

Welcoming the Revenant:  
Spectrality in Literature

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## The Study of Haunting

Every culture has its ghosts. Halloween, a popular holiday in America and England, is filled with haunted houses, urban legends, and tales of the supernatural becoming real. Nigerian Awuru Odo Festivals celebrate the return of dearly departed friends and family with feasts and fanfare. In Hong Kong, autumn is marked by the yearly Zhong Yuan Jie, a time when spirits grow restless and wander the Earth. It is the ultimate end and great unknown of death that drives the human desire to hold on. To linger.

When loved ones pass away, their families often hold ceremonies of remembrance. In my own household, we have a desk with pictures of departed relatives where we light candles and burn incense as an act of both tribute and honor. For some, something as simple as the sound of wind chimes can be taken as a symbol of a lost spirit passing through.

Ghosts are more than just spirits of the dead. Ghosts are symbols of loss and regret that shape the way the living act. Many believe that ghosts are scary things that need to be avoided or sent away, but these specters, although not exactly friendly, can guide humanity towards a brighter future. That is if we allow them to haunt us. However, the process of opening ourselves up to be haunted oftentimes results in far more questions than answers. This thesis works to answer some of the fundamental questions that arise in the field of Hauntology by uncovering ghosts within three popular literary works, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, explaining both their cultural influence and impact in the process. Then, this essay will examine a few important haunted historical events and haunted parts of our cultural identity. Finally, after learning how to find, recognize, and reconcile

metaphorical ghosts, this thesis will lay out the ways in which ghosts can guide both individuals and humanity as a whole.

An analysis of literary ghosts first requires knowledge of basic psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalysis, first introduced by the psychologist Sigmund Freud, is a branch of psychology, and later literary criticism. It lays the foundation of human cognition as split into multiple layers. There is the conscious that humans use when they actively think, and there is the unconscious. The unconscious is a mysterious, yet powerful part of the brain. Psychoanalytic theory claims that all human actions are driven by unconscious or subconscious desires that manifest themselves in the form of mental illness or obsessions.

Literary scholars have taken psychoanalysis and applied it to various genres of literature. This subset of literary criticism usually makes extrapolations about a character's mental state and motivations from the character's actions and attitudes in a work. For example, a psychoanalyst might analyze Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and hone in on the relationship between Hamlet and his mother, Gertrude, claiming there to be a repressed sexual desire between the two. To many readers, this claim might seem ridiculous. Most psychologists agree with that assessment. As a result, psychological and literary theories have developed out of both criticism and concord in psychoanalysis. One such theory is hauntology.

Hauntology is, to put simply, the study of ghosts. As Colin Davis, professor of French and philosophy at the University of London explains, "Hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive" (Davis 373). This theory was first introduced by the French philosopher, post-structuralist, and postmodernist Jacques Derrida. He

was well-versed in psychoanalytic theory and used his knowledge to essentially form his own theory and mode of analysis. As a result, a hauntological analysis of ghosts involves an examination of desire and subconscious manifestations of said desire.

In addition to a basic understanding of French philosophy, this introduction would be remiss without at least a brief synopsis of the three primary pieces of literature that will be analyzed in this thesis. *Hamlet* is a tragedy following the Danish prince Hamlet's fall from grace. Beginning with the death of his father, his uncle's treacherous claim to the throne, and the death of his lover, mother, and ultimately himself, the story displays the way that unchecked pride can lead to the destruction of greatness. *Beloved* chronicles the life of Sethe, an escaped slave, as she experiences the supernatural return of the child she killed. Her child's ghost, Beloved, symbolizes Sethe's regret as the story tangles with the complicated nature of love and sacrifice. *The Things They Carried* is a war story. Woven together through fragmented narratives, Lieutenant Cross and his platoon fight their way through the jungles of Vietnam and the web of their minds. Ghosts, both clearly apparent and invisibly hidden, haunt the pages of each of these books. However, not every ghost is equal.

Although ghosts exist in an uncategorizable state of simultaneous being and non-being, there are some distinctions between ghosts in these works. The main distinction is whether or not the ghost is "physical," or as close to physical as a ghost can get. These are the ghosts that most people immediately think of when they think of ghosts, such as the mysterious specter in the window of a haunted house or a poltergeist who slams cabinet doors closed. The ghosts of King Hamlet and Beloved fall into this category because they are the spiritual forms of the former living. They also have a material presence because they can communicate with the living as well

as affect objects. The other type of ghost is the metaphorical ghost. This is the ghost that Derrida analyzed in his book *Spectres of Marx*. The metaphorical ghost is not tied to a dead body.

