she also steals small treats for herself. One of these is a communion wafer from the hospital church; after the theft, she brings her bounty to Roy's room so that he might share in it. "Are you trying to save my soul?" he asks, to which she responds, "What?", knowing full well that she has stolen the wafers and yet not comprehending their ritualistic significance. Although she might not be attempting to secure his eternal salvation, Alexandria is treating Roy with an affectionate conspiratorial regard that is in line with their established rapport. Just as she steals pills for him, she also steals food, and she is returning to hear more of their story. Her theft is not taken seriously, by Roy or by Singh—the film treats it as a childish antic, just like her thefts of licks of an ice block from the back of a delivery truck. Though he shoos her away, the ice delivery man regards Alexandria affectionately, charmed by her youth. This relationship is significant, because it leads to Alexandria's imagining of the ice delivery man as former slave Otta Benga in Roy's story.⁴⁹ Just as adults in the hospital who frighten her become Odious's men or other villains peppered throughout the story-world, those adults to whom Alexandria takes a liking appear as the allies and traveling companions of the Black Bandit and his daughter, the heroes of the story (portrayed by Lee Pace and Catinca Untaru, respectively). The significance of any acts of kindness resonates, as the child who is without parental protection or affection recognizes the efforts of a non-parent adult to provide for her in some way. The non-verbal allowance of Alexandria's tendencies

⁴⁹ The character's name alludes to the historical Ota Benga, the Congolese slave who was exploited at the Bronx Zoo and other tourist attraction sites around the turn of the twentieth century. However, as he does with Charles Darwin, another character lifted from history, Singh completely reconstructs the image of Benga to suit his mythic tale of heroism. For Singh, the story-world exists as a space in which all of his characters have the opportunity to enact vengeance and heroics that would have most certainly been denied them in the real world. Similarly, Alexandria is able in the story-world to reclaim and alter the role of "bandit," performing heroic deeds as a daughter to the Black bandit while in the real world, bandits stole her family's horse and killed her father.

towards theft comes in affectionate shooing away and laughter at her behavior, expanding the impact of that kind regard for her.

Even when food is not being stolen in *The Fall*, its presence denotes clandestine activity, which in turn represents a level of trust as it is established between Alexandria and her adult surrogate caregiver. Alexandria meets Roy because she enjoys throwing oranges at the priest, and during this favorite pastime, a note she has written to a nurse, Evelyn, accidentally finds its way into Roy's room. When Roy later asserts that everyone knows Alexandria likes to throw oranges at the priest, she dismisses this, as though it is impossible the entire hospital could know her secret. Interestingly, it is picking oranges in an orchard with her mother that led to Alexandria's first fall and the injury for which she was hospitalized. Oranges thus represent hazard and comfort all at once, a vehicle of taking Alexandria away from her mother but also of bringing her to Roy, who becomes a surrogate father. When Roy receives a gift basket that he does not want, and he tells Alexandria that it came for her. He offers a bar of chocolate from the basket, asking her, "You like chocolate?" Alexandria replies, "I like it," and Roy asks, "Did you want me to finish the story?" She immediately responds in the affirmative, and the chocolate is quickly forgotten; however, Roy then asks a favor requiring Alexandria to steal him more morphine. Though she attempts to avoid having to steal the pills— she does recognize some problems with stealing, and is sure that asking a nurse would be easier—Roy presses her. She finally acquiesces, insisting, "Promise you'll finish the story?" And when he replies that he will, she goes immediately to steal the pills. Despite the fact that the chocolate never gets eaten, it is almost immediately swapped out for more storytelling, indicating that for Alexandria, consuming Roy's narrative is synonymous

with—or better than—consuming sweets. This demonstrates how storytelling and food converge in Alexandria's search for affection from her flawed surrogate caregiver.

But food is not always currency that might be traded for affection, pills, sweets, or stories. In Hushpuppy's case, food proves a means by which she establishes her might, and her ability to find her way in the world. At a community gathering, one of the residents of the Bathtub begins teaching Hushpuppy how to carefully remove crabmeat from its shell. Just at the moment that he is handing her the knife so that she can take over the process, Wink slams a fist onto the table and cries, "No, Hushpuppy!" He grabs the crab from her and as she looks up at him, he commands her, "Beast it!" He rips the crab in half, sucks the meat out, and then puts another in front of her, repeating, "Beast it!" She picks up the crab uncertainly, and he encourages her, "Show me you can do it." As she begins to tear the crab, Wink and the others at the party continue to shout, "Come on!" and then begins a collective chant of "Beast it! Beast it!" When Hushpuppy manages to tear open the crab, they all cheer, and she sucks the meat out as Wink did before throwing the remains down, climbing up to stand on the table, and flexing her muscles and screaming in victory in one of the more iconic scenes of the film. We know that Hushpuppy is aware throughout the narrative of the beasts she will ultimately face, the aurochs. In telling her to beast the crab, Wink is not only teaching her to assert herself powerfully, he is also pointing her towards an ability to engage whatever she may confront, beasts included. He sees, in equipping his daughter with the ability to circumvent that tenant of childhood that keeps food, and thus control, in the hands of adults, the possibility that she will be able to mimic adult behavior to the degree that she will be able to thrive, even in his absence.

However, one food-related encounter that Hushpuppy has that is unprecedented by Wink in his effort to treat her as he would an adult is with a cook at Elysian Fields, who acts as a surrogate for Hushpuppy's mother. The chef asks when she sees Hushpuppy standing alone, "You need something, baby?" As she is cooking the child a meal, she offers life advice and guidance to Hushpuppy that is not unlike the advice Miss Bathsheba gives the children at the beginning of the film, warning that life will not be as pleasant as children are typically told it will be. Hushpuppy is uncharacteristically silent throughout this scene. Instead of hearing her usual narration, we hear the chef speaking to her in a voice much like the one she imagines in her house when she's "listening" to the jersey meant to represent her mother. As with the scene in which Hushpuppy recounts Wink's story of her mother, the camera is frequently not at eye level with the chef. Instead, we see angles of her waist and her hips as she leads Hushpuppy into the kitchen, the parts of her body that are at Hushpuppy's eye level.⁵⁰ And just as the story of Hushpuppy's mother involves her cooking alligator to share with Wink, so does the chef at Elysian Fields cook up alligator for Hushpuppy to eat. Hushpuppy's interaction with this woman demonstrates that even a child who is being equipped by her terminally ill father to survive in adult ways is not an adult, and she seeks out the nourishing affection that adults can offer her, limited though it may be. There is in Zeitlin's narrative an emotional tension placed on the adult viewer, whose projective gaze that is concerned for

⁵⁰ The self-proclaimed "Floating Catfish Shack" boasts on its sign the advertisement, "Girls Girls Girls," and the undergarment-clad women that are found in the restaurant are dancing with what we are evidently meant to assume are male clientele for whom this sign appeals at least as much as the food. However, the attention that the women pay the girls when they enter Elysian Fields undercuts the idea that these women are present exclusively for the entertainment of men who come to the restaurant. That these girls receive bodily affection from the staff that work there pushes against the completely sexualized image of women who dance for dollars and puts forth an unexpected but also undeniable maternal aspect to their profession. Furthermore, the filmmaker's use of a child's gaze here in lieu of the conventional male gaze serves to underscore that maternity.

the child at risk may well relate to the parental attempt to make that child self-sufficient, even while recognizing the insufficiency of such an effort. That impossible effort of making the child totally self-sufficient resonates in this scene, and viewers find that the surrogacy represented has its limits. Hushpuppy offers the cook, “You can take care of me, and Daddy.” Holding Hushpuppy in her arms now, she responds, “I can’t take care of nobody but myself.” Hushpuppy is not the only girl being rocked to the music; it seems that each of her friends has found a woman who will hold her and dance with her, enacting gestures and contact of affection and care. Hushpuppy says, “This is my favorite thing,” and the chef, her eyes half-closed, tells her, “I know.” The next thing we hear is Hushpuppy’s voice as narrator. She says, “I can count all the times I’ve been lifted. I can count all the times I’ve been lifted on two fingers.” Even as she spends this cherished time with the chef, she is aware of its inevitable transience, and remains unsurprised when she is left alone again.

These instances of Wink and the cook at Elysian Fields demonstrating their regard for Hushpuppy through food are set up in sharp contrast to the clinic workers that respond to the displaced people of the Bathtub in the wake of the storm. Of the clinic, Hushpuppy observes, “It looked...like a fish tank with no water. They said that we were here for our own good.” When she is given food by the clinic, Wink warns her not to consume it. Almost immediately after this, Wink gets into an altercation with a doctor. Hushpuppy attempts to go to her father, but is held back by a blonde woman dressed in orderly’s clothing. She struggles, but cannot escape the grip of the adult woman restricting her. The warning against eating the food is a way for Wink to indicate to his daughter that they are

not in a safe space; the manipulative potential of food in a clinical setting, which we also observe with Roy and Alexandria's interactions, takes on a new gravity.

The very next scene shows Hushpuppy with her hair tied up and wearing a formal blue dress. A white woman working with the children in the clinic is bent over and shouting in Hushpuppy's face about a time-out, demanding, "Are you even listening to me?"

Hushpuppy, looking somber and detached in clothes that are not hers and separated from Wink, says nothing in response. The surreal experience of having her physical appearance shaped to match an ideal that belongs to strangers she has never met before is only highlighted by Hushpuppy's awareness of the grave condition of her father.

Perceiving hypocrisy in this atmosphere of caregiving, Hushpuppy narrates, "When an animal gets sick here, they plug it into the wall," as she observes adults like Wink who have been attached to the clinic's machinery. By comparing herself and her community to animals, she articulates the vulnerability she is feeling, in a space where they are all overwhelmed and stripped of agency. Animals are food in Hushpuppy's world, as we know from when she considers eating her pets; she is also food, as she considers what would happen if the aurochs still roamed the earth. But in the clinic, food is untrustworthy, deception poorly mimics surrogate caregiving, and people are stripped of their clothing and their identity. For a little black girl who has worn oversized boots, worn her hair out, and articulated herself as "the man," the clinic's attempts to curb and qualify her physical identity are not only disingenuous acts of caregiving: they actively work against Hushpuppy's agency over her own body and erase her reality as a black girl being raised by a father to fend for herself in an impoverished bayou community, resisting gender and age norms as she takes on adult challenges and behaviors.

Hushpuppy must escape this imposed restyling of her identity before she can confront the aurochs; her subjectivity as she channels it through her appearance is in part what prepares her for this meeting of heroine and beast.

Hushpuppy is not the only girl in these films to be forced into clothing that she does not wish to wear, clothing that is meant to impose a gender propriety that does not track with her experience and identity. Ofelia's mother gives her a dress she has made her for a fancy dinner party that the captain has planned. Her mother's expectation that Ofelia perform an adult, feminine cleanliness is demonstrated early in the film, when Ofelia excitedly reports that she has seen a fairy for the first time. Not hearing her daughter, Ofelia's mother is fixated on the fact that she has dirtied her shoes in the woods, a concern far less pressing for Ofelia than the sighting of a fairy. The feminine, formal styling of both Hushpuppy and Ofelia is demonstrative of specific girlhood gender conventions that push against any formative agency that these girl protagonists might wish to exert within the context of their own identities. Furthermore, clothing is wrapped up in the formula of caregiving and withholding of comfort, as Ofelia's invitation to a dinner is contingent upon her dress, and Hushpuppy is not deemed an acceptable picture of childhood to the clinic workers until she wears their dress. Beyond the performance of wealth that does not apply to their realities,⁵¹ the dresses force Hushpuppy and Ofelia to wear definitions of their childhood identities that are rooted in projections of future

⁵¹ Ofelia insists on articulating herself as her father's daughter, refusing the status of the captain and staying faithful to the memory of her deceased father, a poor tailor, even when her mother insists she refer to Vidal as "Father." Ofelia recognizes that clothing cannot change her origins, much as her mother might wish that it could. The dress that Hushpuppy rejects is more formal than garments she is used to wearing, and it is an impracticality for a girl who is literally learning to hunt for her own food; her preference for oversized, waterproof boots is much more sensible than the dress the clinic workers force her into, underscoring that their caregiving is not only false, but not informed at all by the day-to-day life of the children they work with.

womanhood imposed on them by adults. The insidiously patriarchal aspect of adult authoritative control of childhood identity and experience thus comes to light. Notably, a significant aspect of Ofelia's mother's concerns about her daughter's dress is reflected when we become acquainted with Captain Vidal, who is meticulous about his own appearance and clearly expects the others under his control to reflect the immaculateness he obsessively reveres. As much as her mother might want Ofelia to aspire to a gendered physical ideal, underneath that desire is the pressing danger of displeasing her new husband.⁵²

As food functions in these narratives as a kind of currency in the form of rewards, sometimes interchangeably with stories and other forms of affection, we can read gifts more generally as part of the manipulative arsenal that adults use in their attempts to control children. The inconsistency between what Ofelia and her mother prioritize is demonstrated again when Ofelia is given the dress. The night before, her mother tells her happily, "Tomorrow, I'm going to give you a surprise." In Ofelia's mind, the best surprise would come in the form of a story, a work that she can consume; she eagerly asks, "A book?" Her mother counters, "No, something much better." Ofelia seems unable to imagine what might be better than a book. The next day, when her mother proudly holds up the green dress she has sewn for Ofelia, the latter wears an expression of

⁵² This compulsion towards what the Captain views as cleanliness extends to his political views. Speaking about the rebels in the mountains who continue to resist him and the military he serves and represents, he tells the company of his dinner party, "I want my son to be born in a new, clean Spain. Because these people hold the mistaken belief that we're all equal. But there's a big difference: the war is over and we won. And if we need to kill every one of these vermin to settle it, then we'll kill them all and that's that." For Vidal, cleanliness means the utter extermination of anything that could potentially be messy, anything that functions out of the order he seeks to impose around him.

Critic Francisco J. Sánchez's 2012 "A Post-National Spanish Imaginary" presents a fascinating extended analysis of how del Toro's film represents Ofelia and Vidal as two directly oppositional forces pushing against one another in the context of patriarchy and fatherhood. For a thorough reading of Vidal's political perspectives and how they relate to fatherhood, refer to Sánchez's work.

detachment. Her mother says in her excitement, “Do you like it? What I wouldn’t have given to have a dress as fine as this when I was your age. And look at the shoes! Do you like them?” In spite of the disappointment on her face, Ofelia replies, “Yes, they’re very pretty,” clearly longing to please her sick mother who so deeply misunderstands her. At her mother’s request, she then goes to take the bath that has been drawn for her, yet another adult effort to impose impeccable cleanliness. However, here Ofelia makes a small yet defiant gesture as she takes out the Book of the Crossroads to read in the bath, given to her by the faun. This magical book is the kind of gift she obviously wishes her mother had presented her with, and it will reveal to her when she is alone the details of the three tasks the faun has given her to prove herself a true princess.

Beyond her obvious aversion to relinquishing fairytales for fancy clothes, this dress represents a real impediment for Ofelia: her first task is to enter the mud-saturated interior of the fig tree in which the enormous, parasitic toad resides in its own slime. The mud surrounds the tree as well, and we see that even in her approach, Ofelia has once again muddied her shoes, foreshadowing the mess that will lead to her mother’s disapproval. Trying to strategize a way to abide by her mother’s wishes that she “look beautiful for the Captain” and still complete her magical task, she hangs her dress on a nearby branch of the tree, having enough foresight to understand that this mission is in direct opposition to the cleanliness represented by the dress. Unfortunately, the wind throws the dress into the mud; even if it hadn’t, Ofelia herself is so thoroughly muddy that there is no way she would have been able to carry the garment home without dirtying it. Though victorious in completing her first task, she is covered in mud and slime from head to foot, and on her way home, gets caught in a downpour of rain. Her mother’s

disappointment over the ruined dress is painful enough for our protagonist; however, her mother sends Ofelia to bed without dinner, withholding food as punishment for what she believes is simply a selfish childish disregard for her elders. Feeding the stones to the toad exempted Ofelia from partaking in a meal herself; del Toro's film demonstrates how children must often use food to barter, even when it means that they will go without.

This withholding of a meal leads to a yet another problem for Ofelia as she attempts to complete the faun's second task. Ofelia enters a banquet hall inhabited by a monster that sits seemingly asleep at the head of a table filled with an elaborate feast. Decorating the walls of the hall are storybook-style illustrations depicting the same monster stabbing and devouring small children, and near his seat at the banquet table is a pile of the shoes of children we understand he has consumed. Ofelia and three of the fairies that the faun has sent to guide her in her second task make their way towards the head of the table, from which Ofelia is supposed to find and retrieve the monster's dagger. The most important condition she must obey in completing her task is to not consume any of the food laid out before the sleeping monster. The scene progresses toward a frustrating though perhaps predictable conclusion: Ofelia reaches out and steals two grapes from the feast and obstinately shoves them in her mouth, though her fairy guides frantically attempt to stop her. The result is swift and deadly: the child-eating monster awakens and pursues Ofelia with the clear intent to eat her. She escapes with her life and just one of her fairy companions; the other two are horrifically devoured by the monster as they bravely attempt to help Ofelia escape. This scene is frustrating not because Ofelia disobeyed the faun's instructions, but because if any child could piece together the reasoning behind the condition that she not eat the food from the banquet, it should be Ofelia. The faun warns

her from the outset that her life “depends on it”; she is well-versed in fairytales, and the monster at the head of the table is a familiar fairytale consequence for children who consume what they are instructed not to. The wall illustrations and the pile of children’s shoes are almost excessive confirmation of the danger that the monster clearly posed. So why does Ofelia stubbornly wave these many warnings aside and risk her life and sacrifice the fairies’ lives in order to eat two grapes?

This is a hard lesson in the extent and reach of the punishment an adult authority can inflict upon a child. Del Toro underscores how the fantastic is far from an escapist destination; indeed, consequences are that much more severe when the laws of fairytales add to and often exceed the laws of an adult-dominated real world. Even as the adjacent fantastic world offers Ofelia intermittent access to a space beyond the grasp of Captain Vidal, it cannot give her a way to escape completely from the authority of adults. And where her mother has been kept from Ofelia because of her dangerous pregnancy, her denial of dinner to her daughter, meant as a reflection of her disappointment that the dress has been ruined, reads to Ofelia as a betrayal not unconnected to the cruelty of the captain. As her mother’s withholding of dinner also presents to Ofelia as a denial of affection, the staunch refusal to stay away from the banquet is perhaps a defiant act of seeking comfort, even in the face of such grave danger. But rather than nourishment for her troubles, Ofelia almost becomes food herself, underscoring her vulnerability in the context of this fantastic world to which she does have mitigated access. Beyond this, she loses the fairies for whom she feels much affection. Mirroring her own eating of the two forbidden grapes, the monster’s consumption of two of her companions seems to suggest that a harsh equilibrium functions in both of the cinematic worlds Ofelia moves through;

where fairies are traded for grapes, so the number of dead between the captain's soldiers and the guerrillas in the mountains continues to rise.⁵³

The films present a demonstration of food and comfort as linked through the politics of interaction between children and adults. What the parents, flawed surrogate caregivers, and hostile adult characters across these narratives have in common is control of the distribution of food and other forms of currency, including clothing, gifts, and even stories themselves. The child protagonists' efforts to engage the adults in ways that will give them access to such currency range from attempts towards fair exchange to defiance to theft; however, what they all serve to demonstrate is a consistent lack of agency on the part of the girls in the narratives. As long as basic necessities such as food and comfort remain the currency of the power structure of these texts, the girls will not be able to attain agency and assert their own will.

Self-Assertion/Self-Defense

While the children depicted in these films may never achieve full agency, that is not to say the failure to do so is for lack of trying. Hushpuppy, Ofelia, and Alexandria all move to assert themselves and their needs at crucial moments in each of the films. And while these assertions are subject to the rules of the adult-dominated contexts in which the girls reside, those same contexts allow for necessity to take precedence fleetingly, particularly when survival hangs in the balance. Whereas comfort is an everyday form of currency that is frequently interchangeable with nourishment, in the face of extreme, life-

⁵³ Many thanks to Michelle Stephens for several conversations in which I struggled with Ofelia's decision to consume the grapes. It was her suggestion that the child in question was seeking out more than food-based nourishment, and those memorable conversations helped inspire and shape this section of the chapter.

threatening hazard, the girls must move beyond seeking comfort from adults and turn their efforts towards defending themselves. Such a shift in circumstance means that the girls must move past their inferior placement as children in adult-dominated zones and assert themselves, despite their marginalization. Whereas comfort may be an attainable, negotiable goal in the day-to-day, the dire and extreme necessitate striving for agency.

The metatextual aspect of these films as narratives about girls invested in narratives opens a possibility for a restructuring, or revision, of narrative that may open the possibility for such assertion. In *The Fall*, Alexandria asserts herself by claiming partial ownership of the story that Roy tells, and that ownership allows her to influence Roy's decision-making outside the context of the story. Roy is at many points resistant to his role in Alexandria's life, even going so far as to remind her outright, "I'm not your father." In his suicidal compulsiveness, he sees caring for a child as a potential impediment to taking his life, and rightly so, as it is arguably Alexandria who saves him by the film's end. When Roy begins the story of the Black Bandit, the role of that character is portrayed by the same actor who plays Alexandria's father in the scenes of her memories of him. However, at a certain point, Alexandria interrupts Roy's storytelling to ask, "Why he speaks like this?" When Roy replies, "Because he's your father," Alexandria corrects him matter-of-factly: "But my father is dead." Surprised, Roy thinks for a moment, then finally says, "Okay, how do you want me—how do you want him to speak?" Alexandria replies, "Normal, like you." And when we return to the story-world, Lee Pace is in the shot, wearing the clothes of the Black Bandit. Roy's pronoun slip in the dialogue—saying "me" when he means to say "him"—indicates that the desire to see him take on the Black Bandit as his story-world avatar is shared by both

of them, regardless of the self-destructive, nihilistic persona he presents. It also highlights the slippage between the story-world and the real world, as the Black Bandit for Roy is both “me” and “him.”

Singh employs this double-casting of Pace in order to play on a tradition of actors assuming multiple roles in fantastic narratives.⁵⁴ This transformation of Alexandria’s father into Roy demonstrates a subtle but crucial aspect of her filmic gaze. That focalization is one that directly impacts not the adults in the film narrative, but those adults in the viewing audience. As this chapter has established, the potential damage wielded by the adult gaze that looks at the child framed within the film is that the individuality of that child will be obscured by a double-projection of viewing adult-as-former-child and adult-as-protector; this scriptive looking is layered upon as adult audiences contribute to it alongside their fictive counterparts portrayed on the screen. However, Alexandria’s determination of the shift in who will assume the role of the Black Bandit specifically gestures to her self-aware individual experience, as well as a metatextual moment in which the fictional child directs the filmmaker towards appropriate casting. This dual awareness manifests in Alexandria first as a child character who has lost her father and is able to articulate that loss, and second as a child character whose imaginative potential can momentarily dominate a story that is being narrated by an adult teller, to such an extent that the teller ends up writing himself into his own story

⁵⁴ The most memorable instance of this that is often parodied in contemporary media is the 1939 *The Wizard of Oz* film. However, there are also other examples of note, not least of which include P.J. Hogan’s 2003 *Peter Pan*, in which Mr. Darling’s toxic patriarchal behavior is reflected as he is portrayed by Jason Isaacs, who also assumes the role of Hook; and the 1986 motion-picture ballet *Nutcracker*, in which Clara’s mother is danced by Maia Rosal, who also takes on the role of the captive peacock. Frequently, mythologies and failures that child characters find in their parent figures are literalized through such dual-castings; it is little wonder, then, that Pace would be so doubly-cast as Roy stands in for Alexandria’s father in the plot of the real-world narrative.

because the child has taken a liking to him. This self-awareness is jarring for the adult viewer of the film; it suggests that the child subject has knowledge that protective impulses would keep her from (her blunt mention of her dead father), and that how the child regards an adult might for a moment check his authority. This self-aware specificity of Alexandria's focalization is not unique to her. When Hushpuppy views the chef at Elysian Fields in the same way she has constructed Wink's memory of her mother, she participates in a similar act. By forcing the viewer to see these women as a child would, that viewer loses any ability to look down on the child, instead literally seeing the world from her viewpoint. Any efforts of an adult male gaze to sexualize these parts of a woman's body exploitatively is disrupted by the child's view of a maternal body that she recognizes as inherently relative to her own experience as a child in need of nurturing. The memory-based story-world of Wink's narrative and the imagined story-world of Roy's are subject to a focalization that effectively pushes at these men's ability to completely cut the girls off from ownership of those narratives. Though it does not have a permanent impact, the girls' purview nevertheless has the potential to disrupt the adult gaze.

The story-world in *The Fall* frequently exposes and undermines Roy's suicide mission, in no small part because of Alexandria's influence over that world. At the wedding of the Black Bandit and the princess, where the bandit and his company are betrayed, we see the presence of real-world tensions surfacing within the story-world, underscoring that the story-world is not merely based on the real world but that the two influence one another. Darwin warns the Black Bandit, "The Mystic spies danger in your palm. You've taken too many pills. Death is near." Darwin continues, "Suicide is not the

answer. He says he also knows of a secret chant. Whenever we're in trouble, something about 'googly-googly'? He says if you fall asleep, you will never wake up." The googly chant is an anecdote from Roy and Alexandria's friendship. Alexandria has been told by a kindly old man in the hospital that if anything frightens her, she just needs to say, "Googly-googly, be gone!" and the scary thing will go away. She recounts this to Roy, and the magic words reappear throughout the film. Despite the music in the scene of the wedding featuring a chorus chanting "googly-googly," the heroes are betrayed by the priest who was meant to marry the bandit to the princess, and they are taken to be executed by Odious's henchmen. The repetition of this chant that is meant to comfort the child protagonist is a means by which Singh allows Alexandria's influence to enter the story-world in insidious and subtle ways, even before she asserts herself. The story-world character of Darwin is the one to verbally acknowledge Roy/Black Bandit intends to kill himself, but the music with the googly chant implies that Alexandria is aware that her heroes are in danger. That image (as we know from the confusion over the character of the Indian) and music belong to Alexandria even through Roy's narration suggests that to some degree, she has always had implicit influence over the story-world.⁵⁵

When Alexandria anxiously suggests, "And then, they were saved?" Roy replies flatly, "No. There was no one left to save them." However, at that moment in the story, a character played by Catinca Untaru emerges, dressed just like the Black Bandit, and begins to untie the heroes' restraints and place weapons in their hands. Her character shouts joyfully at the Black Bandit, "Shoot, shoot, shoot them, Daddy. Shoot them! Daddy, don't you recognize me?" After some initial confusion, the Black Bandit—and

⁵⁵ Singh even allows Alexandria some ownership over the production aspects of the film, titling his self-financed production company for the film *Googly*.

narrator Roy—seems to catch on, saying, “Yeah. My daughter from a previous marriage...I didn’t recognize you because you have teeth.” Alexandria bares her new adult front teeth, and the Black Bandit tells her, “You must be stronger now.”⁵⁶ It is clear to the audience that Roy meant for all of the heroes including his avatar, the Black Bandit, to die at this point in the story. However, the appearance of Alexandria’s avatar indicates that he no longer has full control of the story-world, and that Alexandria is a formidable influence, not necessarily able to save the heroes but certainly strong enough to help the Black Bandit save himself. By making her very first active intervention in the story-world a call to action that could save the company (“Shoot them, Daddy!”), Alexandria’s character circumvents any possibility of a purely passive role, despite the fact that she is evidently too young to do the shooting herself. Her creation of her own avatar when Roy’s suicidal urges are hijacking the story’s trajectory demonstrates that Alexandria is aware of particularly high stakes and willing to push back against her flawed surrogate’s self-destructive nature at such times.

This effort on the part of a child to make an adult act out of danger and/or necessity is a form of clear assertion on the part of the child; however, it simultaneously underscores how she continues to be dependent on that adult. In *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, it is critical for Wink that Hushpuppy learn to look after herself rather than reaching out for help from the nearest adult. This is apparent in the scene in which the crabs are “beasted”; however, it also occurs in other interactions between father and daughter. In the midst of a stuffed animal fight, Wink stumbles, and Hushpuppy says to him, “Man,

⁵⁶ Singh cleverly writes the story-world Untaru’s new adult front teeth into this scene. She ages in notable ways throughout filming, and his decision to shoot the real-world scenes before the story-world scenes allows for a slightly older, “stronger” Alexandria to enter the narrative story-world and act as heroic on the behalf of her younger, more vulnerable real-world self.

you think I don't know? You think I can't see?" Here, she demonstrates that his adult effort to hide his condition from her has failed; she at once challenges his perceptions of her breadth of scope, as well as his protective lies by omission. She asks him, "You gonna be dead?" and he tells her, "No," in part to soothe his daughter, but also to assuage his own fears of his deteriorating health. Hushpuppy persists, knowing that her father's condition is serious: "Cause if you be gone, I'll be gone, too...I got what you got," she tells him. Sensing that his reassurances regarding his health are not convincing his daughter, Wink suddenly demands that she show him her "guns," and when she does not, he challenges her to arm wrestle with him. This leads to a fierce scream from Hushpuppy as she "wins" the match; Wink triumphantly asks her, "Who the man?" Hushpuppy responds toughly, "I'm the man!" This exchange is repeated several times, and while Wink ultimately frightens Hushpuppy in his excitement by turning over the table, her annunciation of herself as "the man" demonstrates that his effort to elicit a response of self-defense and self-love from her has been successful. And Hushpuppy's repeated declaration of herself as "King of the Bathtub" throughout the film further demonstrates her capability toward self-assertion, as she constructs a narrative over which she bears dominion. Her adoption of masculine terminology to refer to herself under Wink's instruction speaks to the need she will have to overcome gender-based obstacles in her father's absence. This further illustrates how Hushpuppy's identity is tied to breaking with conventional feminine representation and behavior; by owning masculine posturing and sovereign titles, she is finding her ability to fight for herself by modeling her self-assertions after her father's estimations of power.

Efforts towards self-assertion are gradual across the three films; as the girls must learn through trial and error to navigate the fantastic, so must they try and fail as they work towards learning to defend themselves. The moment in *The Fall* in which Alexandria's subtle influence in the story-world progresses to become a definitive, undeniable form of narrative ownership occurs after she has attempted to steal more morphine for Roy from the hospital pharmacy. When she falls from the shelves and cracks her head on the floor, the screen is flooded with dramatic scenes of men breaking and losing their legs. Alongside this montage, we hear Alexandria's voice fading in and out, narrating the night thieves attacked and set fire to her home; the abstract scenes give way to her memory of that traumatic event. We hear her crying at points, and the memories give way to claymation figures representing Alexandria's pain as the doctors tend to her injuries.⁵⁷ Her failure to ensure the survival of the story leads to a second fall, another moment in which she reached for something out of grasp and failed.

Ultimately, narrative proves the most powerful grounds for self-assertion in the films. Where adults and children both fail, story seems to succeed. When she finally comes to after surgery, Alexandria promises Roy, seated at her bedside, "I didn't tell anybody about our secret." Roy is crying, and she assures him, "Even when they tortured me with needles." Her determination to withhold this information from the attendant doctors demonstrates the seriousness with which she regards the story-world as a sacred pact that exists between herself and Roy, with her heroic silence amidst the "torture" of medical

⁵⁷ Julie Taymor makes a similar move in her 2002 film *Frida*, where claymation skeletons represent Frida Kahlo's injured body in surgery after a trolley accident during which her body was run through by a metal handrail. Such sequences suggest that certain kinds of bodily pain must be experienced in imaginative ways, as the way in which the mind processes them is protectively unrealistic. This idea that the mind will create non-normative experiences in a self-protective endeavor is revisited in later chapters of this project.

care after a traumatic injury a reflection of her avatar, the brave daughter of the Black Bandit. When a guilt-ridden Roy tries to end their friendship, Alexandria insists, “But I need the story.” Roy tells her, “You should ask someone else. There’s no—there’s no happy ending with me.” His efforts to avoid an emotional connection with Alexandria echo Wink’s insistence that Hushpuppy not cry over his failing health and the fear of his death. In their cognizance of their own fragile mortality, these men struggling with fatal illness are attempting to steel themselves in the face of children who see them more clearly than they would like to admit (evidenced by Hushpuppy’s demanding of Wink, “You think I can’t see?”). The assertion on the part of the girls that Wink and Roy cannot cope with is their insistent reminder that, should the men die, each will leave behind a child who cares for him and who will be more vulnerable in his absence. That knowledge is something neither man is prepared to accept, and he continues to turn to narrative as a method of avoidance. However, the girls’ partial claim to that same narrative makes it impossible for either Roy or Wink to completely escape the realities—or the responsibilities—before them.

Those claims on narrative are not easily made; the habit of control is deeply imbedded in the adults in the films, and for them to relinquish any of that power, even at the level of storytelling, takes extreme effort on the part of the girl protagonists. When Roy finally returns to the story after more insistence on Alexandria’s part, we see Odious’s men killing the heroes in horrifying and bloody ways, beginning with Darwin’s best friend, his pet monkey Wallace, followed by Darwin himself, and then Luigi, who is mobbed by Odious’s men and subsequently blows himself and all of them up. We hear Alexandria’s voice sobbing, “I don’t like this. I don’t like this story!” And we see her avatar in the

story-world, crying. It is clear that all of the characters have now taken on Roy's suicidal urges, and the only character over which Roy as storyteller does not have complete control is the Black Bandit's daughter; however, the degree to which Roy is in control of his own urges also falls into question, as his avatar can't seem to leave his daughter behind. As more characters are killed, the Black Bandit pulls his daughter along with him while she screams over and over, "No, no, no!" Her repeated protests underscore the raw terror she is experiencing, demonstrating the limits of language to express her distressed emotional state. In the hospital, Alexandria asks Roy heartbrokenly, "Why are you killing everybody? Why are you making everybody die?" Roy tells her, "It's my story." And she responds, "Mine, too."

