

Université de Montréal

Dreams Screams and other Violent Means :

An Essay on Ghosts

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Le département de littératures et de langues du monde Faculté des arts et des sciences

Mémoire présenté à la Faculté des arts et des sciences en vue de l'obtention du grade de maîtrise
en Études anglaises option avec mémoire

Avril, 2024

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Ce mémoire intitulé

Dreams Screams and other Violent Means :

An Essay on Ghosts

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Résumé

Cette thèse se concentre sur l'incarnation descriptive du fantôme en tant qu'expérience sublime dans la littérature. Le fantôme, en tant que signe éthéré, semi-transparent, devient une question de perception qui peut être soit séduisante, soit répulsive, parce qu'inconcevable. C'est dans cette optique que deux nouvelles ont été choisies comme principales études de cas pour cette thèse : Le conte de Lafcadio Hearn, « A Passional Karma », extrait de « In Ghostly Japan » (1899), et « The Tooth » de Shirley Jackson, extrait de son recueil de nouvelles « The Lottery » (1949). La principale perspective argumentative de cette thèse est basée sur une lecture attentive de la délimitation descriptive de l'entité fantomatique impliquée dans chacune de ces histoires ; sur la base du langage employé pour faire apparaître le fantôme, une portée émotionnelle est établie par l'affect de la peur. Les deux chapitres de cette thèse partent de l'idée que le véritable lieu de naissance du fantôme se trouve dans la politique qui gouverne la société. La politique, c'est la répression et le contrôle exercés par tous les moyens disponibles au nom de la régulation, mais tout ce qui est réprimé finit toujours par revenir sous de nouvelles formes inattendues. Il réapparaît comme le fantôme.

Hearn raconte l'histoire d'une société du passé qui illustre comment le temps, au sens karmique de l'action, n'a pas de fin dans les incidences successives d'un seul événement fatidique. Quant à Shirley Jackson, elle s'empare de son propre temps présent et l'utilise pour démontrer la hantise sous-jacente qui se cache sous le vernis de la normalité. Ces deux récits présentent l'affect de la peur comme une émotion ancrée à l'extérieur de l'individu ; comme des mains qui se referment sur un oiseau sans défense, l'affect de la peur éloigne les individus de leurs décisions personnelles et les force à endosser des rôles approuvés par la société.

Mots-clés : fantômes, Lafcadio Hearn, Shirley Jackson, peur, affects, douleur.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the descriptive embodiment of the ghost as a sublime experience through literature. How does literature present an *immaterial* entity? The ghost as an ethereal, semi-transparent signpost beseeching of meaning becomes a matter of perception which can be either alluring or repulsive, because inconceivable. With this in mind, two short stories have been selected as the main case studies for this thesis, these are: Lafcadio Hearn's tale *A Passional Karma*, from *In Ghostly Japan* (c. 1899), and Shirley Jackson's "The Tooth" from her short story compendium "The Lottery" (c. 1949). The main argumentative outlook of this thesis is based on a close reading of the descriptive delimitation of the phantom entity involved in each one of these stories; based on the language employed to bring forth the ghost an emotional scope is set by the affect of fear. Both chapters of this thesis work with the idea that the real birthplace of the ghost is to be found in the politics that govern society. Politics is repression and control exercised by any means available in the name of regulation, but whatever is repressed always ends up by coming back under unexpected new forms. It reemerges like the ghost.

Hearn tells a tale from a society in the past that exemplifies how time, in the karmic sense of action, is non ending in the successive incidences of a single fateful event. While Shirley Jackson takes on her own present time and uses it to demonstrate the underlying haunting underneath the veneer of normality. Both these stories present the affect of fear as an emotion anchored outside of the individual; like hands tightly closing around a defenseless bird, the affect of fear drives individuals away from personal decisions and forces them into societally endorsed roles.

Keywords: ghosts, Lafcadio Hearn, Shirley Jackson, fear, affects, pain.

To Mónica & Branka

Acknowledgments

As the author of this thesis I must foremost recognize the time and dedication given to this same thesis by my supervisor: Lianne Moyes, and my co-supervisor: Vicotria-Oana Lupascu. Lianne's comments and marginalia alongside the weekly meetings with Victoria were the focusing beam through which my arguments have come to fruition. Thank you to the both of you. I shall forever be indebted to you for your help and candor.

During the course of my master's degree at the Université de Montréal I had the chance to participate in seminars taught by both my aforementioned supervisors as well as Professors Jane Malcolm, Heike Harting and Eric Savoy. To these last three I wish to express my deepest thanks and enthusiastic admiration for your academic work. I thank Jane Malcolm for reintroducing me to poetry, the value of sentences and that all important merger of Art and writing. Heike Harting's seminar was one of the most invigorating academic experiences I've had in my life, thank you for your enthusiasm and dedication to the importance of literature! Finally, I wish to thank Eric Savoy for his deep dark humor, and his sincere appreciation of my personal plights.

Last but not least I wish to thank my parents: Patricia Aristizábal & Juan Manuel Cuartas, and my beautiful brother Octavio Bosco Cuartas Hincapie. I miss you and I love you. If there is any worth in my work it is due to you who taught me how to read, write and laugh. What else could anyone need in this round blue world? To my friends Alex, Max, Nico, Amir, thank you for existing and distracting me when I needed it the most. Even your shadows are awesome.

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Introduction

1. *The Stories that Shape Us*

There is no possible journey through the valley shrouded in the shadow of death that is not pierced here and there by the stories we tell each other. Stories give us a fundamental sense of orientation that provide a structural narrative to our minds allowing us to place ourselves on a scale with the immense human past. As a child I grew up hearing *scary* stories told by my mother and grandmother, almost daily it would seem. Some of the stories were told directly to us (me and my cousins) for our pleasure and instruction, but the best of them (and the scariest) were to be heard being shared amongst the adults themselves.

It could be argued from an educational perspective that these stories were designed to make us behave (go to church) and respect our elders by inducing into us a sense of fear of wrongdoing. But there was always a feeling of truth behind the stories, they were not parables or myths, but actual accounts of something seen, lived through, and very real. Parallel to these stories were the tales due to the absence of my grandfather, who had died long before any of us were born, at the age of fifty-seven from a massive heart attack. Although my grandfather — by today's standards — would be considered a landowner, he was, in the broadest terms: a farmer. By the use of the term farm, one should not imagine agricultural tracts of perfectly defined crop fields, no, this takes place during the 1950's and 60's Colombia; the idea of farmland at the time was more akin to our present idea of inhabited forest land (in Spanish the term used for this is *el monte*, which carries within it the image of green rolling hills and pristine uncultivated territory most closely associated in English with the word jungle or forest, but this is no jungle or even jungle-like territory). I mention this setting because both the scary stories and *the* story of my grandfather were usually set within this territory of nature, inhabited by man yet still retaining that mysterious allure of

unexplored, wild, *frightening* in the dark, land. Decades later, these two sets of stories have merged within me into an inquisitive interest for *ghosts*. My absent maternal grandfather has become my firsthand experience with the general concept of the ghost; someone who was alive that remains tangible only in memory, eternally un-present and un-seen.

Even if my interest in ghosts comes from a deeply personal place (the oral tradition in which I was born), this research project parts from the assumption that we have all experienced fear due to ghosts at one point or other of our lives. Maybe we noticed it or maybe we leaned into the rational part of our misgivings and let it pass leaving only a trace of doubt. This assumption brings into consideration the possibility of crossing paths with a ghost either as an evocative term¹ into the nature of unseen things that haunt and affect our daily life, or as a tangible experience with the immaterial. This research is founded on both these possibilities; one, the ghost is true; and two, the ghost can be explained away by factual means. With these two possibilities in mind, the following study proposes an analysis of the structures (both exterior as pertaining to form and interior concerning the contents) of two short stories whose narratives are graced with a ghostly presence, without becoming horror stories in themselves. In other words, they are not stories concerned *with* the ghost as main theme or protagonist. The ghost's role is heightened by fear, an important emotional response that will be the guiding compass for our analytical encounter with *the* ghost.

In this thesis we shall be concentrating on two short stories: Lafcadio Hearn's "A Passional Karma²" followed by Shirley Jackson's "The Tooth". There is a connecting filament stretching between these two literary endeavors; over and beyond the ghostly aspect present in both, there is

¹ More as a concept functioning as a descriptive emanation, rather than an actual experience.

² This first story I will from here on address as a tale, only because the noun *tale* retains the aura of orality Mr. Hearn liked to portray in his translations (re-telling).

an underlying undercurrent of criticism against the rigid structures underneath society's polite veneer. The ghost acts as a catalyst that reveals and makes apparent the hidden yet present aspects of the society in which the story takes place. Because of this, and through the characteristics of the ghostly (both as presence and consequent reaction to), this thesis will be able to establish a discourse on the emotion/feeling of fear under the guise of an affect. Having bracketed fear as the primordial emotion to be traced in the course of this research, the following study will seek to create a validation of the argument that all human societies create, maintain, and manifest their own haunting aspects and that these, no matter what they are, can only be expressed, worded, seen (in the broadest sense of the word) in literature and endeavors of the imagination.

This thesis' main concerns rest within the realm of literature and literary theory. This thesis does not pertain to the field of affect studies, even if it draws abundant information and clarity from this important field of study based on the work of Sara Ahmed, Julia Kristeva and Sianne Ngai. The relationship with fear and how it is understood as an affect can be summed up by a line from Kristeva: fear takes the subject away from decision, (1980: 10). The paralyzing effect of fear is generated by the bodily processes which occur within the subject after a collapse of meaning. This collapse connects with the intended effect of the stories my mother and grandmother used to regale us with, that fear of something *bad* happening, would deter us from even attempting anything considered beyond the established bounds. The affect of fear has the capability to annul reasoning and it is from this same angle that we shall henceforth study and utilize it.

Through a close reading of the descriptive and conceptualizing scenes taken from these two stories, we shall propose an analysis; first, of the object producing fear; secondly, the descriptive wording of said emotion of fear. Asking how fear, a feeling, an emotion (a mental process) is described by or put into words. There is no doubt that emotions are a guiding principle

in our lives; how emotions structure society and how social hierarchy is bound to emotions is not difficult to see (Ahmed, 2014). There is always an appeal to our emotions within any art-form, any type of communication be it politically oriented, publicity, religious, etc. Making fear a pervasively interesting emotion found rooted to many an unconscious process; for example, the common fear of the future, or apprehension for tomorrow, is translated into the body as anxiety. There is in it also the idea that fear can function as a defense mechanism, keeping one from harm. The question then becomes: how does a text convey, or work with fear and the possibilities of fear?

By taking into consideration how fear is felt, described, worded, and otherwise expressed within these two stories, the overall inquiry of this thesis is aimed at what is producing said fear. This opens up by necessity two different question lines: one, what is causing the fear? The external agent. And two, how is fear being put into words, described? Not as an internal agent, but as a question of agency in and of itself, the affect of fear formed from within the body/mind. This affect breeds the question: how does fear come about into action? In what way is fear happening to the subject, how is being *afraid* felt through the body, what thoughts and words are used to describe this process? Fear under the header of an affect comes from the inside, not only as a private reaction to some chance occurrence, but as an emotion deeply anchored within the sense self. Sianne Ngai defines affect with reference to two other authors:

In this it [the feeling] recalls the distinction between affect and emotion elaborated by Lawrence Grossberg and Brian Massumi, insofar as both approach emotion as contained by identity in a way that affect is not. (Ngai 2005: 40)

The affect goes beyond the ego. It exists outside of the parameters assigned to a personality, as if it were a natural thing-emotion, that is felt, transmitted, or otherwise circulating through all living beings. Think of a smell as you perceive it, before stipulations of bad/good; that is the space in

which the affect resides and exerts all its influence. The affect is the underlaying structure to human emotions, which in their basic form *tend* to behave in the same manner in all of us. The key reasoning by Ngai and others which places the affect outside individuality makes it traceable through different cultures and periods of time. In other words, the affect is broad where the emotion is personal.

1.1 *Ghost, a definition*

A divisive argument is opened up on two opposite ends whenever a ghost is mentioned. This opposition makes any encounter with a ghost either a true event that does effectively take place (like Hearn describes, where the ghost is discussed as a total tangible **fact**), or the ghost's existence is utterly denied as fantasy, madness or lies, as is the case in Shirley Jackson's story. With these two possibilities in mind, this research proposes a study in both approaches to the ghost in order to reveal what the literary presence of the ghost ends up by demonstrating. It does not truly matter if the ghost is real or not; the method of the ghost is like a fog hiding the road along which we ride, forcing us to go slowly. As a visual-conceptual-idea the ghost has and will always exist.

In the following chapters we shall be discussing how the ghost is a line into regions unseen yet latent within any society. In Hearn's tale the certainty of the ghost is part of a cultural ethos, a given, the ghost behaves *as if* it were still alive (and in love). The ghost in "A Passional Karma" is filled with desire, it has a set mission, a prey, a victim. This *mission* sets this particular ghost aside, this is no emissary of evil, or demonic emanation, this is a soul unhinged from time repeating the same patterns of desire in death that it had in life. This approach stands in stark contrast to the apparition of the ghost in Shirley Jackson's story. It must be stated that by defining the apparition

in Jackson's story as a ghost, we are placing a deliberate interpretative loop around this character, since there is no real proof that Jim is, in fact, a ghost. This is precisely why Shirley Jackson's story is so necessary to balance out our discussion: it puts the ghost in doubt. Jim is never defined as being real or not, his presence is pretty much *up for grabs* in an interpretative way. So, both Hearn's tale and Jackson's story represent each of the possibilities in the argument on the possibility of ghosts. These two literary devices were deliberately chosen to present the reader with an equilibrium in opinions, with enough differences amongst them to make the following analysis both interesting and insightful.

By contrasting these two approaches to the ghost from within literature, this research seeks to arrive at a definition of the ghost that forgoes all previous standards of weirdness while trying to bring the ghost back to a societal standpoint. This outlook views the ghost as a hungry "I" that craves, haunts, and starves for the company of the living. The ghost first seduces its prey with its performance of being one of us, the alive-breathing-feeling fellowship of those of us with a pulse. The ghost then weaves forth its sticky feelers of timelessness, its vaporous body, glimmering like a flowing river: you can see through it and at it. The ghost is both a contradiction and an *impossibility* within this physical realm since it is neither subject nor object, neither hardware nor complete software update. Like an illusion it's there, yes, but nearer to the ethereal than say your own shadow. The ghost speaks by plain presence, a symbolic catastrophe, since it is death that gives birth to the ghost. We arrive at the inevitable dichotomy where: Death gives Birth, exclusively for the ghost. To *be* a ghost you must first die. In other words, the entering in our lives of the ghost/ghostly is an encounter with death. Not our own death, but a more global *other's* death.

From this exclusive definition of the ghost as something post-human, derivative of, something beyond a definite form. Forget the sheet covered shape, the underneath of nothingness

is a concoction of meaning, a force that ripples in time. So powerful that it can unhinge time itself, and, as a necessary aftertaste, the ghost can also be psychological, purely of the mind and the ego. “Like the ghost, it is neither in the head nor outside the head.” (Derrida 1993: 216). What turns the concept of the ghost into a most suggestive and ubiquitous possible occurrence? There is something stimulating about the idea of the ghost when we separate it from a visual presence that retains, somehow, its past previous structuring (e.g. the effects of Latin on the French language). Unlike the bones and decay of horror, the ghost presents the abysmal linkage of certitude between present and bottomless past in the most sober of tones, that can range on a scale from being the most horror inducing apparition or the semitransparent figure of the revenant. As will be seen subsequently, the ghost as both a lovely and hideous form is present in Hearn’s tale, and the ghost as an idea³ affecting a present, haunts Shirley Jackson’s story. But be the image of the ghost as it may be, it is the silent meaning behind the visual idea what interests us. The ghost as a medium of information is not to be wholly judged by its form. The recurrence of the ghost implies *something* veiled, an aspect of society that comes back to haunt the present. This is where ghost and fear merge, in the haunting aspect of the ghost. The fear the ghost produces is not only related to death and the inevitability of it; it is also a shrouded expression of society and the aspects of society that gave rise to the ghost. These perverse aspects of society are the reasons beneath the rise of the ghost in both these literary works.

1. 2 *An Irish Greek American Japanese Writer*

The first chapter of this research concentrates on Lafcadio Hearn’s “*A Passional Karma*”. This being Hearn’s retelling, or version, of the tale commonly known as the “*Peony Lantern*”.

³ Ethereal, hard to pin down in certainty. Very fleeting.