Instead, the metaphorical ghost haunts an event, place, society, or conscience. This could mean a psychoanalytic interpretation of spectrality, where ghosts are manifestations of the desire for the dead to return to life. Or, it could be, in the case of literature, symbolic of feelings such as regret and fear. The ghosts of King Hamlet, *Beloved*, and especially the ghosts of the soldiers in *The Things They Carried*, are all in a sense metaphorical, because they are used to move each story forward as well as tie events back to a central theme within each novel.

One does not have to believe that souls or ghosts exist in the real world in order to affirm a theory of hauntology. Because of the complicated nature of the ghost, as long one can visualize the ghost as a metaphor for death, loss, and reconciliation, then one can be haunted. One could ask, however, about why anyone would ever want to be haunted. The most important application of hauntology is that in the pedagogical sphere. Most curriculums are taught in a very objective, factual, “true or false” manner. However, much of history cannot be reduced to mere facts or objective interpretations, especially in the context of conflict and war. As Michalinos Zembylas, Associate Professor of Educational Studies at the University of Cyprus explains, “hauntology reframes histories of loss and absence and uses them as points of departure to acknowledge the complexities and contradictions that emerge from haunting” (Zembylas 71). The world is constantly changing and the information explosion has made it more and more difficult to know what the best course of action could possibly be. However, with the memory of the past there to both haunt and guide us, we can find solace in the presence of the supernatural.

## Haunted Text

Authors, philosophers, historians, and the superstitious have grappled with the concept of the ghost for millennia. However, it was not until the era of postmodernism that the study of the ghost could be named. French philosopher Jacques Derrida coined the term “Hauntology” in his 1993 book, *Specters of Marx*, as a new form of academic study specifically dedicated to specters and ghosts. The philosophical use of the word “ghost” does not usually apply to actual spirits of the dead. Instead, ghosts are concepts or ideologies that remain throughout history. The ghost that Derrida original discusses is the ghost of Karl Marx and the specter of communism across Europe. He argues that Marx’s work will continue to influence and “haunt” European politics and critical literature long after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the asserted victory of capitalism. Contemporaries such as Mark Fisher have adapted and interpreted the term to apply to modern society and the way that it is continually haunted by “lost futures” or lost possibilities, such as the effect of a life cut short or the regret of an action not taken.

Ghosts exist around us in the form of missing pieces, in a state of simultaneous being and non-being. This state of being and non-being can be physical, with the classic belief that ghosts have no corporeal form and are instead physically similar to fog or vapor; or it can be metaphysical, similar to feelings of déjà vu, regret over a missed opportunity, or yearning and nostalgia for an unavailable past. Ghosts stories are infamously popular to tell around campfires, during holidays, and late at night. But why do humans love scary stories? Well, before this question can be answered, it is wise to be familiar with a few ghost stories, specifically *Hamlet*, *Beloved*, and *The Things They Carried*. These novels are so universally intriguing that they have

permeated the very structure of literary criticism, providing a litany of text and secondary works to be analyzed through a hauntological lens.

Beginning one of the oldest and most famous ghost stories written in modern English is William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* and the plot surrounding the ghost of King Hamlet. This ghost has been regarded by many literary critics to be the most famous ghost in the history of English literature for its cultural significance and influence on future works. King Hamlet, the protagonist's father, dies before the play even begins. However, his ghost still haunts the castle of Elsinore, roaming the castle grounds at night.

The play begins with the changing of the guard. Barnardo and Marcellus, two sentinels, explain to Horatio, one of Prince Hamlet's close friends, how their guard has been interrupted on multiple nights by an unseemly apparition. Horatio refuses to believe the two, writing off their concerns as hallucinations and fantasy. That is until he sees the King's figure for himself. He remarks that "Before my God, I might not this believe/ Without the sensible and true avouch/ Of mine own eyes" (Shakespeare 1.1.66-68). The encounter forces Horatio to question his own sanity, exemplifying the absurdity of the specter, the inability to distinguish reality from the supernatural. On an interpersonal level, though, familiarity with the ghost brings Horatio and Hamlet closer together as characters because they share this experience with the undead.

Prince Hamlet's first encounter with the ghost of his father is hard-fought. His guards and Horatio try to hold him back, worrying that the ghost might bring him "to the dreadful summit of the cliff", or that the ghost might drive the young prince into madness (Shakespeare 1.4.78). The concerns that Horatio and the guards bring up reflect the superstitions of Shakespeare's time. This is another example of how ghosts are both contextual to social norms and universally

feared. Centuries before Shakespeare's lifetime, in countries across the globe, tribal groups had their own superstitions against following mysterious figures into the night. In the Iban culture that is native to Borneo, it was customary to leave a place of burial without turning around out of fear that the spirit would become visible and pull the viewer into the earth.