Though only two small words, this assertion proves to be critically true. Alexandria does in part own the story; without her, Roy would never felt the need to begin telling it, and that their avatars wear the identical clothing of bandits suggests that they are equals in this fantastic narrative world. After Alexandria claims the story verbally, the final showdown between the Black Bandit and Governor Odious commences, not with one narrator but two. Even when Roy cries for Alexandria to "shut up" and continues his own gory narration, she is persistent. As the Black Bandit begins to drown, Alexandria demands, "Let him live," while her avatar is shouting for her father to get up. Roy answers, "There's nothing left for him," and Alexandria reminds him, "His daughter." Roy protests this by bringing their real-world relationship up, saying somewhat cruelly, "He wasn't her father, either." But Alexandria is undeterred and responds, "She loves him," and these words have as much impact as her initial assertion of her claim to the story. Roy tries to reason against this declaration of love: "She'll survive. She's young."

Alexandria tells him, “I don’t want you to die.” She repeats her requests that Roy not kill the Black Bandit: “Let him live. Don’t kill him. Promise?” And finally, Roy relents, “I promise.” When the Black Bandit rises up from the water, Alexandria instructs Roy that the bandit must go to his daughter—there is no longer any need for fighting. And so he goes, and it is clear that Alexandria has not only made Roy promise not to destroy his avatar, but also not to kill himself, for her sake. It takes pleading, persistence, and an insistent claim to a narrative world, but Alexandria is ultimately victorious in this moment of self-assertion. Her narrative voice emerges as the pushback against violence, a reason to end the conflict that she has proven herself a central part of.

Alexandria’s self-assertion is an example of how the fantastic and the real world can be collapsed in the act of self-defense; as she pushes against the impossibility of achieving full agency, the child protagonist works across marginal and central space, expanding her efforts so that they resonate in the parallel worlds. It is this world-bridging in part that allows her the fleeting moment of assertion that she manages, and that bridging is tied directly to her intervention into narrative. In *El laberinto del fauno*, the faun appears to be the key to Ofelia’s past as Princess Moanna and her hope for escape from the captain’s tyranny. He functions throughout the film as the guardian of the world of fairytales with which Ofelia is so enamored, and he coaxes her to trust him, claiming to have no personal stake in helping her regain the throne. However, when Ofelia confides in Mercedes about the fairies and the faun, rather than doubting her as other adults do, Mercedes warns that her own mother had advised her that fauns are by nature

untrustworthy. And, as the film proceeds, the similarities between the captain and the faun, who both expect blind obedience, become increasingly undeniable.⁵⁸

In the final moments of the film and of Ofelia's life, the faun urges her to give him her baby brother, whom she has just managed to take from Vidal's room: "Quick, Your Majesty, give him to me. The full moon is high in the sky; we can open the portal [to your kingdom]." Ofelia notices that the faun holds the dagger she retrieved from the monster's banquet hall—the same dagger with which that ferocious creature was depicted gutting and murdering children. "Why is that in your hand?" she asks, not giving her brother to the faun. He tells her, "The portal will only open if we offer the blood of an innocent. Just a drop of blood. A pinprick is all. It's the final task. Hurry." Despite the faun's reassurances, Ofelia backs away from him, shaking her head and cradling her infant brother close. "You promised to obey me!" shouts an enraged faun. Ofelia insists, "My brother stays with me." This is the first time she has stood up to the faun in regards to one of the tasks he has assigned her. Even when she consumes the grapes, she still completes the aim of the second task, which is to retrieve the dagger. While her disobedience in that previous scene was incidental, here it is clear and deliberate, a defiant intervention into the fabric of the tale she is meant to be living out.⁵⁹

The faun is not willing to give up his own resolve so quickly, much as Roy was insistent in his slaughter of all of the characters, despite Alexandria's pleading. "You would give up your sacred rights for this brat you barely know?" the faun demands of Ofelia. "Yes, I would," she replies without hesitation, crying and holding her brother's

⁵⁸ Much gratitude to the students in my Rutgers University fall 2016 Literature and Psychology course, "The Child in Conflict," who were the first to make this comparison to me in their analyses of the film.

⁵⁹ For further discussion of disobedience in del Toro's film as it relates to narrative desire, consult Jennifer Orme's previously cited 2010 article on the text.

head to her cheek. As the faun continues questioning her resolve, Captain Vidal appears behind Ofelia, having pursued her into the labyrinth. Vidal's focalization takes over for a moment; he sees Ofelia repeating, "Yes, I would," to what appears to be empty air. "As you wish, Your Highness," the faun tells her darkly, leaving her as the captain approaches, as if to suggest that del Toro feels one threatening masculine authoritative presence on the screen is enough and the two cannot exist in the same space together. That Vidal cannot see the faun is unsurprising; his hostility towards Ofelia shuts down any possibility of a shared perspective between them, and he belongs solidly to the adult-dominated real world while the faun is part of the fantastic. However, it is evident that the faun can see Vidal, and his abandonment of Ofelia indicates that he will not allow the fairytale that she is expected to obey to be altered, regardless of the cost. The captain takes his son from Ofelia's arms, and when she calls out in protest, he brutally shoots her in the stomach. Ofelia's blood drips down into the portal, and as Mercedes weeps over her, we see the scene suddenly shift; Ofelia finds herself in a sun-kissed throne room, where her father and mother sit in royal splendor. Her father speaks: "You have spilled your own blood rather than the blood of an innocent. That was the final task, and the most important." And from behind his throne, the faun emerges, saying, "And you chose well, Your Highness," as he bows to Ofelia. Regardless of if this scene is meant to illustrate that Ofelia has entered a rewarding afterlife or that her death allows her to pass through a veritable portal into her true kingdom, the scene indicates that Ofelia's intervention into the fairytale is a critical one. Her protective efforts to keep her brother safe are based largely on an empathetic connection with the only remaining member of her family, a child in an even more precarious position than she is. Thus, her assertion of

her own narrative—the narrative that says she and her brother must remain together, regardless of the rules of fairytale or military leader—is based on a view of her brother that is protective, but unlike the adult gaze, that maintains her brother as a focal point and does not require her to scribe onto him any projective identification. This narrative assertion is so powerful that the final scene that takes place within the fantastic space is a celebration of Ofelia’s understanding of the “true” fairytale, in which her choice to spare her brother even small injury is the right one, and she is able to come home victorious, restored to the family she loves.

Narrative intervention, then, is a powerful means by which a child protagonist stands to defend and assert herself. As a narrative entity, she takes hold of the literalization of the material in which she appears: a girl in a story grasping hold of another story to change the terms of the story she is in. By placing these children both inside of and in proximity to fantastic narratives, the filmmakers allow their characters a taste of their own magic of storytelling. If childhood has some claim to the fantastic, make-believe, and storytelling, then even amidst a power structure that does not place them at the top, children may have some unforeseen influence in those narrative realms that they can say belong, at least in part, to them.

Adult Access and the Gaze of the Child

Though narrative allows the child protagonist fleeting moments of this kind of self-assertion, she still must exist under a power structure that does not recognize her as a subject in the same way that it recognizes adult characters. The structure in which the child subject is expected to conform to adult understandings of her role (both as a child in

an adult-centered real world and as a child who will ultimately grow to become an adult) also requires that the child adapt, or at least, obey and adhere to an adult point of view. There is no expectation, however, of reciprocation in such a structure, and so the child protagonist's perspective, like the child herself, is marginalized and dismissed. Furthermore, in an effort to self-protect and in recognition of her own marginalized state, the child may come to guard her perspective, often simply by means of omission—she is aware that adult authorities will not inquire after what it is she is encountering, and she offers no relevant information. Karl Kroeber suggests that

Children do not possess the intensity of self-awareness of adults. Children may be open to possibilities, but they lack the power of organized self-skepticism about their own fantasy, the self-challenging component in all worthwhile adult make believe, whose most apparent manifestation is irony. Children's make believe is private. Even when it extends beyond a single child to a small group, that group defines itself as against everybody else. Their make believe is not openly accessible to all others—others can participate in it only by joining the self-isolated group. (48)

While this phenomenon of privacy that Kroeber discusses is relevant in considering accessibility and its relationship to interactions between children and adults, the idea that a denial of access is wrapped up in a lack of self-awareness is a flawed and very adult reading of childhood interiority. What Kroeber mistakes as an inability to examine oneself is in fact a keen ability to examine another, specifically an adult in authority that has already determined which perspectives matter and which “lack organized self-skepticism” and thus validity. The privacy, or perhaps, the specific nature of children's make-believe—that is, their engagement with making narrative and accessing the fantastic—has to do with a move towards self-care, one that recognizes that their perspective is rooted in their existence as children. If the adult gaze is scriptive when it is applied to children, then the child's gaze is closed off from adults because it is not possible to share perspective with an individual that one cannot fully see as a subject.

Thus, as a result of specific conditions—the exclusivity of interiority, the impediment of cross-generational communication, the power dynamics that exist between child and adult—the child protagonist’s gaze becomes not only something that is not accessed by adults, but also something that *cannot* be accessed by adults. This inaccessibility comes as a result of an inability to empathize with the child subject, as is evidenced by the persistent marginalization and subsequent invalidation of that subject. Therefore, if the child’s gaze is to become accessible to an adult, the adult in question must begin a project of empathy—rather than of projective scripting—through a deeply interpersonal interaction with the child whose gaze she or he wishes to access. That interaction depends on a forfeiting of adult conventions that uphold the scriptive adult gaze; as Jessica Benjamin suggests, this occurs “when we are able to let go of the absolute position of self-assertion to take in the other’s point of view or reality without abnegating our own. Surrender implies the freedom from any intent to control or coerce” (122). This surrender occurs as a means by which adults that are close to the children in question might also have the opportunity to access the fantastic; that is, they may be granted access to the fantastic as focalized by the children in question. In each of the three films, this fantastic access occurs through a mutual act of looking: the gaze of the adult merges with the gaze of the child, and what is seen is comprehended/experienced in much the same light. Thus, the projective gaze of the adult temporarily becomes an empathetic gaze; it is limited in the extent of its empathy and in its capacity to understand the significance behind what is witnessed, but even with such limits, this empathetic shift presents the adult with the child’s experience in such a way as to outline her individuality, rather than to overwrite it.

The adult characters who experience empathetic shifts in these narratives are typically the flawed surrogates who have acted as caregivers for the girl protagonists (though in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, it is notably Wink who is able to access his daughter's gaze). The significance of this has to do with the degrees of separation present in the relationship between child subject and surrogate. In the friendships that exist between Roy and Alexandria in *The Fall* and Mercedes and Ofelia in *El laberinto del fauno*, both surrogates act as only partial caregivers; they cannot replace or completely stand in for the girls' absent parents. There is a significant emotional distance that is maintained within these relationships: a result of societal propriety as well as the inability for the surrogate to completely invest her/himself in the child's life, whether due to subversive political preoccupations in the case of Mercedes or struggles with mental and physical illness in the case of Roy. That distance results in a situation where the authority that an adult would typically utilize in marginalizing the child becomes instead checked as a result of that adult not having assumed complete authority over the child in question. This balance between emotional proximity and authority aligns with Wink and Hushpuppy's father-daughter relationship, as well. Wink's constant pushes for Hushpuppy's independence from him demonstrate his desire to view her as an individual who will be capable of taking care of herself, a desire that in Wink's case is motivated by the apparent danger of his fatal illness. And while Hushpuppy's status as a little girl who is inevitably subject to adult authority in a larger existing societal structure undercuts this effort, it is Wink's attempt to alter the lens through which he views his daughter that gives him momentary access to her gaze.

This phenomenon of momentary access to the child protagonist's gaze functions as a transient disruption of designated relationships that fall within the established rules of the adult-dominated power structure. Theorists Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright explain that "Looking involves learning to interpret and, like other practices, looking involves relationships of power. To willfully look or not is to exercise choice and influence. To be made to look, to try to get someone else to look at you or at something you want to be noticed, or to engage in an exchange of looks, entails a play of power" (10). Thus, when we consider the momentary access these adults gain to the gaze of the children they are caring for, we are in fact thinking through an act that begins with empathy but that results in a kind of subversion-via-communication of the power dynamics existing between adult authority and marginal child. This is not to suggest that such a fleeting moment can undermine the larger normative structures that exist between child protagonist and adult authority, nor that the location of the child at the margins is subject to any notable migration to the center of such a structure. But the kind of communication that occurs, albeit briefly, unquestionably marks the presence of an individual that exists within the figure of the child subject, an individual that the adult-dominated authoritative structure, in its preoccupation with its own conflicts, did not acknowledge until this empathetic project was begun. The ability to share the gaze of that child protagonist represents a convergence of an empathizing adult, a momentarily subjectified child, and a fantastic intervention that moves the narrative in such a way that adult viewers in the audience also are privy to the access that their adult fictive counterparts attain.

Hushpuppy's confrontation with the aurochs is arguably the climactic moment of Zeitlin's film. However, it is also the moment in which Wink gains access to his

daughter's gaze. Hushpuppy leads her three girl companions through high grasses; having returned from their journey in search of maternal comfort at Elysian Fields, the four girls march forward, arms swinging and moving at a steady pace. Hushpuppy holds a bag of fried alligator in her hand. The scene shifts so that the audience catches sight of four aurochs swimming in the waters that edge the high grasses, also moving steadily forward at a pace that matches the girls'. Wink lies, eyes closed, on what we learn will be his deathbed, surrounded by mournful Bathtub neighbors and friends who are keeping watch. The girls suddenly hear the thunderous sound of the aurochs' hooves behind them and hurry forward, finally casting a look at the beasts we can see over their shoulders. The other three girls scream and run ahead, but Hushpuppy stops, her mouth set firmly, as she meets Wink's now open eyes through the window in line with his bed. The aurochs approach Hushpuppy, and she abruptly turns to face the one that comes closest to her. The great beast sniffs at Hushpuppy, and Wink sits up at attention, apparently able to observe his daughter in the fantastic challenge she has engaged in. Hushpuppy holds her head high as she gazes back at the auroch. After several seconds of this shared gaze, the aurochs fall to their knees in a bow, and Hushpuppy says, "You're my friend, kind of." The camera zooms in close on one of the auroch's eyes as it blinks at Hushpuppy; gazes layer upon gazes as child and beast, father and child, viewers and characters share in this suspended moment of looking. Hushpuppy firmly tells the beast, "I gotta take care of mine." At these words, the aurochs step back and walk away, and Hushpuppy goes to her father to feed him the leftover alligator. Wink and his daughter share a tearful glance.

This is their final shared moment before Wink dies. That he is able to see his daughter's confrontation with the mythic beasts that have filled her mind since the start of

the film demonstrates a dying reassurance for Wink: that his efforts to give his daughter strength and independence have been successful enough for her to bravely face down a collective of arctic monsters. Hushpuppy's ability to find a friend in the auroch, to see an equal where other little girls run away in terror, shows that she stands apart from her peers, and her father's ability to bear empathetic witness to her own courage and empathy makes her fantastic encounter not only briefly visible, but a resonant declaration of her individuality and her steady presence in the face of conflict. Thus, the fantastic encounter with the aurochs is the penultimate action of the film, with the final scene being Hushpuppy and her Bathtub community's farewell to Wink as they push his burning body out onto the water. Hushpuppy narrates the end of her story:

When it all goes quiet behind my eyes, I see everything that made me lying around in invisible pieces. When I look too hard, it goes away. And when it all goes quiet, I see they are right here. I see that I'm a little piece in a big, big universe. And that makes things right. When I die, the scientists of the future, they're gonna find it all. They gonna know, once there was a Hushpuppy, and she lived with her daddy in the Bathtub.

This is Hushpuppy's final claim to her own narrative, her assertion of her experience and the tribulations she has faced, as well as her humble understanding of herself as small but important in the context of the larger world. That Wink is able to access her gaze for a moment and see the fantastic encounter she has with the aurochs represents a momentary disruption in the adult act of scribing onto her, offering the child protagonist a triumphant subjective presence that allows the film to end, aptly, with her conclusion of her own story.

Ofelia's surrogate caretaker, Mercedes, does not glimpse such a climactic moment; this fact underscores that unlike Wink, she is a surrogate caregiver and has not accepted complete responsibility for Ofelia. However, Mercedes is able to find Ofelia after the girl

goes missing and, though too late to save the elder child, she rescues Ofelia's infant brother from the Captain. The sum of this action comes thanks to Mercedes's understanding of a fantastic moment in which only Ofelia is present, but that del Toro includes a deliberate trace of. Mercedes is present for Ofelia as a non-judgmental adult who does not discourage her reading. She does not attempt to tell Ofelia that the fantastic creatures she encounters do not exist; instead, she tries to help Ofelia navigate the conflicts she endures, be they in the fantastic space at the margins of their world or the everyday horrors that exist in the home of Captain Vidal. The moment in which Mercedes's faith in Ofelia is realized is after the child has been locked in a room by herself. Although there is no real-world way for Ofelia to escape the room without an adult unlocking the door, when Mercedes goes to find her, Ofelia is gone. This is because she has taken the remainder of the chalk that led her to the child-eating monster's banquet hall and used it again to escape the room, drug the Captain, and rescue her little brother. When Mercedes sees the chalk outline of a little portal on the wall, she seems to recognize that this is evidence of where Ofelia has disappeared to and how she has managed her escape.

Though it seems a minor moment, Mercedes's ability to understand the implications of the chalk outline and the filmmaker's inclusion of an empty room together legitimize the fantastic experience this grown woman has witnessed the aftermath of as just as impactful as the real-world events of the narrative. While viewers may see a suggested correlation when the mandrake root is thrown into the fire and Ofelia's mother suddenly becomes fatally ill, here there is no question as to whether the magic in the film has "happened," no lingering doubt of it instead being perhaps a figment of a child's

imagination. The child, arguably, cannot imagine herself out of a locked room to which she possesses no key. Thus, viewing adults must accept that something fantastic has occurred, and that therefore the rest of the fantastic events of the film have also occurred. The film repeats this reassurance, using the fantastic to comfort the audience in the final scene of Ofelia's death, where Mercedes cries over the child's body but we see her enter the underworld kingdom as Princess Moanna. If Ofelia can escape a locked room in the Captain's stronghold of a house, then perhaps, audiences think, she is truly able to escape a horrific death and descend into a happy restoration of her royal fairytale identity.

Thus, del Toro and Zeitlin effectively represent moments when the fantastic is glimpsed by adult characters in their films as a result of empathetically connecting to the child protagonists effectively enough to disrupt the scriptive adult gaze. While Mercedes and Wink gain access to the perspectives of Ofelia and Hushpuppy respectively, *The Fall* includes an inversion of this phenomenon. When Singh's film ends, we see Alexandria viewing early Hollywood silent films in which different men perform stunts. Although these men are not Roy, she narrates them as such, joyfully watching the supposedly dangerous scenes that she knows do not represent any real injury or threat. By naming each of these unknown stuntmen after the surrogate for whom she feels such affection, Alexandria actually performs her own form of projective viewing. Unlike the adult's projective gaze, however, Alexandria's understanding of Roy as all stuntmen underscores their empathetic connection. Contrasting with the scriptive viewings where adults see in children their former selves and, at the same time, unspecific children who need shielding and protection rather than recognition, she does not erase Roy's individuality in order to satisfy a personal need to make herself central. Instead, Alexandria remembers her

affection for Roy and revisits him in as many films as she can; restored to her family, she is no longer with the actor with whom she spent so many hours in the hospital and their story-world. However, she is able to reconnect with someone she cares for through a ritual of remembrance that hinges on her gaze and the connections it makes through film.

Ultimately, the child's gaze may fall somewhere over the rainbow; it is tangible but ungraspable to those adults who cast their own dominant glances that are favored by the world of the real in which they reside. The adult falls into a puzzle of once having had access to a child's perspective via childhood itself, and now at best is left to make a valiant effort at empathizing with another who exists in that space in time. Susan Honeyman, playing on Gayatri Spivak's seminal work, writes suggestively, "One might ask, 'can a child speak?' But it might not be worth asking unless adults can hear a child answer" (114). She goes on to assert that "As a function of our shared cultural imagination, childhood undoes experience," calling the enigma faced by childhood studies scholars and writers of children's literature alike "the impossibility of representing childhood" (28). However, to represent the traumatic is, arguably, to represent the impossible. The same can be said of representing the fantastic. If this is a larger examination of the impossible representation of transient experience, then efforts toward emerge as that much more crucial. Glimpses may be all that are achievable, but that means that the chance is not at the end of the rainbow, but in the attempt to reach it.

Fantastic Children: Playing on the Edge of Agency

The children created by del Toro, Zeitlin, and Singh are fictive reflections of how these turn-of-the-century adult male filmmakers view children. They are also more than

renderings of children as these adults see them. The collaborative nature of film is distinct from other forms of text in that it invites other voices to challenge and sometimes alter the driving voice of the author; where there is collaboration in the production of contemporary literature, the number of minds and talents that contribute pale in comparison to those credited in a feature film (compare a novel's acknowledgments page with the rolling credits at the end of a film). Filmmakers who work to portray fictive children must also work with actual children, and so the conditions of their set must accommodate individuals who are from the outset not quite like them. In the case of two of the three films discussed here, the child actors on set were young enough to produce a performance that was part acting, part authentic response to situations on the film sets.

Fictive children in and of themselves are worthy of thoughtful examination; they reflect how childhood impacts adult creators, how it remains a significant influence even as those who reference it have themselves left it behind. But from these fictive on-screen portrayals of children, we can gain relevant understandings of how textual children speak to and sometimes for their real-world counterparts. That children outside of narrative experience the same denial of agency that those fictive children contend with is not in question. What we gain from examining how the children in these films reach towards agency is an understanding of how the marginalized and objectified individual might make efforts that are indeed *fantastic* as they strive towards asserting themselves as in possession of voice and perspective that are worthy of acknowledgement.

Hushpuppy, Ofelia, and Alexandria demonstrate strength under adversity. We follow them on adventures into fantastic and dangerous realms, through terrifying tasks and the loss of parents; the path of childhood is represented as a struggle to assert oneself in the

face of impossible odds. That the child's gaze holds the key to all parts of her narrative suggests that she is able to reach something, as she strives towards agency, that the adult characters around her cannot. That singular quality marks her as a protagonist who stands out in the face of overwhelming conflicts—climate change and natural disaster, war, illness, suicide, torture—because of an inability to see the pieces as they fit together. The child's gaze provides an openness that the adult's gaze is too preoccupied to achieve, and that affords her knowledge outside of the trauma that the adult fixates on.

The girls in these narratives receive the final word. Their voices resonate as dramatic music plays, the light on screens fade, and images fall away to words representing their creators. Those voices sound as final because through and inside of story, the child achieves what was before impossible. Narrative intervention is how these girls demonstrate their efforts towards agency; the fantastic is the location in which those efforts are made. As this project develops, we will move beyond the child protagonist as an individual and consider her in the context of family and then generations, but the resonance of her voice will persist in those narratives that follow.

Chapter Two

Disappearing as a Doll: Familial Traumatic Legacy

All my life
 I have scoured a house soiled
 with the thick soot of his resentment.
 It has left its mark on the walls,
 in his eyes, and on me.
 All of it I have tried to wipe away.
 In my hands I hold a broom,
 in my heart—
 ashes, ashes.
 -Judith Ortiz Cofer

Family, Caregiving, and Aftermath

In understanding the fictive child as she appears in contexts of conflict, this project has established that trauma-inducing events function as central to adult concerns to the end that they will marginalize proximate children in an effort to protect but also dismiss them. That marginalization yields encounters with the fantastic for the child; for the adults, it presents the opportunity to fixate on a conflict that they are unaware is impacted by that which they have marginalized, child and fantastic alike. This chapter will consider how the fantastic functions when the trauma of an adult who has survived a major conflict becomes transmittable to the child who is in the care of that adult.

Set against the industrialization of Puerto Rico in the first half of the twentieth century, Rosario Ferré has written in “La muñeca menor” (Eng: “The Youngest Doll”) a curious and grotesque fiction that features a virgin aunt whose nine nieces are bathed in her adoration as she rears them to adulthood.⁶⁰ Ferré’s tale demonstrates how the burdens

⁶⁰ I will be using the English translation written by the author in conjunction with Diana Vélez. In her essay “On Destiny, Language, and Translation; or, Ophelia Adrift in the C. & O. Canal,” Ferré discusses the task of translating her own work: “As a Puerto Rican, I have undergone exile as a way of life... Many Puerto Ricans undergo this ordeal... It is for these people that translation becomes of fundamental importance. Obligated to adapt in order to survive, the children of these Puerto Rican parents often refuse to learn to

of parents are inevitably but volatily placed upon their children. The psychic weight that children carry as a result of conflict alters how we view trauma when it manifests in a familial, rather than an individual context. The previous chapter dealt with a contained temporality specific to a particular conflict and/or event. This chapter begins to consider how emotion, internal experience, and affect—particularly traumata—function beyond the present and expand on an intimate level as well as intergenerationally. Ferré's text will be utilized as a case study in which a traumatic burden as it is represented in speculative fiction moves from one generation to another. The impact on those characters who belong to the respective generations will speak to the nature of trauma as it functions in the domestic, intimate space of the family.

In the story, a young single woman loses her marriageability to the presence of a prawn in her calf, which burrowed itself into her leg one fateful day as she took a swim in the river. A local doctor visits her regularly to check on the status of the prawn, which continues to reside in her leg. Because the woman cannot marry, she becomes the surrogate parent for her many nieces, raising them as if they are her own children. Every year, she crafts a doll of each niece that is identical to the respective niece at that particular age. By the time the youngest niece is ready to be married, the aunt has in her home—a vestige of a crumbling sugarcane aristocracy that is giving way to the new money forging its way in a modernizing industrial Puerto Rican society—a giant room filled with the dolls of all of the girls, depicting her nieces at all the stages of their

speak Spanish, and they grow up having lost the ability to read the literature and the history of their island. This cultural suicide constitutes an immense loss...I believe it is the duty of the Puerto Rican writer, who has been privileged enough to learn both languages, to try to alleviate this situation, making an effort either to translate some of her own work or to contribute to the translation of the work of other Puerto Rican writers...Memory...can, through translation, perhaps be reinstated to its true abode" (163-4).

childhood. The final doll that the aunt makes on each girl's eighteenth birthday becomes her "Easter Sunday," as she refers to it when she gifts each doll to its respective niece. These last dolls depart the estate with their prototypes, following the girls to their new husbands' homes.

Literary scholars who have critiqued Ferré's story have been quick to highlight the uncanny elements of the narrative, not least of which are these many lifelike dolls.⁶¹

⁶¹ There are two significant periods of criticism that examine Ferré's work: "second-wave" readings of the 1980s and early 1990s, and more contemporary analyses published in the 2000s. The former period includes notable work by: Apter-Cragolino, Aída. "El cuento de hadas y la Bildungsroman: Modelo y subversión en 'La bella durmiente' de Rosario Ferré." *Chasqui* 20.2 (1991): 3-9; Apter-Cragolino, Aída. "De sitios y asedios: la escritura de Rosario Ferré." *Revista Chilena de Literatura* (1993): 25-30; Arroyo, Elsa R. "Contracultura y parodia en cuatro cuentos de Rosario Ferré y Ana Lydia Vega." *Caribbean Studies* 22.3 (1989); Bilbija, Ksenija. "Rosario Ferré's 'The Youngest Doll': On Women, Dolls, Golems and Cyborgs." *Callaloo* 17.3 (1994): 878-888; Bustos Fernández, María José. "Subversión de la autoridad narrativa en 'Maldito amor' de Rosario Ferré." *Chasqui* 23.2 (1994): 22-29; Castillo, Debra A. *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992; Fernández Olmos, Margarite. "Constructing Heroines: Rosario Ferré's *Cuentos Infantiles* and Feminine Instruments of Change." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 10 (1986): 83-94; Guerra-Cunningham, Lucía. "Tensiones paradójicas de la femineidad en la narrativa de Rosario Ferré." *Chasqui* 13.2/3 (1984): 13-25; Gutiérrez, Mariela. "Ideology in Literature: Images of Social Relationships within Puerto Rico's Historical Context in 'Isolda's Mirror,' a Short Story by Rosario Ferré." *Social Studies* 83.1 (1992): 12-16; Gutiérrez, Mariela. "Rosario Ferré y el itinerario del deseo: un estudio lacaniano de 'Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres.'" *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 16.2 (1992); Heller, Ben A. "Landscape, Femininity, and Caribbean Discourse." *MLN* 111.2 (1996); Paley Francescato, Martha. "Un cuento de hadas contemporáneo (envenenado) de Rosario Ferré." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 20.39 (1994); Pérez Marín, Carmen I. "De la épica a la novela: la recuperación de la voz en 'Maldito amor' de Rosario Ferré." *Letras Femeninas* 20.1 (1994): 35-43; Pokorny, Elba D. Birmingham. "(Re)writing the Body: The Legitimization of The Female Voice, History, Culture and Space in Rosario Ferré's *La muñeca menor*." *Confluencia* 10.1 (1994): 75-80; Rivera, Carmen S. "Porcelain Face / Rotten Flesh: The Doll in *Papeles de Pandora*." *Chasqui* 23.2 (1994): 95-101; Urrea, Beatriz. "El cuerpo femenino: identidad(es) problematizada(s) en dos cuentos de Rosario Ferré." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 22.43/44 (1996): 279-300; Vega Carney, Carmen. "El amor como discurso político en Ana Lydia Vega y Rosario Ferré." *Letras Femeninas* 17.1/2 (1991): 77-87; Vega Carney, Carmen. "Sexo y texto en Rosario Ferré." *Confluencia* 4.1 (1988): 119-127; Vélez, Diana L. "Power and the Text: Rebellion in Rosario Ferré's 'Papeles de Pandora.'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 17.1 (1984): 70-80; Zee, Linda S. "Rosario Ferré's 'La muñeca menor' and Caribbean Myth." *Chasqui* 23.2 (1994): 102-110. The latter period includes work by: Adán-Lifante, Virginia M. "Historia y Solidaridad Femenina en la Cuentística de Rosario Ferré." *The Bilingual Review* 27.2 (2003): 125-131; Bares, Sarah Wamester. "A Horrifying Encounter: Economies of Desire in Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo's *La muñeca* and Rosario Ferré's 'La muñeca menor.'" *Latin Americanist* 54.2 (2010): 113-123; Carrasquillo Hernández, Tania. "Las Isabeles de Rosario Ferré y Manuel Ramos Otero: Modelos de desconstrucción de género y sexualidad en la literatura puertorriqueña de la década del setenta." *Centro Journal* 30.2 (2018): 88-113; Gosser Esquilín, Mary Ann. "Rosario Ferré y Olga Nolla: ¿manuscritos reconceptualizando la nación?" *Confluencia* 19.2 (2004): 58-68; Gilliam, David Akbar. "Mother Africa and la Abuela Puertorriqueña: Francisco Arriví, Rosario Ferré, and the Ambiguity of Race in the Puerto Rican Family Tradition." *Afro-Hispanic Review*

Carmen S. Rivera reads the gender politics of Ferré's narrative in the dolls and the girls-turned-women who inspired their creation, asserting that "Rosario Ferré uses the doll motif in *Papeles de Pandora* to epitomize the passive, mute role to which women have been reduced in Puerto Rican society" (95).⁶² For Ksenija Bilbija, the dolls evoke the mythic figure of the golem;⁶³ for Margarite Fernández Olmos, they are the stuff of fairytales.⁶⁴ Regardless of what fantastic and/or mythological traditions scholars have tied the dolls to, they remain the central symbolic element of the narrative: objects that speak to the status and limitations placed on those women in whose likeness they have been crafted. The fact that they are representations of people in the text, and as such are temporally frozen, points to their existence as uncanny objects crafted to memorialize aristocratic femininity even as it grotesquely falls to pieces in a fast-evolving (post)colonial society.

24.2 (2005): 57-70; Karshmer, Elana. "'This House is Not a Home': Familial Conflict, Negotiation, and Bargaining in Rosario Ferré's *The House on the Lagoon*." *Centro Journal* 28.2 (2015): 162-177; Lagos, María Inés. "Subjetividades corporalizadas: 'Maldito amor' de Rosario Ferré y Jamás el fuego nunca de Diamela Eltit." *Nomadas* 10 (2009): 87-111; Larisch, Sharon. "State of Exception and the Ends of Paradise in Rosario Ferré's 'Amalia.'" *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 44.2 (2010): 333-354; Magnani, Jessica. "Colonial Subjects, Imperial Discourses: Rosario Ferré's *The House on the Lagoon* and Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun*." *Centro Journal* 21.1 (2009): 156-180; Moreno, Marisel. "Family Matters: Revisiting la gran familia puertorriqueña in the works of Rosario Ferré and Judith Ortiz Cofer." *Centro* 22.2 (2010): 74-105; Rodríguez Navas, Ana. "Gossip and Nation in Rosario Ferré's 'Maldito amor.'" *Chasqui* 45.1 (2016): 65-78; Rivera, Olga. "El ballet clásico como intertexto en *La casa de la laguna* de Rosario Ferré." *Letras Femeninas* 42.2 (2016): 110-120; Rodero, Jesús. "Lo fantástico feminista: metamorfosis y transgresión en Rosario Ferré y Rima de Vallbona." *Neophilologus* 93.2 (2009): 263-277; Rodero, Jesús. "Paradigmas culturales y configuración de la identidad: lo fantástico socio-político en dos cuentos de Rosario Ferré." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 19.1 (2013): 77-92; Scoular, Bryan T. "Over Our Dead Bodies: Emilia Pardo Bazán, Rosario Ferré, and the Feminine Fantastic." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 44.4 (2008): 445-459; Sloan, Cynthia A. "Caricature, Parody, and Dolls: How to Play at Deconstructing and (Re-)Constructing Female Identity in Rosario Ferré's *Papeles de Pandora*." *Pacific Coast Philology* 35.1 (2000): 35-48; Valens, Keja. "The Love of Neighbors: Rosario Ferré's *Eccentric Neighbors*." *Contemporary Women's Writing* 6.3 (2012) 251-266.

⁶² "Porcelain Face/Rotten Flesh: The Doll in *Papeles de Pandora*" (1994).

⁶³ "Rosario Ferré's 'The Youngest Doll': On Women, Dolls, Golems and Cyborgs" (1994).

⁶⁴ "Constructing Heroines: Rosario Ferré's *Cuentos Infantiles* and Feminine Instruments of Change" (1986).