Within its twenty odd pages we can find a restrained and generalized picture of Japanese Samurai society and how the societal roles and rules within this society (politics) give rise to the revenant ghost. Recent scholarly attention on Hearn's work has been focused on the relationships, or remixes, Rafukadio Hān made of the Japanese Ghost stories he was translating/re-telling and fussing with elements of Greek mythology and other European literary traditions. How he could incorporate one with the other seamlessly is better understood by Hearn's appreciation of Japan as 'the Greece of the Orient' (Hirakawa 2007: 6). When studying Hearn's literary output, one must keep in mind that he is using Japanese material to craft *his* fiction. He is not making up these stories and then putting them in a Japanese setting, these are Japanese tales that pass-through Hearn and his skills as a writer/journalist, and as such, as rewritten tales, they acquire many a relationship with his own European education and extensive reading in English:

Hearn had a householder's knowledge of Japanese life, a cultural anthropologist's knowledge of religious customs, and something more than that, a sympathetic understanding of Japanese legends. His wife Setsuko helped him, by reading old books for him and retelling the stories. Hearn put the best of them into English, with the freedom of a storyteller working from oral sources. He sometimes described his work as a translation, but it was more than that. (Hirakawa 2007: 13)

This outlook on Hearn's literary work seeks to pacify the cultural incongruences of an English-speaking author whose work is based on Japanese cultural heritage. In the global village experience of the world, cultural assets are not only to be considered as pertaining to a single culture but to a wider human experience of life and all its mysteries. Critics like Hirakawa and others seem to have a need of excusing Hearn and liberating him of any charges of cultural appropriation; it must be stated then that Hearn's writings about Japan are not the work of an anthropologist or a translator.

There is within Hearn's work elements of both, but what prevails throughout his extensive writings on the subject of Japan is always guided by a literary sense of marvel and aesthetic appreciation. Hearn's style of writing itself sought to emulate the deceptively simple Japanese style of narration. It might also help to think of Hearn's work in the vein of an orchestral conductor that stitches together from various sources a single unique symphony. Although this appreciation of Hearn's work is an interesting subject in of itself, nonetheless, for the purposes of this research it is not the whole oeuvre of Hearn which interests us but a single specific tale (i.e. "A Passional Karma"). The ghost is of this planet, it belongs to all cultures past and present, so the more we describe it from all possible angles the better we shall come to understand it.

Through the study of this single tale of Hearn's we come in contact with a society haunted both by ghosts and social structures. It is this haunting aspect which we are tracing, beyond speculations of macabre or morbid interest, the haunting enters within the framework previously established for the affect of fear. The *what* is producing fear and the *how* is it being produced:

Hearn sought to stun readers by intensifying the unpredictable in life so that they would question the accepted social norms in Western and Eastern societies at the time. (Codrescu 2019: xi)

Based on past — should we say critical — studies of ghosts and hauntings (Derrida, Fisher, etc.) we know that the true birthplace of the haunting is found in politics. Politics is repression and control exercised by any means available in the name of regulation. The laws that govern the people excise a strict confinement for the development of personalities. This is a stringent part of reality, one that traces a frontier between us and them, creating division based on arbitrary definitions and generalized principles of conduct. But whatever is repressed always ends up coming back under unexpected new forms. It reemerges like the ghost, to haunt and delude reality.

So, if repression is instilled by the political machinery, how does this become reflected in the ghost?

These are the driving questions fueling the inquires in the first chapter of this research, one that will be resolved and understood with the presentation of the concept of *karma*. How can an eastern conception of time, and its recurrence, place the ghost in a loose frontier between present and past? The question of karma provides a new appreciation of the phenomena of the ghost, the word *inevitable* comes to mind, but it should be avoided if only to preserve a clear picture of the emotions that lead one down the way of decision. Like Hearn who in a single lifetime lived through many lives — as European, American, and finally Japanese — the idea of death and rebirth does not have to literally entail a decomposition of the body. The pattern flow of time beats a rhythm that only the tranquil at ease mind can perceive, for the rest, the inevitable crash comes in the future. From this, there is no escape.

1.3 *Fear of Pain, Shirley Jackson's "The Tooth"*

Shirley Jackson struggled with bad teeth through a large part of her life. Every visit to the dentist's office was an ordeal of pain, suffering and lingering narcotic effects. By the time she was in her forties all her upper teeth had been pulled out and replaced (Hass 2015: 133). This single biographical detail imbues this precise short story by Jackson with very personal implications. As readers we are placed within a private ordeal that stems from the writer's own life experiences. Just as Hearn was writing from a place of personal interest, Jackson is using her own experiences and traumas to imbue *The Tooth* with a muted cry of anguish and pain. One cannot put into words another person's pain. There can only be understanding and admiration for those brave enough to write and elaborate from the place, state, of pain. Having said this, it is necessary to add that there

will be a necessary shift from a general idea of fear held throughout the first chapter into the more precise fear of pain, which is felt throughout Jackson's story. Hearn will show us scenes from a far-of distant land and culture and Jackson will put us back within the confines of ordinary life, of the body and the bodily, with all the strangeness that seeps through underneath the so-called *normal*.

If we could accept the *not knowing* of all things in the world, if we could view the world through a *true* prism of ignorance, consciously, as a certainty, accepting the void of meaning behind all tabulations, society would break down. This is where the supernatural takes place, as language, as shape and form of speculation. What lies underneath? What if society were different? These are not just questions, these are feelings; a way of relating to the world surrounding us that is not founded on any belief, be it religious or scientific but is rather best thought of as an experience. An experience after which we state the known jingle: *I do not know*. In other words, what is real within reality is subverted by a clear statement of unapologetic clarity of doubt. Worse yet, the things we believe are real, be that for reasons factual or habitual, once they lose that layer of veracity become strange. Hence the supernatural is not only a means of speculation but a way of introducing into language — by way of stories — a means of understanding and relating to the *not knowing* that surrounds us.

This is why Shirley Jackson is classified as a genre writer, a post-gothic modern witch. There are traces and underlying elements of the supernatural in her fiction. Not overtly supernatural, these are no Hearn-like, or Lovecraftian situations; Shirley Jackson's writing is much more subtle, *almost* realist in its approach, adhering to a point of resolution to which there are no concrete answers. Was there a ghost in the story? We don't know. It could be imagined or real, it could be

interpreted as both. As Darryl Hattenhauer marks in the introduction to their long essay aimed at the recovery of Jackson's position amongst her literary peers:

Where magical realists often begin with an absurd premise and develop it realistically, Jackson often begins with what seems to be mundane and unravels it—shows the character and sometimes the setting as they disintegrate along fault lines of internal contradictions. (Hattenhauer 2003: 3)

This research is not preoccupied with Shirley Jackson's legacy as a writer, we believe this can and is happening without any help needed from our part. On the contrary, it is the beautiful strangeness and adept use of the supernatural that impels us to engage with one of Jackson's short stories. Wherein, Clara Spencer, the protagonist, slowly becomes a voice haunting her own body and by the end of the story, she fails to recognize the image of herself in a mirror leading to a split between her mind and the body it inhabits. Based on the extensive critical work done on Jackson's oeuvre, this story is another example of the conflict between societal norms and individual expression. Clara is a small-town housewife immersed in what life should be like, when she experiences pain in a tooth this results in an inevitable deviation from normality, which brings about an encounter with the supernatural.

Now, if we take the concept of *Hauntology* to mean (in the broadest of terms) an idea of time out of joint wherein a spectral *something*, difficult to name, haunts a present event, could it be possible to haunt one's own body? To be a ghost within the body, haunting from inside? We can sense the phantom-like presence, but we can never be sure of it. Despite this, I find that labeling the ghost as a mere remainder of a troubled past is an unjust and incomplete definition. The ghost is not just an apparition, but a vortex of summons. Both signified and signifier. Leading us to the conclusion that what haunts us is not necessarily human but certainly of human doing. Within

Jackson's story there is no direct reference to something out of place, no real violence or overtly strange imagery. Everything is quite normal (too normal?) but when we look, observe, paint, describe, the normal everyday-everything in up close and minute detail, we must conclude that normality is as strange a creature as a pygmy unicorn covered in scales. In Jackson's story we are surrounded by the eerie scenery of common places. Consider Edward Hopper's paintings, where we, as spectators are presented with a sight that is either too early for the scene of a crime or years too late. That same eerie sense of mundane calm that hides under the appearance of tranquil banality is to found in "The Tooth". In Shirley Jackson's own words (quoted from an essay by Melanie R. Anderson's on Jackson):

I've had for many years a consuming interest in magic and the supernatural ... I think this is because I find there so convenient a shorthand statement of the possibilities of human adjustment to what seems to be at best an inhuman world.

(2016: 37)

Sadly though, this continues to be the case. The world we live in, the society that prevails in existence today, is still very much an inhuman response to life. Further developing an idea of the supernatural that is not just mere speculation, but apparent (and aberrant) truth. The possibility of evil exists on this earth through the agency of humanity. To live and cope within a society implies the acceptance of a myriad little details we know deep down to be wrong, to the point of being willfully harmful. The way women, or any minority for that matter, have been treated throughout history is clear proof of this. Within the confines of this thesis, when we talk of ghosts and spirits come back from the dead, we are also talking about the processes within life that produced such a violent outcome, that a trace of that suffering survived the passage of time. Shirley Jackson's merit lies in the way she is able to present the supernatural, putting it to use, without falling into fantasy

and overt horror tropes. She makes the supernatural seem natural, a slightly misaligned form within the societies we are a part of, in which we still live in and continue to perpetuate.

In the end the real important aspect of this research and its findings is the revelation of yet another perverse outcome of the uniformization of society. The assignment of roles for each individual as seen through Hearn's tale and Shirley Jackson's story underlines the tremendously nefarious implications of such roles. The continued division and compartmentalization of life within society is the origin of the ghost. Through the ghost fear is engendered and because of fear, be it rational or irrational, society continues to behave in a controlling and manipulative capacity. These two short stories are not rebellious or transgressive, they are reflections on a state of being that is general to all human beings, and as such, they pertain to all of us.

1.4 *Adagio*

What we can learn from the supernatural⁴ by basing our assumptions on these two stories, does not concern exclusively either something come back from beyond death, nor a frontier out of focus between the present and the past. On the contrary we remain within the scope of life and its politics. Any good ghost story, worth its dose of goosebumps, is whispered in our ears; it's no proclamation, more like a challenge to common sense. Belief is suspended, and the factual truths we base assumptions on are put to a stringent psychological test. These darker explorations of our human psyche are not based on rock solid truths; they speak to us of that which is out of norm, unhinged, out of time and otherwise unglued from the boundaries encompassing familiarity. The

⁴ For the time being, we offer a partial definition of *supernatural* as: an event that finds itself outside of the natural laws prescribed to the universe.

genre of ghost stories, derived from horror (weird) fiction, always threads the thin line between what ‘could’ be real and what really does happen alongside awesome speculation. The genre proposes, entices the imagination with happenings beyond our perceptions of what we deem, and qualify, as real. H. P Lovecraft traced this idea of the supernatural in his seminal essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (c. 1927), with an aim at establishing a historical lineage to a genre he rightly felt to have existed since *forever*:

The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extraterrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part.

(Lovecraft 1927: 13)

This idea of the *unknown* has almost scientific qualities to it. An enticing question to be delved into to solve the mysteries of the universe. The unknown might produce fear, yes, but it also arouses that all important quality for any researcher within any field: curiosity.

Going, departing, leaving, all these are synonymous with death. Let us call ourselves less of what we are and more of what we’ll be. The future’s future if you will. After our skin and bones have gone *puff* in a cloud of dust, doesn’t nonexistence sound too untrue? After all, all carbon-based life forms go humus wild after death — we all know this — right? The great *decomposition* seems to me so variably infinite, that nonbeing would be better replaced by an *all-ness* compared to what I am now. So individually and gullibly unique. The ironic ‘*I’m*’ is but a seed in a pod in a seed from a pod (∞). Slow deliverance comes from understanding life in all its terms and times, not as definitions memorized by heart under pain of punishment, but as a form of consent between

the now of being, the present of time and space, and the all devouring aspect of death (under the guise of the future).

This research parts from the literary, the stories that shape and form us, then delves into the tighter realms of society and its implications. The main argument seeks to liberate the ghost from the oppressions of genre, out into the open space of unseen physical forces. Only to reveal the all-pervasive culprit: the norms of society. All things must be seen as hiding something behind their mask of visibility and if we follow the ghost line of thought through everything that occurs in time, nothing coalesces in the present but is already happening, even if it be a tomorrow a yesterday or a never before.

Chapter 1 *In Ghostly Japan*

2.1 *Who What is Why Lafcadio Hearn?*

Amongst the literary figures of the nineteenth century, Koizumi (*little spring*) Yakumo (*eight clouds*), known to English readers as Lafcadio Hearn cuts a rather strange figure; born on the Greek island of Lafka (after which he was named) to a would-be-absent Irish father and estranged Greek mother. One eyed, abandoned by both mother and father, poor and drifting through London by the age of 17, he would migrate to the United States by a stroke of Dickensian⁵ good luck. Hearn would make his name (and earn his keep) as a journalist in segregated Cincinnati working for the *Enquirer*. He moved down to New Orleans after a scandal involving his relationship with a black woman living on the other side of the tracks cost him his job. On assignment for Harper's magazine, Hearn would find a culture akin to his temperament in a Japan undergoing the change from a millennia-old feudal society into a great industrial power. Lafcadio-Koizumi would live out the remainder of his life in Tokyo, married to a Japanese lady — adopting a Japanese name — basically introducing himself into Japanese life, while never shedding his Western mindset of the world. He is best known for his work in compiling and translating strange stories, studies in Buddhism, along with essays and observations on life and culture, from their original Japanese setting into English.

Hearn's Japanophilia came, so to speak, from within. By having married into a traditional Japanese family, steeped in Samurai customs and traditions, it was through his wife, Setsu Koizumi, that Hearn became familiar with many of the Japanese themes, fairy tales, strange stories, lore, and history he is now remember for. When we place Hearn's work under the broader terms

⁵ A relation of his father's, worried about the family's reputation, handed him a one-way ticket to the United States.

of Orientalism, we might easily mistake his literary legacy as the work of a writer trying to describe an *'ideal other'*. In fact, his keen Western mind was attempting a mitigation of the corrupting damage Western Thought can exert on a society that has hitherto had no contact with the West. Hearn was trying to preserve the pristine conditions under which he was able to experience Japan and the Japanese. Hearn's tales are not the creations of his imagination, something where there was nothing before, no; instead, he — Lafcadio (alongside his numerous helpers, translators, friends and consultants; amongst whom we should never forget his wife) — established a canon of Japanese literature, in English. This is what has turned Lafcadio Hearn into a Japanese cultural icon today, with a memorial park to his name, a museum and his literary work being constantly re-edited. It was through his writing and interpretations that this treasure trove of literary wealth became (if not wholly visible) at the very least present, for the world and the Japanese themselves! As the Japanese critic of comparative literature Sukehiro Hirakawa points out in his essay "*Lafcadio Hearn, a Reprisal*", Hearn left an indelible mark beyond Japanese culture:

In the history of more than one hundred and twenty years of Tokyo University no Westerner has enjoyed such high esteem as Hearn. His lectures were so much appreciated by Japanese students that when it was announced that Hearn was going to be replaced by the then little known Sōseki, students went on a strike. (Hirakawa 2007: 4)

During the fourteen years Hearn lived in Japan, not only did he translate Japan and the Japanese to Western audience, he also brought his Japanese students closer to English literature. In doing so he fulfilled the same role he played as a journalist, where the lesser-known aspects of a society become present and acquired a voice through him. In other words, what was previously outside the realm of considerations enters into the public sphere.

2.2 *A new variety in the pleasure of fear*

What is it about fear that is so alluring? So enticing to certain people yet so repulsive to others? As H.P. Lovecraft's states at the very beginning of his long essay SHL: "*The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown*". (Lovecraft 1927: 12) Fear as a quality of relationship towards things, as well as a forming affect within the body and a preexisting condition within the mind (e.g. primordial fears of darkness, predators, death, etc.), is an unpleasant form of intensity (Ahmed, 2014: 64). The pleasure of fear is born through a rationalization of events. Fear might be impossible to grapple with when directly experienced, but when fear is sifted through any artistic medium, it can become a delight that remains at a gleeful safe distance. A generalized definition of fear should respect what fear describes by remaining knowable and somehow unknown, tangible, and permanently elusive—both within the mind and the body. We may try to rationalize our fears by finding reason within them, but fear has permanence over the mind, and there will always *be* darkness and monsters inhabiting it. *Fear is the mind-killer*.⁶ We shall adhere to the concept of affect as a *verb*, an action, studying the movement that is fear. How does fear kill the mind?

Lafcadio Hearn's interest in Japanese ghost stories stems from his personal questioning into the nature of fear and the supernatural. Finding within Japanese customs an extensive tradition of ghost and strange stories that resound with this life-long interest. In one of his better-known essays "*Nightmare Touch*" first compiled in the book *Shadowings* (c. 1900); Hearn discusses the relationship fear, dreams and darkness have, from an early inception in the child's mind, into a conception (possible trauma?) in the adult's imagination/psyche. Hearn exemplifies this with an autobiographical passage where, as a child, he was *forced* to sleep in a dark room with the key on

⁶ This a *mantra* from Frank Herbert's *Dune*. First published in book form in 1965.

the outside of the door safely locking him in. Inside this dark room the child's imagination frightened him out of his neglected boy's wits with images of ghastly apparitions who's stretch themselves horridly towards him:

They were not like any people that I had ever known. They were shadowy dark-robed figures, capable of atrocious self-distortion, – capable, for instance, of growing up to the ceiling, and then across it, and then lengthening themselves, head-downwards, along the opposite wall. (Hearn 1900: 241)

It was the possibility of being touched by one of these ghosts that terrified the child Hearn. To be *touched*, a contact established through the senses, the complete *feeling* of this total *otherness*, a bodily interaction, not just in the mind but the actual corporeal feeling of being touched. Information relayed through the nervous system would efface imagination and establish a definite reality through bodily sensation. As long as the ghost, or nightmare, does not break this thin barrier, fear remains transient, breaking up with the darkness as it's pierced by the first light of day. But if ever *contact* is established, it would be deadly, melting away all mental protection and creating an all too terrifying certainty of existence.