Regardless of his friend's warning, however, Hamlet's curiosity and desire to fill the empty spaces that his father's death left push him to follow the specter. Here, he learns that his father's death was caused by none other than the heir to the throne, Hamlet's stepfather and uncle, Claudius. The boy decides to make revenge his ultimate goal, forgetting his memory of "books, all forms, all pressures past," and replacing their place in his mind with the memory of the ghost (Shakespeare 1.5.107). Upon hearing the ghost speak, Hamlet obtains both a glimpse into the past and a pathway to the future that alter the course of his life.

The king's ghost, although only appearing to Hamlet once more in the play, being invisible to everyone else nonetheless, continues to haunt Hamlet indirectly. The ghost becomes a symbol instead of a sign, embodying Hamlet's growing feelings of regret and indignation with the royal state of affairs. He continually hesitates to take action in moments where he ought to be unfaltering, such as when Hamlet has a chance to kill Claudius after Hamlet's elaborate expository play; however, he lets the opportunity slip by (Shakespeare 3.3). Hamlet grows increasingly irrational and short-tempered, blinded by anger and unable to judge the consequences of his actions. He is furious against his mother and kills Polonius, a member of the king's inner circle who was spying on the two (Shakespeare 3.4). Looking back to Hamlet's first encounter with his father's ghost, it appears that Horatio's warning to Hamlet advising against

following the spirit is well warranted. It is this dreadful irony that foreshadows a similar downfall in the haunted narratives of our own lives.

Another example of haunted literature can be seen in the form of Alice Walker's *Beloved*. However, unlike our tragic prince, Sethe's descent into insanity arrives with the departure of the ghost of her dead daughter, Beloved. Sethe, believing that death would be freer for her child than a life of slavery, killed Beloved when escaping from Sweet Home, the plantation where they were kept as slaves. She thinks to herself, "if I hadn't killed her she would have died," presumably at the hands of a white man after a life of suffering (Morrison 236). During her escape, she only succeeded in killing one child before slave catchers found her and decided that she was far too deranged to be a useful slave back on the farm, leaving Sethe and the rest of her three children to live freely. With her life taken by the hands of her own mother, Beloved enacts her own vengeance on her family. House 124 is a haunted house and Beloved is not a friendly spirit. Her venomous spite does not even serve to guide the souls in 124. Her restless ghost only seeks to destroy, in spite of her mother's supposed love. When her living daughter Denver mentions Beloved's fury, Sethe mentions that the ghost's spell is "no more powerful than the way I loved her" (Morrison 5). However, as the story progresses and Beloved's haunting becomes more and more real, Sethe must reconcile the fact that, although it may have been intended as an act of love, the murdered will never take their deaths kindly.

One day, a young woman who calls herself Beloved, presumably the physical manifestation of Sethe's daughter, appears, wreaking havoc on the prospects of a stable life in 124. Although less violent than the baby's ghost, this new Beloved effects more turmoil in a few weeks than the baby had in eighteen years. Sethe, finally coming to terms with feeling guilty

over killing Beloved, starts taking any and all measures to appease the ghost, wasting away in the process. She doesn't eat, sleep, or listen to sound judgment. Eventually, Sethe loses her sanity, and Beloved fades away with it, a life for a life.

How can we determine the difference between murder, manslaughter, and “just doing the job?” This is a question that prosecutors, criminals, and soldiers have to answer. But can it ever really be answered? *The Things They Carried* is a haunted narrative, a retelling of history. War carries with it immeasurable suffering and pain. Each soldier carried a number of personal items onto the battlefield: a photograph, a bible, or maybe some pills. Some things they carried from the battlefield, even after returning home. “They all carried ghosts,” like painful memories, nostalgia, the fear that they may never make it home to tell their families they loved them, and the blurred faces of dead men (O'Brien 9). The symbol of the ghost in O'Brien's work is twofold, however. Vietnam was a “ghost country”; they called the enemy ghosts (O'Brien 192). The Vietcong were invisible but ever-present, guiding the troops' actions, almost seen but never seen.

O'Brien, both the author and the persona within the novel, has an irreconcilable loss. He has lost the soundness of his memory and his innocence. He regrets killing soldiers he does not know if he killed. When his daughter asks if he has ever killed someone, he honestly tells her no. But what good is honesty when one doesn't even know the truth? O'Brien's ghosts follow him from beyond the grave—beyond the battlefield. Twenty years after leaving Vietnam, he is left with “faceless responsibility and faceless grief” (O'Brien 172). He explains that he, now forty-three years old, still cannot let go of his past. He doesn't want to forget. O'Brien instead writes stories as a way to heal his memory and his conscience. In these stories “the dead

sometimes smile and sit up and return to the world” (O’Brien 213). In these stories, the past can happen again.