These dolls in the aunt's home are lifelike, tangible memories of the different stages of the nieces' lives. Sigmund Freud's seminal work on the uncanny reminds us that automatons and dolls are *unheimlich* in not their silence or immobility, but rather in their strange familiarity. If the stories of Ofelia, Hushpuppy, and Alexandria engaged filmic frames in an effort to capture children at a particular point in time, suspending them in a moment of youth and fantastic convergence, then in Ferré's story the dolls themselves suspend a compilation of moments, a multiplicity that haunts readers. The films offer a moment, akin to their formal predecessor, the photograph, in that the snapshot they produce reflects a single temporal instance; the dolls in the story, on the other hand, represent myriad snapshots that function across full childhoods. In reconstructing the stages of her nieces' lives, the aunt actually separates those stages out into disparate entities. This separation suggests that memory and time yield not a continuity of a unified life, but rather that the self in memory exists as many rather than as one. That nonlinear narration of the self (a narration that works as something of a cluster, a constellation of the individual, rather than in a solitary line), suggests a troubled narrative, one that is destined to be without conclusion because it lacks progression.

Beyond their eerie nature as perfect mute replicas of girls who never once utter a word within the entire text of the story; beyond their likeness to living children eventually (and inevitably) turned wives; beyond the single room in which they reside together, myriad copies existing anachronistically and bridging lifetimes into a haunting simultaneity, is the aunt's practice of making and keeping the dolls so that she might "gently pick up each doll, murmuring a lullaby as she rocked it" (2). The aunt falls into the habit of holding so many remembered girls in her arms only to send them away as women, leaving her

grasping their lifeless frozen replicas, mock-children who will never move beyond the time of life which they reflect. She is denied motherhood by the creature that resides in her leg. At the same time, she is fond of that prawn which never leaves her body as a fetus ultimately would. Her identity falls away to a caregiving practice that is all-consuming, such that even the prawn that disrupted her anticipated maternal role has become a part of this habitual cradling and caring.

The hollow nature of a caregiving practice as it is applied to inanimate dolls results in a distortion of the motherhood the aunt works to mimic. Thus, “La muñeca menor” includes a corrosive phenomenon, one that is reminiscent of the adult gaze as it scripts onto the child subject in Zeitlin, Singh, and del Toro’s films. However, in the case of Ferré’s story, the oppressive force enacted on the child subject happens *after the fact* of the traumatic event that catalyzes it. In other words, Ofelia, Hushpuppy, and Alexandria were forced to grapple with adult responses to a current conflict, marginalized because that conflict was ongoing in the action of the respective films. On the other hand, Ferré’s story presents an adult response to a past event—the aunt coming to terms with the prawn in her leg and its effects on her ability to parent as well as what she is denied in her life—and the impact that the aftermath of that event has on the nieces as they come of age while the adult who experienced the initial trauma and who also reared them simultaneously attempts a resolution.

The care and rearing of a child is inevitably influenced by the trauma her adult caretaker experiences. That child lives and grows with the perpetual presence of an intrusive and restless past. Trauma scholar Gabriele Schwab writes, “It is almost as if these children become the recipients not only of their parents’ lived memories but also of

their somatic memories...” (14). For the aunt, the process of taking something that is harbored and tended to within the body and pushing it forth is not a possibility. The doctor makes certain of that, as he acknowledges toward the end of the story that he could have easily removed the prawn long ago, but instead chose to continue visiting the aunt and taking her money, even as this act of greed destroyed her potential for marriage and conventional motherhood. The exploited aunt’s caretaking is as stunted as her familial and reproductive choice, dedicated to her nieces though she is. The clustered narrative of her nieces’ lives that she constructs by means of creating the dolls points to the ways in which the girls themselves have the potential to become dolls, to lose their humanity in taking on a vehicular nature so that their caregiver can eventually achieve vengeance. As her trauma expands and evolves over time, it eclipses those children onto whom it is transmitted.

The transmission of such trauma will necessitate that aspects of day-to-day experience are disrupted. A close analysis of Ferré’s story reveals how trauma introduces a temporal experience into the lives of those touched by it that is non-normative in its unpredictability and its persistence. This non-normative temporality enters the family home in one of the most basic acts that occur there: child-rearing. Schwab asserts, “Without being fully aware of it, they [the children] become skilled readers of the optical unconscious revealed in their parents’ body language. I would add that, beyond the optical unconscious, children read their parents’ unconscious more generally in the embodied language of affects” (14). Whereas the fantastic emergence observed in the preceding chapter functioned as a way for the children in question to begin to subvert, resist, and cope with their experience of marginalization, the family dynamics in Ferré’s

short fiction demonstrate how the trauma experienced by an individual as the result of a single event evolves over the course of generations, and as such, becomes much more volatile than the slippage in and out of the fantastic permitted Hushpuppy, Ofelia, and Alexandria. This volatility is a direct result of the constancy of trauma, and that constancy, in turn, leads to a very different manifestation of the fantastic.

In the previous chapter, the girl protagonists were able to utilize their dismissal by adults and gain access to similarly dismissed fantastic spaces; the marginalized became allies in the face of domineering adult authority, and the girls had extreme experiences in fantastic locations. However, because the aunt's trauma infuses her acts of caregiving and affection for her nieces, its effects are most apparent in domestic space and daily life. Both the magical real and the uncanny are subcategories of the fantastic that are closely tied to the ordinary and the domestic. This association makes them both appropriate lenses for reading a narrative that focuses on the domestic lives of two relatively small families: the aunt and her nieces, and the doctor and his son. Moreover, by understanding the magically real and uncanny elements of what I will term *the quotidian fantastic*, we further grasp the temporal disruption that occurs in the aftermath of a traumatic event as its effects persist into not individual, but familial experience.

The Quotidian Fantastic

The setting of Ferré's story gestures to a magically real narrative because of the emphasis on domestic space. Magical realism is a subgenre of speculative fiction that has been widely accepted in more highbrow literary circles, marking it as an outlier among speculative subgenres. While contemporary publishing efforts to welcome diverse voices

may likely play a role in that acceptance, the fact remains that this subgenre stands out as distinct, and that is the result of its emphasis on realism. Wendy Faris, a scholar on the subgenre, suggests that magical realism contains an “irreducible element of magic,” a fantastic aspect that stands apart from the otherwise overwhelming realism of the text. Faris specifies that this element, however, remains unyielding in its fantastic nature: “the magic in these texts refuses to be entirely assimilated into their realism; it does not brutally shock but neither does it melt away, so that it is like a grain of sand in the oyster of their realism” (7-9). What magical realism allows us to glean, then, is contrast: the extraordinary in the ordinary, the unexpected among the mundane.⁶⁵

When we discuss spaces in magically realist texts, we are not to expect the fantastic marginal worlds discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike spaces that belong to the fantastic—the faun’s labyrinth, the world of Alexandria’s story—places found in magically real narratives depend much more on the real and realism. Arguably, no adjacent fantastic space is necessary within the subgenre, because the fantastic within its texts is infused into the space of the real. In keeping with these qualities of the genre, “The Youngest Doll” is preoccupied with the real in such a way that adjacent, immersive fantastic space never emerges. Instead, the ordinary domestic spaces of everyday life

⁶⁵ For relevant scholarship on the magically real, see: Arellano, Jerónimo. *Magical Realism and the History of the Emotions in Latin America*. Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2015; Baron, Christine and Manfred Engel. *Realism/Anti-Realism in 20th-Century Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010; Bowers, Maggie Ann. *Magic(al) Realism*. New York: Routledge, 2004; Cooper, Brenda. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2012; Danow, David K. *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015; Hart, Stephen M. and Wen-chin Ouyang, eds. *A Companion to Magical Realism*. Rochester, New York: Boydell and Brewer, 2010; di Iorio, Lyn and Richard Perez, eds. *Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Taner, Can. *Magical Realism in Postcolonial British Fiction*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2015; Young, David and Keith Hollaman, eds. *Magical Realist Fiction*. Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College Press, 1984; Zamora, Lois Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris, eds. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995;

become surreal, uncanny, and extraordinary. What I call *the quotidian fantastic* is an undeniably fantastic aspect that persists in a calmly insistent, almost mundane fashion within a real-world context. For example, the prawn that lives in the aunt's calf doesn't do much beyond existing there, beyond its natural life-span, outside of its natural habitat, at once remarkable and completely unexceptional in its tranquil parasitism. Its presence, however, is as pernicious as it is quiet, serving as an unrelenting reminder of the aunt's fate of spinsterhood and financial ruin. The prawn thus exists as a mundane extraordinary object: an ordinary creature, a fantastic lifespan and habitat, and with a radical impact on the lives of those around it.

Not least among the ordinary objects that turn into quotidian fantastic elements of Ferré's story are the dolls that the aunt makes to fill her days. They begin as simple playthings, but "as time passed...she began to refine her craft more and more...The aunt continued to increase the size of the dolls so that their height and other measurements conformed to those of each of the girls" (2). As we learn of the aunt's process, it becomes clear that, more than ordinary homemade toys, these are intricate constructions based completely on the physical appearance of her nieces. This demonstrates yet another example of the quotidian fantastic, present not only in the product of the aunt's process but in the doll-making itself: what is at first glance an ordinary hobby for a single unmarried woman to fill her days with becomes the process of recreating the image of living, growing girls in a three-dimensional, meticulous form. And the point at which the line between the real and the fantastic is crossed in this doll-making process is blurred: is it the detail in the construction, the imperfect effort to reproduce a living creature, or the obsessive nature of creating not one but many of these objects? What should be a simple

art for entertainment contorts into something more, an act that creates doubles and takes the place of reproductive and domestic activity that society expects from the individual engaged in it.

The dolls furthermore present as familiar objects that draw on grotesque and magically real conventions. Critic Bryan T. Scoular reads a significant interaction between gender and fantasy in Ferré's use of this artifact that he traces back to foundational literature in the genre: "In the context of women writers and the fantastic, one image in particular stands out from the rest: that of the female as a life-size doll, a toy that dates back at least to the invention of automata in the late eighteenth century and their appearance in the tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann" (451-2). Prussian author E.T.A. Hoffmann becomes a significant figure in the scholarship that examines Ferré's story, in no small part because of his fiction's seminal position among literature that includes dolls and their ilk, and writings on the uncanny.⁶⁶ Freud also engages the feminized object of the doll in his essay on the uncanny with a famous reading of Hoffmann's short fiction, "The Sandman." There, Freud incorporates the following from Jentsch, whose scholarship forms the basic foundation for his own theories of the uncanny: "one of the surest devices for producing slight uncanny effects through story-telling...is to leave the reader wondering whether a particular figure is a real person or an automaton, and to do so in such a way that his attention is not focused directly on the uncertainty" (qtd. in Freud 135). Indeed, the more real the aunt's dolls become—that is, the more they appear

⁶⁶ See also work by Ksenija Bilbija (cited in the previous footnote), Antonia Garcia-Rodriguez (*Female Feelings of Fragmentation in Rosario Ferre's 'Papeles de Pandora' and Elena Poniatowska's 'Hasta no verte Jesus mio,'* 1988), and Lisa Palmer (*(Re)visioning the Female Body: The doll in contemporary Latin American narrative*, 1998), all of whom reference Hoffmann to better understand how dolls function within Ferré's text.

like the people after whom they are modeled—the more uncanny they become, taking on such lifelike aspects of the nieces as to become their doubles, memories of children come to life in the present and never released to the past as other memories might be. The dolls reflect a phenomenon we will see expand into an even greater collective context in the subsequent chapter: memories that are not conventionally integrated into the linear stored narrative of individual lives function as extraordinary, with traumatic memory existing as the prime example of content that the mind's narration resists.

Dolls are not necessarily critically upheld as a definitive cause of the uncanny by all of the foundational literature. Backtracking on his readings to some extent, Freud stipulates that “uncertainty as to whether an object is animate or inanimate...is quite irrelevant in the case of this more potent example of the uncanny” (Freud 138-9). Rather, Freud argues as he builds his case for the more relevant instance of the uncanny in Hoffmann's work, “it is another motif that is central to the tale, the one that gives it its name and is repeatedly emphasized at crucial points—the motif of the Sand-Man, who tears out children's eyes” (Freud 136). This removal of the eyes is crucial to Freud for his development of the castration complex in his extended reading of the Hoffmann. But his question of what is more truly uncanny, the lifelike object that may or may not be lifelike enough to stir, or the excised gaze of that object, is interesting because both of these aspects of the doll point to its uncanny quality of being *almost*: nearly moving, nearly animated, nearly casting a gaze that can see.⁶⁷ Contemporary accounts of discomfort

⁶⁷ The transition away from animation in Freud's argument and towards a more favorable, to his mind, aspect of the uncanny reads as follows: “‘The Sand-Man’ also contains the motif of the apparently animate doll, which was singled out by Jentsch. According to him we have particularly favourable conditions for generating feelings of the uncanny if intellectual uncertainty is aroused as to whether something is animate or inanimate, and whether the lifeless bears an excessive likeness to the living. With dolls, of course, we are not far from the world of childhood...But, oddly enough, ‘The Sand-Man’ involved the evocation of an old childhood fear, whereas there is no question of fear in the case of a living doll: children are not afraid of

caused by dolls based on actual living children demonstrate the validity of Jentsch's claims, that uncanny experience is certainly produced by automaton figures that mirror in their appearance living people.⁶⁸ One need only to go to bid a child goodnight and find that child clutching an open-eyed, minute replica of herself in a dark room in order to appreciate the unsettling impact that this manifestation of the uncanny can have. It is enough to make an adult caretaker hope that the child has already fallen asleep and that there will be no need to enter the room from which the doll extends its eerie gaze. For although that object might seem to lack animation, that same gaze suggests otherwise: it elicits a knowledge that eyes in their open state imply, looking out in the darkness with sentience we project as akin to our own.

The tearing out of the eyes that Freud is so interested in seems equally relevant to the presence of these *almost* animate, *nearly* peering dolls as a critical uncanny aspect of Ferré's short story. The meticulous detail with which the aunt infuses her doll-making process is, as mentioned previously, oddly specific enough to necessitate close examination:

she would call out so that everyone in the house would come and help her...bringing wax, porcelain clay, needles, spools of thread of every shade and color...Then she would make a wax mask of the child's face...Then she would draw out an endless flaxen thread of melted wax through a pinpoint on her chin. The porcelain of the hands and face was always translucent...For the body, the aunt would always send out to the garden for twenty glossy gourds. She would hold them in one hand and, with an

their dolls coming to life—they may even want them to" (140-1). As recent horror and gothic fiction would suggest, Freud's underestimating the potential of dolls to be frightening is perhaps due to his contemporary experience (although, given the many instances of historical uneasiness around the reproduction of the human image, some of which are so organized as to be central tenets of certain religions, one might question whether it is simply Freud himself who is afraid of dolls, mannequins, and other anthropomorphic objects featured in episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, *The X-Files*, and similar contemporary narratives). Nonetheless, dolls as uncanny and terrifying entities are widely present in fiction, including in Ferré's work.

⁶⁸ This relates to conversations I've had with my students over the unease caused by replica dolls of their younger siblings and children (crafted by such companies as American Girl and much-beloved by children of an early age).

expert twist of her knife, would slice them up and lean them against the railing of the balcony, so that the sun and wind would dry the cottony guano brains out. After a few days, she would scrape off the dried fluff with a teaspoon and, with infinite patience, feed it into the doll's mouth. (3)

This intensely detailed process speaks to the aunt's maternal devotion, though whether that devotion is to her nieces (demonstrated in her meticulous process of making these their gifts and mementos of their childhood) or to the dolls themselves (as she hand-feeds them into existence) is not clear. Each gesture is, of course, informed by and infused with the presence of the prawn, as the origins of her doll-making process and the necessity of rearing surrogate children in the absence of the possibility of having children of her own are all a result of her tragic accident. There is also a temporal suspension in what appears to be a painstakingly drawn-out process, which both allows the aunt to pass time (perhaps collapsing that year between birthdays after she has finished one doll and must wait to make another) and also adds to the distortion of temporal experience enacted by the many dolls of individual nieces represented as all ages at once. The detail in this passage also points to another element of the magical real articulated by Wendy Faris:

Realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in, often by excessive use of detail. On one hand, this attention to sensory detail continues and renews the realistic tradition. On the other hand, in addition to including magical events...or phenomena...magical realist fiction includes intriguing magical details. Because these magical details represent a clear departure from realism, detail is freed from a traditionally mimetic role to a greater extent than it has been before. (14)

If the "devil is in the details," so, it would seem, are the dolls and their magically real qualities; the sensory aspects of the doll-making process demonstrate careful artistry as much as they enliven these inanimate narrative objects, bringing them vivacity on the page. In addition to demonstrating the aunt's temporally vague practice of caregiving as it applies to nieces or dolls, the text also includes such a richly dense and diverse array of doll-making paraphernalia and practices that the dolls themselves become receptacles of

an accumulation of the quotidian fantastic, even before the more fanciful events of the story unfold.

The natural resources of the island of Puerto Rico are also critical to the aunt's doll-making process, including the labor of its residents. The gourds and other doll-making elements are brought to her by those who work her land, and this speaks to a creative process that is not only wrapped up in a familial past, but also a past that is rooted in hierarchical class structures. As critic Cynthia A. Sloan tells us,

As a result of the American occupation of the island, power and social status in Puerto Rican society begin to shift from a dying rural aristocracy to a nascent urban professional class. In the words of Ferré, this story deals with 'la ruina de una clase y de su sustitución por otra, de la metamorfosis de un sistema de valores basados en el concepto de la familia, por unos intereses de lucro y aprovechamiento personales, resultado de una visión del mundo inescrupulosa y utilitaria.' The aunt...appears as a final link to a lost way of life. (39)⁶⁹

If the aunt's doll-making is a way for her to capture tangible, three-dimensional memories of her nieces, it is also a way for her to hold a societal past in her hands and attempt to make sense of the changing world around her. In (re)creating her nieces in the form of dolls, she is also fusing these remembered girls with the stuff of the island, saving both her home and her family in the form of (extra)ordinary, uncanny objects. Even as her nieces progress forward into the new society in Puerto Rico as they are married off to young money, their matching dolls are literally made of an older version of the island, their caregiver's Puerto Rico. In a way, this prohibits the nieces themselves from totally moving forward in their lives, as they are made to uphold the Puerto Rico of their aunt.

⁶⁹ "the replacement of one ruined social class by another, the metamorphosis of a value system based on the idea of family, in the interest of profit and the gains of the individual, resulting in an unscrupulous, utilitarian world view." Translation mine.

The quotidian fantastic is the backdrop of this curious and short but powerful narrative. Life-like dolls, an incubated prawn, and the limits placed on the life of the unmarried, unmarry-able aunt converge with the ordinary and the day-to-day as they vibrate with potentialities extending beyond the real, or even the magically real. What is distinct about the quotidian fantastic as it functions in Ferré's story is that its fantasy stems directly from the ordinary rather than the extraordinary. It is not magical to be unable to participate in what is viewed as conventional motherhood and yet offer maternal shelter to someone else's children through the utilization of one's body, in a practice of constant caregiving and creative acts of hand that measure out the years of the lives of loved ones. Rather, the quotidian fantastic can be found where the commonplace practices of motherhood underscore their own extraordinary existence, viewed as new and unfamiliar (though what could be more familiar?) through the apparition of a woman whose status as both exploited spinster and once-respected aristocrat finds her echoing the hazard in stepping from a predictable and expected path into uncharted domestic, ordinary territory. What emerges from the aunt's unforeseen trajectory is the hidden fantastic aspect of that domesticity she engages: it is the ordinary stone turned over to reveal worlds of unexpected possibility, commonplace enough as stones are, but nevertheless infused with depth and vibrating with fantastic consequence.

Doubles, Dolls, Doctors, and Paper Progeny

A relevant uncanny element that contributes to the quotidian fantastic in Ferré's story is present in the form of the *Doppelgänger*, or the "double." The presence of doubles/doubling is greatly significant in a narrative that depicts dolls made in the exact

image of living people, to the extent that the multiplicity of these dolls and their existence alongside one another reflect the alterations in their models as they grow from children into young adults. Freud posits that similarity in the context of the uncanny is significant because it results in

the appearance of persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike. This doubling relationship is intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other—what we would call telepathy—so that the one becomes the co-owner of the other’s knowledge, emotions, and experience. Moreover, a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other’s self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided, and interchanged. (141-2)

At the crux of this argument lies an extreme form of empathy based on exterior

appearance, one that leads to an immediate recognition and/or grafting of a particular interiority onto another, resulting in a kind of interchangeability that is powerful enough to shake the very certainty of the self. This interchangeability is the most relevant aspect of doubles as it relates to Ferré’s story. As Freud carefully articulates that doubles arise in the face of a person being “*regarded* as identical” (emphasis mine), we also need to think through the great significance of treatment and demonstrative action, and to consider the impact of an active response such as “regard.” In other words, how others actively behave towards, respond to, and interact with both the nieces and their dolls is revealed to be deeply impactful. To regard them is to not only observe them as identical on the surface level, but also to engage with them and thus develop their relationship with one another as doubles. It is not enough for the doubles to simply exist; according to Freud and to the story, there must be some kind of exchange—empathetic, telepathic—that feeds that same existence through responsive action.

This psychic exchange falls under the act of caregiving, which is applied to both the individual children in the story and the objects that are their doubles. The dolls exist as

multiplicitous copies of the nieces at various stages of their lives. As simulacra, representing children who have for all purposes vanished due to their inevitable progression to adulthood, they often seem to exceed their designated lifelikeness, having been treated with the same reverence, adoration, and, most importantly, the care with which the aunt regards her nieces:

...it became necessary to set aside a room for the dolls alone in the house...But the aunt didn't enter the room for any of these pleasures. Instead, she would unlatch the door and gently pick up each doll, murmuring a lullaby as she rocked it: 'This is how you were when you were a year old, this is you at two, and like this at three,' measuring out each year of their lives against the hollow they had left in her arms. (2) The dolls seem to supersede the nieces themselves, filling the aunt's arms where children once rested, more perfect in their ability to do so because they will not grow older and leave the home to pursue marriage. Indeed, the dolls' residence is evidently permanent, as there has been a space established in the house that belongs solely to the them. Whether the aunt is reminiscing or participating in an act of replacement remains unclear; the comportment of care with which both dolls and nieces are treated makes it impossible to tell. Furthermore, the aunt's caregiving begins to exist outside of normative time. Since she can cradle a double of any one of her nieces at any age that she might choose, she does not quite experience the temporal loss that caregivers of children typically experience when those children move beyond a particular age. Her affection, as it is placed on the dolls, blurs temporal lines and yields further ambiguous relationships between the children she has held in her arms and their static doubles. This creation of ambiguity through repetitive, anachronistic, and identical acts of care is directly relevant to the aunt's legacy of vengeance, which becomes relevant toward the end of the story.

Another repetitive act of caregiving is present throughout the text, and that is the old doctor's visits to his prawn-plagued patient. Arguably the most significant moment in the

story, the crux on which the narrative turns famously towards revenge, is when the doctor's son reveals to both the reader and the aunt simultaneously that the ailment caused by the prawn in her leg was as much due to his manipulation as it was to unhappy accident:

The young man lifted the starched ruffle of the aunt's skirt and looked intently at the huge ulcer which oozed a perfumed sperm from the tip of its greenish scales. He pulled out his stethoscope and listened to it carefully. The aunt thought he was listening for the prawn's breathing, to see if it was still alive, and so she fondly lifted his hand and placed it on the spot where he could feel the constant movement of the creature's antennae. The young man released the ruffle and looked fixedly at his father. 'You could have cured this from the start,' he told him. 'That's true,' his father answered, 'but I just wanted you to come and see the prawn that has been paying for your education these twenty years.' (4)

The paragraph ends on this terrible revelation, and notably, we witness no response whatsoever from the aunt; Ferré offers neither comment nor reaction, keeping her character's trademark silence consistent as the story continues. This is, the next passage of the story details, the old doctor's final visit to his patient, as he is to be succeeded by his son. The young doctor, the son, always brings the youngest niece a bouquet of flowers (5), courting her as he tends to her aunt and the untreated ailment that was perpetuated by his father. The aunt's perspective remains hidden from readers, and the above passage makes us startlingly aware in retrospect of the lack of her interiority throughout the narrative. Indeed, the only instances of free indirect discourse belong to the youngest niece, and they have to do with her courtship by and marriage to the doctor's son. The one moment of the aunt's experience we are privy to resides in the introductory paragraph of the story, in which we learn of the sharp pain she feels as the prawn enters her leg (1). Thus, with pain being the only character development the aunt is afforded, the absolute silence that follows this revelatory moment is paramount.

For a fiction that has been a staple among collections of contemporary texts that are considered feminist narratives to have a completely silent female protagonist is not unheard of, but it is striking in its radical decision to represent what appears at first glance an extreme form of passivity. Feminist critical readings of the narrative no doubt take stock of the mute aunt as they discuss in Ferré's story a central theme of the oppression of women at the hands of men.⁷⁰ That she must act as an audience for the revelation of her own planned ruin seems to suggest that male exploitation of women is as stark and unabashed as Ferré later implies female retaliation against such exploitation is quiet and subtle. The nonchalance with which the doctor discloses his planned destruction of the aunt's societal position and physical body underscores his lack of regard for her as both a patient and as a woman whose marriageability he effectively destroyed and whose inheritance he bankrupted on his own son's education. His own family benefits from the parasitic entity he leaves to fester inside of the aunt. Thus, he and his son have enacted their own parasitism on the aunt's household, as the nieces have no choice but to marry and leave the family home if they are to avoid financial ruin. Like the dolls she so carefully creates, the aunt is a mute but spectacular presence, with her oozing leg and the scent of sweetsop that accompanies her everywhere, and her ambiguous, perpetual, near-obsessive practice of care. This demure existence is, we learn, ultimately subversive; after the youngest niece's realization that "it wasn't just her husband's silhouette that was made of paper, but his soul as well" (5), her husband

noticed that, although he was aging naturally, the youngest still kept the same firm, porcelained skin...One night he decided to go into her bedroom...He noticed that her

⁷⁰ It should be noted that both waves of criticism that analyze Ferré's work mentioned in a previous footnote decree the story to be without question a feminist project, despite the fact that respective contemporary understandings of what exactly it means for such a story to be feminist demonstrate dramatic evolution.

chest wasn't moving. He gently placed his stethoscope over her heart and heard a distant swish of water. Then the doll lifted up her eyelids, and out of the empty sockets of her eyes came the frenzied antennae of all those prawns. (6)

And so the niece's husband, who insisted she display herself on the balcony of the home so that his social status might rise to meet his finances via the good name of his wife's family, discovers that the hollow existence he imposed upon her has become a hollow reality as she is reduced to a shell. All he is left with is a doll within which the creature symbolizing his father's greed and his own ruin now resides.

Ferré's narrative concludes on the greatest ambiguity of all: what has happened to the youngest niece? Initially, it seems readers are to be left with her as the central focus of the narrative, as after her courtship, we continue to hear nothing from her aunt. The latter remains mute, and in fact disappears from the action of the story altogether. However, it is the aunt's vengeance that is visited upon the son of the man who ruined her: her niece vanishes, replaced by the final doll that was made in her likeness and that now contains the progeny of the prawn that made the fortune and societal position of this paper-husband a reality. Bryan T. Scoular posits that while this conclusion to the story does ring reminiscent of Freud's analysis of the Hoffmann story, "Freud ultimately dismisses dolls as essentially innocuous... Yet Ferré's story shows that the contrary can be true: if dolls appear innocent, she seems to say, it is because male writers (including Freud) have repressed the threatening aspects of the figure" (452-3). It is perhaps such repression, then, that allows for the fantastic replacement of the youngest niece with the doll. The aunt herself has been perceived to possess such feminized passivity that this innocuous quality of silence is passed on to all she does, especially her craft of doll-making, so innocent and mundane at a distance and yet uncannily extraordinary upon close examination. If the only way through the gendered rules of society is to accept them, then

the aunt's wordless response to the doctor's revelation of his exploitative greed is what allows her to have the final word. It comes in the form of a doll, lifelike and the perfect picture of an old money, high-bred society wife, made in the image of her prototype and the woman who raised her, right down to the shellfish living within her silent frame. Doll-making yields a doubled double as aunt and niece together form an object of revenge.

That object of revenge proves complex, as again magically real aspects of Ferré's narrative manifest in the form of extremely specific detail. A second revelation of the young doctor's "paper soul" occurs when the niece discovers that the eyes of her last doll, which her aunt had embroidered with diamonds, are gone: "he pried out the doll's eyes with the tip of his scalpel and pawned them for a fancy gold pocket watch with a long, embossed chain." This passage points us to Freud's discussion regarding the anxiety surrounding the removal of the eyeballs (452), and it also gestures towards questions of consumerism and new money in relation to theories of simulacra. Also relevant is the passage in which the narrator describes the process by which the aunt prepared the eyeballs for the dolls in the first place:

The only items the aunt would agree to use...that were not made by her with whatever materials came to her from the land, were the glass eyeballs. They were mailed to her directly from Europe in all colors, but the aunt considered them useless until she had left them submerged at the bottom of the stream for a few days, so that they would learn to recognize the slightest stirring of the prawn's antennae. (3)

This submerging of the eyes with the prawns holds great significance, as the prawn is what begins the chain of events in the narrative and the prawn evolves, through the aunt's practice of care, from the perpetrator of her affliction to the crux of her revenge. The fondness with which she places the young doctor's hand upon the prawn in her leg demonstrates the depth of this shift in her relationship to the creature that marred her. It is

also important to note that the eyeballs are an imported European element in an otherwise island-grown creation. Ferré never quite leaves the (post)colonial aspects of the story behind, and if the young doctor is intent on grasping at the eyeballs as a symbol of the old colonial aristocracy he aims to parasitize through marriage to the youngest niece, they quickly slip from him and are replaced by the gauche pocket watch, revealing that he is incapable of truly gleaning that societal air he so desperately wishes to acquire.

This inability of the male successor character in the narrative to recognize class markers even as he yearns for a shift in his own class status is tied to the failure of the parent to pass on a certain substance to the child he rears. In the case of the two doctors, that failure comes in the form of the inability to discern aristocratic qualities; in the case of the aunt and her niece, it is related to vengeance. The theft of the last doll's eyes, in combination with the caregivers' failings, make possible the eerie, uncanny conclusion of the tale. Arguably, the antennae of the prawn progeny would not have been immediately visible had the husband not made the self-destructive faux-pas of removing the eyes; that is, if the progeny were in fact there all along. Freud writes:

in Hoffmann's tale the sense of the uncanny attached directly to the figure of the Sand-Man, and therefore to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes...psychoanalytic experience reminds us that some children have a terrible fear of damaging or losing their eyes...many other features of the tale appear arbitrary and meaningless if one rejects the relation between fear for the eyes and fear of castration, but they become meaningful as soon as the Sand-Man is replaced by the dreaded father, at whose hands castration is expected. (140)

This removal of the eyes turns our gaze towards another doubling, another familial replacement: the youngest niece who is replaced by her doll is perhaps the most obvious example, but on the other hand, we have the replacement of the old doctor by his son, the one who managed to become a millionaire and far exceed his father's monetary success—that is, until he discovers that his family's legacy of greed has left him with a

monstrosity in the bed where his wife once rested. As the son once demanded his wife display herself on his balcony so that her body reflected his wealth, now her body reflects the source of that wealth as corrupt and ill-won. So on the one hand, the obliteration of the youngest niece parallels the ruined reputation of the young doctor, her husband—her body continues to reflect his financial and social status, as its decay into a broken doll means that he has at once lost a wife and his claim to an aristocratic class.

While the child of the oppressor in this instance may be reaping the grotesque, prawn-filled husk of that exploitative greed he and his father have sewn, and while the young doctor with a paper silhouette to match his paper soul is left with the rewards of being an apple that has found its place on the ground rather near the family tree, the vanishing of the son's silent bride is not a simple example of an eye taken for an eye. If fathers are responsible for castration, then it is clear that the old doctor's corrupt acts and example led his son into a marriage that was built on an obsolescent foundation, a foundation which brought him to believe he had achieved the ultimate social uprising a marriage into the sugarcane aristocracy seemed to promise. So blinded by their greed and the ease with which they take advantage of women, neither the doctor nor his son realize that the fact that the aunt's estate crumbled due to the exploitation they visited upon her means that the source of the old money has effectively evaporated. Neither doctor comes to see that the influence of old money falters when a new society, the same society in which they aim to build their sizable fortune, comes to replace it. The most destabilizing aspect of the aunt's revenge is not that it takes away what the son has gained through his marriage, but rather that it makes transparent that what he believes he has conquered and claimed for himself was never really there in the first place.

Revenge and Replacement

Revenge functions as the concluding note of the narrative, but the nature of the narrative is shaped by how readings of that revenge view its outcomes. A third familial replacement that occurs in the narrative proves the most insidious. In becoming the vehicle for her aunt's revenge on the doctor, the youngest niece is arguably replaced entirely by her aunt. We never learn what has happened to the niece, whether she is transformed into the doll or disappeared by fantastic or ordinary means. But the "frenzied antennae of all those prawns" that bustle in the eye sockets of the doll point to the direct link between aunt, niece, and doll, as the progeny of the prawn in the aunt's leg come to enact justice on the young man who profited from her body through his exploitative medical practice and her household through his marriage to her niece. The niece, reared in a house full of affected caregiving, brought up by a traumatized recluse, and married into loneliness and further exploitation, is obliterated by the aunt's efforts at resolution, the specter of her injury taking form in the eyeless, prawn-filled doll. Just as her aunt fades from the story in the scene where her exploitation by the doctors is verbalized, the niece as a person—beloved child, prized wife—vanishes at the conclusion of the story without a trace. In understanding that the niece becomes a vehicle of vengeance, we must also focus on the fact that such a vehicle does not necessarily get to be a person.