When reading Hearn's descriptions of these monstrous entities and comparing them to this famous woodcut by the Japanese artist Hokusai (c. 1760-1849), small doubt is left as to why a good part of the literary output written *by* Hearn *about* Japan is the translation and interpretation of Japanese strange stories:



Fig. 1 – Colored wood cut of a female and male smoking *Yokai* with elongated necks to the right and over the top from right to left. A three eyed man/monster in the center and two musicians (one of whom appears to be a Monk) at the lower left. *Katsushika Hokusai* (c. 1760-1849)

Having specialized in nightmares as a writer, whatever Hearn had imagined, seen, and tried to render into plain English was already present within this rich tradition of Japanese strange stories. Known as *Kwaidan*; with *Kai* possibly meaning strange, mysterious, rare, or bewitching apparition, followed by *Dan* which means talk or narration = strange narrations. Through these narrations Hearn had a gleaming into the hovering unseen essence of *things*, which comes naturally to the Japanese mind, but is so difficult to comprehend for a Western fact-driven-mind. The ghost story is — if *anything* — a very good source of gossip. How a society fears, and most important: what *does* a society fear? Boils down to beliefs. Through belief comes faith-security, all the barriers we try and establish to keep fear at bay. Hearn's style of presentation, derived from his journalistically trained observations, is grounded on simple explanations of all *things* Japanese. Making this *version* of fear an expression of the Japanese fear, as understood by Koizumi Yakumo.

Trying to articulate something about fear through fear, by telling stories meant to induce/produce fear is the paradox that drives this thesis. As Sara Ahmed keenly expresses in the introduction to her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (c. 2014). Fear acts in the body as a means of repelling the subject from the object that causes fear, while desire works the other way around, by attraction. Literature tries to bring us closer to fear, contradicting the natural bodily reaction to fear, through an intellectual stimulation of the mind.

2.3. *Structures for a Palimpsest*

Coming down to the tale “*A Passional Karma*” itself. There are certain formal historical aspects of Hearn’s text that possess an interestingly unique quality to them which we shall allude to as being a possible palimpsest. A palimpsest is commonly considered to be a *text* that has different versions, one on top of the other. With ideas being written in successive layers, producing an un-uniform merger within a reduced space. This action of writing on top is not an effacement or a censoring, sometimes it’s a commentary to the text or corrections/insertions done at the margins to explain, complement, and possibly expand the original ‘first’ text. Not to be mistaken with a re-writing, or a re-mixing of an idea, a palimpsest is composed by an addition on top, creating a visibility of layers that make transparent the temporal dimension of the object itself.

Hearn’s retelling of the *Botan-Dōrō*, the tale we are about to analyze and decorticate, has had many a previous version, telling, retelling, and adaptations into many multiple shapes and forms. Leading one to the assumption that what lays at the core of this particular tale is connected to a deeper sense of myth, parable, folk-lore, or Zen Kōan. A ghostly tale built up in such a way that it says more about the society in which it takes place, rather than being a mere fantasy of ghosts and love. By taking the trouble of explaining every possible unknown term or concept,

pertaining to Japanese society present within the tale, Hearn offers us a *version* of the tale apt for Western readership where no unknowns will distract us from the underlying critique within the tale itself.

To consider Hearn's re-telling as a palimpsest, it would be necessary to take a minute and imagine all the previous versions of the tale present at once on the same paper. A crisscrossing of different inks and ideograms, making the end result quite possibly undecipherable, more like a work of art by Brion Gysin than a literary text. First of all, the original name of the tale is *Botan-Dōrō* ("The Peony Lantern"). The version of the tale through which we shall be filtering our argumentation is Hearn's version of this same tale, somewhat abridged, for a Western English reading public, which he deemed necessary to rechristen as "*A Passional Karma*"⁷. Hearn states clearly at the beginning of the tale that this re-telling of the tale serves a purpose, almost educational, not only pertaining to Japanese society but as an example of how the Japanese relate to the supernatural. All these previous versions of the tale haunt the tale we are about to study, not in a negative *you are damned* sort of way, more in the sense of a photographic image in which its subjects are not completely in focus and through the fuzzy edges, other versions of the image become apparent (dare we say, that they appear, only to disappear?). The story of the tale itself, is a story, or has accumulated *story* over time and space. All these past retellings can be gleaned in Hearn's version, not explicitly of course, but implicitly, like stitches on the inset of a piece of clothing.

⁷ By renaming the tale in this way, Hearn drives away the attention from the object —the peony *lantern* (the guiding light from the underworld to the world of the living) — to the more philosophical/religious idea, or concept, of Karma. Implying within the title not only the successive recurrences of the tale itself but also the karmic fault line in which its passionate characters are intertwined. In other words, this is not the first time these two lovers have met. Having met many times before, in previous existences as well as in different versions and settings.

2.3.1 *The Palimpsest Ghost*

The previous versions of the tale include, first: a Chinese ghost story (?) that crossed over to Japan where it became: an oral romance most famously told by San'yutei Enchō (c. 1831-1900). This oral version of the story was then adapted for the stage as: a Kabuki play performed by Kikugorō and his company (all plays possessing that phantomatic aura of a text underneath the staged representation — a *script*). After which, or rather from which, Lafcadio would be *inspired* to write his re-telling of the '*Botan-Dōrō*'. So what LH is offering his readers is not a literal translation of the tale, or even a complete translation, but an interpreted *summary* of its ghostly parts. One that appears to seamlessly connect its varying sources, except for the ending, which is Hearn's own addition to the tale (but more on this later).

Hearn is always present within the tale as omniscient narrator, and finally as active participant. He continually places footnotes during the telling of the tale whenever he feels like something needs to be explained to his readers. Giving the final result and form of the tale, an overall oral quality, which takes us back to the idea of a ghost story as a form of gossip, the: *I heard say tell that...* For the Palimpsest to come into full view, all these previous versions must become one within a single delimited space, the sheet (papyrus) filled with ink scrawls that both translate, interpret, study, and otherwise make illegible the original text. All previous versions are here alongside this, the newest, telling. Hearn's version is the ink on top, the freshest lines yet (probably not anymore since the tale was published back in c. 1899). On top of this we must add the plain and unavoidable consideration that, at its core, this is a ghostly romance, therefore that which was thought gone (faded out/dead) is somehow brought back (renewed) making the Palimpsest idea complete.

2.3.2 Textual Oddities

There is a brief passage on page 78 of “*A Passional Karma*” that I find worth looking at, only because its appearance might go easily unnoticed and it reveals, or at the very least makes explicit reference to one of the layers beneath Hearn’s re-telling of the *Botan-Dōrō*. It happens somewhere around the beginning of the tale during a conversation between the family physician (Dr. Yamamoto Shijō), with the main protagonist, the young Samurai Shinzaburō. During the conversation of the two men there are three direct actions that materialize bracketed within the text, they are:

Then, remembering all that had taken place, I knew that the young lady must have died of love for you...[Laughing] Ah, you are really a sinful fellow! Yes, you are!
[Laughing] Is n't it a sin to have been born so handsome that the girls die for love of you? ... [Seriously]. (Hearn 1899: 78)

Why are the doctor’s mood inflections so specified and bracketed? Foremost, it directly reminds us of the Kabuki play that inspired Hearn to re-tell the tale in the first place. As if these were screen directions, notations on the side so the actor knows what emotion to convey with his dialogue.

But why has LH left them bracketed within the text? Oh, we could well contrive a way of saying that this is a minimal aspect in a text otherwise abounding with a myriad other hints and aspects. Yes, but also, this is no script for a play, or at least the text has no pretensions of being one at all. And never you mind what the doctor is saying for now (or the fact that he is trying to wash his hands off responsibility in the matter of lady O-Tsuyu’s death by subtly putting the entire blame on Shinzaburō’s good looks). This bracketing of emotions does not happen anywhere else in the text which further emphasizes this specific exchange in a very salient way. Why would the doctor’s emotions need to be marked down like this? Is there something specific that Hearn wants

to underline with this change from laughter to seriousness? In the introduction to the tale, Hearn makes the following statement: “... *and we tried to keep close to the text only in the conversational passages, —some of which happen to possess a particular quality of psychological interest*” (Hearn 1899: 74). Consequently, these bracketed emotions must be remnants of previous versions of the tale/text. Revealing how the palimpsest functions, not as mechanism, more as a beaten path indicating the passages through which past strollers have walked. Previous forms become visible, the ghost glides over the surface of the earth.

And finally, from a totally different perspective, if we are to take the tale seriously once and for all — including the ghosts — wouldn't these bracketed emotions count as some variety of apparition? A specter in between the lines? Haunting the doctor's words? Perhaps mocking him for his gall. If these [emotions] be a remnant from previous versions of the tale then it *is* a textual ghost, a brief apparition of forms past.

2.3.3 *In the end*

Jumping ahead to the end of this re-telling of the tale to the brief closing moment where Hearn becomes active protagonist and observer and goes alongside his unidentified friend⁸ to the graveyard where the lovers are supposedly buried. After venting his frustration at not being able to identify the graves his Japanese associate and interpreter chides him: “*You came here because you wanted a sensation (...) You did not suppose that ghost-story was true, did you?*” (Hearn 1899: 113). Does Hearn need an actual grave that proves there was once a Samurai named Shinzaburō who died for his lost love? Isn't the tale enough? It seems incongruous, but not out of place, that

⁸ This unnamed friend is probably the most important ghostly figure within the tale. Not only is he, she, or they, never given a name but their role in bringing about the writing of this version of the tale is paramount. Based on Hearn's life, we could speculate that this unnamed helper might be his wife, Setsu Koizumi, who was the fountain spring from which Hearn avidly drank to bring about his writings within a Japanese setting.

after having summarized the ghostly part of the story, Hearn would somehow feel duped by there not being actual graves marked with the lover's names. He excuses his excursion by saying that the visit to the cemetery would bring out more definitely the local color of the author's studies, which it probably does, but what it ends up by showing in sharp focus is Hearn himself as a Westerner in a Japanese setting. He was still avid for factual truths, even when pertaining to the supernatural. And he knows all we've mentioned before about the tale coming from China, etc. He points this out himself in the introduction. So why would the graves even be on Japanese soil?

What people put their blind faith in, the beliefs of a society, create a reality. The actual temperature under which the limits of possibilities converge, what can be done or *must* be done. Without straying too far into religious aspects, the contrast between East & West, is marked by belief systems that distill down into philosophies of life. Lafcadio Hearn, the Western writer/journalist, seeks evidence that will prove this ghost tale to be...what? True? Authentic? That a grief-stricken lover was buried next to his departed better half? In a tale filled with incongruous shapes and apparitions, this last bit, which we can only assume is the most factual part of the whole tale, the one single part that probably *did* indeed happen, stands in clear contrast to the rest. Not only is Hearn placing himself in the role of narrator *and* main character out to prove that the people who became part of a ghost story were in fact, real people, he is also adding another layer of commentary to the palimpsest that is the compendium of versions within this *Passional Karma*.

2.4 *Do you fear fear?*

Point blank: what has fear got to do with it? If this tale is a passional love story, what sort of fear creeps and crawls over it? Before we delve into this question, a relationship must be established between fear and society, between fear and the character that has/expresses such an

affect. When we say establish, it is not a bridge we are trying to build, but a descriptive literary liaison between the affect of fear and the character affected by it, under its effects. Furthermore, the socio-economic implications within the tale make *fear* a vastly different affect according to what rises up or conjures fear. Fear restricts the mobility of the body within the social space (Ahmed, 2014: 64). This forces us to distinguish between two different types of fear: One, the fear ingrained within each one of us according to our socio-economic standards and placement (i.e. fear of walking alone in an unknown neighborhood, especially if we consider said neighborhood to be beneath our own economic level); two: the fear produced by an agent of the supernatural, something that does not belong within our normalization of time and space.

Since the tragic (because dead girl) love story can only take place because of the socio-economic structures structuring the Feudal Japanese society of the time (i.e. the invisible maze of duty these two young lovers must maneuver through to *be* together), it all boils down to the plain fact that fear was already present before the ghost became a ghost. It wasn't *just* the ghost that generated fear (although it does); in fact, it was fear that brought the ghost(s) into being in the first place. This being something very important that should always be kept in mind: that no matter what the ghost may induce, the production of the ghost was ignited by fear.

By putting fear first, we are trying to prove that the fear of ghosts is in no way related to the unknown (in what concerns this specific tale) instead, fear is most powerfully felt when pertaining to a rotund possibility. Let's turn to politics for a moment. Without going into too many unnecessary details, this *Passional* tale takes place in a period of Japanese History where society was ruled by a military aristocracy. The hierarchy of Samurais was severely maintained by a prevailing sense of undying fidelity and extreme duty towards one's retainer or master. Any and all possible transgressions were met with the certainty of having one's head lopped off. Control

established through ruthless violence; fear of bodily harm keeps subjects and vassals in line. As the Prince Machiavelli says: ‘*It is much safer to be feared than to be loved*’. Although this is neither the place, nor do we have the time, to discuss to what extent this fear of bodily harm has been consciously used to keep society in check, suffice it to say: it’s been proven to be very effective. This is how lion tamers tame lions, by teaching the beast to fear the whip.

In the same way as fear is placed before the emergence of the ghost, when the ghost(s) do in fact appear, their presence is first heard *before* being seen. Two examples from the tale: Shinzaburō hears women’s Geta (wooden sandals) going *kara-kon kara-kon*, slowly approaching his home. With his curiosity peaked to the point of action, he stands on tiptoe looking over the hedge surrounding his house and sees two women passing. The supposedly dead duo of O-Yoné & O-Tsuyu! He hears them first and then he sees them. In the same way, the treacherous servant to Shinzaburō, has *his* curiosity peaked when late at night he hears a lady’s voice⁹ coming from within Shinzaburō’s chambers. Recognizing the lady’s speech as someone of *high rank*, he decides to have a glimpse into his master’s room. Peering through a chink he is able to *see* the terrifying ghostly form of O-Tsuyu — *a woman long dead* — caressing his master with the even weirder shape of O-Yoné chaperoning the scene.

We are enclosed in a universe where the concept precedes its definition. Having the ghost heard first before being seen creates that ambiguous sense of curiosity that entices at first and once confirmed as an observable event either compels or repels, this being a ghost that can vary its outward appearance according to who sees *it*¹⁰. In this case Shinzaburō is completely fettered by

⁹ “*The forms of speech used by the samurai, and other superior classes, differed considerably from those of the popular idiom; but these differences could not be effectively rendered into English.*” (Hearn, 1899: 87)

¹⁰ It is necessary at this point to state the following for argumentative purposes which will become evident later: when the ghost knows it is being seen it assumes a protective benign shape but when it’s looked at without the ghost being aware of it, the true hideous form (the underneath) of the ghost becomes visible.

the threads of illusion and sees nothing askew about the reappearance of O-Tsuyu. She seems to him as lovely as she was in life. Likewise, the first pangs of fear to be marked down, come from within the social sphere (before anything supernatural gains agency), and they would appear to be, for now, pre-programmed responses to living situations or social interactions. In other words, when fear emerges as part of the interactions within the social, curiosity is completely deadened. This kind of fear enjoys a double possibility; one, that repels completely (social fears¹¹); two, it awakens curiosity being alluring in some way (the ghost).

2.5 Subordinate Characters

By and by we come closer and closer to the tale itself, at the center of which one finds the tragic love story of Shinzaburō and O-Tsuyu. Peripheral to this pair of lovers there is a host of side characters that englobe all strata of Japanese society at the time. From the highest-ranking military power (O-Tsuyu's father) down to Shinzaburō's servant (Tomozō) and O-Tsuyu's handmaiden, O-Yoné. With both Servants playing key roles within the narrative from *behind* the two main protagonists. Tomozō is the selfish unfaithful servant, while O-Yoné sticks to her mistress through life and death.

As main *fictional* character we have Shinzaburō. Regulatory-wise it's his point of view and perspective that is privileged. Shinzaburō is either directly present in each of the 11 chapters or presented as being irrevocably affected by the subordinate characters who plot (against or for him) behind his back. His relationship with the ghosts of O-Tsuyu & O-Yoné is the main conundrum of the tale, and yet, these nightly trysts are neither seen nor described. Instead, it's through the eyes

¹¹ Social fears or social anxieties are common to all of us, it's what makes us wear clothes whenever we walk out the door.

of an *outsider* (the servant Tomozō) that we get a glimpse at what happens between Shinzaburō and O-Tsuyu. It's also through this subordinate character that we finally *see* the true form of the ghosts that visit the young Samurai's house each night.

