

Université de Montréal

A Hauntology of Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*

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Ce mémoire intitulé

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Résumé

Ce mémoire est une lecture hantologique du roman *The Double Hook* de Sheila Watson. Une telle lecture accorde une importance particulière aux fantômes et aux spectres qui se trouvent dans un texte ou qui le hantent. La hantologie étant un mouvement de pensée introduit par Jacques Derrida dans *Spectres de Marx*, cet ouvrage de Derrida se veut à la fois un point de départ et un site important de mon analyse auquel je retourne tout au long de ce mémoire. De plus, à travers les écrits de plusieurs spécialistes de la littérature canadienne-anglaise tels que Marlene Goldman, Margaret Turner et Cynthia Sugars, ce mémoire explore ce que le roman de Watson permet de découvrir à propos de ce qui hante l'imaginaire collectif canadien. Dans une première partie de ce mémoire, je concentre mon analyse sur les spectres textuels qui hantent les pages du roman de Watson. Les mythes autochtones, les récits chrétiens, les conventions du 'Western' et du roman régional, ainsi que les traces de plusieurs textes modernistes, semblent hanter la structure du roman et l'utilisation du langage qui crée l'histoire présentée par Watson. Dans le deuxième chapitre de ce mémoire, mon analyse se tourne vers les fantômes et les personnages fantomatiques qui existent dans le monde fictionnel créé par Watson. Les personnages tels que la mère de la famille Potter et Coyote sont fréquemment associés aux tropes du gothique et lus comme étant des spectres et ce sont de telles lectures qui ponctuent mon analyse de cet important roman.

Mots-clés : Hantologie, spectres, littérature canadienne, Sheila Watson, ontologie

Abstract

This thesis consists of a study of haunting, both at the textual and fictional level, in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*. In this hauntology of the novel, I explore the texts and cultural archetypes that haunt Watson's novel as well as the ghosts, spectral figures, and haunting spaces and places represented in the novel. The theoretical movement of hauntology introduced by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* is a fundamental work in contemporary studies of the tropes of the Gothic and of a more generalized haunting that threatens notions of stability in our understanding of existence. Moreover, the haunting figures and texts in Watson's novel subvert the heterogenous conception of a national discourse in Canada. The insights provided by scholars such as Marlene Goldman, Margaret Turner, and Cynthia Sugars, who are concerned with what Watson's use of spectral figures in her narrative accomplishes in relation to writing the settler-colonizer nation of Canada, contribute to informing my argument about the place Watson's novel occupies in the Canadian collective imaginary. In the first chapter of this thesis, I focus on the textual hauntings in the pages of Watson's novel. Indigenous myths, Christian rituals, conventions of the western and regional novel, and modernist texts haunt the novel's structure, content, and the language that constitutes it. In the second chapter of this thesis, I direct my attention towards the haunting and haunted figures that exist in the world created by Watson. In both chapters, my goal is to converse with the specters I see in the novel, to give a voice to what is not explicitly said and to find what lies between the fragments of Watson's experimental prose.

Keywords: Hauntology, specters, Canadian Literature, Sheila Watson, ontology

Table of Contents

Résumé.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Acknowledgements.....	6
1 Introduction: Fragments, Traces, and Haunts in <i>The Double Hook</i>	7
1.1 Authorial Haunts: Watson Responds	20
1.2 Beginning with Ghosts.....	23
2 Textual Hauntings and Ghosts in the Intertext	27
2.1 Haunting in The Writing Process.....	31
2.2 Ghosts of the Scriptures	35
2.3 Language and Messengers in <i>The Double Hook</i>	44
2.4 Echoes of Modernism	47
2.5 John Grube and Writing Western Canada	50
3 Ghostly Figures in <i>The Double Hook</i> : The Uncanny Now, Here, and There	54
3.1 The Old Lady, Specters, and ‘the Other’	58
3.2 Coyote: God or Ghost or Nor or Neither	65
3.3 Letting the World See: Vision, Sight, and Presence Under Coyote’s Eye	68
3.4 Inescapable Temporalities: Felix and Specters.....	72
3.5 The Burning of the House.....	76
4 Conclusion: “Figures, Made of Words”.....	80
Works Cited and Consulted	83

To Isabelle

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1 Introduction: Fragments, Traces, and Haunts in *The Double Hook*