We are all haunted. Regret, yearning, and confusion are all normal parts of the human psyche. Why, then, do we continually try to flee these specters if we can never escape? Similarly to Horatio, we tend to write off our ghosts as non-existent figments of our overactive imaginations, or as irrational thoughts to forget about. However, the truth, as he so fearfully realizes, is that our ghosts are both very real and heavily influential, although not always apparent.

### Spectral Significance: The History of Ghosts

What defines culture? Shared values, traditions, beliefs, and goals all set a culture apart from another. In this sense, there is no singular entity or concept that contributes to or shapes a culture. However, there is a common theme or component that every culture possesses: ghosts. Ghosts act as cultural placeholders. They fill the void left by loss, tragedy, and the passage of time. Culturally, ghosts can be recurring events, traditional ceremonies of remembrance, or a solemn reminder of a culture's origin. One example of this is the American ghost of settler colonialism. Although often reduced to images of wrathful spirits in homes built atop burial grounds, the ghosts of Indigenous people who were forced off their land or killed still haunt United States history. The portrayal of the Indian burial ground in horror films flips the historical script of the settler and the settled, where the homeowners are the innocent victims and the ghosts are the terrorizers. However, it was the generational actions of these homeowners, or really, homemakers, that created the specters they so deeply fear.

Settlers create ruins. Ruins create ghosts. And as Indigenous scholars Eve Tuck and C. Ree explain, Native ruins take the form of “the quick turnover of buildings, disappearing landmarks, and disposable homes, layered upon each other over and over again” (Tuck and Ree 653). Many modern-day Indigenous activists bring up events such as the Trail of Tears or the creation of the reservation system as moments in history that Native Americans should receive reparations for. In response, critics of this form of activism often exclaim the mantra of “leaving the past in the past.” But ghosts transcend time. They haunt the present to seek reparations for the wrongs done to them. The poltergeists want to reclaim their burial grounds once and for all.

The past returns to the present in moments of spectrality. These spectral events can be ceremonies of remembrance or monuments dedicated to great tragedies. For the history of American conflict, the most common spectral event happens every year on November 11. Veteran's Day serves as a way to honor those who have fought and died for the United States. But for some veterans, the memory of war never leaves their minds. As in *The Things They Carried*, both the author and narrator Tim O'Brien are haunted by the ghosts of "faceless responsibility and faceless grief," leading to a life of guilt and sleepless nights (O'Brien 172). O'Brien is trapped in a double-bind, where he wants to forget his traumatic memories of the war while still feeling indebted to remember his ghosts. In scientific terms, these ghosts take the form of post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that about thirty percent of Vietnam war veterans have had PTSD in their lifetimes ("PTSD: National Center for PTSD").

In addition to mental disorders that come from trauma, war holds grave physical consequences. Aside from the obvious physical reminder of pain and injury, soldiers who lose limbs in combat have been known to still "feel" those limbs long after, in a phenomenon known as phantom pain. Even without direct exposure to bombs and bullets, the children of Vietnam war veterans who came in contact with the herbicide Agent Orange have a higher risk of birth defects such as spina bifida ("Public Health"). The impact on those who were in fact directly affected is even worse. Portions of rainforest that were treated with Agent Orange still have yet to regrow, and there are entire hospitals and orphanages dedicated to children with severe birth defects, such as missing limbs or organs. However, most Americans are not aware of the lasting impacts that war has had on foreign countries. As cultural anthropologist Natalie Baloy explains,

ghosts are “apparent and visible in some contexts, but erased or minimized in others,” and the specter “retreats from view as the event continues or attention switches to other concerns” (Baloy 27). Living ghosts are thus always present-- it is merely a question of whether or not the haunted want to pay attention.

Aside from moments in history that people want to forget, ghosts can also be the missing pieces that people long to know. In her article, “How to Talk to Ghosts,” Kuang explains the existence of ghosts in the context of immigration and the transfer of culture and history across borders. As a child of immigrants escaping the Communist Revolution and the rise of Maoism in China, Kuang grew up with much of her family’s history concealed. Her parents “didn’t speak of life in China, and any questions were met with a stony silence,” a practice that she explains to be “a kind of self-induced amnesia, a psychic protective shield of immigrants” (Kuang). However, try as they might, her parents could not stop the ghosts that followed them across the sea. Kuang discovered Iris Chang’s *The Rape of Nanking*. Her father, upon seeing a dormitory poster of tanks in Tiananmen Square, said: “I was there” (Kuang). By virtue of human curiosity, people will find their ghosts. Or really, their ghosts will find them.