Thus, it's the characters at the side lines that gradually push the tale to its frightful conclusion. They create, as it were, a space in which both female and male titular characters are left rigid in their loving embrace. The ripples of consequence part from this loving core that should not be, alive and dead do not belong together. But nothing can part these two lovers from each other. To better illustrate this important role played by the secondary characters we turn to Alex Woloch with a quote taken from the introduction to his lengthy study of minor characters:

If many previous genres flattened subordinate characters—highlighting the tension between allegory and reference—the omniscient novel is particularly conscious of this narrative process, integrating its awareness into the narrative fabric. 19th century realism—with its mobile and often impersonal narrators, its ambitions towards structural totality, and its commitment to an inclusive social representation—generates endless varieties of interaction between the discursive organization of minor and central characters and the essential social and aesthetic impulses of the genre as a whole. (Woloch 2023: 20)

Call it an awareness, if you like, but keep in mind that Koizumi Yakumo (LH) seeks to exemplify something particular to the Japanese *understanding* of the supernatural through this tale. Ultimately what this does is offer a critique of the society therein portrayed. But this awareness that Woloch mentions, could be enhanced by adding a layer of self-awareness. Understandably this would have to take place from the author's side, thankfully for us, Hearn's penchant for journalistic chronicling offers us exactly this. His initial, and stated intention, for the tale is to offer some sort

of understanding of the supernatural: “*It would serve to explain some popular ideas of the supernatural which Western people know very little about*” (Hearn 1971: 73).

Added to this, we have Hearn’s own continuous perspective/commentary concerning Japan, creating an ambivalence within the *functionality* of the tale. Because it is not an overt critical essay about life in Japan, it’s a ghost story, as formal as that. The gossip of society, the whispered truths, are all part of the ghost story. Also provided by this idea of functionality, is a glimpse, through the side characters, of the whole functioning of Japanese feudal society, its beliefs, fears and ulterior workings. Not that by reading this tale we would achieve a *Japanese* level of understanding of the supernatural, *no*, but it does show *us* their level of awareness in the matter. Considerations on the nature of the universe need to be bullet holed with all possible possibilities.

At this point we must put our focus on Mr. Hearn once again, only this time not as omniscient author, but as another character active within the narrative. As we mentioned before, this is *his* re-telling of the tale for our benefit, with the key exception that this version also marks his own experience of the tale. First was the *new variety in the pleasures of fear* stirred by the Kabuki play, and then, by the end of the tale his first-hand — should we say journalistic endeavor — to trace down the tombs of both lovers. Hearn places himself, with his opinions and experiences, both at the center of the introduction and the conclusion of the tale.

Additional to this, it is Hearn’s unnamed & unidentified friend that both sets the tale in motion and gives it its closing remarks. Since this *friend* remains unclear to the readers, we’re never sure if they do exist or if it’s Hearn’s way of pushing the story along by having someone other than himself suggest the tale be translated into English: “*Why not give English readers the ghostly part of the story?*” — *asked a friend who guides me betimes through the mazes of Eastern Philosophy*” (Hearn 1899: 73). It’s this same unnamed *friend* who accompanies Hearn to the

rundown cemetery and asks for directions to the tombs. Even the englobing story arc has a subordinate character that seemingly guides the main character through the narrative.

2.5.1 *Cast of Characters*

Moving on from the structure of the tale to the contents themselves, the most interesting aspect of which, as stated earlier, is how the subordinate characters provide the tale with its course and closure. But before we move further, this is as good a place as any to provide a brief summary of “*A Passional Karma*”: girl meets boy, they fall deeply in love. *She* dies of loneliness because *he* never came back to visit her when in fact the sole reason he never visited her again was decided by a question of social etiquette, the: *what would society say?* of Samurai Japan. With girl dead, boy is left sick of grief, filling his time wishing *she* was back. Add some daily burning incense sticks at the Buddhist altar of his house to this heartfelt longing and she does end up coming back! Only she’s a ghost, and despite begin warned of the dangers of sleeping with a ghost, boy just can’t get enough. Yet he tries to end this deadly relationship (with Buddhist charms and sutras), but betrayal comes when you least expect it¹², and boy ends up dead too (if the lovers reunite after death, could this be considered a happy ending?).

Thus what I propose now, by way of an analytical summary of the tale, is to go through each one of the characters, and describe their role in the tale while underlining the political implications of their actions, feelings, thoughts, on so forth. I’ve also decided to separate characters between their living form and their ghostly form as a means of keep things precise and also interesting. This break down of the characters will help us see the complete picture of Japanese society Hearn was most certainly aiming at. Within this relatively short tale we have characters

¹² The boy’s servant betrays him for a 100 gold pieces to the ghost.

and social roles that duly exemplify the spectrum of social classes from 18th century Japan. Precise studies into the nature of things always end up revealing universal traits, that duly vary according to the geographical weather of their place of origin, but nonetheless, the emotion of fear remains only too human.

2.5.1.2 *Roll Call*

Starting from top to bottom we have the pair of lovers Shinzaburō and O-Tsuyu, as upper-class representatives, with O-Tsuyu's father standing in for the powerful — unseen, but duly obeyed to — ruling class. The means of introduction between these two lovers is offered by a working-class man, the doctor. A nosey neighbor, that moonlights as soothsayer, tries to help Shinzaburō unglue himself from his ghastly illusion by seeking the help of the priest Ryoseki, who imparts practical advice on how to get rid of ghosts as well as providing the closing arguments on the '*inevitability within the nature of karma*'. At the lowest caste we have O-Yoné, who follows O-Tsuyu everywhere (including death) and does her every bidding; and Tomozō, who is servant and betrayer of Shinzaburō.

O-Tsuyu Living

O-Tsuyu means '*Morning Dew*', which already implies something both fragile and short lived. Being the daughter of a high-ranking Samurai (*Hatamoto*), she comes from a family high-up in the echelon of Japanese society of the time. Since she doesn't get along with her new stepmother, the Hatamoto has a pretty villa built for her, providing O-Tsuyu with a maidservant (O-Yoné) that looks after her every need. This is the state of affairs at the beginning of the tale: a beautiful, rich, teenage girl is living alone with only her maid for company in a private villa. *There*

is a certain fairytale aspect to O-Tsuyu's character, like a Rapunzel or any other princess, locked up in solitude, surrounded by luxury. When she meets Shinzaburō they fall in love directly, taking less than six lines of text for them to pledge themselves to each other for life. Since Shinzaburō never comes back to visit her, she quickly dies believing that her love has been scorned. O-Tsuyu dies first socially with her body following suit.

O-Yoné Living

O-Yoné is said to be *given* to O-Tsuyu by her father (as much as one human being can be given to another). O-Yoné's role whilst living is quite limited, she's a handmaid. We are given a sense of her looking after every possible want of O-Tsuyu, a faithful companion in her lonely retreat. Apart from this we know nothing else about her, she is so discreet that not even her appearance is described. Making her the perfect servant, invisible. Her death through grief at the loss of her *mistress* further underscores her position as a most loyal retainer, something like an ancient Egyptian votary in the cause of O-Tsuyu. The dead counterpart of O-Yoné is the epitome of this devotional characteristic. Following her mistress to and out of the grave. Even dogs are said to starve themselves after their master passes away. A commitment to responsibility that goes beyond life, in a karmic sense, O-Yoné dies to continue serving.

Dr. Yamamoto Shijō (family physician)

If there is an unwittingly evil character in the tale it would be this yellow-bellied medical advisor. He is responsible for bringing the two lovers together and then apart and then together again! Thus creating the conflict that will propel both these lovers on the quick path to death. What is interesting about the doctor's character is that at the basis of his actions lies the affect of fear in

its most primordial sense: fear of death through failure of one's responsibility towards a superior/higher ranking individual: "Iijima Heizayémon [O-Tsuyu's father] had a reputation for cutting off heads" (Hearn 1899: 76). This being the main reason why Dr. Yamamoto never brought the young Samurai Shinzaburō to visit lady O-Tsuyu a second time. Fear of the master, fear of the consequences at the hands of the master. Hence *fear* gives birth to the ghost, paves the way if you will. Control of the population being exerted through fear and absence, O-Tsuyu's father has no need to be present for his menace to be felt. Dr. Yamamoto only plays a role at the beginning of the tale, serving twice as a means for the lovers to get together. After which he completely disappears. The doctor is a bridge: he connects one part of the story to the other, and like all bridges, once we've crossed them, we forget them.

Furthermore it is this same doctor who instills in Shinzaburō a dutiful need for an act of remembrance of the dead, saying to the young Samurai: "— all that you now can do for her is to repeat the Nembutsu..." (Hearn 1971: 78). Therefore, the doctor — unintentionally always — introduces the action that will reunite the lovers from beyond the pale of death. Seen from a societal perspective, the doctor is a necessary cog within the narrative; he represents a figure within society liable and useful as a means to procure introductions, while also being completely disposable once his function is accomplished. He revolves within a society where formality is primordial, the proper introductions, the proper way of doing things, etc. His fear as well as O-Yoné's death are a symptom of duty, the fear of failing in one's duty or taking duty too far, are both consequences of the stringent efforts society does to 'control' and put the individual within a designated place/situation from which it cannot deviate (under pain of death/loss of status, etc.). A social barrier of fear is imbedded within all of us, this is common to all people who are governed and ruled over, we accept the fear of breaking the norms of living in society.

Iijima Heizayémon

“Authority must have death behind it.”

The Adventures of Augie March, Saul Bellow

O-Tsuyu’s father rests invisible at the top of the scale of the patriarchal Samurai structure of Japanese society, and accordingly, the power he holds over life exerts a phantom-like presence over the whole tale; existing and affecting others despite the absence of a corporeal/physical presence. He is only mentioned a couple of times and not once do we have a *scene* where he intervenes directly, *“To haunt does not mean to be present...”*¹³(Derrida 1993: 202). And so, he haunts the tale by proxy. The fear the doctor has of his command causes the demise of his daughter, the same comely daughter he had built a pretty villa for to avoid any bitterness between his new wife and said daughter. He holds a position of power, thus becoming an abstract figure that represents both wealth and danger; to cross him is to incite reprisals. A figure of power that remains in the void of the unseen. We cannot give him the qualifications needed to be a ghost but he does emanate an extension of his body that permeates all outcomes within the narrative. The body of power functions without the need of being present; its influence is felt by those subject to it everywhere.

Shinzaburō¹⁴

“... a despicable creature.” (Hearn 1971: 110). This is how Lafcadio Hearn chooses to word his closing opinion concerning Shinzaburō’s character. The Samurai with killer looks — as the doctor calls him, and O-Tsuyu’s rapid demise seems to prove. In a tale speckled with phantomatic

¹³ *“Everything begins before it begins”.*

¹⁴ *“He whose bride is a ghost cannot live”.* (Hearn 1899: 89)

apparitions and specters, Shinzaburō is the only one to claim a certain validity (heaviness) of living, despite the fact that his actions tend to retain a transparent quality to them. He moves effectively through the tale, falling in love, grief-stricken and all that, but nonetheless he seems to float — hovering over the action. The only thing he does concretely is dying of fear: “*Shinzaburō was dead — hideously dead; — and his face was the face of a man who had died in the uttermost agony of fear...*” (Hearn 1899: 106). Albeit this was the resolution the tale was working up to all along, and as such, it comes as no surprise. Despite his feeble attempts at protecting himself, his fear of love was much more powerful than his will to live. Shinzaburō stands as an embodiment to inevitability and it’s probably this quality which makes him float over the narrative. Not quite doomed but marked. As the priest Ryōseki would remark, he had his karma written all over his face. To reinforce an idea we have been working with, Shinzaburō’s *fear* of what O-Tsuyu’s father might do is also at the basis of his and *her* death, fear of the ghost of power creates *real* ghosts. Shinzaburō dies of fear and lives in fear. He is — in fact, as Hearn says — quite *despicable*; since Shinzaburō exemplifies fear at every turn, completely lacking the courage of O-Tsuyu or the self-sacrifice of O-Yoné.

The only action of true merit that Shinzaburō performs is the invocation of O-Tsuyu by faithfully burning incense in her name. He wishes her back to life, bringing her to him. Given his state of sorrow we could argue that O-Tsuyu’s return are the mad ramblings of a person going through grief; denial being a probable cause for the apparition of the loved one (and her maid). Gradually going madder and madder until he dies alone in his room, hugging the bare bones of his dead lover. To Shinzaburō’s eyes lady O-Tsuyu is as radiant as ever, there is nothing to denote her as being one of the deceased. Point in fact: Shinzaburō never once sees O-Tsuyu as dead, it’s only his servant who is privy to her true form and features.

On the social/economic side he died having obeyed the laws of etiquette, fearing the consequences of crossing the phantom-like power qualities of O-Tsuyu's father, his superior and elder. When he starts fearing for his life at the caressing hands of ghostly O-Tsuyu, even though he had got what he so fervently prayed for, Shinzaburō loses all credibility. The inevitable conclusion is that fear was at the basis of every action and decision he took/made in the tale. But fear is no decision, fear is running away, hiding, and like that, Shinzaburō allows his fate to encircle him. The quickest way of being reunited with a dead loved one, is to die as well.

O-Yoné, the handmaid in life & death, is the one who carries the lamp that guides O-Tsuyu from out of the realm of death back into life. In the same way, it's to O-Yoné that Shinzaburō addresses himself to, when he first sees the ghostly pair passing by his house. Even when facing possible ghosts, he maintains etiquette; it's so far ingrained in his brain, in his manners, that when he finally has in front of him the beautiful teenage daughter of his boss, whom he was told had taken a love stricken early-grave in *his* name, he chooses to address her handmaid. Always afraid not to offend, never going straight ahead. He would get sick for love, but not die of it. Afraid he is. Afflicted by a deeply imbedded affect of fear, Shinzaburō bases all his life's (lives) decisions and interactions, through or validated, based, on fear.

But then, we also read the following regarding Shinzaburō's attempts at extricating himself from his lover's desire: "*something stronger than his fear impelled him ...*" (Hearn 1899: 98) which is more in line with the subtle commentary underling this, Hearn's version, of the tale. What this Greek Irish translator and interpreter is trying to elucidate about Japan, for Western readers, that goes beyond the supernatural — exclusively for Western minds and perceptions — is the idea/concept of karma. What is karma? If it's not a ghost or fear of something imposed by society? How far *back* can It reach? This is not a tale for the sake of telling it; this is an

example/exemplification of the concept of *karma*. It's very hard to understand karma for Western minds because Karma¹⁵ means action. And to every action there is a reaction, and both the consequences of action and reaction are encompassed within the term karma. There cannot be one without the other; they are both one, like a coin is not heads *or* tails but both at the same time. As Western readers we are segregated to considerations of the observable and quantifiable present. The fact of the matter is that regardless of Shinzaburō's fears, he was already hemmed in by his past choices. All the more damning for him since they were all probably based on fear as well. Karma is not an unhinging of time, an out of place within the present, karma transcends time. Which is what Hearn is trying to drift our way, not as an attempt to make us understand (finally!) but of giving an example, an elucidation through a case study. The case of Shinzaburō's and O-Tsuyu's love.

Tomozō

Refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.

Powers of Horror, Julia Kristeva.

The counterpoise to O-Yoné's faithfulness is Tomozō and his wife, a couple of servants in the service of Shinzaburō. Being tickled into curiosity by a voice coming from within the apartments of his lordship, it's Tomozō who breaks the seven-night spell of love between his master and his ghostly guest. Where O-Yoné is faithful to the point of laying down her bones in the service of her ladyship, Tomozō only cares for himself. The reason given for his eavesdropping is that he *feared* some cunning lady might be worming her way into his master's heart. In

¹⁵ From the Sanskrit word *Kri*, which can be translated as: *to do*. Interdependent origination.

proletarian terms: he was afraid of losing a sweet situation next to Shinzaburō (seeing as it came with a house that let them live in relative comfort). It's always an economic transaction with Tomozō, first his eavesdropping — fear of losing his job. Followed by the selling out of his master for a hundred golden Ryō — to the ghosts of O-Tsuyu and O-Yoné — Tomozō is just making sure he lands on his feet after his master/main source of income dies.

A base level character. Materialistic. Grounded in terms of the real, the working capitalist man cares only for himself, forsaking nature, master and maker, all in the name of personal gain and maintaining of status. Not the image of the worker plowing through field and adverse conditions, but the other, the sly earner always out for some easy \$. Tomozō is the first character to see the ghosts with their visors lifted¹⁶, so to speak, what he sees through the chink in the sliding shutters gives us our first accurate description of fear caused by the ghost: “ — *but therewith an icy trembling seized him; and the hair of his head stood up*”. This is how fear affects the body, the common bodily sensations associated with fear. Cold electricity flowing through your veins. Hearn continues:

For the face was the face of a woman long dead, — and the fingers caressing were fingers of naked bone, — and of the body below the waist there was not anything: it melted off into thinnest trailing shadow. Where the eyes of the lover deluded saw youth and grace and beauty, there appeared to the eyes of the watcher horror only, and the emptiness of death. Simultaneously another woman's figure, and weirder, rose from within the chamber, and swiftly made toward the watcher, as if discerning his presence. (Hearn 1971: 87-88).