Those feminist critics writing on Ferré's work in the 1980s and 1990s fixate on the significance of the doll not simply as the aunt's vehicle of revenge, but as a disrupter of oppressive patriarchal structures that threaten in particular the female body. As Cynthia A. Sloan articulates, "Ferré juxtaposes real and imaginary worlds to show what is false

and contradictory in the lives of the female protagonists” (38). Though this tale belongs to the quotidian fantastic, Sloan’s assertion that it exists at the crux of the real and imagined speaks to the extreme conditions under which women are expected to exist. While the surreal and magically real are set within a logic-based, limited world that is not as close to the immersive kind of fantasy as those marginal fantastic spaces explored in the previous chapter, the quotidian fantastic elements in this story have to do with a *reaction*, the response that women’s domestic and day-to-day oppression elicit. Thus, the function of the simulacrum in question is to draw attention to the condition of and expectations placed upon women as they exist together under the oppressive devices of men. Elba D. Birmingham Pokorny’s article on Ferré’s narrative posits liberation through a reclamation of voice as the inevitable feminist outcome of the story. She reads in the text a “feminist call to women to take charge of their destiny by reappropriating their bodies so they can reinscribe on them, their own personal history and the island’s history [that] is also a call to bring about the legitimization of the female voice, history, culture and space” (76). Pokorny’s focus on destiny’s relationship with embodiment points to voice as a solution for the fallacy that Sloan has observed above. The doll, then, also becomes a form of embodied scripting which the aunt’s careful craft enacts in the place of her missing voice. For these two critics, the story serves at once to underscore the lie that women have been made to live and to demonstrate how taking hold of that lie allows for a distortion of it through which a collective, female lived-veracity might seep.

With women functioning as a unified collective, vengeance as it functions in the narrative becomes a driving force related to the construction of the female characters more broadly. However, stepping away from that broader view of women as a group and

thinking in terms of the individual women in the story raises new concerns that these scholars have left unconsidered. Sloan, building on Pokorny's essay, argues that the aunt's

ultimate, although symbolic, fusion with the figure of the niece allows for the resurrection of her deep-seated anger and frustration. It is the only means available to her to denounce the injustices that have been perpetrated against the women of her family... 'the ritualistic creation of dolls...reverses and demythologizes the myths and taboos constructed by men to manipulate women to observe the virtues of submission, silence and sexual innocence and to conceive her body as having a dual nature while maintaining the illusion of total conformance to the images and symbols of femininity created by patriarchal discourse' (Pokorny 77). Through the metaphoric reappropriation of the image, Ferré rejects the masculinist conception of women as objects...Avoiding a reversal of meaning, she allows the object to move into a subject position in order to reappropriate and rework the original image. (40-1)

This argument that the doll functions in a purely subversive manner reflects a dominant portion of the criticism on Ferré's narrative. Pokorny's assertion that silencing can be undermined by doll-making appears valid in light of Sloan's reading of Ferré's dolls as critical in the de-objectification of the story's women. As Sloan points out, the aunt does indeed seem to merge with her silent, submissive creations as seamlessly as does her niece, in a manner that none of the men in the story would have ever anticipated. In their near-anonymity, a result of the blurring boundaries that have risen from objectification and the reduction of women to veritable dolls, the women's close relation to the dolls themselves—be it via appearance or treatment—affords the slippage that allows for the categories of subject and object to come into question. And the conclusion, with the young doctor left with a hideous grotesquerie in place of his ill-treated prize object of a wife, by all accounts does seem to give the women in the narrative the last laugh.

There is a notable way in which the representations of women in the narrative fails at the perceived subversion with which critics credit their construction, however. The disappearance of the niece is still troubling, given the aunt's revenge and the fact that the

story never tells us what has become of her. This raises the question of the role of retribution as it works in a climate catalyzed by a traumatic event. Sloan posits that “a seemingly inoffensive toy becomes a vehicle for the expression of outrage and frustration as the aunt, the niece, and the doll converge into the same identity” (40). It is this convergence that is troubling, primarily because, though the niece certainly suffers from the bankruptcy brought about by the doctor’s malpractice, it is the aunt’s traumatic experience that this singular identity responds to, and it is the aunt’s revenge that is ultimately taken. If the aunt is only afforded character development through the device of pain, the niece is not permitted any development whatsoever. In fact, there is very little difference in the narrative between the nieces and the dolls—they are all nameless, silent, and at the whim of the woman who rears them and then subsequently the husbands that take them from her home. The youngest niece is given a single moment of interiority within the story, and that is the moment in which she observes her husband’s paper soul. Perhaps all of the women in the story might benefit from revenge upon the young doctor to an extent, regardless of how it is delivered and at whose cost. But the prawns that fill the doll do not belong to the niece; they are the fruit of the creature that lives in the aunt, and what was a ritualistic practice of caregiving here seems so pervasive as to be suffocating in its finality and reach.

The trend of reading triumphant revenge into the final scene of the narrative hinges on a reading of the women in the story as a collective. Pokorny’s essay sees in the aunt’s doll-making and, she argues, subversively transformative craft a pervasive influence that effectively inserts itself

on the life of her nieces...on their identity, on their behavior, on their personal history, on their response to the traditional roles assigned to them by society, on the prevalent

cultural construction of the female sexual identity and/or destiny, on their perception of the mechanisms of power, on their future, and, on a broader aspect, in the ever-present history of patriarchal and colonial oppression of the Puerto Rican society. (76) Certainly, the dolls in this narrative might act as symbols for a broader collective of women as Pokorny and many of her peers believe them to be. As such, the many-faceted impact she describes seems achievable and central to the story's arc. But the details of the story and its many silent women form a less easily assembled picture of an oppressed gender. Each niece receives a doll that is unique to her, so unique that some of the dolls contain the nieces' baby teeth. And what would be the purpose of creating such specific, such individual dolls that represent not only girls, but girls at the various stages of their lives, if they were all effectively interchangeable? There is strength to be read in numbers, surely, and the gathering of the nieces, the aunt, and the dolls is impactful in its conveyance of a message of female lived experience that is articulated through the merging of those female voices that were kept silent as individuals within the events of the story. However, losing sight of the individual for a broader understanding of the collective excises another important aspect of the text, another message that Ferré weaves into the conclusion of the niece as a doll.

In embodying a vengeful airing of the silenced voices of others, the individual woman becomes the fallout as she loses her humanity to what is in effect the mission of another woman. Ferré presents not only the possibilities of voicing the oppressed through subversion, but the limitations that such an effort presents as well. Those limitations are not by accident rooted in family structures and relationships. In the next and final chapter of this project, I examine traumata as it is passed across generations within the context of larger collectives. Here, a similar phenomenon is at work on a much smaller, more intimate scale. The work of avenging one individual falls not to her but to the child she

has reared, and whether that child might have her own subjective claim to a different destiny does not ultimately seem to figure. What Ferré manages to demonstrate in a powerful few pages of narrative is that through affective caregiving, familial connectivity, and even love, a parent figure can absolutely destroy the subjectivity of a child if that parent's own emotional and psychic baggage remains unresolved and deeply rooted within the space and dynamics of the family at large.

In other words, the family is subject to an infusion of negativity that stems from the unresolved. Call it any of the terms that have been used to describe haunted houses, which are really haunted families if one looks closely enough: a curse, an unwelcome inhabitation, bad luck, a domestic ruin. All of these point to something that the family has been saddled with and that those most vulnerable members, the children, cannot quite reconcile, at least without great sacrifice and in no small part because it is not something that belongs to them but is rather inherited. Ownership of anything is more challenging secondhand, not least of all traumata; making something your own that belonged to a parent means incorporating the psychic matter of that parent into the self, and that process is rarely smooth.

In the end, the youngest niece falls out of the equation entirely, for what is a vehicle of vengeance if not a tool to be used without its own will or desire? The niece has become more of an object than a woman among other de-subjectified women in the narrative (her aunt, her sisters). She is the object that is woman—a possession in marriage, a voiceless and easily reproducible doll—and the object that is child—the bearer of an unquiet legacy given to her regardless of her own will. Automaton and lacking animation just like a doll, she is lifelike only insofar as she is able to achieve those ends dictated by her

maker, whose agenda of revenge consumes wholly and without regard for progeny, or, for that matter, anything else at all.

Pedagogy, Rereading, and “The Youngest Doll”

“La muñeca menor” has appeared in several syllabi I’ve crafted during my graduate instructorship at Rutgers University and concurrent teaching at Queensborough Community College. Practically speaking, the story’s appeal is superficial: it is only a few pages long, the margins in the edition I hand to students are generous, and the tale has an intriguing enough title to appeal to those who are among the least likely to want to commit to any reading homework. If the latter problem should manifest, it’s also a brief and engaging enough story to read together during class. But my students’ response to Ferré’s short story has been far from superficial, and I’ve come away from every class in which we’ve discussed it reflecting on ideas about the text that hadn’t occurred to me before.

When I teach this story, almost every class that I present it to argues passionately over the ambiguity in the plot, which seems to frustrate them unanimously and to no end. They can’t decide: did the youngest niece run away, leaving the doll behind her like a teenaged girl stuffing her bedspread with pillows as she sneaks from her room in the middle of the night, escaping her parents’ watchful eyes? Is this a way for her to publicly humiliate a shallow husband who is obsessed with image and control, while at the same time making a plan for a better life away from men? A good portion of my students seem to think this is the case. Others are dissatisfied with this reading, recognizing the magically real and uncanny aspects of the narrative, and ask: do the two somehow merge, doll and niece,

preternaturally brought together by a familial need for vengeance that takes the form of an anthropomorphic cocoon in which the progeny of the river prawn may thrive? Isn't this a prime example of the magically real functioning at the heart of marriage, the home, and women's restricted existence? And then there is the third group of students, who can't choose between either of these readings and insist: certainly, this is a deliberate enigma crafted by a cunning author whose true purpose is to make her readers doubt themselves. If freshmen writers have learned one thing between Chaucer and Poe, it's that they must never trust their narrators, and if that is the case, then why should authors be above suspicion?

As a teacher of critical reading and writing, this argument in which my students—the staunch pragmatists, the believers in magical realities, the sleuthing skeptics committed to uncertainty—eagerly engage is a kind of gift, as they begin to actively participate in self-motivated close-readings of the story, all determined to prove that their faction of the class has unearthed the true answer and they will be able to show their other classmates the “correct” meaning one should derive from the narrative. The niece has escaped her wicked husband, surely, without use of anything more fantastic than elusiveness. The niece *has* become her doll, and this final magic of the story is satisfying as it is creepy. I have gone so far as to include a question on my reading quizzes regarding the outcome of the story where students can choose: (a) the magically real conclusion, (b) the pragmatic explanation, (c) the author is out to trick us, (d) the classic “none of the above,” or (e) our professor is out to trick us and this question is bogus. Almost none will choose option (e), so determined are they in their resolve. (And in the event that there is any concern about

my teaching practices, I always give bonus points for this question—no one gets it wrong.)

Of course, impassioned as these investigative readings are, students never manage to completely erase the ambiguity present in Ferré's story (though those who are sure they have the accurate reading can never seem to be convinced otherwise). I've even come across exciting and unusual readings of the story that are the result of students working to extremes in order to find a way to smooth out the story's end. One such student suspects the aunt to be a much more active agent in her revenge, pointing out that "since Ferré does not explicitly state the fate of the elder sisters, one cannot assume that the aunt [did not] craft every doll with prawns hidden away inside." Another student recognizes in the prawn the potential for a reproductive capacity that the aunt herself is denied: "The 'frienziéd antennae' serve as a synecdoche for the multitude of prawns that were born from the crustacean implanted in the aunt's leg. Just as the aunt has many nieces, the prawn itself was able to flourish and grow, despite its entrapment within her appendage. Bearing children is a powerful tool in making sure that a family will grow strong and continue on." For another student, the revenge in and of itself seems debatably worth the trouble of its manifestation: "whether the doll has any redeeming qualities in regards to its own horrifying nature is up for debate." And for one student, the locus of the young doctor's greed is not his wife or her title, but her aunt's ailment itself: "It was [a] message to her husband that he really didn't care [about her], everything was based on the prawn that helped him become who he is."⁷¹

⁷¹ Gratitude to my Principles of Literary Studies: Prose students at Rutgers and my Introduction to Literature students at Queensborough for their clever insights, particularly Heather Goodson, Scott Cameron, Daniel Maglione, and Jeffrey Herrera, whose perspectives are quoted here.

Remarkably creative as these students' perspectives are, and in spite of some very persuasive and thoughtful close-reading, in the end none of them rest quite comfortably with the conclusion of Ferré's narrative. And this is in part what the story seems to want to elicit: a response that leaves the reader with revenge but without resolution, with an ending but without a clear conclusion, with the reaping of what was sown but no direction as to what should be done with the yields. Those antennae moving about the doll/niece's hollow eye sockets at the end of the story take us beyond the uncanny and indeed towards the horrific, as my student observes, and that shift as a concluding note leaves readers uncomfortable and perplexed. I assert that it is precisely this lack of resolution that characterizes the experience of familial trauma, and that qualifies the nature of the psychic burden that children reared by disturbed adults find themselves bearing.

Conflict is disruptive to the very fabric of the family; we see evidence of this in the previous chapter as Hushpuppy, Ofelia, and Alexandria are separated from their parents, failed by their surrogates, and marginalized by a societal structure that transcends and corrupts, devastatingly, family ties. The impact is intimate; it strikes close to home by manifesting literally *within* the home, and those inhabitants who encounter such trauma have no option but to continue on with a lack of resolution. If the quotidian fantastic is about a pervasive, particular kind of realism that begets the more-than-real, then in a home infused with emotional unrest, the family can only find objects, rooms, and experiences that reflect their psychic baggage, that echo back their daily struggles in the most unadorned and direct manner.

Psychoanalysis and trauma theory tell us that trauma is not incorporated into the individual's mind as other, more ordinary experience is. Rather, trauma resists narrative and yet insists on being expressed. As a result, its reach extends beyond the typical limits of mundane experience and memory. The family is at once self-contained but also a small collective; what happens to one member belongs to that individual, but the other members of the family are unable to avoid it just the same. The unrest becomes insidious: it spreads throughout the home and touches everyone who resides there, and is passed from parent to child through interaction with one another inside of a common space. As a result, that disturbance becomes the burden of the whole family and not just the individual who brought it home, and as such, it changes and shifts. Before long, the home is haunted, concentric ripples of unrest moving through the domestic space, and the challenge of parsing a source for the effects of this disturbance or being able to glean the sums of its parts grows increasingly difficult. Therefore, the family cannot incorporate a disruptive experience into its multiplicitous existence in a normative manner, or even in the same way that an individual might. It must instead grapple with the incomplete, not locatable nature of that experience.

Perhaps the thing that impresses me most whenever I teach this story is my students' enthusiasm in returning to and actively rereading the text. I typically assign it towards the beginning of a semester, if anything as an exercise in careful and thorough close-reading. Yet many of my students will request the story as a text to include in their final paper, pairing it with any number of other narratives we have read, as it seems they can trace its reach across the duration of the semester. In rereading "La muñeca menor," much that is observed at first glance increases in its gravity upon another look; in particular, the

familial relationships and repetitions seem to stand out to these critical readers, and they find themselves seeing double: in the aunt and her niece, in the nieces and their dolls, in the doctor and his son, in the prawn and its progeny. And the theme of trauma in Ferré's short work thus becomes heavier and more baldly apparent.

To reread a text about trauma, to repeat words multiple times in the hopes of incorporating new ideas into one's own narrative work, functions on a level that is doubly metatextual, with the repetitive creative acts and the repetitive nature of traumatic narrative in the text both echoed by the reader. As trauma theorist Cathy Caruth refreshes readers' memory on the concept of the double wound as Freud discusses it, she highlights the importance of repetition and return in regards to trauma:

...in Freud's text, the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But...the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that...is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor...trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (3-4)

To look more than once at a narrative about trauma, to return to a story like Ferré's, is to enact a critical aspect of the content of the text itself. It is impossible, according to Freud and Caruth, for the traumatized individual to simply know the fact of her trauma. This haunting, this act of repeated return, brings the aftermath of a traumatic event closer, and yet it also destabilizes the world around the traumatized, because it resists temporal conventions of narrative and memory. In the case of a family, that return is not taken up by the individual alone. The niece/doll's body is the one that is filled with prawns, not because a prawn burrowed into her leg, but because her aunt has not come to a resolution.

The literal wound in the aunt's leg becomes the psychic wound Caruth is discussing as the return to the past is taken up by a family, one with a house full of frozen memories in the form of handcrafted dolls. And to reread the story of this family, to experience it again, is to mimic the trajectory of the trauma survivor: the reader at once knows and does not know what is to come, and every return is at once familiar and yet distinctly changed.

The quotidian fantastic as a subtle insertion of the extraordinary into the space and experience of the ordinary functions as more than a simple manifestation of magical realism; it can be understood in the same way that trauma begins to ooze from the afflicted individual into her family, much like the tip of the wound in which a prawn resides oozes evidence of its near-complacent perpetuity and nevertheless catastrophic effects. The domestic space of the home, the affect of those adults presiding over that space, and the manner in which they rear the children of the home become infused with traumatic experience in such a way that begets an expanded reaction that is, in many senses, infectious in nature. Caruth also tells us that, "it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (4). This link to the unknown is what functions so critically between members of a family as traumata is handed to the youth. What is unspoken/unspeakable and unseen/invisible is also pervasive/undeniable, and as a result, those family members who inherit the burden of trauma do not have the option of denial. The burden is present, even as it is indecipherable, and it is weighty enough to erode the individuality of the

child who has no choice but to take it up. The magically real premise of the story of a woman brought to ruin is proven a quotidian fantastic narrative incidence of traumatic replacement in which a child becomes infused with and then erased by the extraordinary condition of her upbringing: the prawns appear as the youngest niece disappears, and so our story ends.

Ferré's story portrays a traumatic event that follows and ultimately erases the child of the parent who experienced it, but her narrative is focused on a contained scale at the level of the familial. When one family becomes many and a larger collective is formed, the nature of traumatic experience develops further and in new ways. The danger of trauma is its persistence, which manifests across generations; its volatility, as it alters in unexpected ways; and its desire to replicate, which we see in the not one, but many prawns that fill the body of the youngest niece/doll. The child who is present during a conflict may navigate her own engagement with that conflict, even as adults work to push her away and dismiss her from it, thinking and acting through her own experience of the conflict in parallel tensions and worlds. However, the child of another's trauma, who has no access to or memory of the source event, is left struggling with the presence of something she cannot figure out by tracing it back to its origin. The past is not within her grasp, and yet it violently affects her by means of her familial associations. Trauma makes the family, the domestic, the quotidian, and the caring unstable at best; while the traumatized parent generation attempts to work through the remnants of a past event, the children that come after the fact are ultimately erased as a result of those same efforts.

Chapter Three

Traumatic Inheritance: Gothic Legacy and Somatic Phantasy

Your memory is a monster; you forget—it doesn't. It simply files things away. It keeps things for you, or hides things from you—and summons them to your recall with a will of its own. You think you have a memory; but it has you!

-John Irving

I longed for a future that could be wrested from an irredeemable past. My present was the future that had been created by men and women in chains, by human commodities, by chattel persons. I tried hard to envision a future in which this past had ended, and most often I failed.

-Saidiya Hartman

Collective Histories of Mass Oppression, Descendant Generations, and Temporal

Disruption

From the preceding chapter's engagement with Rosario Ferré's story "La muñeca menor," we glean the impact of a traumatic incident on not only the member of a family to whom it occurs, but also on the child that is subsequently reared by that initial family member after the fact of that traumatic incident. There are in Ferré's text two relevant fictive individuals belonging to two consecutive generations within a single narrative family who are both impacted by a single traumatic event. Thus, we can conclude that fictive representations of children whose rearing follows a traumatic event that their caregiver(s) survived are shaped by that event. For the child characters of traumatized parents within contemporary narrative, the past becomes a persistent presence that mutates their linear experience of time and ordinary domestic life into a quotidian fantastic occurrence. The caregiver figure in Ferré's story, whether intentionally or subconsciously, utilizes the child character in such a way that overshadows the latter's individuality, leaving that child as a narrative vehicle of vengeance without claims to desires or designs of her own. An erasure of sorts ensues, and the familial traumatic burden that the child carries obliterates her existence, even as there is a degree of distance

separating her from the traumata in question. That distance is her own separation from the initial traumatic incident: the aunt is the character in Ferré's story who is bitten by the prawn. Her niece is reared in the wake of that incident, and even as the doll-like body fills with prawns at the story's end, those prawns are part of an aftermath of the initial event.

This chapter will posit that the purview of this phenomenon of the familial traumatic burden as seen in Ferré's text can effectively be expanded. The first two chapters of the project have looked to narrative situations where the individual child subject relates to an individual adult authority/caregiver in an isolated context. However, this chapter examines how a *descendant generation* has a relevant but distinct relationship with a *parent generation* comprised of a particular traumatized collective.⁷² The parent generation is a group that has survived a traumatic *source event* (literally, an event that results in the traumatization of a collective), and the descendant generation are those whose ancestry extends back several generations to that traumatized parent generation and whose contemporary collective experience is informed by ancestral trauma.⁷³

⁷² My terminology adheres to normative familial conventions that may not always prove the best direct parallel to a narrative like Ferré's. That said, this chapter is engaging critics who find the parent-child relationship as a terminological equivalent effective in conveying arguments about collectives. In an effort towards clarity and a comprehensible vocabulary, I am also employing such terminology while acknowledging that normative family models do not necessarily make up the collectives to which I refer.

⁷³ My theories on collective experience as it belongs to the descendant generation is indebted to scholars working on collective memory, particularly as I am considering how identity politics inform the makeup of these collectives. As William Hirst and David Manier assert, there are significant and "close relations between collective memory and collective identity" (183). Other notable sources on the subject as it exists across disciplines include: Ainslie, Ricardo C. "Intervention Strategies for Addressing Collective Trauma: Healing Communities Ravaged by Racial Strife." *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 18.2 (2013); Assmann, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; Aydin, Ciano. "How to Forget the Unforgettable? On Collective Trauma, Cultural Identity, and Mnemotechnologies." *Identity* 17.3 (2017): 125-137; Bakó, Tihamér and Katalin Zana. "The Vehicle of Transgenerational Trauma: The Transgenerational Atmosphere." *American Imago* 75.2 (2018): 271-285; Barash, Jeffrey Andrew. "At the Threshold of Memory: Collective Memory Between Personal Experience and Political Identity." *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics* 2 (2011): 249-267; Bourke, Joanna, Stefan Goebel, Arnold Krammer, Michael Cunningham, Wulf Kansteiner, Scott Worthy, and Dan Porat. "Collective Memory." *Journal of Contemporary History*

Whereas the first two chapters of this project involved the impact of trauma-inducing conflict examined at what we will now consider the micro-level of individuals and families, here we will engage a much broader experience of trauma. The characters in the novels on which this chapter focuses will thus be considered descendants of traumatized collectives and the bearers of inherited traumata themselves, while not being subject to the traumatic source event, as it occurred long before they were born.

In contrast with the individual child whose subjectivity is threatened by the unresolved issues of her caregiver, the descendant generation that emerges from a traumatized collective is not in danger of being overlooked or erased by her ancestry, but rather *overtaken* by that traumatized collective as a result of a much more aggressive temporal disruption that is at work. For the descendants of a traumatized collective, the traumata of their predecessors interrupt their lives with no accessible point of origin. As the traumatic past disrupts the present, it almost jealously retains the source event of the trauma that haunts these subsequent generations' lives. The violence of the past aggressively acts out in the present as residue of the source event, but at the same time, that source trauma is closed off from the present by conventions of linear time, making direct access to the traumatic catalyst impossible. Therefore, the unfinished business of the past cannot be

39.4 (2004): 473-636; Confino, Alon. *Foundational Pasts: the Holocaust as Historical Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Corning, Amy and Howard Schuman. *Generations and Collective Memory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015; Hirschberger, Gilad. "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning." *Frontiers in Psychology* (2018); Jacobs, Janet Liebman. "Sacred Space and Collective Memory: Memorializing Genocide at Sites of Terror." *Sociology of Religion* 72.2 (2011): 154-165; Johnson, Corey W. *Collective Memory Work*. New York: Routledge, 2018; Kansteiner, Wulf. "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies." *History and Theory* 41.2 (2002): 179-197; Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001; Olick, Jeffrey K. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge, 2007; Osiel, Mark. *Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory, and the Law*. Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1999; Ros, Ana. *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

rectified through a direct confrontation from the present, shutting down the possibility of straightforward resolution. Furthermore, the magnitude of atrocity that must exist in order for this traumatic disruption to span an entire collective manifests in an extraordinary persistence of the past, a fantastic iteration that is incessant and gothic in nature.

Magnitude is the most significant aspect of collective trauma as it works on multiple levels. Horizontally, it is enacted upon many individuals and families who together form a collective; vertically, it moves down through successive generations of that collective in perpetuity; and circuitously, the temporal disruption in question can only occur once the source event is closed off in a past to which descendant generations have no immediate access, not even through contact with an elder relative who was directly touched by that event. This last distinction is important; in the individual and family stories examined in the previous two chapters, the fantastic at the margins and infused in the quotidian act upon children who can look upon and/or recall by familial proxy the source event of trauma. However, in narratives focused on descendant generations, characters are cut off from the traumatic source event by the passage of linear time, and this results in an instability that is distinct from the fantastic occurrences that frame those who have direct access to a source event. Time in the context of trauma takes on a notably spatial aspect, as there is definitive and troublesome distance preventing descendant generations from stabilizing themselves through contact with the source of the trauma they encounter.

This instability manifests as a gothic occurrence both because of the magnitude⁷⁴ of the collectives involved, and because of the particular nature of its fantastic

⁷⁴ From the inception of gothic studies, magnitude has been identified as productive of terror. Looking briefly to Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, we can see that he traces Vastness, Infinity, and Succession and Uniformity as contributors to sublime and terrifying experiences (Burke 66-69). This grouping underscores the classically gothic elements that appear in the texts this chapter focuses on.

manifestations: violent time travel (in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*), possession (in Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*), second sight (in Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue*), and perceived/realized madness and adjacent realities (in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*). These four narratives are the focus of this chapter because their protagonists belong to descendant generations that stem from traumatized ancestry who were targeted by oppressors for particular identity markers, and the manifestation of the traumata in the life of each text's protagonist is richly gothic in nature. These are stories in which the figure of the gothic heroine converges with the classic gothic *and* colonial convention of the individual who is desubjectified as Other.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the authors' use of gothic elements allow for representations that otherwise might seem extreme but that are absolutely crucial in conveying the equally extreme nature of traumatic experience on the page. As gothicist Fred Botting reminds us, "Gothic signifies a writing of excess" (1), and though in the context of conventional realist narrative it might seem contradictory, in texts where traumatic representation is the goal, excess is not extraneous but unquestionably necessary.

Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred*, first published in 1979, tells the story of a twentieth-century black American woman who is without warning transported to the plantation on

⁷⁵ Ann Radcliffe is perhaps the most cited author of such heroines within Western gothic canons. Other sources of note in this tradition include works by the Brontës, Frances Burney, Horace Walpole, and any number of anonymous creators of gothic bluebooks that plagiarized and/or serialized the more well-known works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

which her ancestors were kept as slaves.^{76, 77} The catalyst for this violent time travel⁷⁸ is Rufus, the young son of the plantation owner and, as protagonist Dana will discover, one of her ancestors. Whenever Rufus finds his life in danger, Dana is transported from her life in 1970s California to nineteenth century Maryland. Over relative time, as Rufus grows up into a brutal slaveowner, alcoholic, and rapist, it becomes increasingly difficult for Dana to justify saving his life, especially since the targets of his violence are her own ancestors, and eventually Dana herself. *Kindred* functions as gothic in its violent utilization of its science fiction element.⁷⁹ Firsthand exposure to her ancestral past leaves Dana physically and psychologically linked to an atrocious history, and what is a fantastic element of the novel enacts a realism and believability that is crucial to Butler's project in creating a speculative neo-slave narrative: "Through the insertion of slave narrative elements, Dana's otherwise fantastic experience of slavery becomes typical, credible...Through speculative fiction's juxtapositions, the conditions and logic of

⁷⁶ While *Kindred* is conventionally seen as an outlier to Butler's oeuvre of science fiction because of its historical aspects, the novel as a work of gothic literature is in keeping with much of her work, notably her shorter works which she has in some cases annotated and analyzed in order to correct critical assumptions (some based on *Kindred*) and offer the reader an insight directly into the author's views on the text.

⁷⁷ Philip Miletic reads Butler's novel as a timely response to the Black Arts and Black Power literary movements, citing in particular the book's highlighting the historical voices of black women (2016). Other critics who engage historical political projects of the novel include: Guha-Majumdar, Jishnu. "The Dilemmas of Hope and History: Concrete Utopianism in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*." *Palimpsest* 6.2 (2017): 129-152; Schiff, Sarah Eden. "Recovering (from) the Double: Fiction as Historical Revision in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *Arizona Quarterly* 65.1 (2009): 107-136; Setka, Stella. "Phantasmic Reincarnation: Igbo Cosmology in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *MELUS* 41.1 (2016). In a 2009 essay, Kelley Wagers, who speaks to Butler's perspectives on how black youth at the time of her novel's publication were misreading the survival tactics of their elders as conservative and submissive (27).

⁷⁸ For a fascinating engagement that looks to *Kindred* and Butler's vampire novel *Fledgling* as texts that resist conventional temporal representation and experiences of aging, see Habiba Ibrahim's 2016 article "Any Other Age: Vampires and Oceanic Lifespans."

⁷⁹ Kirin Wachter-Grene writes of *Kindred* and other related fictions that feature speculative and gothic engagements with a slave past: "Abuse and trauma are historical specters that understandably haunt much African American literature...The literature represents abuse and trauma and their relationship to transgression through forms of slavery and neoslavery and often drives literary criticism that traces slavery's contemporary residue as a continual trauma, as seen in Ashraf Rushdy's *Neo-Slave Narratives*, Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, and Christina Sharpe's *Monstrous Intimacies*" (339).

slavery are made immediate and jarring” (Flagel 218). This believability is a critical aspect of the genre, as the narrative utilizes its gothic elements in order to communicate a historical veracity to readers that points to the significance of collective traumatic phenomena. Furthermore, the threat of incestuous rape that is raised in the latter part of the novel takes up the gothic trope of sexual violence as a decidedly American traumatic residue, where entire collectives can articulate themselves as descendants of systemic rape.⁸⁰ It is no accident that this threat of rape is a limit for Dana in terms of what she is willing to live through, as the chapter will discuss.

A text that is frequently read alongside Butler’s, *Stigmata* is a debut novel published by journalist Phyllis Alesia Perry in 1998.⁸¹ Lizzie, the book’s protagonist, finds her

⁸⁰ Scholars focused on systemic gendered violence and historical sexual violence against black women in America include: Braxton, Joanne M. and Trimiko Melancon. *Black Female Sexualities*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015; Buchanan, NiCole T., Isis H. Settles, and Krystle C. Woods. "Comparing Sexual Harassment Subtypes Among Black and White Women by Military Rank." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 32.4 (2008): 347-361; Chapman, Erin D. *Prove It On Me*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2008; Cooper, Brittney C. *Beyond Respectability*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017; Davis, Angela. *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Vintage, 1983; Feimster, Crystal N. *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011; Freedman, Estelle B. *Redefining Rape*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015; Gaye, Roxanne. *Hunger*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2018; Gaye, Roxane. *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2018; Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; Lindsey, Treva B. *Colored No More*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017; McGuire, Danielle L. *At the Dark End of the Street*. New York: Vintage, 2011; Napson-Williams, Theresa. *Violating the black body: Black women, white men and sexual violence, 1920-1952*. 2007. PhD dissertation; Pierce-Baker, Charlotte. *Surviving the Silence: Black Women's Stories of Rape*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000; Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body*. New York: Vintage, 1998; Washington, Harriet A. *Medical Apartheid*. New York: Anchor, 2008; West, Carolyn M. *Violence in the Lives of Black Women*. New York: Routledge, 2003; Wooten, Sara Carrigan, ed. *The Crisis of Campus Sexual Violence*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

⁸¹ Critics who engage such comparative readings of the two novels include: Bellamy, Maria Rice. *Bridges to Memory*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015; Crossley, Robert. "Critical Essay." *Kindred*. Octavia Butler, author. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003; Harris, Trudier. *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009; Long, Lisa A. "A Relative Pain: The Rape of History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*." *College English* 64.4 (2002): 459-483; Schalk, Sami. *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2018; Woolfork, Lisa. *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture*. Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

body afflicted with wounds of slavery, only to learn that they signify the presence of her deceased grandmother Grace, and Grace's own grandmother Ayo/Bessie, both come to consciousness within Lizzie's body in the present. As with Butler's text, Perry's novel utilizes non-linear and unconventional temporalities; unlike Dana in *Kindred*, however, Lizzie faces an additional challenge of a family that institutionalizes her, seeking help from mental health professionals who prove no match for the possessions of Grace and Ayo-Bessie. The gothic convention of the institutionalized madwoman intersects with the trope of the possessed individual who is misunderstood as mad within the pages of *Stigmata*, though as critic Camille Passalacqua points out, "Lizzie's first-person narration makes it difficult for readers to believe that she is as crazy as the doctors in the mental hospitals suggest. Paradoxically, Lizzie's story requires readers' trust because what she tells us defies logic" (144). As with Butler's novel, a certain degree of credibility is necessary for Perry to establish the link to her readers that the novel is pushing for. That said, this trust is earned through more than simply a first-person narrative voice. Other women in the narrative manage to attain glimpses of Grace and Ayo-Bessie as they exist within Lizzie; as with many trauma narratives, it is the role of the witness to testify to what she has seen, unbelievable and extreme though it may be.

Yvonne Vera's lyric 1996 novella *Under the Tongue* moves us out of the United States and brings us to Zimbabwe in the context of war and societal upheaval, where adolescent Zhizha is cared for by her grandmother, having lost her mother Runyararo to prison. Runyararo's imprisonment is the result of her killing her soldier husband Muroyiwa after discovering he had violently raped their daughter. The novella brings us back to the incest and rape taboos mentioned previously in the context of Butler's novel;

here, however, it is the aftermath rather than the threat of rape that the narrative engages. Canonical gothic works often include incest, but they frequently make the act one of ancient family history so that the immediate aftermath is not portrayed. Vera's decision to represent the immediate trauma of rape, even as she builds into her narrative the ancestral trauma of colonization that informs all perspectives in the novella, allows readers to see how descendant generations can be subject to the compounding of a traumatic ancestral history while struggling with traumatic events that happen directly to them in the present.⁸² Vera makes use of striking stylized narration that lends itself to gothic symbolism, such as the mirror in which Zhizha envisions and speaks with her imprisoned mother, as well as eliciting sublime nature imagery that is the hallmark of many early canonical gothic texts. Whereas a canonical author like Radcliffe might utilize Valancourt's fixation with the wild mountain landscape in order to showcase the sensitivity of her gothic hero, Vera takes this convention and replaces ordinary language with nature imagery-heavy symbolic narration in order to allow her protagonist a way to recover her voice in the face of a traumatic emotional paralysis. This gothic language allows Zhizha to piece together her self and her memory of the rape that is preventing her from moving forward, offering her a way of viewing the world that I liken to a fantastic form of second sight.