In a sense, those ghosts, those missing pieces, become a part of one’s subjectivity and identity. Take, for example, children who grow up without one or both parents in their lives. They are often psychologically haunted by that absence for the rest of their lives. Some even develop an obsession with finding a missing parent, hiring private investigators to find clues that might fill the gaps in their childhoods. However, most children come to terms with that absence as they grow into adulthood. For Denver, Beloved’s living sister in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, the physical absence of her sister becomes a comforting spiritual presence as she develops. She has

lived most of her life with only the company of her mother and Beloved's ghost. As a result, the newfound presence of Paul D that drives away Beloved is unsettling, "making Denver long, downright *long*, for a sign of spite from the baby ghost" (Morrison 11). Through ghosts, the past can return to the present. However, the present cannot become the past. Upon Beloved's return to the physical Earth, her body looks as though she never even left. She is not the baby Sethe once knew. Upon her departure, the house she haunted looks the same as it has for years. But the lives of its residents will never be the same.

And what of the purported hauntings that appear on television? Psychologists have attempted to explain the phenomenon of supernatural or paranormal encounters for centuries. In a field of study called anomalistic psychology, scientists have attributed many sightings of ghosts to factors such as confirmation bias, paranoia, and psychosis. However, these figures that seek to disprove the existence of material ghosts, in fact, prove the presence of metaphysical specters. Frank McAndrew, a professor of psychology at Knox College, explains the phenomenon of "sensed presences." These sensed presences can take the form of gods, demons, or loved ones, and seemingly appear "in an extreme or unusual environment, often when high levels of stress are involved" (McAndrew). In short, most ghost sightings are written off as hallucinations or tricks the mind plays. This could explain the presence of Prince Hamlet's spectral father in Act III of *Hamlet*. He exclaims that the ghost is looking at him and his mother, but the queen sees nothing (Shakespeare 3.4.151). Hamlet is clearly distraught by the plot to murder his uncle, causing him to lash out and scorn his own mother. The appearance of the ghost could, then, be caused by the stress that the young prince is feeling. But why, of all things, would he hallucinate? This is where psychoanalysis has filled the gap between empirics and theory.

Psychoanalysts use the cognitive model of the “divided psyche” to explain much of human behavior. They claim that the subconscious is the source of dreams and, by extension, hallucinations and psychic visions. The subconscious is also the storehouse of basic human desires. As a result, psychoanalysts say that dreams and hallucinations are manifestations of one’s desires, which explains why people who have recently lost a loved one may think that the spirit of the departed has come back to the Earth for just a moment. For Hamlet, the desire for both vengeance and guidance resulted in the vision of his father’s ghost in a time of intense stress and confusion. Even the other characters’ grief over losing a good king might have prompted the very first appearance of the ghost in the play. The desire to be reunited and to overcome the great unknown of death triggers a psychological response, creating the experience of haunting.

Ghosts affect humanity in many ways. The effect of ghosts is magnified by a failure to recognize their presence. One of the most powerful cultural effects of ghosts is melancholia. An aspect of melancholia arises from our inability to process or understand concepts that do not fit into a concrete binary mode of being. For example, prisoners of war who have gone missing in action leave behind families who do not know whether to wait for their loved ones, mourn them, or forget about them altogether because they do not know if they are dead or alive. The way to reconcile this distress is to use haunting as a “theoretical and methodological tool to give voice, shape, and animacy to affects and other immaterialities that shape everyday conditions” (Baloy, 32). In essence, we should allow ourselves to be haunted by our ghosts in order to become more familiar with and more accepting of concepts, ideas, and events that do not entirely “make sense” or that are culturally unfamiliar. Using ghosts to prescribe a more understandable form to

seemingly irrational aspects of daily life that we, as a society, would rather forget can help guide humanity towards a future where the indescribable can be revealed and made intelligible through living language.

## The Conjuring

April 20, 1999. Columbine High School. Fifteen dead and twenty-three wounded in the United States' deadliest school shooting at the time. Over 20 years later, the tragic events of that day are seared into America's memory. Strangely enough, though, ask a random person on the street, and chances are that they're more likely to remember the names of the shooters rather than the victims. What happens when a society tries to forget its past? What about when people try to make up for their oversight, only for their actions to be futile? What does learning to live with ghosts even look like in a society haunted by the failure to have tombstones for every soldier killed in combat? The answers are far from clear, even for the wisest and most thoughtful of scholars. Generally, the path of remembrance includes both memorial and education to prevent cultural loss of memory, but these two modes alone normally fail to encompass the complex totality of forgotten history. Because literature and fiction have the uncanny ability to fill the gap that the human conception of objective history and linear time have left, they become the perfect vessels to contact the ghosts of history and explore a world where life is haunted.