¹⁶ This is something Derrida mentions in his **Specters of Marx**, coming from **Hamlet** where Hamlet's father lifts his visor to uncover his true form. Something ghosts are apt to do, one of their traits, is that despite being ghosts (ethereal, hard to see, etc.) there is an underneath subjacent, something more to it beyond the phenomena of spectrality, a weirder form — the unknown of the unknown. But this form is exclusive to whomever the ghost chooses to lift up its visor for. The shade in Hamlet does so only **for** Hamlet, to prove his identity, purpose, the visual conveys the message (massage), no need for words, within the image of the specter/apparition resides its message. The form in which it is seen, perceived, is what **it** is conveying, its intentions. The reason why you are seeing me like this.

Enough to frighten any sane person I'm sure. For the sake of compact theorizing, the *true* shape or status of the ghost is a skull-like¹⁷ bones and drifting *not anything*. Something like a perceptible void, perhaps? A descriptive play on words of what is missing (not seen) and what is there (visibly); the skeleton represents the decay of a dead body, obviously, and the emptiness of *not anything* is still a form that is compacted by the essence of O-Tsuyu, so the bones and the empty shell still have a sense of property or individuality, which gives the ghost the thinnest trailing shadow.

Tomozō is inevitably linked to the chain of events in socio-economic standards, being connected as he is (under pain of salary and housing) to Shinzaburō. In the same way that O-Tsuyu's first *victim* is O-Yoné, Shinzaburō's fate would inevitably drag down Tomozō as well. Like the doctor before him, Tomozō quickly wipes his hands off Shinzaburō (a hundred Ryō richer) and leaves the tale without consequence. That is, unless you trust in karma.

The Ghosts of O-Tsuyu & O-Yoné

It seems only fair, concerning the relationship of mistress and handmaid that these two have stretched beyond life, to treat their ghosts under a single header. Apart from what was said earlier about their shapes, as seen through the witness Tomozō, little more can be added here. Their purpose (*little private work* as O-Yoné defines it for Shinzaburō) is straight forward. O-Tsuyu wants to be loved by this particular Samurai and O-Yoné is there to see that she gets anything she wants. A spoiled rich girl and her go getter henchwoman. If O-Tsuyu doesn't get what she wants she hides her face, and O-Yoné faces whatever must be faced to get it, be it Buddhist charm or chant, she will find a way to gratify her dead-lady's wishes. This is what gives O-Yoné's

¹⁷ For the sake of this present tale. The ghost is a most definite thing-entity-even-person since the ghosts within the tale of the peony lantern carry-on their personality from out of the grave. Beyond the pale of death, where the sun is always cold, the worst would be to constantly remember one's life in life.

shape/form as a ghost the adjective of *weirder*: what is weirder than a skeletal figure with no feet? Pure force of purpose in the cause of O-Tsuyu is what O-Yoné is, her ghostly form proves it, strong-willed and scary. The true Samurai emblem in the tale is O-Yoné, she dies for her mistress and fulfils her duties in the afterlife for her mistress too. If Shinzaburō is guided by fear, O-Yoné is fearless, courageous, resourceful. She gets that coveted promotion to service beyond death.

Ryōseki

The character of the high priest functions as a counterweight to O-Tsuyu's father. Where the Hatamoto rules by de facto and fear inducing absence, Ryōseki is the spiritual know-all within the tale, calm collect wise and physically present. He has all the answers before there was even a need for questions. It is his reasonings on karma that close the ghostly part of the tale. His spiritual vision being such that he can see into distant past and future: "*What happened to Hagiwara Sama [Shinzaburō] was unavoidable; — his destiny had been determined from a time long before his last birth*" (Hearn 1971: 109). This is the function of Hearn's retelling of the Peony Lantern and the reason why he chose to emphasize *karma* in the title. The ghosts were an excuse, a way of execution, a means towards an end, a method. Their shape and presence are well established, their roles well defined. There is no doubt as to their place within the framework of this story, here, ghosts are real.

If we were to ascribe a meta function to the ghosts, beyond acting as a means of conveying an unhinged representation of the past (happening or taking place in the present); the ghosts are the resulting consequences of the pressures of formality within society, the wickedness hidden under well-meant good intentions. Fear, on the other hand, always came first; fear was not brought on *because* of the dead, no, on the contrary, fear of death/harm was the emotion affecting the

decisions taken. But by explaining everything supernatural in the tale by means of karma, we ascribe to it a huge amount of agency. The sorry complaint that comes to the Western mind is: what happens with free will? First of all, there is nothing *free* about it. That's the whole point. Karma, the end result within all of our actions/decisions, is easier to understand when placed next to one of the fundamental laws of energy: *energy is neither created nor destroyed, it is transformed*. A transformational flow that has been going on for ever and ever in both what is to come and what has always already happened. Karma takes away any illusion of freedom we might believe to have, every choice you make, every encounter, of natural or supernatural allure, is, or has, not only already happened many a time before, but will always bring about the same result. Not to be confused with the false idea of destiny or predestination, karma is best understood as a wheel. With a first point going up and then down but in no way can we tell which is the up and which is the down, once the figure is flat and static. As the high priest Ryōseki recommends: *It will be better for you not to let your mind be troubled by this event*.

2.6 *Post-mortem*

“*A Passional Karma*” portrays a Japanese society on the brink of change. With the arrival of the new millennia, traditional Japanese values and beliefs would come to a shocking encounter with the West and its ideas. At this crucial point, the arrival of Lafcadio Hearn is of vast importance. As we have seen in this chapter, Hearn (and his helpers) had the sensibility to capture the essence of this traditional Chino-Japanese tale and translate it into English without it losing any of its luster or charm. Hearn was teaching himself to see things (life) in that deceptive simple style commonly associated with Japanese art. As we learn alongside him, some of the concepts might remain difficult to assess and master. But gradual comprehension has begun to grow around these themes

of spirits, karma, and so on, in way that has separated them from the cultures that first nurtured them, achieving a transcendence into a global human appreciation. This is how we learn from each other. There is no need to be steeped in the knowledge of Asian cultures to able to capture the delicacies of thought and subtlety of language present within these works of art.

The educational purposes of Hearn's literary work had a double standard: educating the West in questions of Japanese cultural significance, as well as preserving Japanese cultural heritage for the Japanese themselves. This double standard is always aimed at a better comprehension of life in the most general terms, as the critic Yoko Makino explains:

(...) one of the reasons why Hearn continued retelling Japanese old ghost stories, besides his own personal innate attachment to the supernatural unseen world, was that the topic of ghosts was linked with the Japanese notion of death and rebirth, in other words, the notion of the inevitable relationship that binds the living and the dead, and the idea of destiny as determined by one's past deeds (generally termed 'Karma' or 'Ingwa'), in which he had a strong interest. (Makino 2007: 123)

That continuous question into the darker shades of life, which can be named ghosts, the supernatural, etc.; it's the latent power behind the darkness which interests us now and not the strict form or shape of unverified occurrences. Hearn liberated his re-telling from its emphasis on the materialistic components (i.e. the lantern) in order to focus on the more salient aspect of recurrence (or karma). Even with a change of setting and characters, certain stories tend to repeat themselves. This human *karma*, the idea of every action engendering a constant flow of reaction cannot be quenched, satiated or downright stopped. The ghost will always comeback, the past will repeat itself, and death is but another beginning. To break free from action would imply a break from desire. Since even the ghost desires, seeks, and haunts its prey. This idea, the recurrence of

the desire within the ghost, should become a proven fact, outside the realm of science (obviously), and even further away from any possible intellectual feat. As long as there is life, there will be action based on desire, that much is clear, but even beyond death our desire continues to multiply and grow.

The usual outcome to a Zen Kōan is the opening up of a wealth of doubt. Through doubt, the mind becomes inquisitive into the nature of things, and hopefully — through doubt — which is in of itself a sort-of void like situation, the mind *might* attain a glimpse into the vacuity at the heart of existence. There is no given answer to a Kōan, that would invalidate its purpose. So, what have we learn from Hearn's tale? If we insist on remaining on the safe shores of the Western mindset and outlook of the world, well, we have traced how the affect of fear was a persistent presence within the society described in the pages of "*A Passional Karma*". But this is only a partial answer, since it does not explain the ghost, scratch explain, and replace it by: takes into account. In a proper assessment of the term ghost, we have in it already the idea of a past projected on to a present. Which is closer to the conception we have of *karma*, or how an action in the past comes to *affect* the present. In tracing how emotions create a context for the development of human functionality, we realized — long ago — that theoretical thinking, critical assessment, and so forth, can be better established (and studied) through fiction and its representations (Ngai 2005: 36). From within the realm of representation the transcendence of emotions can be sublimated, not as a coming forth, more like simmering contents releasing their primordial juices, bringing forth the nutritious components hidden within.

Chapter 2. *A Visit to the Dentist*

*I am the center
Of a circle of pain
Exceeding its boundaries in every direction*
Parturition — Mina Loy, 1914

3. 1 *In Plain Sight*

The ghostliest of all things are those that hover constantly in front of our eyes and yet we fail to perceive them. This would not mean that we are not aware of these ghostly aspects of life. On the contrary the ghosts that haunt us in everyday life are our own societal creations. Think, for example, of the effects of Capital (money) over life. How it pervades over and haunts all aspects of society. Even the idea of society as a whole, behaves in the manner of a ghost: unassailable, almost invisible, and phantomatic in its ubiquity. In other words, society is a ghostly ever-present entity haunting all phases of life¹⁸, yet we fail to perceive its presence in a direct manner. We live in it immersed in its values and ideas that end up shaping our lives, both physically and mentally.

Shifting our attention from fear to pain (from Japanese society to American society), we leave behind the concept of a factual ghost and pass on to the possibility of a ghost. Here, the apparition and its demeanor become a matter open to speculation. With Hearn's *Passional Karma* we were eyebrows deep into Japanese culture, a way of life inhabited part and part by the living and spirits. With the latter being accepted and introduced as part of daily life. In this chapter, through Shirley Jackson's fiction, we come in contact with a Western formulation of society that like our own tarnished and dilapidated world, where the ghost remains as a never resolved possibility¹⁹, an event open to subjective speculation.

¹⁸ Society can even stretch its cold grasp onto the realm of death, as was seen in the previous chapter.

¹⁹ Venturing the concept that a ghost is an experience, only transmissible through an *experiencing* of the phenomena. Like in, *I'm experiencing this ghost*, as opposed to the formulation: I'm seeing a ghost. The more diffuse an idea

As we come closer to what we tentatively could define as the real²⁰, we must first open with the subject of the human body; that which gauges all experiences within the ambit of the real: both physical and emotional. Furthermore, it's through the bodies and minds (train of thought) of her various female characters that Shirley Jackson builds-up her portrayal of individual pain and fear within society. Making it imperative that we take a moment to establish what the body and the mind will stand for within the rationale of this chapter. In literary terms we are passing from Hearn's tale, narrated part in part from a first person and third person point of view onto a short story completely narrated in the third person, granting the reader access to the thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations of its main character. We are now in the dominions of the physical and psychological.

In this chapter the main object of study will be the short story 'The Tooth'²¹ by the aforementioned Shirley Jackson; story which will allow us to discuss themes of pain, fear, and how these two feelings/emotions come together to play an important part in the forming of individuals apt to live in society. In keeping with the general thesis of this research, we are looking at the role played by the ghost (or possibility of one) and how this apparition is a mouthpiece for an unseen aspect within society. The importance of Shirley Jackson's story when compared to "A Passional Karma" is the acquisition of a body and a mind by the main character. Hearn's tale was much more allegorical than psychological, with all the characters functioning as prototypes —

presents itself to us the less we should attach a visual connotation to it. The ghost is not something we are merely seeing, as you would a gazelle or an airplane; the unseen ghost goes deeper into the realm of what is *felt*. I feel a ghostly presence.

²⁰ "1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things." Wittgenstein L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 1922: p. 5. As the focus of this chapter works with a version of society within the western canon of understanding of the World, where proven facts stand above beliefs. In doing so, the term reality becomes something that must be proven and given concrete evidence of for it to be accepted and introduced into what is considered, termed, defined, as real.

²¹ "The Tooth" first appeared in *The Hudson Review* during the winter of 1948. It was then collected as part of the short story collection, by Jackson: "*The Lottery; or The Adventures of James Harris*" in 1949.

with even the ghosts embodying a sense of archetypal karmic duty. In Jackson's short story we'll be faced with the body of an individual presented as someone with thoughts, feelings and most telling of all, a past, which is not openly mentioned but implied. All of the above create a visualization of an individual grounded by the same traits any real individual possess. So, before we touch on the literary to arrive at the ghostly core, we must look into aspects of the body, the mind, and how pain affects both these characteristics when talking about an individual. Once we reach the literary portion of this chapter, the focus will shift from the main character to the possible apparition of a ghost. Finally, this chapter will close with an up-close look at the role society plays in the formulation of possible madness and how the main character in Jackson's story finds a way to free herself from her pained place in society.

3.2 *The Body*

The human body is the reservoir of all things belonging to this inflamed existence called life, and remains, to a measurable extent²², the only available portion of reality we shall ever experience. There where the body ends (and to the possibilities of extension we shall not refer to here), is by all means the culminating measure of our experiences within the real. Through the body and by the body we live. Flesh is of the body. Bones, teeth and sinews are of the body. But all these wonderful components we ignore during the correct functioning of the body; it is only when soreness, pain, amputation, sickness and so on, come to interrupt the regular/daily processes of normality that we re-discover parts of our anatomy.

I become aware of my body as having a surface only in the event of feeling discomfort (prickly sensations, cramps) that become transformed into pain through

²² The years we end up living. The sum total of a life span.

an act of reading and recognition ('it hurts!'), which is also a judgement ('it is bad!'). The recognition of a sensation as being painful (from 'it hurts' to 'it is bad' to 'move away') also involves the reconstitution of bodily space, as the reorientation of the bodily relation to that which gets attributed as the cause of the pain. (Ahmed 2014: 24)

It is through pain (reading) that we arrive back into our bodies (recognition). Pain is a means of information relay, with nervous terminals signaling sensations coming from the surface of the body down, or up, the nervous channel into the brain which recognizes, classifies, and reacts to these readings. Placing consciousness back on to the surface of what I recognize as my body. This back and forth between pain, feeling and recognition, is comparable to the act of reading (as Ahmed well implies); as I read down a paragraph I absorb and interpret in a simultaneous instant. This is proven in the body by the painless act of breathing; it is only when we concentrate on our breathing (i.e. meditation) that we are made aware (that we read) and recognize the interior passages of our body: from the mouth or nose down the larynx, accompanied by the expansion and contraction of the rib cage as the lungs fill-up and release air respectively. The body is an experience of constant recognition, and as Ahmed argues pain becomes one of the gateways²³ to identity. There is a primordial relationship between self and body, and from there on, between the body and the society that encapsulates said body. But before we go into society, we must say a few words regarding the mind as it is the mind that apparently controls the body, or, at the very least perceives the whole structuring processes of the body.

Does the body rule the mind or does the mind rule the body? Traditionally, based on the Cartesian logic of the world, the thinking part of the human body is preeminently elevated above

²³ There are many other possible ways of recognizing oneself within the body beyond pain, like movement, touch, conversation, amongst others.

the moving-feeling-rest. We could argue that the process of generating that dry conclusion of the ‘I am’ is sifted both by the thinking mind and the moving body. The abstract and the concrete as a same whole. In this author’s opinion there is no sense in placing one above or below the other²⁴. There is no cleaving the power that holds this supposed duality together. Mind and body are one and the same. Occam’s razor would have us shave-off the idea of a mind from the equation, since the mind belongs (is an integral part) of the body, one and both constituting fundamentally inseparable units of a total whole. Perceiving one or the other in any individual is beyond impossible, can only be done by establishing a most stringent categorization²⁵ which in turn can only create separations through the naming of components. Writing of the divergence between mythological and factual — science-based — language, Alan Watts argues:

(...) factual language dissects and disintegrates experience into categories and oppositions that cannot be resolved. It is the language of either/or, and from its standpoint all that is on the dark side of life — death, evil, and suffering — cannot be assimilated. There is nothing for it but to get rid of it. (Watts 1963: 15)

We cannot establish a human as being either mind or body, this duality is insufferable as well as impractical. The whole process of living takes place in the mind through the body. The establishing of perception itself, which occurs thanks to the feeding of information through the central nervous center to the brain, is what constitutes the whole idea of body. The body is a continuous process of intricately coordinated systems. A constant, non-stop, flow of information perception and categorization (reading and recognition). Through the body the ‘I’ receives/perceives/ingests all

²⁴ “2.0121 Just as we cannot think of spatial objects at all outside space, or temporal objects outside time, so we cannot think of *any* object outside the possibility of its combination with other objects.” *Wittgenstein L. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 2023: 5. In other words, the polarity of the mind versus body question is a problem of perspective. One cannot perceive a figure unless it has a background that brings it into comparative focus.