⁸² Another notable primary source in which a child member of a descendant generation experiences a rape in the present and the compounding of both present and transmitted traumas is Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. As with Morrison's text, Vera's is unique in looking at the traumatic experiences of the child protagonist, her parental abuser, and the context in which these acts of violence occur. Other relevant texts that look at the trauma of rape within the context of a family that experiences broader collective traumata include: Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*, Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*.

Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* is an autobiographical novel published in 1973, making it the oldest of the texts this chapter will explore and an apt selection to conclude a chapter on the gothic, which habitually sets its gaze to the past. Elizabeth's exile from apartheid South Africa and subsequent residence in Botswana is only one aspect of her struggle with displacement; she is also subject to visions that torment her in her waking life and prevent her from caring for her young son. As does Vera's novella, *A Question of Power* presents readers with a striking stylized language. However, Bessie Head's prose summons mythological and biblical figures of wrath and extreme violence, bringing her readers in extremely close proximity to the experience of mental anguish; as Jacqueline Rose writes, "I am sure I am not the only reader to have experienced *A Question of Power* as writing by battery assault" (404).⁸³ Head's novel touches on many of the mental health issues that Perry's book also examines; it also broadens our scope, temporally and geographically, in looking to black women's experience with mental healthcare systems in the second half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the gothic engagement that the novel takes up in representing an Othering that is rooted in the policing of citizenship and the exile of individuals based on race speaks to a larger critical conversation in the field of gothic studies, one that turns its attention towards (post)colonial progressions within the genre as it develops through the twentieth century.⁸⁴

⁸³ Critics who are focused specifically on Head's representations of mental struggles and illness include: Hogan, Patrick Colm. "Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*: a Lacanian Psychosis." *Mosaic* 27.2 (1994): 95-113; Veit-Wild, Flora. *Writing Madness: Borderlines of the Body in African Literature*. Melton: James Currey, 2006; Young, Shannon. "Therapeutic Insanity: The Transformative Vision of Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*." *Research in African Literatures* 41.4 (2010): 227-241.

⁸⁴ Notable scholars working in the subfield of (post)colonial gothic include: Ancuta, Katarzyna. "Asian Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Gothic*. Jerrold E. Hogle, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Barclay, Fiona. *Writing Postcolonial France*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011; Beville, Maria. *Gothic-Postmodernism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009; Casanova-Vizcaíno, Sandra and Inés Ordiz. *Latin American Gothic in Literature and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2017; Edmundson, Melissa. *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire*.

The introduction of a gothic lens as it is applied to late-twentieth century literature will inevitably invite debate over whether that genre and/or mode of literature even exists into the twentieth century.⁸⁵ This debate, however, is less relevant than questions of *how* these particular novels build on, deconstruct, and reshape gothic foundations, and how their gothic aspects contribute to understanding the violent impact of temporal disruption on descendant generations. Gothicists working in the subfields of postcolonial and global gothic studies, as well as gothicists committed to discussing issues of race and racism in the context of the literature offer new perspectives that have enriched the field by turning it towards relevant applications to previously marginalized voices and narratives.^{86 87}

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Edwards, Justin D. *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013; Eljaiek-Rodríguez, Gabriel. *The Migration and Politics of Monsters in Latin American Cinema*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Eljaiek-Rodríguez, Gabriel. *Selva de fantasmas: El gótico en la literatura y el cine latinoamericanos*. Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2017; Gelder, Ken and Rachael Weaver, eds. *The Anthology of Colonial Australian Gothic Fiction*. Melbourne: Melbourne University, 2007; Gladwin, Derek. *Contentious Terrains: Boglands, Ireland, Postcolonial Gothic*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2016; Khair, Tabish and Johan Höglund. *Transnational and Postcolonial Vampires*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Ng, Andrew Hock Soon, ed. *Asian Gothic*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2008; Rudd, Alison. *Postcolonial Gothic Fictions from the Caribbean, Canada, Australia and New Zealand*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010; Sis, Roshanak Naseri. *A Study of the Parodic Postcolonial and Postcolonial Gothic Fiction*. Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2015; Sugars, Cynthia and Gerry Turcotte, eds. *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009; Wester, Maisha L. *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

⁸⁵ I find Fred Botting's understanding of the development of the gothic genre in the twentieth century helpful: "Many of the anxieties articulated in Gothic terms in the nineteenth century reappear in the twentieth century. Their appearance, however, is more diverse, a diffusion of Gothic traces among a multiplicity of different genres and media. Science fiction, the adventure novel, modernist literature, romantic fiction and popular horror writing often resonate with Gothic motifs that have been transformed and displaced by different cultural anxieties" (13). That such displacement should occur across genres as a direct result of cultural anxieties is truly a gothic progression and an organic evolution for that mode to undergo in a century fixated on new technology and digital text.

⁸⁶ Katarzyna Ancuta on the expansion of the gothic as it is taken up by postcolonial scholarship: "By acknowledging that both the process and the outcomes of colonization are traumatic experiences capable of producing haunting narratives, postcolonial studies have successfully relocated the discussion of the Gothic outside the narrow boundaries of its Anglo-American foundations" (Hogle 208).

⁸⁷ Maisha L. Wester on the relevance of the genre in a contemporary context: "While scholars have listed a number of reasons for the Gothic genre's prevalence in the British and American traditions—particularly its capacity to be a consistent resource for the disguised expression of challenges and anxieties facing a given culture at a given moment—one of the most striking reasons for the genre's popularity has proven to be its function as a discourse on the terrors of racial otherness and racial encounter" (Hogle 157).

While who exists at the margins is contingent upon whose story is being told (and, as our twenty-first century perspectives would suggest, who is doing the telling), white Western claims on gothic literature have been challenged, deconstructed, and dispelled throughout contemporary critical conversations with a voice that is growing into a majority within gothic studies.⁸⁸

In examining the novels that are included in this chapter, I aim to look more closely at trauma as it stands as central within relevant (post)colonial, racial, and national subfields of the gothic. Trauma as it functions in these particular texts belongs to the gothic because of the encounters members of descendant generations have with their ancestral traumatic matter. At the crux of those interactions is the uncanny and consuming persistence of the traumatic experience for the members of the descendant generation. To borrow Gabriele Schwab's terminology, when trauma takes its *transgenerational* form, when it spreads beyond the confines of the individual and the family and is taken up by a collective, moving down through generations, it evolves so that, like anything, it might continue. In other words, like any virus or other invasive organism, trauma seeks to

⁸⁸ The most notable work gothic scholars continually turn to when considering these subfields is Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Andrew Smith writes of the gothic anxieties in the text, "*Beloved* (1987) is a gender-aware reconstruction of a range of anxieties (psychological, historical, and economic) which reflect on the history of slavery in North America" (Smith 9). Maisha L. Wester adds, "...it is Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) that best illustrates that African American reworking of the Gothic tradition. At once a ghost story and a neo-slave narrative, the novel is also an African American refusal to give 'way to imaginary terror' and a decision to ground fear 'in the stern realities of life' within the historical 'boundaries of time'...Indeed, Gothic tropes of torture, murder, rape, immolation, living burial, and madness all occur as parts of narratives of slavery, not as part of the supernatural. Thus...the Gothic in *Beloved* becomes a way of both mystifying and symbolizing the living nightmare of racial oppression" (Hogle 171). In the near-thirty years since the novel's publication, such contextualizations have come forth in abundance; however, despite its foundational status, this chapter will not engage *Beloved* for a very specific reason: as Wester reminds us, *Beloved* is a neo-slave narrative, and Sethe's haunted present is tied directly to her own traumatic past. The descendant generation experiences gothic manifestations of the parent generation's trauma because of the temporal distance that keeps the descendant generation from accessing the source trauma.

multiply and, in so doing, survive. And it is this survival of a traumatic event's impact within the children of its victims that leads to the perpetuation of trauma itself. The dead victims of genocide, slavery, or war do not carry on the trauma of their encounter with the malevolence that kills them; rather, those victims who survive, who escape the traumatic incident's lethality but take with them a terrible knowledge gained via a horrific encounter, will inevitably pass down their traumata. That knowledge develops into myriad gothic experiences and occurrences, perhaps in part because the term "survivor" is imperfect. Of those who do survive a traumatic event, the parent generation, critic Ghislaine Boulanger writes, "persecution and terror...can, and frequently do, lead to the collapse of the self, a psychic disenfranchisement that makes the survivor question whether he or she did, in fact, survive" (641). The extended climate of anxiety that surrounds descendant generations is not the xenophobic, externalized fear featured in canonical Western gothic novels—fear of the Other, of a disappearing way of life—but rather an internal, intimate understanding that the past, in fact, is not disappearing but able to recur without warning; that you exist *as* the Other, and the fear colonizers and their privileged domesticities have for you could have even kept you from ever being born; that something bad is not going to happen but already has, and whether or not you are prepared to deal with that event, it intends to reckon with you.

This form of gothic anxiety strikes at the heart of sublime terror, perhaps more authentically than many canonical gothic texts are able to. This is because those older texts are largely based on the unknown, on anxieties one may hold within oneself but that are based on glimpses of something outside of that self, gleaned and yet removed from it. The stories examined in this chapter, however, feature gothic protagonists whose

anxieties are very much rooted in something well and deeply known. Dana *knows* what it means that she has returned to the antebellum South as a black woman; Elizabeth *knows* that the visions that visit her are not dissimilar from visions that may have appeared to her mother, who was locked in an institution for behavior deemed by society to be mental illness. This knowledge achieves a sublime terror that is deeply internal, much more than any fear of the unknown could be. The interior of the descendant of a traumatized collective is full of the awful knowledge that what she fears is not possibility, but, in fact, long ago realized reality.

While these protagonists may experience the self-aware, awful knowledge that they are interacting with the psychic residue of something that has happened in the past, even as they all experience the temporal disruption of haunting and visits of a traumatic past, the past can of course never *precisely* repeat itself. Thus, to be revisited by a past traumatic event is not to experience that event exactly, but rather to be disrupted in a way that is both familiar and unexpected: collective memory entails a certain awareness of a history that has never been seen by those who recall it by means of its lingering and impact. This unpredictability of the disruption experienced by the descendant generation adds another layer to inherited traumata with which the individual experiencing it must grapple. Converging with the passed-on material of the past and the struggle to make sense of residue of a past ancestral event is the reality of one's own present-day negative experiences colliding with the trauma that one has inherited. This can be specific to the present moment while simultaneously contributed to by the past. For example, in *Kindred*, Dana is experiencing perilous time travel back to the slave plantation where her ancestors reside, but she is also a Black woman navigating the 1970s in America. The

familial tension of racism caused by her white sister-in-law's decision to snub Dana is as relevant to her ancestry as her violent travel through time: in both cases, it is Dana's race that is being attacked. The totality of the traumatic experience becomes in a sense plural, as Dana attempts to manage her ancestral trauma and her present-day struggles at the same time.

That plural compounding of past and present traumatic material is in and of itself anachronistic; in order to navigate the out-of-time aspects of the traumata, these protagonists become the space in which said anachronism takes up residence. Just because these women do not have voluntary or direct access to the source traumatic events that disrupt their lives does not mean that the past does not have direct access to them. In other words, this temporal disruption is particularly intrusive, with violent potential that is magnified by its anachronistic aspects and by its embodiment within members of the descendant generation. This is because the temporal disruption, in its extreme nature and existing within the protagonists themselves, can do physical harm to the protagonists, reproducing the physical harm their ancestors experienced as a result of the source traumatic event. Again, somatization is not the same as the event of trauma repeating itself exactly—these women remain within their temporal context, to an extent, and they are never able to return completely to the source traumatic event for a direct confrontation. However, the repetition of specific bodily injury points to the source event's impact as inevitably tied to bodily harm; thus, these women experience exhibit somatic responses to their ancestral pasts because the gothic manifestation of that past within the present is always, to whatever degree, embodied. This is the distinction I am drawing when I say that these characters are not erased but rather overtaken: the trauma

that works on members of descendant generations takes the traumata of the source event and enacts them in the bodies of descendants.⁸⁹ This embodied traumatic experience compounds further with the psychological health of the women, who are often perceived as insane; given that the source traumatic event—the violent acts that cause these wounds to appear—belongs to the past, the cause of their physical symptoms cannot be witnessed by onlookers who evaluate their overall health. This prohibits their conditions from being fully understood, and therefore further prohibits proper diagnoses. The issue is not that the somatization in question is invisible, but that those who seek to fix the somatic responses see in the physical ailments both cause and effect, unable to look beyond and find a restless, violent past.

As the gothic occurrence of these wounds repeats, knowledge of the source trauma begins to transform into memory.⁹⁰ In this way, the bodies of the descendant generation are subject to possession by their ancestors, the remembered traumatized who form the initial collective.⁹¹ As such, the parent generation does not aim to harm its progeny; rather, its pain resonates in such a way that the descendant generation gains limited

⁸⁹ Marianne Hirsch speaks similarly about this, though her argument leans more towards a perceived erasure than the possession my own work discusses: “To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present” (Hirsch 5). While I agree with much of this argument, as will become apparent in the next paragraph, I feel that there is an empathetic aspect to the traumatic persistence in question that prohibits complete erasure and instead leads to members of the descendant generation being overtaken, resulting in a traumatic persistence that is also potentially transient.

⁹⁰ Hirsch neatly lays out several memory studies critics’ terminology for this phenomenon of passed-down ancestral traumatic recall, which she terms *postmemory*: “‘absent memory’ (Ellen Fine), ‘inherited memory,’ ‘belated memory,’ ‘prosthetic memory’ (Celia Lury, Alison Landsberg), ‘mémoire trouée’ (Henri Raczymow), ‘mémoire des cendres’ (Nadine Fresco), ‘vicarious witnessing’ (Froma Zeitlin), ‘received history’ (James Young), ‘haunting legacy’ (Gabriele Schwab), and ‘postmemory’” (3).

⁹¹ It is this embodied experience that Maria Rice Bellamy makes the focus of her comparative analysis of Butler’s and Perry’s respective works: “What if postmemory were experienced physically, affecting the inheritors of traumatic memory in their bodies as well as their minds and emotions?” (Bellamy).

access to it, and that access is empathetic in nature. Thus, to be haunted by one's ancestral trauma is to come to know the pain of that trauma in intimate and embodied ways. Again, magnitude figures as key in this gothic occurrence: the slavery of an isolated woman's ancestry is not enough to cause temporal disruption that works at this level. It is the systemic enslavement of her entire race—all ancestors of all descendants belonging to that collective—that creates such an extreme phenomenon of psychic trauma that it can reach beyond the temporal root of the source traumatic event. The archive of memory that visits itself on the descendant body is an archive belonging to the multitudes that have come forth out of that source event, vast enough feel the echoes of such horror into the very bodies of the future.

Archives are kept so that something may be remembered; the act of remembering of the pain of a source traumatic event at first glance might seem to defy logic. In the novels explored in this chapter, many of the characters are dangerously, nearly fatally, wounded by the gothic manifestations of the violence that their ancestors experienced. As stated previously, the protagonists in question are the descendants of survivors—the victims of a traumatic source event that do not survive are in turn unable to ensure the survival of the trauma of that event. If the idea is not only to transmit the past but also attest to it, to ensure that some record of it not only exists but thrives as a living being, or rather *in* a living being, then why risk the life of that individual meant to carry forth this collective memory? This seeming contradiction comes as a result of the fact that it is paradigmatic for trauma to exist outside of narrative and conventional memory, in no small part because trauma is never the thing itself, but by its very nature, aftermath. In order for trauma, which psychology understands as experience that has not been incorporated by

the mind into the life narrative of the self, to persist, the mind must be at odds with the body. In other words, from the perspective of parties who hope to see the harmful effects of traumatic residue heal, there needs to be a conventional incorporation of the source event into the narrative of the individual. But when the source event does not belong directly to the individual, how is she supposed to incorporate this residue into herself? How can the member of the descendant generation accept into herself atrocious residue from her ancestral past without undertaking great risk to that same self? And, on the other hand, how can she refuse the collective memory, the archive that must be preserved?

If there are satisfactory answers to be found, they seem to lie in the gothic narrative renderings explored here. In *Stigmata*, Lizzie experiences a temporal disruption that visits members of descendant generations in her family, but skips from grandmother to granddaughter; thus, she experiences her grandmother experiencing *her* grandmother's capture and enslavement, the deep wounds caused by manacles appearing on the wrists of all three women. In addition to the experience of the wounds, Lizzie is from time to time possessed by her grandmother and her grandmother's grandmother, losing track of herself but remaining cognizant in the process. As she is slowly beginning to understand what is happening to her, she instinctively turns towards dismissal of her experience:

Ok. I was sitting up in bed and then I wasn't here. I looked from the eyes of another person. A person now dead...I went out for a long moment and I was back. Wasn't I? I don't know who to tell. Not them, the parents, who'll say I was dreaming. No, I was there...Gotta be a dream. I was just sitting here, daydreaming a little, getting sleepy, and I fell asleep, I guess. Been doing a lot of that lately. Aunt Mary Nell would have said that the ghosts were strolling. (Perry 73)

This easy denial gets more and more difficult for Lizzie as the violence of her possession recurs and becomes more serious, resulting in hospitalization and, eventually, institutionalization. As the novel progresses and she begins to understand that this is

something more than dreaming, her attitude becomes one of inevitable acceptance.

Speaking to her grandmother's presence, Lizzie says aloud,

'That's why I'm here, isn't it? Not to get away like I figured.
'I'm here to find...something...' I talk to the air, then climb into the window, dangling one leg outside...
And I wait.

Twilight. I can tell by the way the shadows have deepened in the room. The floor digs into my butt. Damn. Why did I fall asleep on the floor? That dust will be living permanently in my clothes. I look down and notice, almost nonchalantly, that the clothes are clean. And that they are not my clothes. Not my shoes. Not my feet, legs, or hands.

I am here. (Perry 122)

The "I" in the final sentence does not belong to Lizzie, but to her grandmother, Grace.

Lizzie's turn towards articulating the possession is by no means a form of acquiescence; rather, it is her acknowledgment that denial of the phenomenon her body undergoes will not stop the violence she is embodying. She progresses with more focus on the possessions that visit her, realizing that the only direction in which she can turn is toward the repetitive disruption. In this way, she begins to build narrative, piecing together her own story with the stories of her grandmothers. Whether the violence of their trauma will prove fatal before she can achieve any form of recovery is not made clear by the text; however, that the text does not offer a conclusion, an end to the passing on of Lizzie's family archive, does point to the potential that the gothic offers for her story.

Gothic narratives come to decidedly final ends whenever their gothic elements are resolved: once the trick of the terror is unveiled in a Radcliffe novel, our heroine lives happily ever after and we never hear from her again; once Dracula has a stake driven through his heart, the novel named for him quite literally seems to run out of space and there are few words left to close out the heroes' victory. The fact that Perry's novel does not wrap up so neatly points to the endurance of Lizzie's family legacy. The archive that

is passed to our protagonist exists indefinitely beyond the pages of her narrative, and thus we know that the most central gothic element contained within—the archive itself—will continue to persist.

Collapsing Time

In Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, what I will refer to as violent time travel is the gothic device that allows protagonist Dana engagement with her ancestral traumatic legacy.^{92 93}

⁹⁴ Dana is projected back in time to the slave plantation to which she can trace her family line so that she can aid her ancestor Rufus, son of the plantation owner, whenever he is in fear for his life.^{95 96} This disruption of a linear experience of time underscores the ability of cross-generationally transmitted trauma to undermine the experience of day-to-day life. While the novel demonstrates through violent time travel how traumatic inheritance disrupts normative temporality, Dana's embodied experiences are also a result of this

⁹² Linh U. Hua refers to this phenomenon within *Kindred* as "speculative time," which is "the material transformation of temporal experience" (391).

⁹³ Of the genre work Butler engages in not only creating a gothic novel, but one that is also a neo-slave narrative, Nadine Flagel tells us, "Arguably the most popular vehicle for imagining alterity in the nineteenth century was the slave narrative; in the twentieth, speculative fiction. Yet both have been dismissed at times for being formulaic, repetitive, and non-literary. While generic conventions in *Kindred* sometimes overlap, more often it is precisely the terms of one genre that allow Butler to interrupt and interrogate the assumptions and expectations held by the other" (217).

⁹⁴ For an intensive study of trauma in the novel, see Marisa Parham's 2009 article "Saying 'Yes': Textual Traumas in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*."

⁹⁵ During the first half of Butler's novel, Rufus is technically a child in crisis. But he belongs to both the parent generation that leads to Dana's existence, and at the same time, the generation and race of the oppressor of Dana's ancestors and ultimately, due to the temporal abnormality of the story, Dana herself. Because of the violence that an adult Rufus will enact upon his own kin, and because of the impact of that violence as it results in the genesis of Dana herself, the hazard in which Rufus finds himself results in a fantastic consequence for a child, but he is not that child—Dana is. Where Rufus as a still vulnerable child was emotionally attached to Dana and her ancestor Alice, that attachment becomes destructive as Rufus leaves childhood behind for violent manhood. The family that he forces into existence are the fallout of his progression into brutality.

⁹⁶ Hua makes a provocative claim in positing Dana's ancestor Alice, rather than Rufus, as her caller. While my own readings align with the majority of scholars who read this role as belonging to Rufus, Hua's claims hold interesting merit and should be considered, especially in the tradition of "black feminist sentimentality" that she is working within (392-3).

violent family history. The novel begins with the final physical injury that Dana endures, the loss of one of her arms,⁹⁷ which is not taken by the atrocity of slavery in the antebellum site she visits, but by her travel from the time and home of her enslaved ancestors back to her own time and house. On the one hand, this moment reminds readers that while Dana is traveling back to an antebellum site, she also has claim to a place in the present: “The only relatively successful escapes are Dana’s, and they occur through the dimension of time, not space, bridging slave narrative and speculative fiction” (219). However, the fact that Dana is most seriously physically injured in her own time strongly suggests that transmitted trauma poses a veritable threat to descendant generations; it is not merely psychic damage that one risks as the recipient of such violent matter, but bodily harm, as well. The familial traumatic archive that works itself out within the body runs the risk of overwhelming the vessel over which it has taken possession. The loss of Dana’s arm bookends the narrative, leaving readers with the question of how much more she could potentially have to lose, and whether her own survival is at risk.

Early in the novel, Dana’s embodied experiences serve to validate her experience to her husband Kevin, as until he himself travels back in time with her, he remains skeptical of her experience. This validation extends to readers, as well. The evidence of the past’s impact must be worn on Dana’s body in order for others to be convinced that that past is so impactful in the first place, which speaks to the attitudes of those who do not belong to

⁹⁷ This particular injury has led a number of scholars in the field of disability studies to engage Butler’s text utilizing that lens, including: Comer, Todd. “The Domestic Politics of Disability in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*.” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 48.1 (2018): 84-108; Schalk, Sami. *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2018; Schalk, Sami. “Experience, Research, and Writing: Octavia E. Butler as an Author of Disability Literature.” *Palimpsest* 6.2 (2017): 153-177; Williams, Jessica Horvath. “Unlike the Average Mental Disability as Narrative Form and Social Critique in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*.” *Studies in American Fiction* 45.1 (2018): 91-117.

specific traumatized collectives towards the plausibility of transgenerational trauma. As Maria Rice Bellamy reminds us that while Dana is summoned repeatedly by Rufus, “her white husband Kevin can only travel through time when he is connected to Dana. Kevin, arguably, has no haunting cultural or ancestral memory to draw him to a violent and unresolved past” (Bellamy). As I argued in the first chapter of this project that the child’s fantastic perspective was only accessible by adults willing to relinquish an aspect of their own authority in order to work towards as much empathy as possible with that child, here I posit that this “connection” Bellamy reads into Dana and Kevin’s relationship is the result of a man choosing to fully accept his wife as family. Though Kevin does not belong to the violent past in question, if he wants to truly build a family that looks to the future with Dana, he needs to come as close to her haunting archive as possible. Indeed, Bellamy continues, “Although *Kindred* ends before the reader learns what postmemorial work will result from Dana’s and Kevin’s experiences, the novel leaves them, a fully historicized African American female and European American male, to face an uncertain future together and manifest a truly American descent line” (Bellamy). Though Kevin, in the reality of his white male privilege, cannot ever access the traumatic residue that Dana embodies throughout the novel, he is called to the position of witness, a role he must accept by believing in Dana to the extent that he is able to travel back with her and submit to a past she holds inside of her.

Visibility and perception are an aspect of Butler’s novel that increase the stakes for her protagonist. Even as she writes into an oeuvre of twentieth century time travel narratives that offer characters varying engagement with the past from completely invisible viewings to the ability to alter the future, Butler deliberately chooses to reveal her

characters in their anachronistic placements, refusing Dana a view of the past with protections against the past looking back.⁹⁸ This decision is, according to some critics, what makes *Kindred* a hybrid fiction, existing as science fiction, historical fiction, neo-slave narrative, and, as I posit, gothic novel.⁹⁹ Indeed, much of Dana's navigation of the hazard in the novel has to do with being seen, especially when she appears in a previous century with contemporary clothing, mannerisms, and figures of speech. Her first interaction with Rufus involves her impulse to both reject and correct his use of the slur "nigger" when he speaks of Dana (25). However, in so correcting this language, Dana marks herself as out of place in this history of her enslaved ancestry, turning an instinct of self-defense into even greater potential danger to herself. The need to navigate the racism and degradation of slavery combines with her efforts to appear as though she belongs temporally to this system of oppression, so that Dana begins to exist out-of-place. Even when she returns to 1976, Dana is unable to transition back into the reality of that time: "As I thought of the field hand, I felt strangely disoriented...Then I realized that I wasn't really dizzy—only confused. My memory of a field hand being whipped suddenly seemed to have no place here with me at home" (115). Her self-perception as belonging to any particular time begins to fall apart, and as a result, Dana's struggle to survive within either timeline is made that much more difficult. Her identity is irrevocably shaped by this inability to fit temporally; a writer, Dana finds herself incapable of describing this disruption in words: "I sat down at my typewriter and tried to write about what had

⁹⁸ Any number of time travel fictions offer present-day characters learning experiences that let them view the past without an ability to enact change in that past and/or any resulting consequence in the present, from Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* to Daphne du Maurier's "Split Second" to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*.

⁹⁹ "In interviews Octavia Butler discussed her purpose in writing *Kindred*. 'I wanted to write a book,' said Butler, 'that would make people *feel* history' (Butler, Reading and Interview at Vertigo Books, 2003)" (Donawerth and Scally 2).

happened, made about six attempts before I gave up and threw them all away. Someday when this was over, if it was ever over, maybe I would be able to write about it” (116).¹⁰⁰ The resistance to Rufus’s language that Dana felt on her first trip to her ancestral past foretells of a greater linguistic failure, an experience that itself resists description through language.

The inability to express her experience as out-of-time makes Dana an anomalous character in terms of temporality, but also a particular type of gothic heroine, one that I argue sits as the focus of a profoundly contemporary gothic narrative where those who in canonical texts would have been marginalized are now placed at the center. Dana, a member of a descendant generation and a person whose experience of time has been traumatically altered, evolves as a result of the temporal disruption in the novel. After she returns from her first brief trip back in time to save Rufus, Dana articulates her mind’s difficulty in grasping what has occurred: “‘As real as the whole episode was, as real as I know it was, it’s beginning to recede from me somehow. It’s becoming like something I saw on television or read about—like something I got secondhand’” (17). This distant processing Dana struggles with in her account of her experience underscores the challenge of integrating traumatic experience into narrative memory; furthermore, given what we have explored about the nature of traumata that is by its nature descendant, her expression of the experience as something she received “secondhand” is correct: these memories at once do and do not belong to her Dana’s own experience, as they are located

¹⁰⁰ Ashraf H. A. Rushdy writes of this inability Dana exhibits to write of her experience in his article “Slavery Represented,” suggesting that embodiment is the only way Dana has to “write” a narrative based on where she has been: “At the novel’s end, Dana is disoriented because she has lost parts of her body and parts of her sanity to the past, and she finds no accessible means of communicating that loss to anyone. A professional writer, she is nonetheless unable to transcribe or represent her experiences; they are only hinted at through her body (in a momentary vacant stare) or where her body used to be (in the loose flap of an unneeded sleeve)” (432-33).

within the time and space of her ancestors. As she continues attempting to process what she has experienced outside of her own temporal and geographical contexts, Dana's mind references the narrative mediums through which she herself first learned of the antebellum time to which she has traveled: literature and television. However, this "recession," as she puts it, whereby her mind transitions firsthand memory of lived experience that can't be incorporated due to its inherent contradictions to an almost secondhand sense of memory is not reassuring for her. That transition rather adds to the uncanny aspect of existing as a member of a descendant generation, that familiar and yet unknowable quality of receiving inherited traumata while remaining removed from the source event:

I moved uncomfortably, looked around. 'I feel like it could happen again—like it could happen anytime. I don't feel secure here... Maybe I'm just like a victim of robbery or rape or something— a victim who survives, but who doesn't feel safe any more.' I shrugged. 'I don't have a name for the thing that happened to me, but I don't feel safe any more'. (17)

As is so often the case with traumatic occurrence, metaphor serves where direct articulation fails. As of yet in the novel's own timeline, Dana has not discovered when and where she has traveled to; much is unknown and obscure, and the reality of such a bizarre form of travel is disruption enough to leave her uncertain. Instead, other more recognizable traumas present as stand-ins for an experience she cannot quite articulate: robbery, rape, both of which are horrors that will be visited on her as a part of the larger atrocity of slavery as the novel progresses. In this eerie foreshadowing, Butler offers her protagonist a vocabulary that will allow her—and the readers who watch her on her journey—to make do for the time being.

More pressing than finding a way to articulate the extreme and violent time travel she has been subject to is Dana's need to survive her journey back in time. Because the

history to which Dana has traveled is a history that she is aware of, the visit is not to a space that is entirely unfamiliar. She has learned the facts of slavery from a twentieth century retrospective, but that knowledge proves limited once Dana experiences contact with those events. As she remarks often throughout the text, the critical aspect of the history that she is missing is how to safely navigate the antebellum world to which she is repeatedly sent:

I sighed. 'So the more I think about it, the harder it is for me to believe that I could survive even a few more trips to a place like that. There's just too much that could go wrong.'

'Will you stop that! Look, your ancestors survived that era—survived it with fewer advantages than you have. You're no less than they are.'

'In a way I am.'

'What way?'

'Strength. Endurance. To survive, my ancestors had to put up with more than I ever could. Much more.' (51)

This conversation with her husband Kevin illustrates the couple's disparate understandings of the violent past as framed by their racial relationships with it; furthermore, what Kevin misreads in his wife as defeatist negativity is actually a recognition of where the answer to survival might lie: in the lives of those who survive within that violent past. Dana understands that she is missing a crucial contextualization, and that this is a lack that represents her restricted access from the source traumatic event that is now reverberating through her existence. As a black American woman, she is of a descendant generation that has claim to an ancestry that did manage to survive.

Eventually, Dana turns to primary sources—conversation, observation, day-to-day living—in order to help her parse this harrowing temporal experience: "I liked to listen to them talk sometimes and fight my way through their accents to find out more about how they survived lives of slavery. Without knowing it, they prepared me to survive" (94).

This autodidactic practice of watching those around her that Dana participates in speaks

to Butler's own inspirations in writing the novel as a project that found the past as it was contained within a living present:

Butler describes her own recognition of the nature of slavery as deriving not from an historic source, but through observing neighboring parents who beat their children: 'When I was about thirteen I found out on a visceral level what slavery was; before that I hadn't understood why the slaves had not simply run away...My mother's attitude was that those children belonged to their parents and they had the right to do what they wanted to with their own children...*That*, I realized, was slavery—human beings treated as if they were possessions' (Butler, "An Interview" 56). Thus Butler researched and wrote *Kindred* in order to provide a realistic portrayal of the complexities of slavery and the difficulties of resistance. (Donawerth and Scally 2-3)¹⁰¹

Through Dana's efforts to learn to survive in her ancestral home, Butler forces readers to relearn history alongside the heroine she has created, embarking on a didactic path that reshapes how audiences will receive not only her fiction, but the facts that inspired it. Just as Butler herself articulates that she had to learn what it meant for a person to be treated as a possession by another, she is instructing readers in a practice of examining what they thought they knew about slavery as it once was a part of daily American life. Sarah Eden Schiff says of the author's project,

Butler's two-pronged and paradoxical technique of undermining master narratives while retaining a faith in the truth-value of the archive is indicative of the state of dissociation as brought about post-trauma, Du Boisian double consciousness, and the uncanny return of those disturbing memories that have been repressed in the service of national mythmaking. Butler highlights the hybrid nature of historical discourse by disorienting the readers' understanding of home, by making what is fundamentally familiar unfamiliar and vice versa... (110)

The aspect of *Kindred* that both Dana and these scholars reading her narrative are remarking on is Butler's decision to set the novel's gaze at a history, the conventional representations of which she aims to upend. And this, I would argue, is one of the moves

¹⁰¹ A scholar engaged in notable and extensive work on how inherited histories of violence within the black community in America impacts child rearing is professor and journalist Stacey Patton, who takes a strong anti-beating, anti-child abuse stance in her book *Spare the Kids: Why Whipping Children Won't Save Black America*. She has founded an activist organization of the same name that works to promote parenting techniques that avoid corporal punishment.

the author makes that qualify *Kindred* as a twentieth-century gothic novel: the revelation of a history that both characters and readers alike thought they knew intimately as rife with untold secrets and hidden hazards is a decidedly gothic narrative tradition. Butler is unraveling the “national mythmaking” in question by having her protagonist embark on the ultimate learning experience: a journey through collective ancestral memory that reconstitutes the impact of the source traumatic event of slavery in ways that are so relevant and alive that they can only exist within her time-traveling self.