Before we can let the ghost guide us, we must first find and contact it. Ghosts are mostly elusive non-beings, moving about the Earth with no obligation. When they appear, they linger for only a moment before disappearing into the unknown. Once a person knows where to find a ghost, they hope for it to remain and communicate. But the ghost acts of its own accord. Like in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, once Horatio is convinced of the apparition's existence by his very own eyes, he asks it to "Stay! speak! speak!" (Shakespeare 1.1.61). This desire to contact the unknown, and subsequent resistance to be contacted, demonstrate the essential relationship between the living and the dead. No matter their fear and horror, Horatio and the guards still

make demands of the ghost to stay, even bringing Hamlet, the ghost king's son, in hopes that the ghost will speak to him. And it does. The ghost tells Hamlet the story of his death and betrayal by his own brother and how he wishes his son to take revenge on his behalf (Shakespeare 2.1.34). This encounter transcends the linear conception of time, allowing Hamlet a glimpse into the past. In the final scene where the ghost appears to Hamlet, he looks to the incorporeal memory of his father for guidance. For the final time the ghost speaks, it guides Hamlet, saying "Do not forget. This visitation/Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (Shakespeare 3.4.126-7). It tells Hamlet to speak of the murder he just committed and his ongoing plans for vengeance to his mother. Then it leaves, never again to return to the stage.

Although in horror movies, attempts to summon and speak to ghosts generally end in bloody spells of demonic revenge, historical obsessions with conjuring ghosts have found different results. In the 19th century, séances grew to popularity within American spiritualism, normally including ceremonial rituals taken from Native American traditions and "Indian Spirit Guides" through which the ghosts communicated. Whether or not spirits actually did temporarily possess these men and women, it is clear that the ghosts still did have their chance to speak to the living. This is because spectrality and conjuring became the ways that Indigenous history made its way into a settler history that tried to erase it. Indigenous scholars Eve Tuck and C. Ree describe settler colonialism as "the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts—those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation" (Tuck and Ree 642). As a structure, it seeks to erase and rewrite parts of the past that it deems "unseemly," such as the adaptation of the origins of Thanksgiving in America that conveniently overlooks the massacre of the Pequot tribe and the introduction of diseases that lead

to countless Native deaths. In a Spiritualist circle in 1867, only four years after President Lincoln named Thanksgiving an official holiday, a Seminole warrior named Osceola relayed the message that ““The white man cannot teach the red man, for the red man knows that the white man has no justice in his heart”” (Besner). Séances and similar encounters like these allowed Indigenous people to voice the long history of grievances that white settler colonialism continued to haunt them with. Even outside of Native American history and culture, ghosts are still present and able to be summoned with the right knowledge and practice.

Some might continue to wonder, why should we even conjure ghosts in the first place? Why not just forget about the past and keep moving forward? One of the main reasons why people would rather forget the past is because of the pain it holds. However, as Denver learns, even if she can prevent accidental encounters with the past, it will still find a way to catch up with her. Sethe tells her daughter that, although she has long since escaped the Sweet Home plantations, “if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you” (Morrison 35). She is explaining that, no matter how hard she herself has tried to forget, the suffering that she and many others had endured will find their way to Denver. If we try to erase our past, it will always find its way back to us.

Literature and critical fabulation become the bridge between the living and the dead. As Rebecca Kuang, author of *The Poppy War*, explains, fiction can give life to the dead in ways that history alone fails to do. She says:

I am by training a historian, but it feels terribly disingenuous to write my ghosts as history. To transcribe literally their experiences would not only feel cold and

clinical, it would ring sparse. There are too many details we don't have access to. But if I spin their lives into stories then I can give voice to the frustration, despair, terror, relief, and pain. (Kuang)

Zembylas concurs, saying:

This “uncovering” of knowledge through a “factual liturgy,” however, expels the ghosts of the disappeared because it is assumed that knowledge of the past needs to work toward a redeemed collective identity. Yet the singularity of each disappeared victim is lost because it is absorbed into the typicality of a historical theme that is legitimated through its narrativization. That is to say, “demystifying” the ghosts of the disappeared makes them simple objects of and for knowledge. Inviting the spectral moment, however, does exactly the opposite: it seeks to create openness to the not yet formulated possibilities of the future, urging the society to come to terms with what is beyond our capacity to comprehend (the disappeared) in accepted ideological, epistemological, and ethical terms. (Zembylas 74)

This is what Tim O'Brien does in *The Things They Carried* and what Toni Morrison does in *Beloved*. Both of these novels are rooted deeply in reality; while O'Brien cites his own lived experiences, Morrison borrows from the experiences of Margaret Garner, a slave who escaped to Ohio and had to murder her own child for the sake of freedom. However, these novels are still works of fiction. This usage of historical roots branching into a work of fiction that allows the ghost to take a more tangible form is called fabulation.