²⁵ The power of thinking divides the universe into named and classified segments called things and events, which appear to be isolated and independent. (Watts 1963: 110)

information proceeding from the outside. The body houses the mind. The mind perceives the body. The individual personality happens in the space in-between the body and the mind. Once the individual is formed, the congregation of numerous individuals composed of the same body-mind syndrome, give birth, sustain, and constantly polish, a society.

3.3 Shirley Jackson (c. 1916 – 65)

These questions of the body (both individual and societal) mixed in with the mind that perceives them, are crucial to the literary work of Shirley Jackson. As was mentioned above, the ghost in Jackson's short story is a different type of ghost from the one studied in the previous chapter. Going from something that is taken for granted (Hearn's revenant lover) into a more psychological, should we say personal, valuations of how society haunts the individual. This possibility will allow us to work with the ghost from the point of view of individual perception itself, which will then permit us to further our analysis of ghosts within society by the opening up of questions on identity. The ghost that cannot be recognizably pegged as a ghost but that haunts as any ghost haunts can be born both from outside the individual (external, i.e. society) as well from the inside (internal, in the psyche). It is at this crucial point that Shirley Jackson's short story proposes the question, is the main character being haunted by a ghost? Or is she going mad because of the society in which she finds²⁶ herself?

It's the customs rigidly adhered to within a given society (be it fictitious or existing) that tend to shock in Jackson's writing. Take her famous short story "The Lottery", which tells of the process of selection for a public stoning in a small town to insure good crops for the season. It

²⁶ As will be seen further down, it is more a question of losing oneself, of loosening the self from the tight place in which society has placed the individual's individuality. Turning the ghost into a sort of escape valve, like a lonely child's imaginary friend.

caused quite the stir when it was first published, people actually thought it was true! So, which is the scariest? What Jackson writes and presents as fiction or the fact that many people believed it could happen, was happening in the present of the late 1940's. The Lottery is a prime example of how Jackson pits the individual against the society that 'houses' said individual. A state of constant friction, where strange sparks and popping sounds come into being. The underlining question is, how does society affect the body (mental and corporeal) of the individual? These are insidious allegories of the paranormal world of customs and traditions that surround her characters, Jackson's fiction provides a commentary on the many ways in which society exerts oppression.

Another important aspect of her fiction is her masterful use of the supernatural as a metaphor for this lurking presence of evil, latent and overt in her writing, particularly in oppressions of a patriarchal society, and in the victims' sometimes doomed attempts to create possibilities for a life within these strictures. (Anderson 2016: 35-6)

That pageant of postures, society, is implied and maintained by a constant background noise of violence and repression. The individual, as in the body-mind question discussed before, is facing oppression from a society that can be visibly experienced (relationships with other members of society, teachers, parents and so on), or invisibly felt (the aforementioned question of capital). This is the haunting Jackson so wonderfully portrays, one that goes on every day; and worse yet, recognizable to the point of appearing real. There are no plastic molecules underneath the social fabric of Shirley Jackson's America. Only bloody customs. As an example of this, a cold opening to a subchapter from Jackson's novel, "The Haunting of Hill House":

It was the custom, rigidly adhered to (...) for the public executioner, before a quartering, to outline his knife strokes in chalk upon the belly of his victim — for fear of a slip, you understand. (Jackson 1959: 354)

Somewhere along the rigid contour lines of society a strangeness arises. What we come to realize, through Jackson's fiction, is that this strangeness has camouflaged itself into a semblance of normality. Which in turn makes Jackson's literary oeuvre into an outcry against superfluous obligations, customs, inherited vices, etc.; whose only dissolution or possible escape from, is to be found in either madness or total obliteration. And, as can be noted in the few lines of dialogue quoted above, there is also a very dark dry humor involved, a tongue in cheek tone that produces laughter, not because of what is said, but as a defense mechanism. *Oh, this is so true it hurts, I must make light of it, if not, I risk losing my mind.* Jackson's writing is the outlet for the struggle between individual versus society. She does not offer comprehension or solutions, no, what she does provide her readers with, is a sense of self (the body and mind) of her characters; thus, her stories become poignant critiques of society and its machinations, seen most often through the eyes of female characters. All of whom are trying to adapt or cope with society, while being themselves immersed in extreme, and somewhat bizarre situations: haunted houses, doomed families, borderline deranged personalities, etc. This makes Jackson's oeuvre unique, in how she manages to re-create worlds that function and look very much like our own. With the slight difference that things are somewhat askew, hence her being labeled as a genre writer. But this should not distract us from the true form of her literature which is always grounded on the psychology of woman, and why not, entertaining too.

3.4 *Pain*

The reason we have been discussing the human body as well as society for the last few pages, is because Clara Spencer, the main protagonist of *The Tooth* is in pain. She will begin an odyssey of sorts parting from a small town and heading into the city to have her offending tooth extracted. Placing the individual in an extreme situation (of constant pain) in a quest through society, facing the normal perils of a bus ride and city commute. Only for Shirley Jackson, the normal, the everyday, the common, is precisely where the uncanny thrives.

The question of pain, at its most generalized possible form, is a question of occurrence. When it happens, where it happens. Name and thing becoming inseparable. One and the same. This is something we know. That nothing can exist without the name that grounds it to reality. In an equivalent way, pain, is both at the place where the pain is emanating from, as well as in the mind that is mediating, sensing, recording, said pain. As Marshall McLuhan aptly reminds us in his seminal work “*Understanding Media*”:

Physiologically, the central nervous system, that electric network that coordinates the various media of our senses, plays the chief role. Whatever threatens its function must be contained, localized, or cut off, even to the total removal of the offending organ. (McLuhan 1964: 43)

Pain is a threat to the correct flow and functioning of the central nervous system of the individual. Pain gains ascendancy over the personality due to the strain placed on the nervous system. There is a gauge to all sorts and types of pain, local pain, mind numbing pain, mild pain, etc. All this to say, that there are two distinct paths for pain. These being: (1) the place where the pain takes place, a broken arm, a pounding headache, and so on and so forth, as well as (2) the mind/brain that is

receiving/recording all the information proceeding from the nervous outlets concerned with the sensations of pain.

Can we separate pain from the act of feeling the pain? Despite the possibility of being able to generate such a schism, the involvement of the mind-body within the problem of pain underlines the bare fact that no matter the pain, the mind is always affected by it, molded to a certain degree, by the pain. "...the wound comes to stand for identity itself." (Ahmed 2014: 32). Also, pain is an emotion. Just as there are emotional pains that hurt like nothing else hurts (i.e. have you ever gone through a break-up?). Pain can result from both the physical bodily level, and the mental, psychological-emotive level.

For the purposes of this chapter, the question of pain is seen through the outlet of the main character, Clara. This Clara Spencer (the mind-body main character) has a swollen lower molar as the root of the pain she's in. As Sara Ahmed notes in "The Cultural Politics of Emotion", co-suffering is a way of aligning the reader with the subject. In this way, any reader that has had dental problems of their own understands the distressing and lonely situation Clara is in.

The pain in Clara's tooth takes her far from her habitual way of living in the world, forcing her to leave her home to face the outside world in her most raw and delicate form. As will be noted further on, this pain ends up shaking her core identity, passing on from a bodily discomfort to a mental one. There is no longer a subterfuge by which she can escape the responsibility of being herself, which ends up superseding her whole role as woman-housewife-mother and allows her to break free from the incongruity of living out her life as she has been doing so, merged into society. The departure from the ordinary world of housewife, is brought on by the pain. The pain returns Clara back to her body, a body that she does not recognize as hers anymore.

Pain is hence bound up with how we inhabit the world, how we live in relationship to the surfaces, bodies and objects that make up our dwelling places. Our question becomes not so much what is pain, but what does pain do. (Ahmed 2014: 27)

Pain is inherently a private matter, we can relate to Clara only if we, ourselves, have had any sort of tooth ache in the past. For those lucky enough not to have had a tooth ache in their lives, well, a swollen jaw or a tooth extraction might seem a remote fantasy within the realm of the possible. Thus, the pain the character is in creates a relationship not only of empathy but of comparison, how we relate to pain in others mirrors how we relate to our own bodies, and the story of our own body.

Now, if a question of agency were to be assigned to pain, through the presence of a cut or any type of irritation etc.; pain establishes a unique and fortified sense of I AM and this 'I am' that is feeling the pain is such a lonely pro(position). Changing the 'I am' from an intellectual feat of thought to a robust and constant reminder of plain sensation (body and mind become an inseparable insufferable whole). Pain, like fear, robs us of ourselves. By tying down the mind to the sensation of pain we lose the grasp on our consciousness of personality. The pain becomes all. Correspondingly, the idea of death, is also associated — placed in a parallel to — pain. It's painful to be shot, stabbed, cancered to death and so on. This complete separation of the mind/body compendium from the realm of life emanates an aura of painfulness. The tearing of the fragile essence of identity (the I am this person) from the physicality of the body is within our ideation of life the ultimate painful experience.

3.5 *The Tooth*

Enclosed within the few pages of “The Tooth” we can find many of the major traits of Shirley Jackson’s literary questioning. With an overlapping of satire alongside her usual use of non-supernatural terror, or psychological suspense (S.T. Joshi, 2016: 26). Shirley Jackson’s characters are, for the most part, women trapped within a social framework (family, marriages, and so on) narrating from within their mental spaces, desires, thoughts, and illusions.

Clara Spencer is in a double headed pain. The obvious one is caused by her rotten lower molar, the bodily pain produced by a physical certainty, but another pain lies dormant underneath this one. A deeper sense of pain residing within her manifests itself as a feeling of imprisonment within a stringently tight role; induced, enforced, and product, of a patriarchal society. Thus, both these pains force Clara to shed — treat — the rotten agent behind the discomfort.

Talking about pain immediately opens up the question of treatment, with the now famous question: what are you taking for the pain? We always seek immediate relief from pain through medication, drugs, therapy, etc. During the story we read of Clara taking pills (codeine) and drinking unhealthy amounts of coffee to stay awake and maneuver, alone, through New York City during a crowded weekday morning. We get a sense of her surroundings through this groggy/pained state of Clara’s, which places a veil over her reality. Shapes, forms, figures, places, pass her by in a blur. She either sleeps badly because she’s in a bus or a waiting room, or she’s awake and the pain is nagging her. I am the center / Of a circle of pain; wrote Mina Loy, referring to childbirth. The ‘I’ still retains its exclusive dominion amidst a painful experience, while pain perdures the ego endures. In Shirley Jackson’s story, the pain, alongside the drug infused system, make Clara a most — I dare not say unreliable — but rather confusing point of view. Albeit this is a deliberate state which Jackson exploits to further push the outcome into a position of doubt. And

since the whole story is narrated through Clara with Clara doing this and the other, saying one thing and thinking another, well, she becomes the center of our circle of attention for the duration of the story. All this to underline the fact that although the story is easy to follow and read, the language being fairly straight forward, nonetheless the state of Clara's mind and body equilibrium is at the brink of a meltdown and as readers, we get a clear picture of this confusingly painful state.

Fear of pain on the other hand, rests on top of our considerations. Fear of getting hurt (either emotionally or physically) is always a barrier to be crossed when taking/making almost any decision. Will I break my neck if I jump from this balcony? If I reveal my true feelings for.... will I have my heart broken? Fear mediates through pain, but also, fear is not painful. Fear in this sense is a projection into the future, a comparison of states from the where I am now (healthy, I hope) to where I could be if I go through x experience. And just as there is no logic to fear, there is no logic to pain. Any sort of pain is unbearable; hence we avoid pain. At all costs. We fear what pain might reveal, how pain makes us vulnerable and weak if faced soberly. What is most interesting in *The Tooth* is that we are way beyond the point where fear of pain might deter Clara from deciding anything respecting her fictitious life in a fictitious future. From the outset of the story Clara is in pain. Her jaw is swollen. She speaks through a hanky she keeps pressed to her face, making her voice muffled and struggled.

Shirley Jackson's literary creations are always considering both sides of the responsible question for the function of fear within society. On the one hand, the thing that is feared, and secondly, the society that feels, or emanates, such ugly feelings:

Pleasure was in the feeling that the terrors of the night, the jungle, had come close to their safe lighted homes, touched them nearly, and departed, leaving

every family safe but one; an acute physical pleasure like a pain,
(...).²⁷(Jackson 1948: 171)

Here we have a variation on the variety of the pleasures of fear. The pleasure of brushing close to danger, very different from the fearful evocations brought on by the Kabuki play which had compelled Hearn to write; in Jackson's literary oeuvre we are in a state of fear and psychological strain occurring to people within a closely knit society (families, suburban neighborhoods, cities, etc.). The terrors that inhabit the snugly well-lit homes of the middle and upper-class western world. It is with immense relief that one reads Shirley Jackson's "The Tooth" without any sense of discomfort or pain. We are so close to Clara and her plight, that one could almost feel her pain through her disoriented state.

Pain as well as fear, has the ability to smash the established order. Pain will generate a sense of self that forces the individual to isolate itself and come to terms with their own bodies. This accordance between mind and body during pain breaks the temporal outpouring of time, establishing a placid state which takes place before the pain arrived/appeared, and an unendurable present state of a now while in pain. Shirley Jackson manages to create a portal leading outside of society through an innocuous pained tooth, laying bare the malevolent machinations of society (psychological terror). The terrors of the mind further distance their subjects from the real. Ultimately, "The Tooth" transposes its readers from a bodily pain into a further escalation of pain born in the mind. Going from the physical to the psychological.

²⁷ From Shirley Jackson's first novel: *The Road Through the Wall*.

3.6 *A Summary*

As the salient conceptual points of *The Tooth* have been touched upon and somewhat elaborated on, and before we delve deeper into the social cavities of pain, a summary of the story is needed to guide the unfamiliar reader through the events that led up to Clara's unburdening of her pains:

Clara's journey begins in her hometown as she awaits the bus that will take her to New York. She has difficulty speaking because of her swollen jaw. But despite the evident pain she's in, she asks her husband if he's sure he'll be alright without her? He shrugs off her concern and making his voice sound weighty, answers: "I'd never forgive myself if it turned out to be something serious and I let you go to this butcher up here.". This being the reason she's going alone in the middle of the night... apparently, to avoid being butchered. Men, any reason is a good reason to get rid of their wives. He adds accusingly: "You had a toothache on our honeymoon". Pain getting in the way, robbing us of the individual's undivided attention. But Clara is not worried, "I just feel as if I were all tooth. Nothing else"; (my emphasis). Teeth are raw exposed bone. Although technically not considered part of the bone system, teeth owe their hardness to their main component, calcium. This small, calcified piece of Clara has come to the surface of what Clara is as a person. As pain invades the body, all derivatives of personality as well as feeling (obviously) are focused on the pain. Personality loses hold to pain. Pain shapes not only the body housing it, but the ego feeling it as well. The offending tooth has gained relevance through pain. The only way the main character can regain her former placid — watching life pass by status quo — is by dealing with the pain.

Clara gets on the bus to the city and falls asleep in her seat, waking up with a crash of pain to find the bus parked next to an all-night restaurant. She goes into the restaurant for a cup of coffee

only to fall asleep in her seat at the end of the counter. “Someone sat next to her and touched her arm (...) He was wearing a blue suit and he looked tall”. At this stage it’s both the pain Clara’s in, and what she has taken to fight²⁸ it, that tinge her perception of places and people with a high degree of untrustworthiness. This state of hers also imbues the character of Jim, this mysterious tall well-dressed stranger that slides up to her, with a casual-like phantomatic essence. Jim proceeds to get on the bus with her, sitting down in the seat next to her; all the while talking of places farther than Samarkand with the waves ringing on the shore like bells, flutes playing all night and nothing to do all day but lie under the trees. Is Clara having a hallucination? What does this ad-like prattle have to do with her tooth? Things get a bit confusing at this point, with the apparition of Jim from the thick air of the crowded all-night restaurant. It will never be fully established whether Jim is a figment of Clara’s overwrought nervous system, or an actual lurking phantomatic essence.

Clara²⁹ left behind a husband for whom she took care of every little detail — don’t forget to empty the pockets of your suit before you hand it over to the cleaners. Leaving behind a world in which she oversees the management of a household, up to the point where — despite the hurt she’s in — she found the time to arrange with a Mrs. Lang to come make breakfast, lunch, whatever the husband might need in the possible twenty-four hours she is gone from home. The immediate future of her husband is already taken care of, by her! But the pain, alongside the pills she’s taken for the pain, have upset this established order. Now the roles are somewhat reversed, leaving her

²⁸ There is always that idea that pain must be fought against, as you would an enemy, calling to your aid analgesics and other varied substances to help you in this relentless battle against pain.

²⁹ At this point we can present a first conceptual possibility yanked forth from improbable criteria: Clara is dead, the pain killed her and now she is slowly, but surely, abandoning her body. Transitioning. This one tooth that is bothering her so, is a vivid reminder of the pain required to endure death. The bus is the raft on which her soul shall cross over, with the driver acting as psychopomps (Charon crossing the Styx).

completely dependent on Jim's help. He makes sure she sleeps comfortably enclosed inside the darkness of the bus. He tells her what to do: Take your coffee; go to the washroom and clean your face. While constantly enticing her with scenes of natural beauty that clash with the surrounding highway-at-night landscape they are passing through: "The sand is so white it looks like snow, but it's hot, even at night it's hot under your feet".