In creating a gothic heroine who travels back to an ancestral slave past, Butler repeatedly turns readers’ attention towards gothic anxieties that Dana has to struggle with internally. One such struggle is ensuring Rufus’s safety, as he grows from a somewhat likable child into a dangerous and brutal adult. She realizes, “I was the worst possible guardian for him—a black to watch over him in a society that considered blacks subhuman, a woman to watch over him in a society that considered women perennial children. I would have all I could do to look after myself. But I would help him as best I could” (68). But it is not simply Dana’s concern for herself that is to cause conflict with her interest in looking after Rufus; in ensuring that she will come to existence in the twentieth century, Dana becomes unavoidably tangled in the web of Rufus’s violence. At the crux of this web is the rape of Alice, the slave that Dana is aware will give birth to Hagar, Dana’s ancestor and the child of Rufus and Alice through that rape. Butler complicates our understanding of Dana as our gothic heroine by constructing such bloodlines; Elana Gomel writes, “Despite her resourcefulness and bravery, Dana is rendered impotent by the historical determinism that is reflected in the circular structure of the novel” (346). Ultimately, Dana’s will to survive the temporal disruption of the

novel will take precedence over all other concerns. As much as it repels her to have to continue caring for Rufus after he rapes Alice for the first time, Dana continues to be afraid to leave his side until she is sure that Alice is pregnant with Hagar. This self-interest is also a point of self-disgust for Dana, and in no small part because she and Alice are frequently articulated as “the same woman,” or two distinct halves of a whole woman.¹⁰² Rufus is the first to make this observation, but Dana herself later makes it as well, and the comparison is based on much more than physical resemblance. Dana’s ancestor attempts to survive the brutality of Rufus and his dangerous possessiveness which Dana is also often subject to. As a result, the two women often find themselves at odds with one another while simultaneously drawn together through empathy and circumstance.

As Dana’s double, Alice serves as a constant reminder that in order to preserve her own life, Dana must continuously devastate the lives of others. Of Butler’s decision to include the gothic trope of the double in the form of one woman who ensures the rape of another, Stella Setka offers a broader perspective on complicity in the context of the systemic violence of slavery: “For Butler, the trauma of slavery has made us all kindred, and just as Dana is complicit in Alice’s rape, we all are complicit in the perpetuation of slavery’s racist underpinnings in contemporary cultural and political institutions” (105). Dana’s conscience is heavily weighted in the knowledge that she is allowing the assaults on Alice to occur, to whatever degree she might have any power to impede them; however, the particularly salient point of Setka’s argument hinges on her understanding

¹⁰² Sarah Eden Schiff offers an extended analysis of Dana and Alice as doubles in the context of the novel as trauma literature in her 2009 essay “Recovering (from) the Double: Fiction as Historical Revision in Octavia E. Butler’s *Kindred*.”

of an American collective existing as kindred not in the wake of, but in fact because of a traumatic legacy of slavery. In a similar light, terming slavery America's "family secret," Ashraf H. A. Rushdy considers what he views as familial tension within the context of slavery in *Kindred*: "The novel asks: what does 'family' mean as a biological or a social category, and as a metaphor for racial unity and identity, given the national history of forced and violent miscegenation? What and who constitute family? The answers to the family secret involve querying the basis and potential of 'family' itself" (109). Indeed, in the context of systemic violence, the question of what constitutes family and whether family ties can sustain a violent origin echoes with poignance. As the party responsible for specific instances of temporal disruption where Dana is called back in time, Rufus may well be Dana's ancestor, but so is Alice, and it is only through the violation of her great-great-grandmother by her great-great-grandfather that Dana herself is allowed to exist. This internal anxiety is the gothic terror residing in the heart of Butler's protagonist and her novel.

That the final brutal act Rufus attempts is a rape that Dana effectively defends herself against highlights how those enacting the oppression of slavery are in turn marked and altered by it, particularly in the understanding of slavery as a system in which people produce children through rape and then go on to brutalize their own children in the name and context of that same system. The family as it exists under slavery becomes in a sense cannibalistic: it devours itself, breeding ferocious destruction that is pointed inward even as it seeks to enact violence on a perceived external Other. Invoking the gothic incest taboo, *Kindred* confronts the paradoxical and relentless drive of slavery to pervert and violate that which it creates. Butler's novel is as fixated on and distressed by the

possibility of its heroine's rape as are many of its canonical, pre-twentieth century gothic predecessors. Where traditional gothic heroines are typically saved from such a fate by heroic male archetypes, by their own insistent demonstrations of feminine virtue, or even by forces of nature that abhor such unions, it is Dana's vehement refusal to be violated in this way that is the only means for her to escape a rape at the hands of her great-great-grandfather:

'He's done plenty, but the worst of it was to other people. He hasn't raped me, Kevin. He understands, though you don't seem to, that for him that would be a form of suicide.'

'You mean there's something he could do to make you kill him, after all?'

... 'I'm not property, Kevin... If I have to seem to be property, if I have to accept limits on my freedom for Rufus's sake, then he also has to accept limits—on his behavior toward me. He has to leave me enough control of my own life to make living look better to me than killing and dying.' (245-6)

The insidious nature of the incest taboo functions to infiltrate Dana's family at both ends, with the existent threat in her ancestral past and a matter of anxious discussion in her marital present. Dana's recognition of this act as an internal breaking point—the one thing that will drive her to murder, the trigger that will awaken an ancestral capacity for brutality handed down to her by the very man who aims to assault her now—underscores a dramatic transformation enacted by traumatic legacy within a family. That transformation is not a singular shaping of the individual by external stimuli; instead, it is an awakening of inherited violence that hides within the individual and rises to meet its parent self, a mirror image of violence that is at once source and catalyst and the thing that seems to promise relief from this constant temporal shifting. Dana sees in the threat of her rape a murder, her own murder; in turn, she accepts the act of murder to prevent that rape as a defensive monstrosity she is willing to own. It is in this way that I argue the twentieth century gothic novel that both builds upon and revises its canonical

foundations: external horrors have always been lesser to gothic internalized terrors, but the heroine who must take up villainous action for survival shifts the terror away from mere anxiety and into a fraught realization of the monstrosity residing within the self. It is survival that leads Dana to wait for the rapacious inception of Hagar, and that same survival that allows her to kill Rufus when he tries to rape her; caught up in the traumatic residue of her parent generation though she may be, the individual still strives. The damage done by that temporal disruption, however, precludes any normative recovery for Dana, wearing the effects of her journey visibly in her amputated arm and invisibly as they are inscribed within her, altered by memory and by experience, transformed.

Wounded and Possessed

In *Kindred*, Dana's initial contact with ancestral trauma through the gothic device of violent time travel is sudden and immersive. By contrast, in Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*, the emergence of trauma from the parent generation is transient and subtle enough that at first, protagonist Lizzie categorizes her experiences with that traumata as dreams.¹⁰³ Her initial access to memories of her grandmother and great-great-grandmother is so fleeting that until physical markers begin to ground her—dust on her feet from walking as her ancestor along a dusty road, wounds of a slave past that begin to pain her body in its present context—Lizzie herself is unconvinced that the visions she experiences are in fact a part of her familial past. As does *Kindred*, *Stigmata* underscores somatic cognizance of traumatic inheritance as at the core of compulsory access to that inheritance: the body figures as the gothic site on which the past works its unresolved

¹⁰³ For a list of scholarship that compares Butler's and Perry's works, see above Footnote 81.

matter.¹⁰⁴ However, rather than a temporal disruption that propels the descendant recipient of ancestral traumata back to the time and place of her ancestors' oppression, in Perry's novel, the past (re)visits Lizzie's body as Grace, her grandmother, and Ayo-Bessie, her great-great-grandmother, reveal their presence within her.¹⁰⁵

The novel features a non-linear organization that reflects the temporal disruption Lizzie experiences through possession by her grandmothers: each chapter is labeled according to year and place, and we move back and forth between the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. In these respective times, we witness Lizzie's possession as it occurs for the first time; her forced hospitalization because the somatic appearance of Ayo-Bessie's wounds of enslavement are misread by her parents and doctors as self-inflicted cuts; and her current efforts to evade institutionalization for a condition that she now knows will not be cured by clinical professionals.¹⁰⁶ There are also inherited family objects that add to Lizzie's awareness of Ayo-Bessie and Grace within her: Ayo-Bessie's diary transcribed by her daughter Joy, and Grace's quilt of Ayo-Bessie's story. Lizzie's great-aunt Eva, already familiar with the stigmatic experience because she witnessed it happening to her sister

¹⁰⁴ Lisa A. Long writes, "in stigmatizing not only those who lived through slavery, but also those contemporary characters long removed from slave times with physical amputations, bleeding whip marks, and manacle wounds, Butler and Perry insist upon the tangible reality of slavery in twentieth-century lives" (460-1).

¹⁰⁵ While scholars such as Maria Rice Bellamy, Lisa A. Long, and Stella Setka read the gothic manifestation of Grace and Ayo-Bessie as reincarnation, I use the term possession. The novel's name refers to a phenomenon rooted in Catholic mysticism (critic Corinne Duboin points out the significance of the title, as well), which Perry engages by including a member of the clergy among her cast of characters, and possession belongs to that same mystic tradition. It also belongs to the gothic tradition, under the purview of horror narratives representing demonic and ghostly possession. Furthermore, the idea of reincarnation suggests that an old soul was remade into a new body, whereas here, old souls coexist inside that body with a new soul, however fraught that coexistence might at times be.

¹⁰⁶ There is another temporal disruption that occurs in Lizzie's life as a response to her stigmatic wounds, and that is the institutionalization itself. Éva Tettenborn tells us, "Lizzie's life is suspended while she spends the better part of her youth locked away in psychiatric institutions where no doctor finds her testimony credible" (95). The time spent within the institution is time that does not move, in terms of traditional life markers and achievements; when Lizzie is given access to a car after her hospitalization, for example, she reflects on this long-term stagnation she has experienced.

Grace, attempts to help her grand-niece understand the phenomenon as it gains prevalence in her life.

‘Think of it like this,’ she says calmly. ‘The past—that’s what you call it—is a circle. If you walk long enough, you catch up with yourself.’...

‘Can’t make progress that way,’ I say.

‘But, well, think about it for a minute. Who better to tell you what’s what than somebody who’s already lived? And I’m telling you, baby, you done already been here. Well, I suppose almost all of us have been around once or twice. But you—you one of the lucky ones.’ (117)

By structuring time as a circle rather than a line, Eva resituates past trauma as inevitable in the present. The “luck” she attributes to Lizzie’s situation seems to have less to do with the traumatic inheritance itself than it does with the ability to cope with that inheritance, an important distinction that foregrounds Grace as a figure who will aid Lizzie with the weight of Ayo-Bessie’s experiences because she navigates the visitation of those experiences in her respective present. Eva’s view of Lizzie as “lucky” gestures to her own claim to the same traumatic legacy that her grand-niece carries. Also a member of a descendant generation, Eva has the same family and racial histories that Lizzie does, but she does not contain within her the memories and voices of women who have preceded her informing how she is to bear such an inheritance.

But Grace and Ayo-Bessie are limited in the work they can perform on behalf of their granddaughter; one of the lessons Perry puts forth in her novel is that even in extreme contact with the past, ancestral trauma won’t work itself out for an individual belonging to a descendant generation. There is in the novel a kind of labor involved in grappling with the past. Attempting to recover the fragments of the two lives that precede her into which she is now tapped, Lizzie begins to quilt as her grandmother did before her, creating a narrative from fabric that literally comes together as it is written in thread. The labor Lizzie engages is, for the protagonist of a twentieth-century gothic novel, notably

metatextual: she is continuing a story that another storyteller pieced together based on another story, and all within the pages of her story as Perry writes it.¹⁰⁷ These pieces and layers literalize the collectives that the characters in the novel belong to and restructure the narratives of. Critic Deborah A. Harter reflects on how narrative itself is an attempt to piece parts into a visible whole:

In a certain sense all narrative reality is a problem in emergence—a strategic uncovering, in a strategic order, of images that can only ever be partial. The writer must construct a world through the process of description in language, and to describe a thing is already to be obliged to break it into its parts before striving in the telling to reassemble its wholeness. (10)

We know that the recipient of traumatic data does not break a whole narrative into parts, but rather compiles that data outside of conventional narrative. Thus, the breaking and then reassembling that Harter traces becomes, in the context of traumatized experience, an initial assembly of what was only ever disparate parts. This is especially true in the case of members of descendant generations, who also have the problem of limited access to keep them from ever gleaning a pre-existent whole.¹⁰⁸ Quilt-making for Lizzie becomes a way to make whole an experience she has received in fragments. Camille Passalacqua articulates that much the same is true of Lizzie's movement through Ayo-Bessie's diary, which presents in "structural fragmentation, various narrative voices, and recurring images, such as blood and dust, express[ing] Lizzie's female ancestors'

¹⁰⁷ Corinne Duboin calls Perry's novel "a hybrid text that oscillates between the historiographic novel and magical realism, a novel in which language (self-writing and storytelling) becomes a liberating space of resistance, reclamation, and rehabilitation" (284).

¹⁰⁸ The degrees of separation between descendant generation and traumatic source event are evident in Lizzie's varying proximities to Ayo-Bessie and Grace. Whereas Grace's memories come quite clearly to Lizzie, even her memories of experiencing Ayo-Bessie's life, Lizzie articulates herself as more distant from her great-great-grandmother than her grandmother: "I'm a little farther away from Ayo, but glad to be. Sadness, an ever-present ache in her chest, crushes her... *Yeah*, [Grace] continues, *that Ayo, she rushed in without warning and there I am flat on my back, wiping up blood from some old wound from some dead time. She's all pain, my grandmother. What I have of her is all pain*" (141-2, 144). The distance between Lizzie and Ayo is a way for the emotional and psychological weight of the traumatic inheritance to be mitigated so that Lizzie is not completely overwhelmed by it. Again, this speaks to Eva's suggestion that it is fortunate to have ancestors present to help make as much sense of the past as possible

traumatized physical and internal states” (144). While her doctors and parents fret that these objects are the source of Lizzie’s “delusions” of the past, Lizzie herself is more interested in what is notably absent from both texts, the fragments she must experience through the piecemeal awakening of Grace and Ayo-Bessie within her.

There are notable moments in the novel in which Lizzie’s possession is clearly evident to others, particularly to other women. Perry’s decision to include such instances appears twofold: on the one hand, readers can ally themselves with these women, gaining credibility for the protagonist’s impossible experiences. But more than that, Perry is also gesturing to a gendered experience of inherited trauma, one that a gendered collective of women can at the very least recognize, even if they don’t necessarily belong to the familial or racial collective that passes down the traumata. The first such woman to glean Lizzie’s experience is her cousin and childhood playmate Ruth, who, in conversation about memories from Grace and Ayo, physically interacts with Lizzie:

‘Did you do something in the other times that hurt you? That could be proof that you really went...Where are the pains?’

‘My wrists and ankles and back. Stinging.’

‘Lemme see.’ She holds out her hands and I give her mine. Turning them over, she examines the wrists. ‘I don’t see anything,’ she says, putting her fingers against my right arm. Then she is still. She puts her hands around my wrists and lets out a small gasp, dropping them as if they are hot...‘I felt something,’ she whispers...‘Pain.’ Ruth closes her eyes. ‘Just for a second. Pain.’

‘What kind of pain? I don’t feel anything, at least not now.’

‘But...oh Jesus, it’s there! Just under your skin.’ (83)

Ruth’s tactile experience of this ancestral somatic legacy is critical, in the first place because it highlights the trauma of slavery as belonging to a descendant collective of which both women in this scene are a part. That Ruth can feel the pain of the shackles of enslavement even when Lizzie cannot demonstrates how Ruth, a woman belonging to the same race as her possessed cousin and friend, can also claim an inheritance of limited

access, even though Ruth is not possessed by Ayo or Grace. Furthermore, Ruth's effort to find "proof" of what is happening to her cousin—evidence to substantiate this phenomenon not to either of them, but to others—and the immediacy with which she uncovers disturbingly intimate evidence speaks to the resistance traumatic legacy offers towards attempts to render it easily legible. It is not impossible to uncover the pain of this history; to transform that pain into broadly accepted "proof," though, is to take it out of its own context. Proof is not simply transmitted because pain is not simply transmitted; and for the pain of an entire enslaved generation to be boiled down to easy proof is not how descendant trauma functions.¹⁰⁹

Ruth's ability to witness what is happening to Lizzie may lead readers to suspect that family ties are perhaps key in seeing beyond the gothic occurrence of her stigmatic wounds. But Perry undercuts this assumption in scenes of Lizzie's institutionalization, where our protagonist encounters an immediately off-putting old white woman, Mrs. Corday, whose first words to her are "What in the world are you?" (162). Mrs. Corday approaches Lizzie right after she has left a vision of Grace with her suitcase, leaving Lizzie's grandfather because of the appearance of Ayo's wounds. The old woman tells her insistently,

'...I did see you, you can't deny that. First you were there, then she was. You look

¹⁰⁹ The embodied nature of Lizzie's possession demonstrates that the physiological archive passed on to her is deeply rooted in the physical violence of trauma; that Lizzie is given the same somatic archive as Ayo's granddaughter demonstrates this, with Ayo as the definitive source recipient of the traumatic wounds both of her descendants bear. While these physical wounds preoccupy those who show concern for Lizzie in her surrounding life—primarily her parents and her doctors, who fixate on this aspect of her overall possession—Lizzie herself experiences an equally compelling aspect of her ancestral traumatic legacy as she is subject to the transmitted memories of both Grace and Ayo, including the former's memories of the latter (so layered and repeated memories). This seems to suggest that the external perception of the trauma of slavery is limited to physical wounds, while the empathetic path to understanding that trauma fully lies in the relationship between those wounds and the psychological matter that accompanies them. More simply put, the reductive external perspective reads the traumatic narrative as culminating in bodily injury; the experience of traumatic possession—in all senses of that word—reveals somatic reoccurrence to be the face, rather than the extent, of descendant traumatic legacy.

kind of alike but she's a little taller. Darker. Wearing a hat and gloves and carrying a suitcase. Pretty nigger girl. I saw her. Smiling and talking. Couldn't hear what she was saying, but saw her clear as day.'

This blows my mind, or what's left of it. She saw me. Us. Grace. (163)

Mrs. Corday seems an extremely unlikely candidate for an empathetic connection with

Lizzie. Readers are set to wonder: what could possibly link these two women such that

one glimpses such an intimate experience of the other, an experience that nearly everyone

else in proximity does not believe exists? At one point, Mrs. Corday even announces

Lizzie's possession before Lizzie herself is aware of it:

'I wish I knew how you do that,' she says cheerfully. 'Change like that. Why, you can't be no more than thirteen. One day you're a woman, today you're a girl. And a dark little thing at that. I've never seen a colored girl as colored as you.'

Ayo is here. She is the terror that renders me motionless. (175)

While both witnesses to Lizzie's experience are women, and gender may preclude men

from having a certain kind of limited access, there is another commonality that those who

catch "proof" of Lizzie's possession share. Offhand, Mrs. Corday and Ruth have in

common that they inquire outright to know more about what Lizzie is experiencing.

Rather than recoiling at that experience or dismissing her, both women show a consistent

interest and credulity in both Lizzie's account of what is happening to her and the

preternatural experience of witnessing her possession. While the most grotesque aspects

of the possession (the stigmatic wounds) draw negative attention from medical

professionals and repulsion from loved ones, those women who are able to glean the

gothic traumatic inheritance behind the stigmata (the lives within Lizzie) are permitted

varying degrees of secondary access. For Ruth, this access is tied to her role as family

and thus bearer of the same traumatic histories; for Mrs. Corday, who the novel marks as

a chilling double of Ayo-Bessie's violent mistress on the slave plantation, the role of

unlikely witness emerges. And for the readers of Perry's text, an invitation to read with an open mind in favor of the protagonist is reasserted.

The walls of a mental health institution are not likely to offer the same openness, however. Much as Mrs. Corday might witness Lizzie's possession, even readers have to wonder why she herself is institutionalized, as Perry inserts the gothic trope of the unreliable character in the form of this woman. The label of madness in the world of the novel is applied to two women who are able to actually see the possession (Lizzie frequently refers to looking over her shoulder for Ayo and Grace, as well as being able to see their faces in place of hers in mirrors). And so the hazard of Lizzie's situation is thus not limited to the wounds and traumatic memories of the stigmata themselves; she must also battle the perception of herself as mentally ill, something that she and Grace both fear will cost them their freedom in their present (158). Even after institutionalization, Ruth's faith in her cousin does not waver:

'Sanity,' she says to the ground, 'is a mutual agreement between folks trying to control their world...Men used to lock women up in asylums because the woman wanted to wear trousers or because they decided they didn't want to be good Christian matrons anymore. The definitions of sanity change every day.' [...]
'I didn't attempt suicide, Ruth,' I say. 'I was hurt. You believe me, right?'
...She turns my hands over, sliding her fingers over the scars on my wrists. At first it's an examination, then a communication between us. Her hands are very warm. A spasm of pain crosses her face, then it's calm again.
'I'm sorry they hurt you,' she whispers, with a secretive, painful smile. She's crying a little. 'I don't know why they have to do that.'
'So I won't forget again.' (193)

Scholars discussing Perry's novel read, alongside Ruth, the gothic trope of the imprisoned lunatic as she is contextualized by gender. Maria Rice Bellamy writes, "Among male representatives of social order, including her father and other medical practitioners, Lizzie's body engenders a narrative of mental illness, hysteria, and suicidal tendencies" (Bellamy); Corrine Duboin posits that "Lizzie's father, together with

psychiatrists who view her as a suicidal, schizophrenic teenager, epitomize the hegemonic scientific mind, the patriarchal will to control one's environment through 'objective' and reassuring rationalization" (285). A large part of the impetus behind imprisoning madwomen is the fear that their insanity is contagious, and if the contagion is, as Ruth asserts, a penchant for creating social change in terms of the rights and experiences of women, then that fear is well-grounded. And in the case of Lizzie's family, the contagion in question is not women's behavior, but their memories: grandmothers can inhabit granddaughters, and the traumatic experiences of one generation are passed on through genetic material and experience in the bodies of descendant generations. Indeed, Ruth's access to Lizzie's possession by mere touch points to the potential for transmission of such "madness" as it exists within their family.

Interestingly, real-world research in therapeutic treatment of dissociation emerged at the time of Lizzie's release from the institution in the novel, the mid-nineties. Philip Bromberg, advancing the concept of self-states, writes,

Pathological dissociation is a defensive impairment of reflective capacity brought about by detaching the mind from the self—what Winnicott called the 'psyche soma.' In the analytic relationship, such patients (individuals dedicated to the avoidance of reflection) are in need of 'recognition' rather than understanding, but if an analyst is to help someone who is dedicated to the avoidance of reflection, it is necessary for him to accept that his 'act of recognition,' both developmentally and therapeutically, is a dyadic process—a two-way street of mutual regulation. (Bromberg)

This intersubjective space is never offered by Lizzie's doctors. They are as impenetrable as they accuse her of being, and rather than making efforts toward the act of recognition cited by Bromberg, they instead write cryptic notes that irritate Lizzie in her selective mutism. Her release becomes contingent upon how credibly she is willing to deny the validity of her inherited memories, a denial which is supposed by the doctors to be at once an effective remedy and a sign of achieved recovery. Such treatment offered by the

medical professionals in the novel—notably, by the exclusively male and eventually, post-institutionalization, the exclusively white professionals—are in direct contradiction with the activities that will help her the most. To live through any of the various dissociative effects of trauma—post-traumatic stress, time loss, self-states—is, in the most basic sense, to stray from normative memory and experience.¹¹⁰ It is perhaps of little wonder that Lizzie’s father’s impulse is to institutionalize her for the wounds that she exhibits. Unfortunately, because the source of Lizzie’s wounds—her ancestral possession—is not visible to her father or her doctors, her symptoms are read as fictive rather than recovered narrative.¹¹¹ Therefore, the mediating process that Lizzie uncovers as key in living with her possession by Grace and Ayo, is to turn towards the visions they show her, rather than away from them, as her doctors would have her do. Thus, Ruth’s faith in Lizzie’s possession, Aunt Eva’s previous experience with it, and even Mrs. Corday’s ability to witness it, gesture toward a response to the clinical, masculine impulse to lock up the madwoman and throw away the key, a response rooted in shared

¹¹⁰ According to Ruth Lanius’s analysis of the altering effects traumatic dissociation on the individual consciousness, “...four dimensions of consciousness, including time, thought, body, and emotion, have been outlined” by scholars in the field. Lanius also cites the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual’s current definition of dissociation: “a disruption and/or discontinuity in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion, perception, body representation, motor control, and behavior.”

¹¹¹ One man who is able to tap into Lizzie’s experience beyond the mere physicality of her wounds is Anthony Paul, with whom she begins a romantic relationship upon her release from institutionalization. Anthony Paul does not “see” Grace or Ayo in the way that Ruth and Mrs. Corday do. An artist, he has painted images of Lizzie, her bare back covered in the scars of her stigmata, before he ever meets her in person. Anthony Paul has no explanation as to how he is able to paint Lizzie before meeting her; his response to Lizzie’s explanation of his precognizant artwork is initially resistance. His struggle with Lizzie’s possession is markedly different from her father’s. He rejects the idea that institutionalization was helpful to her, and rather than try to dictate a solution, he grapples with her experience in an effort to understand it. Implicit in the chapter is the content of Anthony Paul’s dreams, presumably memories of an ancestral slave past. His decision to stand by Lizzie inevitably means accessing the racial history that they share through an empathetic connection based on love, different in intimacy but similar in trust to the close relationship she shares with her cousin Ruth.

female oppression and in acceptance of the testimony of a descendant of ancestral collective trauma.¹¹²

The gendered problem with conventional clinical treatment that Perry gestures to in the novel also has to do with a lack of women among mental health professionals. There is only one female therapist who treats Lizzie in the course of the novel; she comes the closest of all of the doctors to really hearing out her patient. Like the other doctors who treat her, Lizzie can't stand Dr. Brun ("That's what I detest most about you so-called doctors. That smug sarcasm and those be-all, see-all, know-all smiles of yours.' I keep my voice low, my own smile rigidly attached to my face. 'You have no idea how complex the universe really is'" (203)). However, she chooses to reveal to this doctor the full extent of her wounds, removing her shirt during a session so that Dr. Brun can see beyond the cuts on which all of the other therapists have fixated (on her arms and ankles):

Then, silently, I turn my back to her, satisfied with her short gasp.

Her gaze is hot, I can feel it as it steps tentatively through the maze of scars, from neck to waist and beyond, permanent remembrance of the power of time folded back upon itself. Proof of lives intersecting from past to present.

'Sad thing is,' I say, picking up the shirt to slip it back on, 'what you're looking at was rather commonplace back then. Scars like these. That's the thing, Doctor, I'm just a typical nineteenth-century nigger with an extraordinary gift. The gift of memory.' I button the shirt without turning around. Her silence is heavy.

'That's all that sets me apart, really,' I say, heading for the door. 'I remember.' (204)

Again, Perry brings us back to this idea of "proof" in and beyond somatization; here, that proof confronts clinical assumptions head on. Lizzie's experience in institutions has been that of a person no one wants to hear, to the extent that at points she exhibits selective

¹¹² Another outlier among the men in the novel is Father Tom, a priest Lizzie encounters at the institution during the 1980s. Tom has no access to Lizzie's experience whatsoever, not even the distant access that Anthony Paul achieves; his only access to the possession is Lizzie's own account of it. Tom recognizes in Lizzie's scars and story something from his own faith: the Catholic phenomenon known as stigmata (213). Tom never rejects Lizzie's story. His presence allows her to name this experience she is having; in so doing, she develops more of a hold on what's happening to her. She even refers to stigmata and to Tom when talking with her doctors and her father. Though the latter are still reluctant to listen, Tom's faith in Lizzie seems to at the very least disturb their disbelief, if only slightly.

mutism. Now that Lizzie is speaking again, she finds herself under the supervision of Dr. Brun, who seems to have an answer for everything—except, of course, for the sight of Lizzie’s scarred back. Lizzie’s acceptance of her possession, of the memories that she bears, allows her to claim Grace and Ayo as self-states, as valid aspects of herself. Therefore, she no longer feels the need to engage the dismissive efforts of professionals like Dr. Brun. In this scene, it is clear that Lizzie/Grace just wants the droning denial of the medical community to shut up in the face of time-defiant reality. As Corinne Duboin puts it, “The body then becomes a medium for self-expression. The skin surface reads as a text that memorializes and testifies to past ordeals” (287-8). The “proof” of Lizzie’s body is a way to speak into the space where these professionals have stopped listening.

What these scenes we have examined in which Lizzie engages other women—Dr. Brun, Mrs. Corday, Ruth, Eva, and of course Grace and Ayo-Bessie—suggest is that if there is a collective that Lizzie can turn to in the face of her possession, it is a female collective. The gothic heroine of Perry’s twentieth-century novel cannot exist in isolation surrounded by men as she would have in the eighteenth century; her possession is the transmission of knowledge among women, and therefore only women can aid her as she navigates that possession. Thus, Perry chooses to make the central relationship of the novel the one that exists between Lizzie as Lizzie/Grace and Sarah, Grace’s daughter/Lizzie’s mother. If we examine *Stigmata* as a gothic trauma narrative, the space in which the novel wants healing to take place is this doubled mother-daughter relationship. Sarah has never forgiven Grace for inexplicably leaving her family when the stigmata took hold of her present; beyond her own traumatic memories of having lost her mother, Sarah’s efforts to keep the past separate from the present are also rooted in her

concern about her daughter's hospitalization due to perceived self-harm. Her belief that Lizzie's "symptoms" are a result of over-engaging the past inhibit her from recognizing the presence of her mother within the body of her daughter. And Lizzie's efforts to reconcile her mother with aspects of the past are often frustrated by Sarah's fear that her daughter will relapse. This effort to convince Sarah becomes the project of the novel and the heart of Lizzie's progress towards living with possession. It is only through the gathering and repetition of memory that Lizzie begins to convince Sarah that Grace has returned to her:

'I remember one time,' I say quietly, dropping my eyes, 'one Sunday after church, your daddy and I were getting ready to go fishing down to Mr. Poe's pond. You remember that pond where we always caught those big bream? I think it's dried up now...'

'It's been dry for years...since before you were b—' She stops, her eyes widening. (226-7)

As Grace speaks to Sarah through her granddaughter's body, the revelation of her presence becomes so undeniable that Sarah finally stops rejecting the idea that her mother has possessed her daughter. Instead, she brings up old wounds of the heart:

'If you are my mother,' she says, 'then tell me...about that day...'

'What day?'

'The day you left me,' she snaps, her eyes hard.

I put down the needle and tell her. About the day before, with George taking his bath and me searching for my suitcase. About the memories I was having. About the pain. She says nothing when I finish, just sits there with tears on her cheeks. Without wiping them away, she picks up the needle I had put down and finishes the stitching. The circle is complete and my daughter sits across from me with the gap finally closed.

'I used to beg God to send you back to me,' she says trembling.

'I came as soon as I could.' (229-230)

The completion of the circle does not erase the pain or the memory of slavery. What it does provide the women who are descended from Ayo, however, is the ability to emerge from loss in the comfort of one another. Ayo passes on her experience, bloodily and without warning; she also reconciles the loss of her own mother when she was kidnapped

and enslaved by reuniting the daughters of her family with their mothers, through one life or another. *Stigmata* leaves us with the idea that, if memory is the path to navigating descendant trauma, then love ties weave themselves into a continuum of care, working within a traumatized collective with the potential, if not to heal by erasure, to instead guide the descendant futures in moving forward while carrying an atrocious past.

Silence and Second Sight

Dana's final act in *Kindred* is to protect herself from an act of incestuous rape, an anxiety that has belonged to gothic literature since the canon's inception. It is on the aftermath of that act that Yvonne Vera bases her novella *Under the Tongue*, which traces the experience of Zhizha, a young girl we learn is under her grandmother's care because her mother, Runyararo, has gone to prison for murdering Zhizha's father, Muroyiwa, after learning that he raped their daughter.¹¹³ I engage Vera's novella as a distinctly twentieth-century (post)colonial gothic narrative that makes use of the device of *second sight* in order to represent a layered traumatic experience, one that includes the immediacy of the incestuous rape and family violence compounded with ancestral colonial trauma.

Separating the chapters voiced through Zhizha's first-person perspective in the novella are family histories, the origin stories of both of her parents and their lives as

¹¹³ In an essay that reads closely rape as it is represented in Vera's novel, Régine Michelle Jean-Charles writes a powerful discussion of the terms "victim" and "survivor" in regards to women who have been raped, pointing to problematics with these terms, not least of which have to do with their application to black women across the diaspora: "I argue here that when viewed in relation to black women, in general, and African women, in particular, the word survivor is imbued with a different set of problematics that must be taken into account. These tensions revolve around the longstanding images of black women's invulnerability and inviolability that are established tropes of misrecognition structuring representations of women of African descent" (40). While I will primarily engage Jean-Charles's work as it applies specifically to Vera's novel, her scholarship on rape as it exists more broadly should be noted as a clear and extremely valuable resource on the subject and the field.

contextualized by the war in Zimbabwe preceding independence. The scene of Zhizha's rape bookends the text; it is first represented through the highly stylized language used throughout the novel, the nature-imagery heavy mode of expression Zhizha engages that comprises her second sight, or ability to see beyond the layered trauma that risks overwhelming her ordinary sensory perception. The second representation of Zhizha's assault is unadorned, with brutal realism replacing the nature metaphors and ultimately a falling away of her second sight.