A fabulist is one who tells stories, using the power of fiction to create new possibilities and paths of history. This power is the most direct way to give ghosts voices to be heard. The double-bind that O'Brien finds himself in was explored previously in this paper. He wishes he could forget his trauma but knows that if he moves on, the stories and lives of his fellow soldiers will be forgotten. In order to reconcile this dilemma, the character O'Brien uses a form of fabulation to heal. He writes the stories of his fellow soldiers, adding in details of their emotions and their pasts so that once released onto paper, he can finally walk away from his ghosts. As O'Brien explains, "Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story" (O'Brien 36). The stories he writes are more permanent and less painful than keeping the memories to himself, allowing the tormented soldiers' souls to heal. These two works showcase invitations of spectrality because they provide a path for openness for currently undeveloped possibilities of the past and future.

Inviting ghosts back into the realm of the living must be done with caution. Not because the ghosts themselves are dangerous, per se, but because the living have an awful tendency to twist the past to fit their own desires. Take the Indian burial ground from the previous chapter. This is an example of what Zembylas calls "spectacle pedagogy," or "a ubiquitous form of representation that manifests the ghosts in a sensationalized and ideological manner" (71). When ghosts "become spectacles, images, and stories that need to be contained within a certain epistemic frame; their otherness and radicality is gone," ultimately defeating the purpose of

conjuring them in the first place (Zembylas 77). Although the ghost can be a frightening and powerful image, it can also be the most useful guide for humanity moving forward.

Nineteen years after the tragic loss at Columbine High School, history repeats itself. This time, on February 14, a former student opens fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, leaving seventeen dead and seventeen injured. Alyssa Alhadeff, Scott Beigel, Martin Duque, Nicholas Dworet, Aaron Feis, Jaime Guttenberg, Chris Hixon, Chris Hixon, Cara Loughran, Gina Montalto, Joaquin Oliver, Alaina Petty, Meadow Pollack, Helena Ramsay, Alex Schachter, Carmen Schentrup, and Peter Wang would never again wake up to walk the halls of high school. In this list are seniors who will never graduate, teachers who will never see their children again, and freshmen who never even had the chance to experience high school. The families of these victims were despaired to think that their loss would eventually be swept under the rug and forgotten by America. But the survivors had other plans.

Immediately after the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas, a group of student survivors banded together to make sure that the only thing that would never happen again is another school shooting. They founded the student organization March For Our Lives that organized walkouts, protests, and petitions to lawmakers to ensure that students in America could be safe. The group's rallying cry is the social media tag #neveragain, in hopes that one day, history will be dedicated to the remembrance of the dead instead of the repetition of tragedy. Every year, on February 14, the group has reminded the public of what the community lost that day, making sure that these students' and staff's lives will not fade away and be forgotten, serving as an example of how we all can create a place for the ghosts in our lives.

## Life Beyond Death

Ghosts are proof that there really is no “end of all things.” After a person dies, their spirit lingers in the form of memories. In the wake of a national tragedy, the suffering is written into history textbooks and taught in classrooms. Even when people try to erase any traces of the ghost, it will always come back to haunt. A murdered soul calls out to his son to avenge him. The house atop the Indian burial ground refuses to let the colonizer find peace. Broken chains remind us of the broken backs this empire was built upon.

Scattered throughout online blogs and reader submissions to magazine columnists are stories of people who have encountered the supernatural. The ghosts they claim to have seen tend to be either loved ones who have passed away or a building’s previous tenants who continue to haunt the earthly realm, spectral manifestations of both longing and fear. The place where objective knowledge ends is the same place where spectral observation begins. It takes an open mind and a subconscious drive to conjure the ghost. To hear its voice is to relinquish one’s own certainty in having ever known anything at all.

In discovering ghosts and finding ways to restore their haunting voices, writers inevitably discover parts of themselves and their psyches that they never previously thought relevant. A mysterious desire to be a scribe of the unknown comes with a fear not to betray the dead. As a result, authors become both students and teachers of hidden histories. Before her death, Toni Morrison published a book of her essays and insights into life and literature. Within it, she reflects on the journey behind writing *Beloved*. At first, she struggled. Despite being enthralled with the life of Margaret Garner, having to mentally enter into, reexamine, and imagine a life of slavery was repellant. Morrison found it difficult to transcribe a story she did not entirely

understand. However, upon numerous attempts and failures, she realized the way that haunting is “both what we yearn for and what we fear” (Morrison). Only after this realization could she see “the traces of a ghostly presence, the residue of a repressed past in certain concrete but also allusive detail” (Morrison). Writing *Beloved* soon transformed into an almost spiritual journey for Morrison, allowing her to connect with a deeply meaningful pain with vast cultural implications for her, her predecessors, and her descendants, culminating in one of the most chilling and beautifully written novels of the twentieth century.