Pain and journey have become one. With Clara falling asleep every two sentences, and Jim-in-a-blue-suit appearing and disappearing (haunting her). Once they are in the streets of the city, things between Clara and Jim become strained, to the point of becoming weird: "She stood on the corner waiting for the light to change and Jim came swiftly up to her and then away. "Look," he said as he passed, and he held out a handful of pearls³⁰." This being the most bizarre incomprehensible, yet poetic, moment of the whole story. Very telling as well, in what refers to the supernatural (or possible madness) and how it surfaces in the midst of the real, a crowded city street.

The crucial element in the story is the tooth. It holds identity. Clara belongs to this sore lower molar; she gyrates around it, only as its bearer does she acquire importance: "Her tooth, which had brought her here unerringly, seemed now the only part of her to have any identity." (Jackson 215). It is the tooth that has set everything in motion, but it's undeniably Clara that has provided the tooth with a personality, with the specific problems within this journey, with the whole displacement that the pain has caused.

³⁰ "Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!" from T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, 1922. Lines 124 – 125. Eliot pulled this line from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Part of Ariel's song to Ferdinand, describing his father's death by water. Pearls can be used as a euphemism for teeth, white and lustrous. Pearly teeth. Also, in the same poem by Eliot, we have the line: *I will show you fear in a handful of dust*. Along this line of arguing, if fear is equated with dust, with what could we associate pearls?

The truth of the matter is that the tooth must be extracted. To do so, Clara goes across town to the office of a dental surgeon. Before the surgery begins Clara asks the surgeon dentist: will it hurt? and he answers: “we couldn’t stay in business if we hurt people.”. Thus, the dentist becomes an efficient, proficient, and most importantly, painless experience. Pain being bad for business. Unless pain is your business, but that’s a whole different story. The treatment of pain is painless, at least that’s what they say and sell. In Clara’s case the treatment is: knock her out, and have the cause of her pain gone before the patient wakes up. Clara goes under, falls into that deep sleep that had been eluding her all along her bus ride to the city. She goes through a quick dream where Jim makes a brief appearance and then she’s yanked back to reality where she’s sitting in the dentist chair, a nurse is holding her by the arm, the surgeon is gone. Upon waking up she asks three things: 1. Did I talk? 2. Did I say where he was? 3. Where’s my tooth?

There’s a complete summing up of the story within these three questions. The physical pain has been a constant chatter in the background to all her movements. Its presence is felt up until this point in the narrative. The identifying thing-pain that was her lower molar, the whole reason for her painful quest — like Frodo Baggins — was to get rid of it. Now that it is gone, Clara has lost purpose, and with the relief she feels from the pain she gets to have a closer look at herself and her place in the world. The ‘he’ she asks for is unclear, it could either mean the nameless husband or Jim. But since Clara just saw Jim during her sedated state we can safely assume it’s to the latter she’s referring to.

From this point on in the narrative the problem (pain) of identity becomes acute, blooming-like when she fails to recognize her face in a bathroom mirror. Even her own name is alien to herself at this point. Sifting through the things in her purse, taking stock of every item, Clara notes there are no papers, no address book, no identification. She starts throwing things away, first the

barrette that held her hair tight behind her scalp, then a lapel pin with the letter C (both things were tagged with her name) and lastly, she throws away her torn stockings. Leaving the bathroom in her bare feet she takes the elevator to the ground floor, steps out of the building and after a few minutes Jim materializes in front of her and then with: "... her hand in Jim's and her hair down on her shoulders, she ran barefoot through hot sand.". This is the end of the story. The pain is gone, journeys end with lovers meeting. Clara has let go of her previous world of pain and has stepped barefoot into the enchanted world described by Jim.

Once Clara starts questioning herself at a deeper level and stops assuming herself as a functioning part within the machinery of social conventions, as she drops the pretense of being someone, of having a plan she's living through, well, she frees herself from oppression. From a hair-do she probably imposed on herself for practical reasons, she sheds those objects that held her identity in check. In fact, she discards all the prosthetics of a state-based identity. Starting from the moment when she fails to recognize her face in the bathroom mirror, individual and society clash. When the body is in pain, we can localize the pain, identify the affected zone, and treat it. But if the pain comes from being who you are, from being told, molded, into who you are; freedom from this pain is around the bend, mentally, away from the madness we inherit, perpetuate, and accept as the normal routine of the everyday.

The Tooth, or the unexpected journey of Clara Spencer, operates on two interwoven levels: First of all, at a mechanical level, taking Clara from point A to point B. Pain from inflamed tooth implies visiting the dentist. Tooth extraction means relief. Pain is such an unwelcome sensation that it must be treated tout suite. Gotten rid of instantly. Like a stain on a white shirt, it has no place, must be washed, treated, done something with/against. At this stage of the story, the selfish husband male figure vanishes. As soon as there are signs of sickness, pain or disease, the husband

packs his wife in a bus to the city to have her sort out her dental issues, alone. This goes unnoticed because he's so kind, so thoughtful, he'll stay home from work in case she calls needing more money. Clara, the housewife, reaches New York with the help of a strange man (Jim) she meets enroute, who keeps on re-appearing during her day in the city. After her tooth is extracted, Clara has a moment of self-doubt that culminates with her having a mental breakdown, that cannot be precisely described but has something to do with her own recognition of selfhood. The story ends with her walking bare foot down the street/beach (?) with her hair down to her shoulders hand in hand with Jim.

Next, at the uncanny level: the tooth stands not for pain, but for the greater malaise of life within the rigid confines of a society structured by preestablished and preassigned roles. Once the offending tooth is extracted, Clara Spencer becomes 'free' from the bodily pain that had been troubling her and discovers that beneath the tooth, there was a whole other discomfort hidden from view (in plain sight). She ends up by freeing herself from bondage, and social obligations, by throwing her name and salient features away.

But, to our dismay, this freedom is a by-word spoken by a ghostly fellow in a blue suit. Enter Jim, whom we met on the bus, and haven't been able to shake off since. He seems okay, he's charming and what he has to say is never boring, a tad repetitive, but definitely un-tedious. Enticing he is, like ghosts usually are. Because no matter where the ghost may stand within the visual spectrum, they all tend to be quite alluring. In other words, the character of the male husband is replaced by a mysterious stranger with an air of the world, that conveys a sense of beauty to the surrounding mundane city life atmosphere.

Important to note here, that when Clara has her moment of doubt (clarity?) and throws away her name and look, Jim is not with her. She is in the woman's bathroom, surrounded by faces

that are similar to her own, but are not hers. Has Clara gone mad? We can't say for sure. We could argue that she's not thinking straight, not after a minor surgery, but nonetheless her actions are deliberate, methodical, clinically calm. The contrasting effect is that when she leaves the office building, she immediately ends up holding hands with Jim, the both of them walking on warm sand. The transition from busy city street to warm beach is quite smooth, natural, and uninterrupted.

To sum up all of the above together, the mechanical aspects and the uncanniness are intertwined. They are not separate, first one and then the other, no. Instead, we discern them at the same time. Freud, in his well-known essay on the uncanny (the *un-familiar*) quotes the German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch:

One of the surest devices for producing slightly uncanny effects through story-telling,' writes Jentsch, '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, lest he should be prompted to examine and settle the matter at once, for in this way, as we have said, the special emotional effect can be easily dissipated. (Freud 1919: 135)

This is Jackson's greatest ability, that she can create a mystery or a generalized sense of doubt, leaving it unresolved, on the most innocuous (plain everyday) settings. So, the pain and the possible ghostly character never achieve that crescendo moment wherein they all fit together, making perfect sense. Which is precisely her point, that nothing makes sense when closely observed. That true pain comes from being caught up in the way of things. Clara dares to question the why only after she has been roughed up by her trip under medication and pain. She can only

achieve the clarity (or delusional state she is in at the end of the story) because of the journey she has been through.

Let's picture a tooth, that's a small part of the body right? But no matter how small the pain is, once it becomes a problem, it absorbs all the mental concentration (the threat to the central nervous system) needed to normally operate within the world. So we proceed to operate in function to the pain, with the pain, and despite the pain. Clara is not learning to live with the pain, this is why she is seeking treatment. She wants to be free from pain. This desire, this discomfort is what opens her eyes:

(...) It isn't fair, why don't I have any color in my face? There were some pretty faces there, why didn't I take one of those? I didn't have time, she told herself sullenly, they didn't give me time to think, I could have had one of the nice faces, even the blonde would be better. (Jackson 1949: 221)

This vital instant within the story might pass by too quickly for the reader to notice, but what lies underneath Clara's unrecognition of her own face is not only related to a problem of self, but of recognition as a whole. The face plays a central role in the identification not only of features and physical characteristic but also of affects. It's through the face that most affects are expressed, understood, and otherwise made visible:

People are expert readers of faces, and these communications are more often understood than not, even though they often take place outside awareness. So the face plays a central role in the expression and communication of affects (...). (Gibbs 2010: 191)

This could signify that Clara is affectless, and in no way can recognize both herself within her body nor the self of others within their own bodies. This is the problem that lies underneath all the

pain, a schism between the mind and body of an individual. Shirley Jackson stimulates a shifting focus from the bodily to the mental state of her main character, from the expressions on the face to wondering which face to choose. What ends up by coming to the forefront, under Clara's perspective, is a matter of choice, and she feels that the choice was not hers. And that the 'they' she blames for not giving her enough time to choose is society. They are the ones that force Clara to be someone she doesn't want to be. They are the ones doing the choosing for her, forming her appearance, shaping her thoughts. The only problem seems to be that the more she loosens her stability within society, the less she will be able to recognize (read) others and herself.

3.7 *Trouble with Ghosts*

Through Shirley Jackson's use of genre tropes we are always in an in-between the strange and the socially uncomfortable, a place of tension if you will, between the possibility of evil and the uncertainty of the now. This possibility allows us to formulate the question: is Clara going mad or is she having a liberating spiritual moment? Shedding her skin of outer estrangement. The image cast by Jim is truly a signpost (or rock, against which Clara rubs off her skin) within this short story, leading Clara (and the reader) from the too real experiences of pain, bus ride, dentist office etc., into blissful oblivion (or the end, if we want to be pragmatic). Jim, as a character, is left intentionally vague, we only have a notion of his height along with his blue suit. He's an image, a mirage, ungrounded, fleeting, flitting. Through an analysis of Jim's embodiment in the story we can approach a new notion in our appreciation of literary ghosts, situating him at the frontier of sanity and haunting. The critic Robert Hass, who has a paper published on this same story by Shirley Jackson titled: "'The Tooth': Dentistry as Horror, the Imagination as Shield" argues:

The story's mysterious stranger and puzzling ending have raised, beside frank incomprehension, such grim interpretations as that Jim is a "demon lover" leading Clara off to perdition, or that he exists entirely in her imagination, suggesting she may have gone insane. I will read it here instead as more "harmless" and realistic, reflecting Jackson's own considerable personal experience with bad teeth. Her biographer reports she "feared and hated" dental work "even more than most people," a trip to the dentist being "her own personal idea of hell." (Hass 2015: 133)

Hass has a point of view difficult to refute in its willful understanding of reality as a medical symptom, as opposed to our literary interests of descriptive demonstrations that neither place nor consolidate the ghost. We accept this interpretation of Jim as a realistic shield of self-delusion meant to help cope with a stressful traumatic situation. Of course, but what is it saying? What is the medium, i.e. the ghost, implying by sheer force of presence?

To answer this question we'll have to start from the basic inquiry: is Jim haunting Clara? Is Jim a ghost, or a product of Clara's over wrought psyche? Either way it doesn't matter since his function within the story is that of a ghost. A ghost is a ghost is a ghost either in the mind or floating in the outside. With amputees we hear of the term phantom limbs, where limbs that are missing are felt to be there. How do you scratch an itch on a missing leg? Even if we take Jim as a by-product, or side effect, brought on by Clara's self-medicated state, Jim still retains his standard definition as a ghost. Inapprehensible, alluring and mysterious, yet present, all at once.

Jim is mediated through Clara. She is the one who perceives him, we only get a notion of Jim through Clara. He is never a main stay, nor a point of view, it's always Clara that gives us an account of what he does, says and so on. From our perspective as readers, we are faced with a definitive swing. On the one hand he behaves (is described) as a ghostly figure, and on the other

hand we know very well that Clara is in no state to give a clear picture of her surroundings and encounters during her trip to the city. He belongs to both her state and her journey, drifting into the narration at the most liminal space in the whole story: an all-night restaurant by the highway. Where the sense of no-man's land is reinforced by the transitional aspect of motorists, buses, and so on, a societal limbo-like pit stop. This is Shirley Jackson's power; she makes doubt clear, not explicit, while still navigating conventions of genre and character-based plot developments. The following is from Jackson's 5th novel, "The Haunting of Hill House":

No ghost in all the long histories of ghosts has ever hurt anyone physically. The only damage done is by the victim to himself. One cannot even say that the ghost attacks the mind, because the mind, the conscious, thinking mind, is invulnerable; in all our conscious minds (...) there is not one iota of belief in ghosts. (Jackson 1959: 340)

Even the possibility of ghost is a ghost. In and of itself the ghost acts as a ghost³¹ within conscious minds. In other words: if I see a ghost, interact with one, whatever, one of two things is possible, either I'm mad (deluded), or I did see/meet an actual ghost. In the second case, because of the nature of ghosts there is no way of proving that I had an actual encounter with one. If two people see a ghost the same thing applies, and so and so forth until we can talk about mass hysteria, mass hallucinations, and explain all possible ghost sightings as brought forth from a deranged state in the individual, rather than a possibility within the real. So ghost sightings can and cannot happen at the same time. But mostly we tend to blame the individual since no verifiable facts can, or ever

³¹ "*Spirits*, therefore, viewed from the psychological angle, are unconscious autonomous complexes which appear as projections because they have no direct association with the ego." **Jung** (from: 'The Psychological Foundations of the Belief in Spirits' (1920/1948: 585).

An apparition, phantom, or spectral form; otherwise known as spirits — no matter how we name *it*, the ghost is intangible in essence. Wind-like, hovering, haunting, apparitions share that quality of transparency best put by the adverb, *almost*. As in the almost, of seeing, of hearing, sensing, perceiving... a slight mark in the gauge of possibility.

have been (?) given to factually prove their existence. Making the possibility of accepting the ghost, ghostly. That is to say, the ghost ends up by being a ghost. The thing and the definition are one and the same. There is no cake but still, you can eat it all (because it was never there in the first place).

The framework provided by the idea that the only damage done is by the victim to themselves, would somehow prove once and forever, and again, that Jim is a ghost. He is the experience/expression of a ghost in a literary and I dare say philosophical way. Melanie R. Anderson's essay on Shirley Jackson's Hill House provides us with further explanation:

In ghost stories of the uncanny, it is never crystal clear if the ghosts that are witnessed truly exist or are caused by illusions or even delusions – none of the senses can be trusted to interpret reliably the observed events. (Anderson 40)

Shirley Jackson uses the ghost as a deceptive device. A could-be possibility that doesn't shine as the truth, more as a psychological chance. This same doubt could be applied to everything that supposedly exists but lacks a body. Like laws, or opinions. The same manner in which stigmas accompany certain ideas/concepts, these reserved feelings about *x*, haunt *x*. But Mrs. Jackson's literature aims much higher than that. It's not simply to prove or disprove a ghostly sighting, as if seeking an answer for the functioning of the supernatural. This is where Jim's ambiguousness plays on many different levels: his bodily presence is ghostly, yes, that much is clear (reverse pun intended) but there's also the matter of what he says, and how he says it. Enticing and seductive. Whispered to your ear, inside the lull of the tight-knit darkness of a cross country bus. He touches her, but barley; respectful yet dominant. He is the ghost of a man. We could venture a silly conjecture of seduction by a well-dressed man of the world. A James Bond-like figure that appeals to suburban mothers. Maybe Jim could be part of that delusion, why not? Escaping to a hot-sand-

no-shoes-required paradise with a good-looking stranger. It's borderline erotic. Except nothing happens, erotically speaking, between Clara and Jim.

He is deception, a mirage, a thing where there could be no-thing. And yet, he is constantly present somehow (with Clara asking for him after her operation is over). What is Jim? What does he mean? Why, why on earth does he go on and on about distant lands? Is this a reflection of escape, some illusion from a catalog once seen and forgotten, except for that beach, that sand, the heat. God, the heat, the sheer idea of it is always convoluted with ideas of escape, the refreshing heat, the sun, the sensual outdoors, those distant lands are what we now call paradise. Nostalgic scenery at best. Not as the mere means of relaxation but as total escape. Nothing to do inside, can't abide that, can't be cooped up all the time. That is no way to live. You have to break free. Break those bonds of illusion that have trapped us in a life we don't want to live. Within roles we do not wish to comply with. These ideas still resound today as much as they did in Shirley's time.