The text also explores how transgenerational trauma can act as a binding force that brings women together in the face of gendered violence.¹¹⁴ Similar to the ancestral possession in represented in Perry's *Stigmata*, in Vera's novella, Zhizha, her mother, and her grandmother often see themselves in one another, to the extent that they will claim one another's names and thus identities. Unlike Lizzie's experience in Perry's novel, though, this is not so much an unanticipated overtaking of one woman's body as it is an extreme empathetic response to a traumatic stimulus, which exists at macro-levels as inherited traumatic residue and the cataclysmic realities of war, and in closer proximity as incestuous rape: "I see mother. She has come to visit her mother and to be mother. I see Grandmother. I see mother...I have been here all the time with you. Mothers are like that, she says, they can never be away from their children. I can see you even when I am not here. I am your mother...You are me, she says desperately. We grow together even when we are apart" (207-208). Zhizha's recognition of her mother and grandmother within

¹¹⁴ Carolyn Martin Shaw concisely brings together critical perspectives on how Vera's novella represents the oppression of women and gendered violence at literal, metaphorical, and national levels: "In the mind of the rape victim, the land becomes the rapist, as Vera's fiction interrogates the land as a symbol of the liberation struggle and women's lack of customary title to land. *Under the Tongue* is set during the liberation struggle; but, for it, one critic indicts an even broader culprit than women's exclusion from land ownership as the moving force in silencing women: this novel offers a 'sustained analysis of women's 'rape' by culture" (36).

herself is a defensive move, an instinctive step towards two women who make her feel safer. Their appearance within her is welcome, particularly after her mother is taken from her and sent to prison. Critic Régine Michelle Jean-Charles reads this nesting of women within one another as part of a larger feminist project Vera takes up in the creation of Zhizha's narrative: "Through this intergenerational community of women, Vera provides the feminist foundation for her character's development. If voice and the power of enunciation are located at the center of the text's unfolding, then the power of collective, women-centered support propels the narrative forward" (Jean-Charles 46). Just as *Stigmata* demonstrates how a collective of women provided support for Lizzie as she engaged her familial traumatic legacy, so Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue* presents female kinship and support as critical in the face of sexual violence.

In addition to Zhizha's use of her second sight to mitigate her traumatic experience, silence functions as yet another traumatic coping device for Zhizha.¹¹⁵ However, in the context of the collective of women that Vera creates, silence also becomes a metaphor for traumatic response: just as a traumatized individual's mind cannot always relinquish its dissociative habits when the danger to the individual has been removed, so does silence morph from a response that protects Zhizha from speaking that which she is not ready to utter into a larger problem of oppression for the women in the novella. In *Under the Tongue*, silence, trauma, and forgetting form a prohibiting triangle that can prevent Vera's female characters from moving forward. Access to memory is often barred, both by

¹¹⁵ Eleni Coundouriotis, writing on testimonies of rape, reads Vera's use of silence as a form of indirection: "Literary depictions of rape have a greater imaginative range of expression, but they too treat the degree of explicitness as a problem. Depictions of rape in imaginative literature...are often indirect and allusive; we might only know that rape has occurred by reading between the lines...Such indirection allows Vera paradoxically to draw out these scenes of assault, giving a fuller account of their emotional toll" (373).

traumatic experience and by the men in the family who do not want to acknowledge women's suffering: "A memory is a mouth with which to begin. We have no mouth, Grandmother says. Only the departed can speak our sorrow and survive" (163). This position that Zhizha's grandmother takes seems to suggest that traumatic utterance belongs to the deceased, that an articulation of memory is not something living women may attest to. For critic Kizito Z. Muchemwa, silence in the novella is directly tied to the presence or absence of female agency: "Possession of speech is an indicator of presence and privilege; lack of it is a sign of want and absence. It is the lack of the power of speech and its psychological effect on individuals that is the focus of *Under the Tongue*" (4). Zhizha and her grandmother have in common extended moments of silence; or rather, there is content belonging to their archive of experience that manifests as silence because they cannot permit its iteration as memory. For Zhizha, the content in question is her rape; for her grandmother, it is the loss of her first child. In both instances, the struggle between memory and agony is at the foreground, resulting in an inability to speak: "Grandmother says how can we bury the pain which has visited us? It is deep and hidden... This pain cannot be carried in the mouth. There is no mouth. It follows one like a shadow, this pain. It is hewn from rock and larger than memory." (160) The suffering that exceeds memory also pushes at the limits of the body's ability to articulate it; here, that limitation works to eradicate the very existence of the mouth in the context of the pain these women experience. Thus, Vera engages the same tradition of trauma's manifestation in the body that previous authors we have looked to take up; however, somatic response in *Under the Tongue* manifests not in the form of inherited wounds or lost limbs, but a silence that is so powerful, it renders the mouth effectively absent.

Silence then becomes a critical aspect of collective traumatic experience for women in *Under the Tongue*. Kizito Muchemwa writes, “The trauma of silence, physical and psychological, teaches silence. The questioning and rejection of acquiescent silence leads to a recovery of redemptive memory...Memory is used to indicate the history of women, their suffering, their silence and the existence of a rich tradition of women’s orature” (8). In other words, if silence begets silence among women, and memory can be applied to that pedagogy of silence in a way that creates narrative, then trauma as that which sits outside of narrative can be incorporated from disruptive hazard into (his)tory to an archive that is in fact a transmittable tradition through conscious and collective acts of memory. Memory scholar Diana Taylor calls collective memory “a practice, an act of imagination and interconnection” (82). The active language used by Taylor and Muchemwa—to teach, to question, to reject, to practice, to imagine, to connect, to act—speaks to the synonymously active nature of memory; just as silence can be enacted upon a collective of women, so can that collective enact remembering in a way that checks the initial power of that silence. If we read silencing as an act of oppression enacted by men in the novella, we can glean the feminist project Jean-Charles sees Vera taking up in instances of memory acts as they exist within the text.

The entrance of men into female interior psychic spaces in Vera’s text signals the presence of oppression and horror. The first articulation of silence as it is imposed on a woman by a man comes from Runyararo:

Mother speaks in a quiet and sorrowful ululation, saying to Grandmother...Did he not teach me silence, this husband, that a woman is not a man? I am silent...He has filled my mouth with decay, turning the tomorrow of my child into death, burying her, in the middle of the night...I open my eyes wide into the darkness and search for my daughter but she is gone, she has been carried by a dark cloud and when she returns I ask, in astonishment, is this my daughter... is that the sound of your voice and your

crying... Zhizha? But there is silence, the cloud has covered my daughter with ash and filled her mouth with death. (152-153)

An extreme empathetic connection between Runyararo and Zhizha emerges as

Runyararo's speech fluidly evolves from a discussion of her own silence as it is imposed on her by Muroyiwa under the precedents of marital convention to a distressed expression of outrage at the silencing of her daughter through rape, again at Muroyiwa's hands. Muroyiwa becomes synonymous with silence itself, his presence bringing despair in Runyararo's existence as both wife and mother, turning her position within the context of family into one of mourning. The burying of one's child by one's husband that she articulates echoes Grandmother's experience, as the latter envisions her son Tonderayi, born with fatal developmental disabilities, buried by his father under an anthill. The connection across three generations of women in this family hinges in part on the inevitability of destructive father-husbands entering their lives, and the grotesque visions they experience can be grafted onto one another—the child being buried by its father—so that the acts of violence echo into that silence that has been imposed upon them.

The rich nature imagery Vera utilizes in her poetic prose allows the women in the novella to describe that which resists description, to graft onto traumatic experience familiar images and textures that circumvent total silence and the masculine imposition of such silence. Grandmother asks, "Can a woman not speak the word that oppresses her heart, grows heavy on her tongue, heavy pulling her to the ground? I do not speak and my word has grown roots on my tongue filling my mouth. Will my word grow into a tree while I water it every day with silence?" (165-166). The distinction here is significant: silence does not indicate a lack of things to say; indeed, not being able to speak results in a growth, an expansion of sorts for Grandmother. And silence evolves once more within

Vera's novella, this time from a tool of oppression to the proverbial sand in the oyster that forms a pearl: Grandmother uses the silence enacted upon her to "water" the tree of her own language.¹¹⁶ Her mouth becomes the fertile soil in which her experience grows, even in the midst of its silencing. For Zhizha, the mouth is where her personal traumatic experience is located: "I know a stone is buried in my mouth, carried under my tongue. My voice has forgotten me. Only Grandmother's voice remembers me. Her voice says that before I learned to forget there was a river in my mouth" (121). Just as Grandmother attempts to speak on Runyararo's behalf, she also holds on to the parts of her granddaughter that Zhizha herself must forsake in her traumatized state.¹¹⁷ As the empathetic link between the three women expands, efforts to carry one another's burdens occur with growing frequency, suggesting that one way to work through one's own trauma is to engage the female collective by first attempting to help a loved one with hers.¹¹⁸

The extent to which colonial and warring forces are allied with violent patriarchy in the novella is evident in not only the passages focused on that overall violence as it manifests through particular acts, but also in how Vera structures the text. Tiyanambe Zeleza writes of Vera's oeuvre, "the power of Vera's fiction...lies in its narrative style

¹¹⁶ In her essay "Turning Her Back on the Moon: Virginity, Sexuality, and Mothering in the Works of Yvonne Vera," literary critic Carolyn Martin Shaw writes: "In Vera's works, time and again, woman's natural element seems to be water: for her, water is the medium of birth and death...Vera's use of water in female imagery is multivocal: she calls upon water as a mirror of the self, a river of tears and sorrow, a source of healing and regeneration, sexuality, and birth and sometimes nurture" (48).

¹¹⁷ Régine Michelle Jean-Charles reads such moments in *Under the Tongue* as demonstrative of a departure from conventionally privileged didacts on healing from gendered violence: "The extended metaphor of the tongue and reiteration of voice indicates that the work to be done in order to heal takes place in terms of progression. This view is significantly different from the rape crisis intervention field in which voice is unequivocally privileged as the best and only way to heal" (49).

¹¹⁸ For another reading of the text that considers how a collective of women engages individual and shared trauma, see Martina Kopf's 2005 piece "Writing Sexual Violence: Words and Silences in Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue*."

that seamlessly assimilates oral and literary modes of narration as much as in its uncompromising messages against colonial and postcolonial tyrannies of power and patriarchy” (13). In *Under the Tongue* specifically, I read the lyrical language given to the female characters to be part of that unyielding critique that Zeleza gestures to: having been silenced in the action of the plot, their textual voices are especially rich and musical on the page. However, the novel is structured in such a way that everything exists between the descriptions—one metaphorical and symbolic, one starkly realistic—of Zhizha’s rape, except for the conclusion of the text. The final chapter of the novella features a break in perspective that is inconsistent with the otherwise family-focused viewpoint of previous chapters. This last chapter opens with, “1980 spelled the end of loneliness and unfulfilled desire long kept” (232), and it describes people in the wake of the war that had functioned as a backdrop in the previous pages. The location of this chapter’s content as outside of the rest of the novella, sitting between the two representations of Zhizha’s rape, suggests that the impact of patriarchal (post)colonial violence extends beyond the confines of the text itself, that the extent of its reach and the damages it has caused are not clearly defined, such that it feels frighteningly limitless. That undefined, sustained quality spreads from between the lines of the novella to the colonized space in which the characters live:

She [Grandmother] does not say who ‘they’ are, but often she will say, They think we are animals. They make your grandfather work on Saturday. They make us suffer. They built the township. It is crowded in the township. I do not like it here. We live like bees. Who will bury us here? We will die like fruit falling from a tree. We shall bury ourselves. Shadows will bury us. We arrived as people, became strangers, share nothing but our suffering. (144)

Though Grandmother articulates suffering as a shared struggle, which is not dissimilar to the conceptualization of the empathetic experience of suffering shared by the women of

the family, it is clear that the strength the women draw from one another is not present in the broader connected suffering experienced by the township as a colonial state. This is an alienating form of suffering, one that renders people into insects and strips them of their humanity. The use of the pronoun “they” that Zhizha remarks on gestures to both ambiguity and pervasiveness; the cause of this dehumanization remains unclear and thus unidentifiable, making its source impossible to locate or confront.

Vera’s engagement with the colonial influences in the novella’s setting work at the language level elsewhere in the text. She notably implements another form of stylized language that is distinct from Zhizha’s nature imagery rich narration of second sight. This other form of stylized language requires readers to adjust how the text is received: whenever English words occur in the novella—typically written on household objects, but also in the form of lessons Runyararo gives her daughter—the letters appear spaced out, so that they do not quite form language. The immediate effect is for the reader, who is already looking at a text written in English, to realize their own linguistic distance from characters, including a protagonist whose initially alienating stylized narration has now completely drawn readers into its poetry and depth of emotion. One example of this visually affected English, a headline from a newspaper, underscores the omnipresence of the war, even as the household is caught up in Runyararo’s recent murder of Muroyiwa:

She killed her husband, grandfather says...Grandfather walks briskly to the small kitchen holding his newspaper like a shield. He is going to read the paper perhaps. It says M a s s a c r e in bold black print on the front, and shows a man with wide shoulders holding a gun. The man killed someone...Grandfather enters my thought speaking to Grandmother with a violent flourish of his arms. He throws the paper into the fire. The man burns. The gun burns. M s a c e—the letters curl, curve, break, and collapse. (163-164)

At once foreshadowing the final chapter of the novel as it announces independence for Zimbabwe and the traumatic aftermath of the violence of war, the collapse of these letters

also represents for Zhizha an uncertain future with a family that has also, for all intents and purposes, gone up in flames. Her grandfather has made it clear that he will not allow Runyararo's retaliation against Muroyiwa to go unpunished, regardless of the fact that his own granddaughter has been raped; indeed, the only reactions we see to the rape are those of Runyararo and Grandmother. There is no male response whatsoever to this atrocity, and that lack seems to beg the question whether it is deemed worth even acknowledging by the men in the novella. For the reader who looks on, an awful knowledge that the protagonist is spared is offered: the word "massacre" may simply be burning letters to Zhizha, but its implications are clear to those who read her story. In this way, Vera utilizes language to mitigate access to trauma not only for her characters, but for her readers, as well. Her control over how her narrative is received functions at the level of play with language, and the extent to which she uses that technique demonstrates an accounting for audience in the creation of a deeply intimate text, one that seems to cast a self-reflective practice of engaging one's complicity on a readership that can read the word her protagonist can't.

This visual play with language allows Vera to engage another gothic aspect of the text: just as the author uses English letters to create a visual effect resulting in dramatic irony in the above scene, she also uses this visual effect to layer a gothic doubling rooted in the female collective of Zhizha's family. After her mother has been sent to jail, Zhizha reflects on Runyararo's past efforts to teach her English:

Mother saying in a measured voice, Repeat after me
a e i o u

...I sit very still, reading aloud, repeating after my mother through the mirror filled with our calm resemblances and our hope...

I have seen my mother.

...Our yesterday partings vanish like unremembered dreams, like echoes of stream

water, lapping gently. My mother.
a e i o u

I repeat silently. I repeat into the deep of the mirror far where my mother's eyes meet mine. I breathe a warm cloud over the shiny glass of the mirror and write one letter across it. I watch it disappear into the mirror. I breathe again another warm cloud onto the mirror and write the second letter, and again it moves away silently, slowly, and the mirror waits. I meet her gesture of endless warmth, her brilliant glowing love. I meet the radiance of her eyes, and in her tears, I find my past... (201-202)

This tracing and retracing of disappearing letters suggests that, like the newspaper

headline in the fire, there is something transient about language as these women

experience it. By tracing the basic foundations of a foreign language into a mirror, she

attempts to unite herself with the ability to put her voice—which has become foreign—

into comprehensible words. But there is also the need for her mother to be present in this

act, and just as the letters represent the foundations of words, so Zhizha's own reflection

comes to represent the mother she can only find through her own resemblance to her. As

her mother's double, Zhizha can comfort herself in her mother's absence.¹¹⁹

Summoning her mother with the mirror as a central artifact, a portal that allows mutability among women in this family line, Zhizha looks first to herself in order to locate her mother. The emergence of Runyararo as a double, functioning as a comfort mechanism, yields a psychic shift for Zhizha. The latter finds Runyararo in the mirror even before she seems to have an awareness of her own reflection:

Mother calls to me in a voice just like mine, she grows from inside of me...She gives me the moon saying the moon is in my growing and my sleep. I look far into the mirror and the moon travels silent and whole, breaks into small fragments, scatters to the ground in showers of joyful light.

I watch myself through the mirror, my mouth moving in different directions with the letters...

I sit up straight like my mother, my hands folded across my chest and a frown on my brow, and sternly say repeat after me a e i o u, then I change into me, and I say a e i o u. I remember all my letters. I tell my mother and she repeats after me and I laugh then

¹¹⁹ Viewing motherhood as the core of all of Vera's major works, Carolyn Shaw writes, "at the center of her story is the mother-daughter connection or disconnection, loss of the mother, rejection or abandonment of the child, and denial of motherhood" (37).

I repeat after mother who repeats after me and I after her...I have turned into mother, and she laughs, because she has become me. The letters flow from me to mother... We live with words. (202-203)

We see the transition in Zhizha's understanding of herself and her mother, as unified, separate, existing at once within and apart from one another. The flickering transformation that closes this passage suggests that the practice of vowels has evolved beyond its originally intended purpose, forming an incantation of sorts as Zhizha and Runyararo turn into one another again and again. Throughout the passage is the coping mechanism that Zhizha as a traumatized girl uses in order to access the parent who cared for her, who defended her, and who is no longer with her. Zhizha seeks out the comforts a mother gives: the touch of a hand on the forehead, watching over a child as she sleeps. But the exchange between mother and daughter in the mirror allows access to that which had previously been buried, impossible: in this scene, memory becomes tangible once more, in no small part because now Zhizha has something wonderful to remember. When memory meant looking back on her brutal rape, it was something to be avoided at all costs. Now that memory means access to her mother, Zhizha moves towards it, which permits her this fantastic, elated contact with her mother but which will also lead to the penultimate scene of the novella, the harsh realism of her rape.

Vera uses the mirror as central to an awakening of memory in the midst of trauma more than once in the course of the novella. The first time she uses the mirror with Zhizha locating her mother, a deeply intimate and individual psychic shift occurs. But Vera turns readers' gaze back towards the collective in the final chapter of the novella. This conclusion, mentioned previously as a passage that exists outside the novella's bookending of the dual representations of Zhizha's rape, looks to the end of the war in 1980:

When ceremonies were discovered and celebrated, in the city, it became commonplace to see women carrying mirrors into the middle of the streets and crashing them onto the tarred ground... Breaking mirrors in public places became a necessary ritual of abandon... There was something unfathomable in this easy act, courageous even. The sound and sight of breaking glass brought sharp edges to existence.

History had become dazed and circular... The path left strewn with dangerous glitter was fair warning to oncomers that caution made living an art. And when the broken mirrors had become forgotten there was only the hurt lingering underneath coaxing words, just hurt and living and waiting, lingering, not forgotten. (232-233)

This post-war scene in a novella about women who have suffered at the hands of men, whose voices have been not their own, powerfully places the last word of the story in the hands of women whose ritual is to create by shattering. Régine Michelle Jean-Charles writes of Vera's treatment of women in the text: "the intimate stories (*histoire*) of rape can be linked to a larger history (*Histoire*) of violence against women and of the exclusion of women's narratives of violation from the larger historical record. The concept of *histoire*, when viewed in relation to sexual violence and rape narratives, evokes multiple traumatic legacies that intersect and overlap" (44). Mirrors come to represent a hazardous future tied to a violent past, held by collectives of women. Just as Zhizha engaged in repetitive tracing of letters in order to recover her mother and her memory, so "history becomes circular" and the women breaking mirrors ensure that even after these objects fall to obscurity, their significance as they lay in pieces is remembered, too. Traumatic aftermath in this final scene of the novella means uncertainty on the road ahead; the legacy of war results in instability, and the act of remembering extends beyond Zhizha's own narrative and into the space occupied by that collective emerging from the traumatic event of war.

Seeming Mad, Seeing Double

Much like Vera's *Under the Tongue*, Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* utilizes stylistically distinct narration that allows readers insight into a conflicted interior of a protagonist who is grappling with both inherited trauma and personal struggles. However, the stylized language employed by Head is a postmodernist stream of mythologies and violent imageries, haphazardly navigated by significant guiding figureheads who appear in protagonist Elizabeth's visions: Sello, Dan, and Medusa.^{120 121} As the novel represents Elizabeth in a state of national and geographical limbo—living in exile and in a community that is reshaping the space in which they live, notably through agriculture—it also shows her occupation of another space, one in which these visions dominate and Elizabeth often finds herself at the mercy of mental torment. The horror that she witnesses and feels demonstrates her overall experience of lost agency; that, along with the nature of these visions as grotesquely fantastic and extremely violent, gestures to an engagement with a gothic experience that is layered in both its iteration and its resounding impact.

A critical aspect of Elizabeth's exile has to do with the loss of access to family. Where Lizzie in *Stigmata* and Dana in *Kindred* have both artifact-based family records (the bible, the quilt) and oral narrative material to hold onto, Elizabeth is unknowingly raised by a foster mother and does not discover her true familial origins until she is thirteen

¹²⁰ The compounding of immediate traumatic memory with transgenerational traumata results in a text that is startlingly vibrant in its representations of suffering and mental anguish: "...an atmosphere of brutal desire pervaded everything, stagnated everything, and the wrenching, miserable battle of fierce tug-of-war stretched on and on with no end in sight... 'I can't think along these lines,' Elizabeth moaned, over and over. If someone had promised to help someone there had been no warning of a journey right through hell. The radius of hell seemed endless..." (64-65). The novel's structure is such that these experiences with mental anguish disrupt the reader's own comfort, as they appear suddenly—without the organizing principle of chapters—in the midst of day-to-day events in the text. They are representative of the extreme suffering of the interior as it rages in an effort to come forth impossibly into the world outside the mind.

¹²¹ See Sue J. Kim's reading of Head's work in her book *Critiquing Postmodernism in Contemporary Discourses of Race* for an extended look at this aspect of *A Question of Power*.

years old. At that point in time, she is sent away to a mission school and the principal tells her when she arrives, “We have a full docket on you. You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you’re not careful you’ll get insane just like your mother” (16). Elizabeth’s mother was categorized as insane under the South African apartheid system because she was a White woman impregnated by one of her Black workers: “In South Africa she had been rigidly classified Coloured. There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with a personality” (44). The revelation of her true parentage in the context of apartheid law features centrally in Elizabeth’s relationship with insanity and exile: she is at once linked to inherited madness while at the same time severed from the family that raised her.¹²²

There is a question of how the novel is to be read, given its multi-layered existence as an account of mental illness, gothic haunting, political exile, and trauma survival. Whereas both Lizzie and Dana must combat accusations of mental illness in the face of somatic bodily injury, Elizabeth’s relationship to the concept of sanity is tenuous, and pushes at our preexisting notions about that very idea. In addition to the violent and overwhelming visions that she is subject to experiencing without warning as she navigates the world around her, Elizabeth bears the stigma of her institutionalized mother and the knowledge that she had a maternal grandmother who loved her grandchild. Though the revelation of her mother’s identity occurs in childhood, its real impact comes much later in her life when Elizabeth has a son of her own, a period in which most of the

¹²² One cruciality of this autobiographical backing to Head’s protagonist is her mother in particular being written as Elizabeth’s white parent, which underscores the gendered aspects of racist apartheid law. As critic Dobrota Pucherova writes, “The racist economy of female sexuality in segregated South Africa, linking interracial sex with nymphomania and madness, marked Bessie Head’s mother, and by implication Bessie Head herself, as both deviant and insane...” (107).

novel's action is based. The inherent contradiction she is presented with when her family origins are made known to her—a mother who was mad to bear her but a sane grandmother who was allowed to love her—turns on its head the very idea of madness. Furthermore, her ability to function as a mother herself is challenged by the visions that plague her. All of these conflicts make the levels at which the novel functions myriad, and contribute to the feeling that the novel's time is suspended and its space claustrophobic, with everything happening all at once.¹²³

Although the intensity with which Head's stylized language infuses Elizabeth's visions with a gothic quality that highlights interior terror and feelings of displacement, this analysis seeks to avoid diagnostically qualifying Elizabeth's experience, as some scholarship has, and to look instead at how the visions function within the context of the novel.¹²⁴ Rather than speak of Elizabeth's visions and interactions with them as "insanity," her non-normative experiences are better discussed as *perceived madness*. This distinction is significant because of Elizabeth's somatization of a familial memory of psychological non-normative experience that is at odds with the apartheid system. Arguably, under such an extreme and inhumane legal system, certain modes of existence and thought would be deemed mad. Indeed, Elizabeth's racial status is meant to never exist under apartheid law, and so by existing, she is automatically deemed aberrant. Susan Hubert says much to this effect: "Elizabeth's madness can be understood...as a rational response to an irrational society. Apartheid depends on the ideology of white supremacy

¹²³ Examining Head's work by engaging Njabulo S. Ndebele's theories on the ordinary and spectacular, Denae Dyck and Tim Heath speak about this simultaneity that the book employs: "Head's challenge to her reader involves not only her admixture of the spectacular and the ordinary but also the sheer number of characters in the novel and its two-part structure, all of which defy the compression of summary" (55).

¹²⁴ Even twenty-first century critics such as Clare Counihan and Shannon Young who take into account Elizabeth's experience under the apartheid system continue to engage in diagnosing Head's protagonist as "insane."

for its reasonableness; white supremacist discourses and practices are insane to anyone who affirms the full humanity of all people” (132).¹²⁵ Therefore, sanity itself becomes suspect in a work like *A Question of Power*.

The novel reflects this perceived madness and reactions to apartheid through not only Elizabeth’s experiences, but also via interactions with other characters who are living in exile. When Elizabeth suffers her first public outburst in response to the visions that plague her and is institutionalized, a local school principal comes to her aid: “He was an Afrikaner man from South Africa and the founder of the Motabeng Secondary School. He said, simply: ‘My wife will take care of your son until you come out of the hospital. We are both refugees and must help each other...I suffer, too, because I haven’t a country and know what it’s like. A lot of refugees have nervous breakdowns’” (52). For Eugene, the principal, there is a clearly causal relationship between loss of nation and loss of self. It is important to note his use of the word “suffer,” given the violent, painful nature of Elizabeth’s visions.¹²⁶ That Elizabeth shares this common ground with Eugene demonstrates their shared suffering in what is a predominantly isolating narrative, allowing Head to underscore connectivity even as Elizabeth’s prose voice is in so many ways alienating.

Eugene roots the cause of Elizabeth’s symptoms in her displacement, and that experience is gothically doubled in the text, not through a secondary character but in the protagonist’s very context within the novel. Elizabeth is uprooted from her home country

¹²⁵ For a fuller discussion of this aspect of Head’s narrative, see Hubert’s *Questions of Power: The Politics of Women’s Madness Narratives*.

¹²⁶ Dyck and Heath point to Randolph Vigne as a critic of Head’s work who successfully avoids reductive analyses of Elizabeth’s visions by looking not for a diagnosis but instead at her sensory and emotional experience of suffering itself: “Rather than attempt to diagnose Head’s condition, Vigne sympathetically attends to Head’s pain” (58).

and a noncitizen in the new nation where she resides. Additionally, whenever she is launched without warning into her visions, the perceived space around her alters drastically, and she loses access to those spaces in which her consciousness outside of the visions lives.¹²⁷ These include her house and the community garden she is helping to build as part of a local industries project, the latter of which provides her with a rare and much needed sense of order amidst her internal experiences of chaos. It may be simple enough to say that Elizabeth is without a country. But what does it truly mean to be nationless? There is a sense that the ground beneath one's feet could be gone at any moment, that one could be removed from the space one occupies as Elizabeth often is by way of her violent visions. On a deeply personal level, to lack citizenship is to go without the most basic kind of stability, and this is reflected in all of Elizabeth's interpersonal interactions. This spatial experience is linked by Eve Sedgwick to a particular gothic novelistic tradition:

...major Gothic conventions... share a particular spatial model...when an individual fictional 'self' is the subject of one of these conventions, that self is spatialized in the following way. It is the position of the self to be massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access...Typically...there is both something going on inside the isolation...and something intensely relevant going on impossibly out of reach...While the three main elements (what's inside, what's outside, and what separates them) take on the most varied guises, the terms of the relationship are immutable. The self and whatever it is that is outside have a proper, natural, necessary connection to each other, but one that the self is suddenly incapable of making. The inside life and the outside life have to continue separately, becoming counterparts rather than partners... This, though it may happen in an instant, is a fundamental reorganization, creating a doubleness where singleness should be. And the lengths there are to go to reintegrate the sundered elements—finally, the impossibility of restoring them to their original oneness—are the most characteristic energies of the Gothic novel. (12-13)

¹²⁷ Drawing on the scholarship of Helen Kapstein, Shannon Young succinctly articulates this layered on experience of displacement: "Elizabeth's psychological fragmentation is both a mirror of her society's pathology, and emblematic of her refusal to cooperate with a system that functions to negate her" (232).

Sedgwick's tracing out of this particular gothic spatial model is critical to understanding where Elizabeth sits within her various displacements in *A Question of Power*.

Elizabeth's displacement is tied to her status as a traumatized individual: that is, in the most basic contemporary clinical understanding, as a person who has lost access to agency over her life and self. From the intimate familial label of insanity and surrendering of her own maternal responsibility to the expansive destruction of the apartheid system and subsequent exile, Elizabeth's compounding of trauma results in a lack of grounding that would allow her to claim such agency. The separation that Sedgwick discusses—the division of the self, the interior and the exterior placed side by side—is that much more difficult for Elizabeth because she assumes no control over what space she is to inhabit at any given moment. At the beginning of a section of torturous visions in the novel, the narrator intones via Elizabeth's free indirect discourse: "Who would knowingly take a journey into hell?" (126). The lack of autonomy that occurs as she falls into mental anguish without warning reflects the exterior helplessness of living in exile and having no country to call home.

The first chapter of this dissertation project focuses on marginalized children, and there is a child in Head's novel who is so marginalized, most critics who work on the text barely offer him a mention. The novel itself refers to him throughout as "the small boy," not offering him a name until nearly the conclusion of Elizabeth's story. That child is Elizabeth's son, who falls to the periphery of the text as it functions as its protagonist's viewpoint of a rootless, shifting world. This avoidance of naming her son reflects to some extent the emotional distance Elizabeth feels from her own parents; however, it also speaks to the level at which the visions invade the most intimate, domestic space of her

daily life. Those entities who inhabit her visions all have names that appear with great frequency throughout the novel: Dan, Medusa, Sello, the latter even having different designations based on what he is wearing in his varied iterations (Sello the monk, Sello in the brown suit). Too, those individuals Elizabeth encounters in the town of Motabeng are known to her by name: Kenosi and Tom are friends to Elizabeth, and even individuals that only appear fleetingly in the novel (Camilla, Birgette) are known to the reader and our protagonist by name. Her son is the only exception, and the scenes in which she engages with him, many of which interrupt a barrage of violent images, grow both briefer and fewer as the novel progresses. Those scenes also demonstrate a telling distance between Elizabeth and the boy, framed by her robotic and desperate interactions with him:

She was ill and broken down, unprepared in health for this new clamour. She crawled out of bed to set out some food for the small boy. There was some cake with pink sugar-icing and roast chicken. She set it down on the floor near his playthings. He would not bother her once he started on his inventions. She crawled back into bed. (109)

Basic necessities are as much as she can manage to offer the child, and as the above passage shows, keeping him from her is an incentive behind the meager care she does find herself able to give. As for Shorty, whose name we learn in the novel's final pages, he has adapted to the best of his ability to his mother's home: "The small boy had learned to ignore the high drama of the household. He went on eating" (134). He is effectively written out of the text in several instances, the novel's treatment of him reflective of his mother's, in no small part because Elizabeth is not necessarily capable of even caring for herself.

But it is significantly concern for Shorty's well-being that seems to be the sole factor that can break Elizabeth from the powerful hold of her visions, even if only for a

moment. Her sense of herself as a mother is subdued by the visions as is much of the rest of her identity; however, Shorty's voice, when he does manage to push forward from the margins his mother has restricted him to, resonates enough that Elizabeth can catch his words through the haze of her visions:

‘Why was you talking to yourself in the night?’ he asked, pointedly. ‘You talk all the time, then you shout: Leave me! Leave me! I get frightened. I cover my head.’ She stared back at him in appalled silence. So that was what it had come to? She knew about the silent soliloquies of that year of sleepless nights, but she wasn’t aware that she had begun talking them out loud. (174)

This moment of self-awareness that Elizabeth gains in the horror of Shorty's account of her behavior is not possible without her son's perspective; here, that breath of self-awareness is what “feverishly swerved her mind away from killing him, then herself” (174). That Elizabeth is contemplating family annihilation points to a disturbing destructive force within her that exists where parental instinct seems to have vacated. If Vera's text represents a mother-child relationship in which violence was motivated by the need to protect, this line from Head's text seems to suggest that the distortion of a maternal protective urge can result in a misdirection of that turn towards violence, one that would incite Elizabeth to harm her child and herself.

Motherhood, womanhood, and state-mandated illegitimate existence are central themes that rise up to the surface of the chaos of Elizabeth's narrative of visions; additionally, several gothic anxieties related to both racial and gendered legitimacy accompany these themes.¹²⁸ Head's text contains two sexual anxieties in particular that

¹²⁸ While the two main figures who appear in Elizabeth's visions are Sello and Dan, after whom the two respective sections of the book are named, Medusa shows up with notable frequency throughout the novel. She constantly affronts Elizabeth's sexuality, as does Dan, and these attacks are rooted in Elizabeth's racial identity: “A persistent theme was that she was not genuinely African” (159). Her mixed-race parentage represents for Dan and Medusa a void within Elizabeth that is to be mocked. Dan taunts her: “You are supposed to feel jealous. You are inferior as a Coloured. You haven't got what that girl has got” (127). The gothic novel traditionally explores anxieties, and among the most common of those relate to sexual behaviors that are deemed at their most benign non-normative and at their worst aberrant. In colonial

arise repeatedly in the context of Elizabeth's visions. One is a frustrating homophobia, tied to (mis)understandings of masculinity and disturbingly conflated with the second anxiety, a concern over pedophilia. While this conflation is not unexpected in a text published in the 1970s, it is nevertheless upsetting to the contemporary reader: "Dan was a child-molester too, but much worse still, he went for other men like mad" (116). The concern Elizabeth has over adult men whose sexual preference is for boys and/or for other men falls only second to a deeper anxiety over the same violence represented in Vera's novella: adult men who rape their own daughters:

She was later to cry out in agony:

'Oh, this filthy environment, where men sleep with the little girls they fathered, and other horrific evils'...