While some are driven by the curiosity to comprehend the pain of another, many writers conjure ghosts to cope with their own pain and uncertainty. Forgiveness from others is oftentimes easier to receive than forgiveness from oneself for actions that were both done and left undone. When Tim O’Brien left Vietnam, he carried the memories, dreams, and failures of himself and his platoon back with him. The return was unnerving. “Normal” no longer existed in the way it used to. The most mundane of situations, whether it be brushing his teeth or drinking a Coke, brought back vivid memories. In some ways, he felt obligated to remember the lost ones and make sure they wouldn’t fade away. But remembering is painful and the revenant images of the past refuse to pass quietly. So, he wrote. In an interview with NPR, O’Brien described the process as “overwhelming, and therefore you go quiet out of a kind of nervous - the daunting task ahead of where do you begin and where do you end” (O’Brien). He wrote to an audience similar to himself, educated adults and veterans of war, in hopes of reaching an understanding of the complexities of memory, history, and dreams with himself and the readers. He never intended for *The Things They Carried* to be so widely understood by younger readers. Grasping for a space to project their own past struggles, they took this story and applied it to “a bad

childhood or a broken home, and these are the things they're carrying" (O'Brien). This is what unites us as humans. Not the details of our pasts, simply the fact that we each have memories that, although most likely to be unpleasant, haunt and define who we are as people.

Unlike the other two works, the psychological effects of writing *Hamlet* are close to impossible to know, as Shakespeare has few accounts of his personal life outside of his poetry, and none in regards to *Hamlet* specifically. However, the performance and analysis of the playwright's work have inspired many to reconcile their regrets. The almost schizophrenic association between Hamlet and his father's ghost has sparked debate over the presence of mental illness in English literature, whether that be an analysis of psychosis or examining the stages of grief through Hamlet's downfall. Renowned literary scholar Stephen Greenblatt even wrote an entire book explaining his own obsession with the ghost of King Hamlet (Greenblatt). Encounters with the supernatural stoke humanity's curiosity to be sure, while denying the closure that comes with objective facts, driving society to create in the face of a broken pathway.

Desires shape every thought and action in ways both conscious and subconscious. Ghosts fill the gap of the unknown within the subconscious. Just like time, the presence of ghosts does not pass. It accumulates. As life becomes filled with more experiences, pain, trauma, hopes, and dreams, those same feelings and moments can return. Perhaps you remembered a time when you were embarrassed when you spilled coffee all over yourself, wishing you had been more careful and watched where you were going. Maybe you regret not taking the chance to tell someone you loved them before they passed away. The human relationship with the past is a complicated one. In some cases, people wish they could forget entire years of their lives. In others, they wish to relive a moment over and over again forever. No matter what one's opinions on the matter are,

though, lived experiences cannot be changed or altered. However, the memory might be enough to sway that person away from similar choices in the future. So long as one can feel regret and curiosity, one can be haunted in this way.

When life fades away into oblivion, all that is left of the fleeting vibrancy is the ghost—wandering slices of history that never make it into a textbook. Their existence is hidden all around us in abandoned warehouses, dusty bookshelves, and passing memories. These are the ghosts of a past we never knew. Perhaps it is a past we'll never know. Perhaps this is a past that knows our futures better than we ever could. All we can do is listen for its haunting calls and wait for it to speak.

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Examining works by writers including Michle Roberts, Michael Faber and A.S. Byatt, this collection highlights the pervasive presence of the Victorian past in neo-Victorian novels through the tropes of haunting and spectrality, paralleling a renewed interest in the impact of the supernatural and the occult on Victorian individuals. Purchase *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past* from Amazon.com. Dear user! You need to be registered and logged in to fully enjoy [Englishtips.org](http://Englishtips.org). We recommend registering or logging in. The *Spectralities Reader* works to solidify and clarify a lot of this body of research and has an enviably interdisciplinary scope. It is divided into six sections, each collecting essays on one of the key areas in which the spectral took root. Part One is entitled *The Spectral Turn* and begins with Derridas 1993 interview with Bernard Stieglitz, an often-neglected part of Derridas discourse on spectrality. The *Spectralities Reader* is a valuable collection that showcases the strength and breadth of some of the work of the spectral turn. The language of the philosophical turn, like the wave, implies temporariness. Perhaps the spectral turn has already crested and this book will serve as a repertory of some of its key works, or perhaps its release will help keep the spectral turn alive. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Volume 43 Issue 4. *Eternal returns: a christmas carol's ghosts of repetition*. English Français. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Article contents. Extract. Derridian ideas of spectrality, or "hauntology," as he wittily puts it (10), help us to understand *A Christmas Carol* and its stream of adaptations. Jacques Derrida begins *Specters of Marx* with another ghost of an idea: "Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: I would like to learn to live finally" (xvi). In the case of Christmas ghosts, their reminders of death "their very being as revenants of death" serve to reify Christmas itself, to make it the fate of those they haunt. They make, in other words, a necessity of Christmas.