Somehow the poetic image invoked by Hearn of Japan, a dream like land of spirits and still-life images that rest indelibly stuck in the mind, is reflected in Jim's evocative lines of dialogue. Both Hearn's tale and Shirley Jackson's story are infusions of a world peopled with ghosts that promise love, and for those less inclined to be romantic, think of the ghost as a means of escape. Of breaking free from the oppression of living in society. Even if it means death, or madness, following the ghost is a way of transitioning beyond the stagnant state of obedience and rule following. The true essence of Clara's repressed desires are embodied by ghostly Jim. The way he treats her along the bus ride is already a clear-cut contrast to her absent husband, even his prattle deeply diverges from the business-like dialogue she has with her husband. This is not just the ghost of a man, this is the ghost of the man Clara wants (desires) was beside her helping her and accompanying her.

3. 8 *Escape*

*Conventions are, indeed, all that shields us from the shivering void,
though often they do so but poorly and desperately.*

Aickman, Robert. *The Real Road to the Church*

As this chapter on pain comes to a close, the final union between what has been our double focus thus far (the pain felt by the main character of *The Tooth* and the ghost that haunts said main character), must be resolved as a means of clarifying the emancipation described at the end of the story. Since it is this feeling — or act — of escape, of freeing oneself from the bondage caused by any sort of constraint, be it bodily, physical, mental, social, etc., that provides not only the closure to the story but is also present throughout the literary work of Shirley Jackson. And, lest we forget, Hearn's tale also ended in a liberation (of sorts) from the bondage of illusion and suffering by way of death. Making this question of escape (and not death) the crucial theme which must be touched upon.

The bifocal focus on pain and the ghost has led us to an underlying questioning of the identity of the self. This pain of selfhood awakened within Clara is treated (by her) much in the same way as her tooth was treated, by inspecting and throwing away. She throws away the stuff that held her down within her role (mindset, mind frame) and identity in society wherein the idea of 'designation' becomes a species of immobility from which the individual has no recourse to difference. Seen here simply, and humorously expressed in a cartoon by Dan Piraro:



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This single standing vignette is a commentary on the same problem of mass-produced identities as Clara's brief confused scene with the bathroom mirror where she fails to recognize her own face. In this vignette a group of office men all looking very similar to one another, dressed in the same way, all of them holding the same accessories (briefcase and newspaper), and all of them sporting variations on the same exact haircut. These men are made to look quite similar at a glance and in detail, but even so, they all possess varying degrees of personal traits that differentiate them from each other (height, nose length, etc.).

Clara, on the other hand, after having unburdened herself of her pained tooth, enters into the same line of questioning as the man speaking in the cartoon: 'Who am I? Which is one of the many possible phrasings for the question: which of these faces is mine? We all look so similar, is not just a problem of the individual, this becomes a societal question. When Clara decides to shed the 'look' she had adopted as a normalized part of her life, a small-town housewife mother of two;

³² Piraro, D. *Too Bizarro*. Chronicle Books, San Francisco: 1987. Page 43.

a freed version of her is (not born) but liberated. Which brings us back full circle to Sara Ahmed's discussion, on how pain places the subject back in consciousness with his (or her) body, identity. With awareness going to the surface of the body as a means of recognition, and from there on, once recognition is established, the possibility of repelling or accepting all external stimulation or danger, can be implemented.

Clara Spencer's ultimate plight was her identity; from the casual observation she makes to her husband at the beginning of the story: 'I feel like I'm only tooth', passing through the bus ride to the city where she is described as being nothing³³, to her final act of throwing away her name, Clara has been slowly but surely establishing herself (with herself). Through pain she has been led to rethink her bodily expression of self, making the loosening of her hair, going barefoot, acts of very simple rebellion against the established order (look, appearance) of things. She is breaking from the established boundaries of what is normal, of what should be done, how she should behave and act. Which makes Shirley Jackson's *Tooth* a clear picture of the horror residing in what could be termed as the normal assessment of life.

There is no possible route back to normal in Shirley Jackson's literary world, where too often finding oneself and losing oneself confuse themselves seamlessly. The proverbial happy ending exists for Clara Spencer only in a complete abandonment of all the pieces that held her taut as wife-mother-woman-straight-middle class, what have you, white, etc. Taken loosely, the end of the short story is really the first steps of a housewife going mad. Or even possibly, escaping with another man (the ghost). But these first layer interpretations forgo the whole process through which Clara has been going through all along. Yes — the ending of the story can be interpreted as a possible slipping into madness — but the end could also affect the rest of the narrative by robbing

³³ "*Inside the bus, traveling on, she was nothing...*" (Jackson, page 212).

it of its realist pretensions and elevating it, once again, to this idea of allegory we discussed during the first chapter. An allegory for the freedom of pain, which likewise means freedom from the social boundaries we cannot see but that hold us rigidly in their embrace. Clara's last barefoot stroll through sandy beaches is, in fact, an act of courage, of positioning herself where she wants to be, how (and who) she wants to be. One could only wish to have all dentist's appointments end in such healthy existential and auto reflexive ways. Because what can be, and to a great extent is, called, referred to, as sanity, is, in fact, filled with enormous amounts of in-sanity. The squeezing out, establishing, of normality is a trenchant coup over the lowered heads of our primordial behaviors. And it is primarily to this insane saneness, within the real, that Shirley Jackson dedicated her literary career. Not as a lampooning of society, more like the shrieks of horror brought on by an endless repetition of patterns. This sentiment was never better expressed, by Jackson, than in the opening sentence to her novel *The Haunting of Hill House*, which reads: "No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality (...)". (Jackson 1959: 243) Emphasis added.

The short story "The Tooth", then, stands for this statement. As proof, as example, as demonstration of how much a person has to withstand to live under conditions of absolute reality. Which also raises the question, what are conditions of absolute reality? They are conventions, regulations, laws, parameters of being and behavior, i.e. the way things are usually done. Like signs pointing down a well-known, clear-cut road, one that has been pre-established, pre-condition, pre-everything. Clara is looking to break free, first we believe that she solely wants to break free from the pain caused by her tooth, but the more we get to know her, be with her, the more we come to understand that she is seeking a way to break from everything! Everything being, in this particular case, absolute reality. Absolute normalcy.

A Conclusion

“...the twain were fettered, each to each, by the bond of
illusion which is stronger than bonds of iron.”

Hearn, Lafcadio. *A Passional Karma*

In doing a cold analysis of all the things that make up a life lived, going from the present tense to a definite past, whatever is left undone — unfinished — is always a gap. A hole through which the myriad different pieces of desire and anguish can filter and pass on to other generations of living men, women and so forth. Still, there seems to exist a definite idea to what life is, does and should be. The *how* of things is stipulated and preprogramed in a known melody of process and result. This action will lead to this or that end.

As a statement of nonbeing we could offer ourselves to stillness like the performance art of Marina Abramovic and Ulay; who *performed* during entire days just by sitting and letting time pass, staying intentionally still (unmovable) and quiet³⁴. Another example that comes to mind is the great Tehching Hsieh, and his yearlong pieces of performance art where he would put himself to the test of time with incredible feats of resistance, like locking himself up for a year in his studio as if he were a prisoner, or his infamous Time Clock Piece where he punched every hour on the hour for a whole year! These extensions of human time, of rebellion against established order are works of Art; like a window, they become discourses that possibly praise or sidestep, critique, or attack, the normalized conceptions of *how* life *should* be lived.

This research has been seeking for a snake path into this implied dichotomy of the possibilities of Art through the work of Hearn and Jackson; the beehive of possibilities seen

³⁴ This stillness I find to be very enticing, since it seems to counterbalance the idea of the constantly moving ghost we've been working with.

through two lenses: the poetical evocative and sensual world of Hearn alongside the lyrical corporeal and oppressive existence that Jackson so well conveys. If the life unexamined is not worth living, where does that leave the idea of death? Shedding all the morbid nonsense that attaches itself to any worthwhile conversation about death, we keep coming up against a wall of certitude beyond which there is apparently no possible opinion to be formulated. Which is why literature is so important, the stories we tell each other forge the present time we live in. This was best thought by Ursula K. Le Guin in her essay “*The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*”, in which she states the following:

I would go so far as to say that the natural, proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular powerful relation to another and to us. (Le Guin 1988: 34)

This, then, is what we hold dear when we study literature, a possible reflective meaning for all things that compose life in all its intricate details and flavors. The great emptiness of death is filled with stories, and the best of them are ghost stories. Because the ghost is always a formulation into a possibility, the ghost *could* happen while also never achieving the status of certainty. The ghost breeds all important *doubt*. There is no coming back from the regions of death, only stories filter through. They create a possible way, be it true or not, no one truly cares, what matters is the story and how it's told. Nothing else matters.

Before we close and say goodbye and nevermore, there must be a distinguishing feature (stated) between what has been gained in consciousness and the perfect state of obliviousness born from the inevitable silence that will separate us. Between the ghost on the one hand, fear on the

other and society bringing up the rear, an un-expected triangular force of action-reaction-consequence has come forth. In hindsight this triangulation would appear to be the most normal of occurrences, an everyday (unseen) affair. Which in truth it is, this being the way in which our human conception into the nature of the vanishing beast of *Time* works. Always forward and invisible. The tip of the Arrow of Time³⁵ is steeped in the diaphanous illusion of directionality. The ghost brings down this illusion. The sheer idea of something making a come-back from beyond the grave, setting fashion trends aside, seems impossible under our current notions on Time. Nonetheless the general conceptual idea of ghost helps us give a loose image-like definition of events, phenomena, that are not only unexplainable but apparently impossible as well. If I were to believe without a mental scoff in the stories my grandmother told me as a child, I would have to accept the *fact* that the morning my grandfather died the candle by my dear gran's bed lit itself all on its own. I don't intend to disrespectfully disqualify her grief or her memory of that day by calling the autonomous combustion of her bedside candle a tall tale, not at all. On the contrary what I've set out to prove during this research is that these types of stories — in which a ghost appears and functions in some way or another — are not mere fantasies or fabrications of an imaginative mind. This is how we explain the universe to each other, by giving a human form/explanation to the happenings which we don't comprehend.

Clearly Hearn and Jackson had more in mind than entertaining an audience when they wrote these two stories. There is in them the sense of a perception of the world that is received, by trying to give form into writing something hitherto unseen, unthought of, or quite simply forgotten. As if they could explain something invisible through a literary elaboration. Since certain aspects of reality cannot be put into words, or numbers and equations, many things resist the bureaucratic

³⁵ Also known as Time's Arrow, is the one-way direction in which we *perceive* time to flow. In other words, one cannot wake up and be in the yesterday of today. We are always going forward in time.

heaviness we try and force them in to. Which brings to mind one of the factors I have failed to mention during this research, namely that which is termed as spirit. This important term stands in stark contrast to the ghost; the noun spirit is somehow possessed with a wider sense of suppleness. This is where this research could continue on afterwards, with a widening of the conceptual field of the ghost (specters, phantoms, etc.) with the idea of spirit. All of these terms convey a different theme, meaning, reason, which allows them to exist as, pardon the intrusion, embodiments of the possibility of the ghost. There is a nefarious alphabet in use that hints at much more than what the visual element conveys. There is a stratum of meaning and volition within the words chosen to describe an uncanny phenomenon. For now we have only touched on the subject of the ghost, but if we add the term spirit into the conceptual mix we could possibly pin point and describe other relevant aspects of society.

In a broader sense of terminology the idea of spirit can be easily blurred into the idea of the ghost, which is where the theoretical thinking of the past is so helpful, it allows us to think clearly like a tool designed for the mind. Within the idea of spirit we have a concept that is incorporeal, lacking the heaviness of the physical body, making the concept of spirit a lightweight idea compared to that of the ghost. Even if normally the ghost is imagined (portrayed) as something light and fluid, spirit carries within it a sense of essence. Phrases like the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the times, or the fighting spirit... have in them the idea of something that whirls in residence within, like the soul (another intangible concept). On the other hand the ghost carries with it the other more nefarious aspect of haunting. Spirit and fear don't go together like ghost and fear do, and this is all due to the haunting aspect of the ghost.

The philosopher Jacques Derrida has already done a very thorough job of establishing the ontological possibilities that emanate from the concept of ghostliness, only he prefers the term specter:

The specter, as its name indicates, is the *frequency* of a certain visibility. But not the visibility of the invisible. And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being. The specter is also, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects — on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. (Derrida 1994: 125) [author's emphasis]

Derrida keeps the idea of the ghost linked to an emanation from a beyond, something that lies behind the screen of visibility. But in bringing problems of visibility to bear, he neglects to hold popular formulations for the ghost as a part of his critical equation. It is well worth reiterating that the present research has sought to stretch its analytical hand towards those representations that seem biased conceptions of genre. The image of the ghost, embodied or bodiless, is what matters to us. These two stories are haunted by ghosts, a conception within a conception provided by a visual descriptive representation, the screen on which the phantoms of the human imagination are projected on to. In other words, we are the ghost, we imagine it because we see it (or don't see it ad infinitum). We will be the spirits, and what we carry into that delicate future is inevitably part of the now.

In bringing this research to a close we can now ask ourselves the same question we started with from a slightly different angle: what is the effect of the ghost? No matter the form or shape *it* assumes, the ghost is undeniably part of our human world, call it folklore if you will, but its function goes over and beyond morals and amusement. Before we try and resolve this new question

on the effect of the ghost, an explicative parenthesis must take place. In both case studies we looked through during the course of this research, the presence of the ghost was always confused, attached, or under the semblance of a human figure. Shinzaburō saw his dead lover as she *used* to be when alive and Clara Spencer could interact with Jim, even if his appearance was not clearly defined, his presence was felt and described as being human and not some other thing.

Hearn showed us fear emanating from a place of inevitability, or *karma*. Shinzaburō would have greatly benefited from doing nothing, an actionless hero does not cause problems, or reverberations that in turn affect his living status. Hearn, who had traveled halfway around the world during the turn of the nineteenth century, realized that all societies, in any form, shape or time, create their own hauntings. The ghost in Hearn is a byproduct of society, to what effect? Shinzaburō was so deluded by his desire for his former lover that he could not break the bonds of illusion cast by the spell of his own desire. He was first consumed by the governing rules of the Samurai society he was a part of and then he failed in his own personal fight against desire and lust. He talked, touched and even slept with the ghost before he died of fright. For a hero so consumed by his own passional desires, his *karma* was his own undoing. In other words, the position he held in society, as well as the need to behave in a certain way within a society, was what led him down the path of dutiful death at the arms of his lover. To free oneself of karma one would have to do the impossible act of establishing oneself in a constant state of present(ness). Thus safeguarding oneself in disquieting stillness. A place deemed impossible by society and even our own bodies, which were made for movement and action. The ghost is a reminder, that whatever you do, will be your undoing. So do so slowly.

For her part, Shirley Jackson also reiterated the critique of a society filled with pitfalls of dangerous terms. She seems to be saying that if you accept the place society has seen fit to be

deemed as yours, well, beware the consequences to your mind. The ghost in Shirley Jackson's story was a personal phantom, a fleeting glimpse into a different world (life). To break free from the deep segregated oppressive society Clara Spencer lived in, her only option — apparently — was madness. Between madness and the ghost, never chose normality. Never let them, or they, tell you what to wear, or how to behave. Be your own and own yourself. Fear drives us away from thinking, from peeking over the edge into the precipice of primordial chaos. Those things we thrust aside and ignore, or worse yet, accept because there is no possibility of change, are the ones that come back to haunt us once our back is turned. We can quite easily create our own ghosts, our own bonds of illusion that hold us so tight we run the risk of losing contact with our own bodies.

To speculate even further, we could start considering the visible spectrum of light. Based on science we know that our eyes can capture and perceive only a portion of what light *is*. Which means that we could be surrounded by all manner of ghosts that we fail to see. With only those that break the pattern of invisibility becoming apparent. Fear is the affect of change, it comes from the boundless individual within, not encompassed by the presence of ego or personality, primordial like the air we breathe and the muscles that hold us tight within our body. Fear is the natural response to the unknown, to uncertainty. The body translates fear outside of the realm of the intellect. In other words, once fear emerges thinking is annulled and if the fear augments, all ruling panic is born. The affect of fear turns round and round within our central nervous system as a regulation of sorts, a positioning of emotions within a scale of preservation or pleasure. Fear can cause pleasure when at a distance, in doing so we are not being affected by fear, instead, through fear we are discovering other possibilities of pleasure.

The possibility of the ghost can take place on both planes, the (in)visible exterior and the unknown inside of psychology and emotions. But if we can see beyond our capabilities through

the help of an apparatus, could we possibly feel beyond as well? In staying within the confines of literature and storytelling, we know that death holds awesome power over the living. The constant menace of an end is what creates the prickling sensations on the surface of our skin. The ghost represents a higher level of spiritual existence, a voice from beyond life that speaks to the living. Is it cause or consequence? The never-ending truth of the matter is that the ghost is best seen when unexpected. Seen at an angle if you will, not straightforward. It's always at the corner of vision that reality blurs, loses focus through a disregard of attention. This is where the ghost resides. Where meaning breaks and feeling starts.

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