Did she really believe that Sello had molested his own child? Everything depended and hung on nightmare impressions...By Sunday of that week, Elizabeth had collapsed again. It really meant that she had come to accept the impossible, that Sello had molested his own child. Sello had said:

'You don't realize the point at which you become evil'. (137, 144-145)

It is this moment in her visions that incites Elizabeth to strike out against the actual

member of her town named Sello (upon whom the vision-entity is loosely based),

resulting in her institutionalization. Sexual violence composes much of the content of

Elizabeth's visions (Dan constantly commits and reveals sexual atrocities to Elizabeth,

including the above claims about Sello); however, it is not until an atrocity is committed

by a parent to his child that in her mind, she must begin to act. This points to a motivator

that has lain dormant in Elizabeth but that also functions to disrupt her visions enough for

her to recover enough agency to take action: that motivator, of course, is her maternal

societies, there is an anxiety surrounding the sanctity of white women and how they might be tainted by sexual relationships with nonwhite men. In the case of *A Question of Power*, Head ultimately expands on the gothic anxiety the colonizer feels towards miscegenation and turns it on its head by shifting the dominant perspective on that anxiety, thus allowing readers to analyze not the fear that such a union might take place, but rather what new anxiety the child of such a union experiences in a society that forbids it.

identity. The terror that Elizabeth experiences as a mother hearing Dan make his accusations against Sello pushes her towards action; though we know that Dan's words are grounded in her visions and worst fears rather than anything the man Sello outside of her visions may have done, the disruption of that seemingly endless torment of the interior suggests that her ties to her son and to her own identity as a mother offer the possibility of a more sustained respite for Elizabeth.

The parentally-motivated break in the mass of storm clouds that make up Elizabeth's visions occurs more than once in the novel. This repeated disruption of Elizabeth's disruption, as it were, demonstrates the potential that family ties and the strength of love have in pushing back against internal suffering. Respite is not offered through normative affection and caregiving, because Elizabeth's interior is non-normative. Rather, it comes in the form of desperation and worry over the child's welfare:

In the roar of approaching confusion of mind, Elizabeth thought:

‘I ought to get someone to take care of my son for me. He does not have to die with me.’

...But Medusa had thought out a solution to the problem. She looked at Elizabeth and said calmly: ‘You know you are going to die. The day you die you must take your son with you, because we don't want him here either.’

They stared at each other, lost in a death-grip struggle. Elizabeth fell back into death.
(87)

Though Elizabeth loses this particular battle to the vision-entity of Medusa, it is significant that the figure in her vision acknowledges the responsibilities that she bears as a mother. Elizabeth's visions are, according to what she knows of her own familial past and the warnings she has been given about that past, tied to her heritage in many senses of the word: her parents' racial identities, her political self in the context of both apartheid and exile, her mother's institutionalization. Attempting to resist her son having to bear the ultimate ordeal of traumatic legacy—the death-blow—allows Elizabeth to assert herself

for a moment in the midst of the tumultuous, unrelenting mental suffering she undergoes. Though it is a fleeting moment, the recognition of traumatic legacy and the clear effort to undermine it demonstrates a cognition of the nature of this disruptive force. If there is to be a reckoning that will allow Elizabeth as a descendant of trauma to regain autonomy in the face of her violent inheritance, meeting it in her own role as a mother seems like the place to start.

Eve Sedgwick writes, “The barrier between the self and what should belong to it can be caused by anything and nothing; but only violence or magic, and both of a singularly threatening kind, can ever succeed in joining them again” (13). The “magic” in *A Question of Power* is revealed to be love. As the book concludes, we see neighbors emerge not as vague interruptions to suffering visions as they were previously in the book, but as friends who care for Elizabeth and with whom she managed to connect even amidst the horrible pain she was experiencing. And when it seems as though the visions are going to overtake her once more, Shorty appears and undermines their power:

Then Dan moved towards her. There wasn't any need for her existence any longer. His hands reached for her head... Was this his way of showing her how near the end was? Shorty stood up and padded on bare feet to her bed. She couldn't remember his name. The cunning little bugger wanted his football. He smiled sweetly and rubbed her cheek. She was afraid to ask: 'Who are you?'

'You won't forget my football, mother?' he asked.

The heavy weight of blankness shifted a little. So she was his mother, was she?

'Yes,' she said. (193)

Shorty's emergence as a child who no longer observes his mother's suffering but interrupts it with growing frequency thanks to his developing happiness and self-confidence demonstrates that Elizabeth's visions are not as all-powerful as she had once thought them to be. Although the visions do not entirely leave Elizabeth—she never dismisses them outright—she begins to reflect on the torment as a past learning

experience, and it is clear that she is moving forward: “And from the degradation and destruction of her life had arisen a still, lofty serenity of soul nothing could shake” (202). Her return to memory is tied to her return to her role as a mother, and thus as a member of the community in which she and Shorty have lived for the duration of the novel. She is not a citizen—again, her visions are still with her—but she has gained a new awareness that will allow her to break from the abject destructive hold she has been in.

Within Elizabeth, a compounding of familial, generational, and national suffering has existed over an extended period of time. However, in the narrative close of the traumatic disruption of *A Question of Power*, Head leaves her readers with a profound message of hope:

If there were any revelation whatsoever in her own suffering it seemed to be quite the reverse of Mohammed’s dramatic statement. He had said: There is only one God and his name is Allah. And Mohammed is his prophet.
She said: There is only one God and his name is Man. And Elizabeth is his prophet.
...As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging. (205-206)

In the kindness and care of others, Elizabeth begins to forge a future in which she is no longer without a space to call home; or rather, a place that will call her its own. Elizabeth finds that seeking out her son and prioritizing his well-being in the midst of chaotic visions yield a reclamation of peace of mind and heart. There is something to be said for the efforts to connect, to grow, and to mend: in grappling with the horrific and the impossible, those individuals contextualized by trauma move in ways previously unimagined ways. This is not to say that the impact of trauma is lessened; understandings of traumatic experience as something one can “come back from” are flawed, at best. However, rather than aiming for an unattainable past—a state of being pre-traumatic event—the path forward for the child of traumatic experience seems to lie in expanding

her understanding of where in that aftermath she is located. The more she comes to know herself in this state, the greater the possibility that a new agency she never had before will fall within her grasp.

Twentieth-Century Gothic Heroines: A Descendant Generation

The four gothic heroines in these texts have in common the persistence of inherited trauma, the phenomenon of collective descendant experience, and distinctly gothic modes of navigating these archives of traumatic data. By casting its gaze towards a global Anglophone selection of texts that span the latter half of the century and in many senses respond to one another's representations of traumatic engagement, this chapter has looked to an evolution within mainstream gothic literature that opens towards a feminist, postcolonial, and progressive literary perspective. That development has effectively altered the field in ways that allow it to continue its tradition of reckoning with unfinished business while correcting historic anxieties towards individuals and collectives whose voices now ring out across the pages of the genre.

These narratives demonstrate how gothic fantastic engagement with inherited traumata yields not only an active and at times empowered form of remembering, but also the potential for collectives to experience their own connectivity in ways that are, if not healing, at the very least reparative. In the concluding volume of their comprehensive four-volume anthology on the genre, titled *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Fred Botting and Dale Townshend assert of twentieth century gothic novels, "For all their wanderings through myth and history, however, the novels remain bound up with contemporary questions... of transitional states in which change is no

longer feared or horrifying... but... represent[s] the positive potential of transformation”

(4). This statement speaks in part to what this chapter has established, though the sunny nature of its authors’ conclusion is not reflected in the pages of either the chapter or the novels that it discusses. Rather than leaving fear behind, that transformative possibility exists as a potential mediator for the horror, a way for the haunted to learn how to carry their ghosts in such a way that is sustainable and no longer disruptive of day to day life.

The collectives that Dana, Lizzie, Zhizha, and Elizabeth find themselves belonging to come in myriad forms: families, communities, built upon race, built upon gender. Connections exist among women, between mothers and daughters, within the shared experience of the exiled and the oppressed. If grappling with ghosts continues to be a central project for a gothic heroine in the twentieth century, it would seem from what we have observed over the course of this chapter that it is through collectives that haunting can be made into something one can not only live with, but learn from, albeit terrifying and sometimes near-deadly learning. Family stories are what help Lizzie through her possession and into a loving closeness with Grace and Ayo-Bessie; missing and connecting with her mother allows Zhizha to open her eyes and her voice to the extent of her own experience. The spectacular reality of belonging to a traumatized collective becomes in its communal experience and shared understanding an existence that makes sense of the past and helps shape the gaze of the future.

The trauma theorists and clinical experts read traumatic data as that which exists outside of the majority of mental narrative, but that persists in such a way that it can dominate that central narrative matter. Gothic literature historically has been that which is excluded by and thus exists outside of a literary establishment, but that nevertheless

dominates popular reading markets. The same can be said for literature that has been penned by and is about people of color and women. In these novels, then, we see a heavily layered first-time incorporation of that which has been excluded from the mainstream. The effects of this shift have altered the treatment of a genre, of literary voices, and of those stories informed by an ancestral collective generation that has haunted itself into resonance.

Postscript: On Monstrosity

This project begins with childhood and ends with monsters. We began by looking to the margins, those spaces where children and the fantastic encounter one another on common ground. We progressed into the realm of the domestic, the home that through conflict has evolved into an uncanny space where one generation's psychic burdens are inevitably taken up by their children. And finally, we saw how mass conflict disrupts time for entire collectives as the gothic archive of traumatic aftermath visits the descendants of an oppressed past in frightening and persistent ways. That trauma evolves as it progresses, that it mutates in accordance with things like magnitude and proximity, identity and family, is no longer in question. The ghosts of those who precede us indeed linger in unanticipated and unpredictable ways.

Though this project has focused primarily on survivors of oppression and conflict, it is not possible to think through traumatic histories and traumatic legacy without also considering complicity and shame as they exist in the descendants of oppressors. Like the descendant generations that are burdened with the legacy of their victimized ancestors, descendant generations of oppressors also have limited access to source traumas, as well as the challenge of articulating the unspeakable. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, writing on slavery in America, says that "Slavery, in American intellectual discourse, is not only or merely a metaphor, a sin, a cancer, a crime, or a shame, although it is also all of those things. Slavery is the family secret of America..." (2). By terming slavery a "family secret," Rushdy is able to grapple with not only the struggle descendant generations of oppressors experience in their inability to come to terms with the inhumane enacted brutality of their ancestors, but his definition extends to include those descendant generations who are

offspring of the oppressors and the oppressed, that struggle Dana in *Kindred* experiences as Rufus is humanized in her eyes when she comes to know him as a boy and at the same time monstrous in his bloodlust and rapacious violence as a man.

Where gothic anxieties have traditionally been read in monstrous, external representations of the so-called Other, twenty-first century texts in particular are beginning to investigate what it means when the monster is not found externally, but within. For gothic monsters to become the protagonists of their own haunted narratives at once troubles conceptions of complicity, of identity, and of the sources of anxiety. As a final concluding note to this project, I will look to Helen Oyeyemi's 2009 *White Is for Witching*, a novel that examines many facets of monstrosity and considers what it might mean to exist as a monster. As we think through how inherited transgenerational traumata must be dealt with in a contemporary context, Oyeyemi's book is a case study that touches on many of the themes of this dissertation: children and the fantastic, variations on gothic tropes and anxieties, domestic traumata and familial burdens, and finally, a disruptive temporal-spatial experience that descendant generations inevitably grapple with. The novel reveals a struggle with the monster within that speaks to where contemporary conversations on identity, history, trauma, and oppression are leading.

White Is for Witching focuses on four characters whose perspectives alternate as the novel progresses: Miranda and Eliot Silver, twins whose parents run a bed-and-breakfast out of their great-grandmother's home in Dover, England; Ore, who Miranda befriends and ultimately falls in love with as they study together at Cambridge; and the house in which the Silvers reside, which has developed a voice that in part belongs to Miranda and Eliot's racist grandmother and great-grandmother, and in part seems to stem from a

monstrosity with which it aims to possess the Silver women. As more and more brown-skinned families and queer individuals cross the threshold into the house, its monstrous attributes and activities expand; and the possession with which it threatens Miranda, the youngest and only surviving Silver woman, grows in terrifying inevitability.

Oyeyemi's novel carefully weaves together gothic traditions that are prevalent in both the Caribbean and European canons, using as her anchor the blood-drinking soucouyant, a monster that might also be recognized as a vampire.¹²⁹ The soucouyant is mentioned by Ore in the first page of the novel, part of a prologue that makes sense only after readers have made their way through the rest of the text. Oyeyemi frequently alludes to gothic/fantastic literary predecessors of her work, quoting such texts as *Dracula* ("Besides, she thought, the blood is the life" (80)) and Lewis Carroll's Alice books, as she names Part One of her book "Curiouser" and Part Two, naturally, "And Curiouser" (11, 163). She even includes a playfully metatextual moment in Miranda's Cambridge University admissions interview:

Miranda thought about Ore throughout her interview, even when it descended into a semi-aggressive debate over her assertion that Thackeray's Becky Sharp would easily beat Brontë's Cathy in a fistfight. The only criticism she would have accepted was that she was giving patriarchy precedence over the female consciousness explored in the Gothic. But since that criticism wasn't offered, she stood her ground. (62)

An equally playful discussion of Edgar Allan Poe's work between Miranda and Eliot is included later in the novel (109). And in addition to these textual references to the gothic, Oyeyemi's book includes many of the staples of the genre, not least of which is the

¹²⁹ For further references on this particular vampire, see: Anatol, Giselle Liza. *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature of the Circum-Caribbean and African Diaspora*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015; Dobson, Kit and David Chariandy. "Spirits of Elsewhere Past: A Dialogue on Soucouyant." *Callaloo* 30.3 (2007): 808-817; Hopkinson, Nalo. "Greedy Choke Puppy." *Skin Folk*. New York: Hachette, 2001; Horner, Avril and Sue Zlosnik. *Women and the Gothic*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

setting of a haunted house; indeed, that the house has a will of its own and that the author provides it a narrative first-person voice demonstrates the powerful ways in which Oyeyemi chooses to engage and alter the gothic conventions she is building on. This curious structure is exceptional as it comes to represent British colonial xenophobia and bigotry: the gothic trope of a haunted setting shifts into a fully developed character, and that makes the tradition of oppression that Oyeyemi's novel addresses come alive in contemporary, relevant terms. Even fairy tales are fair game for the monstrous architecture of the house: "An apple fell in through Eliot's window. It was an all-season apple. I can make them grow. Do you know the all-season apples? They have a strange, dual colouring. If you pitied Snow White, then you know" (160). Poison apples made to grow by a possessive, possessed, and possessing house suggest that the contemporary gothic is all about our bedtime stories being brought back and turned on their heads.

But the *soucouyant* is the monster in Oyeyemi's novel on which the characters focus, and it becomes more and more of a presence in the narrative as the book progresses. The monster first appears as Miranda's double, preying on teen boys from Kosovan refugee families in the local community. When girls from the community confront Miranda and threaten her, assuming she has murdered their friends and relatives, she is as puzzled as they are to find that whomever attacked their male friends certainly *looks* like Miranda, but doesn't actually seem to be her. This confusion only deepens as one of the girls, Tijana, learns that Miranda was away in a rehabilitation center for her eating disorders while the murders occurred. Tijana's cousin Agim, who dies under mysterious medical circumstances, also confirms that the girl he has spent time with and who Tijana and her friends suspect of murdering their loved ones, is indeed *not* Miranda (131-132).

Miranda's grasp on reality is tenuous, a fact of which she is placidly aware. This is made evident on the first night she meets the soucouyant face to face:

The girl sitting across from her smiled. Her teeth were jagged. She had been there since Miranda had walked into the dining room, but because she looked exactly like Miranda she had not been noticed. After all, she might have been a reflection in the window. The difference was the teeth, and when she showed her teeth she became noticed. She was not quite three dimensional, this girl. And so white. There couldn't be any blood in her. She was perfect. Miranda but perfect. She was purer than crystal, so pure that she dissolved and Miranda couldn't see her anymore but still felt her there. (91-92)

Perfection and carnivorous teeth are the two qualities that help Miranda understand that she isn't looking at a reflection of herself. The latter is a blatant enough characteristic that points to monstrosity; the former, however, is a quality discussed repeatedly throughout the novel: "She was becoming someone, it seemed. She had read somewhere that you only became a woman once your mother had died. But that wasn't what worried her. She worried about becoming as perfect as the person shown to her on paper in Lily's studio" (153). "Perfection" for Miranda seems to point to bloodless whiteness and extreme thinness, as well as a frightening inevitability. These physical vampiric qualities are where her body progresses as a natural result of her eating disorders, but they are also evidently desired by the house, which seeks within the bodies of the Silver women a kind of animation, a chance to move around the world it so abhors. And the murder of the Kosovan refugee boys is only the beginning of the house's interventions into that world.

The women of the Silver family in order from most recently born include: Miranda, who from an early age exhibits a combination of anorexia and pica, both related to the house's influence over her as well as a family legacy of monstrosity; Lily, Miranda's mother and a globe-trotting photographer, who is caught in the crossfire of political conflict and killed, which the house feels occurs because she is "Stupid, stupid; Lily had

been warned not to go to Haiti. I warned her. Why do people go to these places, these places that are not for them?” (9-10); Jennifer, Lily’s mother, who the house literally consumes when she makes plans to escape it: “Jennifer really meant to abandon her daughter, and how could I allow that?” (97); and Anna Good, also called the children’s GrandAnna or the Goodlady, a war widow whose distorted vision of the world the house adopts and attempts to inflict on all subsequent generations of Silver women: “Anna Good you are long gone now, except when I resurrect you to play in my puppe[t] show...Indeed you are a mother of mine, you gave me a kind of life, mine, the kind of alive that I am” (27). The combination of women and house together seem to make a monster; it is not possible for the house to possess anyone outside of the Silver family—so it would seem. And the Silver women themselves have historically been monstrous: in deed, as they devour blood and nonfood objects; and in thought, as Anna’s bigotries grow and intensify as her presence remains within the house postmortem. But as the house stipulates,

Anna Good it was not your pica that made you into a witch...there was another woman, long before you, but related. This woman was thought an animal. Her way was to slash at her flesh with the blind, frenzied concentration that a starved person might use to get at food that is buried. Her way was to drink of her blood, then bite and suck at the bobbled stubs of her meat. Her appetite was only for herself...It is useful, instructive, comforting to know that you are not alone in your history. (27-28)

The unnamed, faceless woman that the house describes manifests in Oyeyemi’s novel as the beginning of this monstrous lineage, demonstrating a fascination with origin stories that appears frequently in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century vampire narratives.¹³⁰ And the

¹³⁰ This focus on origins appears frequently in film and is especially preoccupied with notable figures from other mythologies that might be incorporated into the lore. Examples include: J. S. Cardone’s 2001 film *The Forsaken*, in which the fallen angel Abaddon created original vampires from medieval knights referred to as the Forsaken, who pass on their curse to victims; Wes Craven and Patrick Lussier’s *Dracula 2000* from the same year as the title, in which Dracula is discovered to be Judas Iscariot, betrayer of Christ; and

house's waxing poetic on the significance of knowing one's familial past intimately highlights the self-aware moves Oyeyemi's novel so skillfully makes within its gothic canon, playing with familiar conventions all the while asserting the context of a contemporary world that bucks under the strain of history.

History is what preoccupies the house, a sustained fixation on that which it feels it cannot relinquish. The house's initial awakening occurs when Anna Good loses her husband during the war:

Andrew Silver was a Dover Queensman...a brave man in brown who flew a plane to Africa to fight the Germans there. One morning someone knocked on my door and gave Anna a telegram, which said her husband was dead...I curved myself into a deep cup, a safe container for her. I did not let her take any harm to herself, I did not let her open the attic window to jump...She was pregnant, you see. It was two Silvers at stake. My poor Anna Good, my good lady...Her fear had crept out from the whites of her eyes and woven itself into my brick until I came to strength, until I became aware... 'I hate them,' she said. 'Blackies, Germans, killers, dirty...dirty killers. He should have stayed here with me. Shouldn't have let him leave. Bring him back, bring him back, bring him back to me.' She spoke from that part of her that was older than her. The part of her that will always tie me to her, to her daughter...I can only be as good as they are. We are on the inside, and we have to stay together, and we absolutely cannot have anyone else...They shouldn't be allowed in though, those others, so eventually I make them leave. (136-137)

The trauma of loss incites a haunting that, rather than filling the house with ghosts, creates a spirit where once there was none. Fear, loss, xenophobia, and bigotry come together within Anna Good to awaken the consciousness of the house as it exists in the novel. Like the convention of most inanimate objects brought to life through witchery, Oyeyemi chooses to continue in the speculative tradition of the out-of-control machine, the thing that takes on a life of its own after being granted an intelligence beyond what it was originally intended to have. The house may be exactly what Anna Good would have wanted—the two run together so closely, particularly in the passages about Anna which

Michael Rymer's 2002 *Queen of the Damned*, a dramatization of Anne Rice's novels that looks to ancient Egyptian Akasha as the mother of all vampires.

are all narrated by the house itself, that it's often difficult to separate them—but Jennifer Silver's capture by the house is certainly not what she desires for herself. But what Jennifer Silver wants is directly at odds with what the house wants, and it becomes quickly clear that only one of their disparate desires will win out.

As the generations pass and the Silver women begin to reject their heritage of hate, the house grows ever more determined to maintain the status quo it conceived of during Anna's time. As Miranda transforms into the *soucouyant*—as the house takes over her identity, her appearance, and her desires—she has increasing difficulty recalling the year, sometimes believing she is still living in war times and under conditions that haven't existed in Dover since her GrandAnna was a young woman. In reality, the tensions in Dover center around the Immigration Removal Centre, where multiple detainees have committed suicide. Sade, who becomes the housekeeper of the bed-and-breakfast when the house chases away the first family of foreigners who maintain it, is herself an immigrant and often visits the Removal Centre, bringing food for the detained. She refers to it as a prison, and it acts as an off-site gothic space that is referenced often rather than central to the action of the novel. Views of the layers of gothic elements within the novel are limited by the nearly claustrophobic nature of the perspectives Oyeyemi has chosen to include. Where it seems we begin the novel with the innocuous points of view of a family and a home, it quickly becomes apparent that at least half of the perspectives we are offered belong to existing/evolving monsters in Miranda and the house. Eliot is one of the individuals the house would like to eliminate; however, when Ore enters the scene in the second half of the book, everything accelerates and quickly begins to come to a monstrous climax.

We do not encounter Ore's voice until the "And Curiouser" section of the novel, though her first chance meeting with Miranda occurs when they interview at Cambridge on the same day. Though she is among multiple black women characters included in the story, Ore is significantly the only person of color whose perspective we are given access to. That her voice enters later in the novel—after the house's tradition of racism, exclusion, and the possession of its own white women have all been established—points to a larger comment the author may be making about literary traditions (again, note the splitting of Lewis Carroll's phrase which designates the halves of the text) and voices that have until recently been excluded in the traditions this novel engages.

With Ore's entrance, the subtle metatextuality of the novel explodes. In a book of Caribbean folklore Ore is gifted by her parents,

I read about the soucouyant, the wicked old woman who flies from her body and at night consumes her food, the souls of others—soul food!—in a ball of flame...I read to the walls. 'Kill the soucouyant...Kill the soucouyant that unnatural old lady, and then all shall be as it should'...As always, the soucouyant seemed more lonely than bad. Maybe that was her trick, her ability to make it so you couldn't decide if she was a monster. (170)

As readers, we haven't encountered the word 'soucouyant' since the prologue.¹³¹ But vampire and monster allusions fill the second half of the novel; on a single page alone, both *Nosferatu* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (and a page later, the White Witch of Narnia) are referenced by Ore (176). Not long afterward, *Dracula* is mentioned (179). The novel becomes a self-aware recovery project, a revision on classic but exclusive fantastic narrative. Oyeyemi's deliberate references voiced in particular through Ore's

¹³¹ One might argue that the prologue isn't a prologue at all but the conclusion of the novel, set at the beginning of the physical book but outside of the "Curiouser And Curiouser" halves of the novel's action. It is also the only place where textually, we find all four perspectives contained at once. Rather than arriving later as she does in the two halves of the novel, Ore receives the first words of the prologue; the house is ominously given the last.

perspective speak to a new way of rethinking narrative convention, perhaps only conceivable by a generation of artists who have access—by means of the most massive library ever to exist in the archive that is the internet—to as much traditional literature as they do reality television. Speculative fiction has always been hyper-aware of its origins and hyper-enthusiastic about revising them, in many ways more so than more highbrow literary fiction (think again of fairytales, which exist in contemporary times as revision more than anything else). Millennial writers of speculative fiction are not only clearly aware of the foundations on which they draw, but playfully so. Deadly serious as the matter contained within *White Is for Witching* is, our author never loses sight of (re)imaginative possibility as it exists in inversion, contortion, distortion, and most significantly, involution.

Ore first meets Tijana, who has also arrived to study at Cambridge, and then finds Miranda on campus, who she remembers from the interviews. She ends up romantically involved with both, but only briefly with Tijana; it is clear that all three girls are exploring new aspects of sexuality, tentative and cautious as to how much they will decide to trust one another. Ore's relationship with Miranda progresses into a longer-term affair, however, as does the house's hold on Miranda and its physical impact on her, most evident in how thin she continues to grow. In studying the soucouyant, Ore makes the observation: "She is a double danger—there is the danger of meeting her, and the danger of becoming her. Does the nightmare of her belong to everyone, or just to me?" (179). This sentiment is echoed by Tijana, who asks Ore in regards to Miranda, "I mean, do you want to be with her, or is it that you want to be her?...Look at yourself. You're disappearing" (213). And indeed, Ore loses a striking amount of weight as the semester

progresses and she spends more and more time with Miranda. She also sees marked physical differences in Miranda that we as readers are meant to recognize as the house's influence; Miranda herself even remarks to Ore at one point that the house wants her back, its influence making her ill of body and heart (203).

The house and Miranda's ancestry have truly merged in an effort to enliven the legacy of the soucouyant within her. During a conversation with Ore, she requests,

'Please tell me a story about a girl who gets away.'
 ... 'Gets away from what, though?'
 'From her fairy godmother. From the happy ending that isn't really happy at all. Please have her get out and run off the page altogether, to somewhere secret where words like "happy" and "good" will never find her.'
 'You don't want her to be happy and good?'
 'I'm not sure what's really meant by happy and good. I would like her to be free...'
 (190)

That Anna Good is also referred to as the Goodlady is especially significant now; the house and its haunting spirits have before suggested to Miranda that she is not "good," though the meaning of that term, as she asserts here, remains vague. And while the other characters in the novel seem to recognize the malignancy of the house over time, only Sade really seems to understand that it's Miranda's ancestors specifically who are contributing to her illness. She remarks, "'They're calling you, aren't they?... Your old ones... I know it's hard'" (112). As readers, we only glimpse the collective Silver women through the passages in Miranda and the house's perspectives. One scene in particular that comes as a dream in Miranda's point of view depicts all four Silver women seated around a table of delicious food and the objects they've devoured as a result of their pica, which proves an effort to sate the desire to consume other humans. While Lily and Miranda sit together, Anna and Jenny have their mouths padlocked shut: "'Who did this to them?'" Miranda asked Lily, curling her arms around her mother's neck. Lily turned her

head away. ‘I did,’ she said. She sounded proud” (147). Lily’s pride marks the moment in the text where we are certain of a distinction between the mother-daughter pairs of Anna and Jennifer Silver and Lily and Miranda Silver. That distinction is tied up in the bigotry practiced by an older generation and the efforts that the younger generations take up in order to fight the racism and xenophobia that is their dangerous legacy. The padlocking of her mother’s and grandmother’s mouths are an attempt on Lily’s part to keep the soucouyant from overtaking herself and her daughter. And so the novel seems to say that those generations that are descended from monstrous ideas, even in their effort to reject the ideals that yielded their monstrosity, nevertheless remain subject to its influence.

But the question of whether monstrosity is as simple as just a force to be destroyed is also raised in the novel, particularly after Ore’s appearance. In response to a story about the soucouyant that Ore has told her, Miranda remains on the topic of freedom:

‘The soucouyant gets away though. Doesn’t she count as a girl?’
I drew back. ‘No, she doesn’t,’ I said. ‘She is a monster. She dies.’
‘Does she?’

‘All monsters deserve to die.’

Miranda didn’t say anything.

‘Miranda,’ I said. ‘Come on. The soucouyant is bad. She sucks the life out of people.’

‘That is true.’ She smiled in a way that undid every knot in me. (192)

Much as Ore objects to Miranda’s apparent sympathy for—or, rather, empathy with—the soucouyant in the story, she herself has been similarly conflicted over how to feel about this particular figure that she finds herself so preoccupied with in her studies: “maybe ‘I don’t believe in you’ is the cruellest way to kill a monster” (171). But Miranda’s struggle is hinged on the affection she feels for Ore, which she knows she must keep at bay if for no other reason than that she is unable to control the soucouyant, the influence of her “old ones”: “Don’t concentrate on Ore. Don’t witch her to death, Miranda...*Ore is not food. I think I am a monster*” (196, 221). The realization of the monstrous self elicits a sense of

desperation and despair, an inevitability that Miranda nevertheless pushes back at, proving she is neither her grandmother's nor great-grandmother's, but most certainly her mother's daughter.

That Ore begins to look like Miranda, as Tijana observes, suggests that what has all along seemed to be a family trait or curse is, in fact, a contagion of sorts. The house's xenophobic response to difference makes Ore repellant to it; when it ascertains who has stolen Miranda's heart, it is at once disgusted and enraged, and it entertains killing Miranda in response (223). However, the house, Anna, and Jennifer are also infuriated when Miranda helps Ore escape them, as they ultimately aim to devour her as they did the Kosovan refugee boys through the reawakened soucouyant. But Ore herself is taking on the physical attributes of the soucouyant; this horrifies her, in part because of the grotesque nature of her transformation, but also because she understands even better than Miranda what the soucouyant is. While Miranda is asking herself if she is a monster, Ore recognizes that she is becoming something *other* than who she is, and that who she is has somehow attracted the ravenous rage of the house.

The house rages against difference; it also craves it and encounters it often. If the house wants to propagate the soucouyant, Miranda must be the source of that propagation. She must be the one to bring in the next woman who will become monster, in the house's mind by bearing a female child. But her lesbian relationship with Ore suggests that she will perhaps be unwilling and/or unable to birth that heir to the monstrous curse in the conventional heterosexual manner that the house would have her commit to. And so Ore, while deemed repulsive by the dead Silver matriarchs in keeping with the racist ideologies of the house, is nevertheless the only new woman to cross the

threshold by way of the sole surviving Silver woman. Therefore, she becomes the only option for this monstrous mantle to be passed to.

This intrusive monstrosity is meant to not only overtake Ore, but also to terrify her. The house literally attempts to whiten her and turn her into a soucouyant through frightening stains of color on white cloth that she touches (246-247). She is aware almost immediately of its intent, as well: “‘Sade, I want to ask you something,’ I said. ‘If you say yes, I’ll believe you. Just tell me. There’s something wrong with this house, isn’t there?’ ‘It is a monster,’ Sade said, simply” (244). And even in an effort to defend against the soucouyant, both Miranda and Ore together find themselves thwarted by the tricks of the house: “She let the scissors drop onto the counter, and I dropped the knife. ‘I thought you were the soucouyant,’ I said. She said, ‘I thought you were.’ We touched each other’s face’s in the dark, trying to be sure” (250). As Miranda and Ore continue to grow closer and more alike in their resemblance to the soucouyant, their respective autonomy seems to ebb, as well. The balance of power is in favor of the monstrous house, the inanimate space that has come to deviant life.

The monstrosity visited upon Miranda and Ore is wrapped up in the guise of desire. But there is also, in both Lily and Miranda Silver, a personality trait that will inevitably alter the family tradition of predatory behavior. Lily and Miranda do not demonstrate the same bigotry that the house, Anna, and Jennifer collectively do; furthermore, Miranda’s struggle with her own monstrous nature leads her to Ore, a partner whose gender and race the ancestral home would never approve of. While Ore may be good enough to eat, the house, Anna, and Jennifer do not accept her as the next soucouyant in the family line; thus, Miranda’s choice is part attraction and part rebellion against the white ideal of

“perfection” instilled within the walls of her home. No matter how the house may want to continue visiting its curse across generations, it has been thwarted from its original vision by progressive thought and new possibilities for contemporary relationships, and its interventions have become a form of grudging compromise. This compromise doesn’t completely shift the power dynamics of the plot, but it does allow Ore and even Miranda some leverage.

In the end, the novel concludes with abstraction and uncertainty. Ore barely escapes the house with her life, and Miranda is left to fight the soucouyant/house on her own:

At the post office she bought a postcard...and addressed the postcard to Ore.
I’m sorry for everything, she wrote.
I am going down against her. (270)

But we never learn whether Miranda succeeds against the house. The prologue tells us that, like Jennifer Silver before her, she has been taken into a part of it that is not accessible or visible to anyone who isn’t a Silver woman. While Eliot in the prologue seems to believe his sister has run away or vanished, Ore and the house both tell us that she has not actually left home. Ore says, “She chose this as the only way to fight the soucouyant” (1), and it seems the most plausible explanation in the context of the story. But whether to fight the soucouyant/house means to fight herself is a final question that readers are left to ponder in the absence of their protagonist/villain. Oyeyemi’s novel tells us that the monstrosity we inherit may just be too much to hold, and it may also be too deep within us to let go.

“Miranda Silver was not, could not be herself plus all her mothers” (269). This dissertation ends on a question of what the descendants, the children of the oppressors and the oppressed, become in the wake of a legacy of trauma and disaster—that is, if they are to become anything at all. If the monster rages from within but refuses to let its vessel

thrive, then all that is clear is that what will be left is an unsustainable existence. Perhaps, as Bessie Head's book seems to suggest, there is an answer to be found in the love of other people. But the soucouyant feeds on love, and love becomes subject to the distortions that the girl who feels it struggles against. There is perhaps no satisfying ending because the narrative of such descendant voices remains to be concluded; in the meantime, their houses continue to be inhabited by monsters and by memories.

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