There exists, in the scholarly world surrounding Sheila Watson's writings, a conversation preoccupied with the intricate and puzzling ways in which Watson's use of language complicates the production of meaning. Watson's first published novel *The Double Hook* has been central to this discussion and it has brought up, as Beverly Mitchell claims, the necessity to find "other criteria that will take into account not only the similarities between the literature of Canada and that of other countries, but also the differences" (99). The need for such criteria comes, in part at least, from the fact that, in the novel, "the questions of Canada and of human being in Canada are framed by and within new world discourse" (Turner 64). The question of how meaning is both produced and perceived in Watson's text is therefore tainted with the problems associated with the very concept of a 'new world.' For Margaret Turner, Watson demonstrates an awareness of the complexities that writing this 'new world' entails:

[Watson] fragments the intertexts of Western culture to show that meaning and human being are possible only within discursive structures; she thematizes this issue by having figures move from speech to silence to speech again, an event that resonates with echoes of classical, Christian, and native mythologies of creation and apocalypse. (64)

Turner's observations with regards to the fragmentation that characterizes Watson's narrative are essential to my reading of the novel. It is in this fragmentation, which creates fissures between discourses, that the traces and echoes of the past come into existence and imbue the text with uncanny voices. This intrusion of meaning in the gaps between silence and speech suggests that the traces of the mythological discourses that are present in Watson's novel appear

as a result of the relationship between what is expressed in language and what is kept unspoken. Turner and Mitchell both point to Canada's particularity as a cultural space in which creating literary works must compose with a silenced past and, because it is written and read in such a context, a text such as Watson's *The Double Hook* runs the risk of re-enacting the very silencing of some of the stories in this discursive space. Since Watson frames "a substantially white narrative (or at least one with pervasive white literary echoes and analogues) 'under Coyote's eye' and then [recounts] it partly in the words of that traditional Native American trickster as well" (Davidson 58), the characterization as trace of both settler and Indigenous narratives allows me to complicate how the tropes of both exist in the novel. If conventions of white-settler narratives are present in the text, what is their relationship to those of Indigenous narratives and how, in language and in the fictional elements of the text, do the latter inform the production and perception of meaning? On the one hand, the spectrality of some of the texts, figures, and archetypes used by Watson to create this novel contributes, in a sense, to inform our collective imaginary that "a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back" (*Specters of Marx* 123). On the other hand, some of the ghostly figures in Watson's novel reproduce "[t]he portrayal of Indigenous peoples as fading ghosts" (Cameron 385). Specters are challenging and unsettling sites of inquiry that often perpetuate rather than resolve the problems they are indicators of.

My reading of Watson's novel will therefore address how the tropes of haunting presented in it can be closely related to a discourse that undermines the existence of the Indigenous other before settlement in Canada in order to construct a homogenous and normative national identity. It is thus important for me to consider this in addressing the literary ghosts that haunt the novel. The latter have predominantly been coming from this hegemonic discourse

which often silences Indigenous voices. This is also the case with the ghosts that are represented in the text. However, such ghosts have conflated functions in the novel: they simultaneously originate from a settler-invader discourse's attempt to silence other non-conforming discourses and unsettle or destabilize that same discourse. Therefore, this introduction allows me to explore how Watson's novel presents these unsettling figures and uses of language and to introduce the theoretical framework (hauntology) through which I will develop an understanding of the ways in which haunting works in the context of the novel.

The first chapter of this thesis will look at the haunting of Watson's novel by other texts. In this chapter, I will analyze the poetic-prose in which Watson writes her story to understand how interstices may be created between words and how haunting may take place in these gaps. This reading will therefore draw upon much of Jacques Derrida's work on deconstruction and hauntology and on the work of Julian Wolfreys whose theory of textual haunting provides important insights on Watson's novel. This chapter will focus on what creates, in the novel, "the play of possible meanings; the text not as artifact but as enabling act. Not meaning, but the possibility of meanings" (Kroetsch and Bessai 208).

The second chapter of this thesis will discuss the haunting figures, characters, and landscapes of Watson's novel to find out how they may inform our understanding of existence, presence, and visibility or invisibility. In this final chapter, I will work towards uncovering how haunting takes place through some of the symbols, figures, and events in Watson's novel. As Nancy F. Corbett argues in "Closed Circle,"

the theme of sight and insight is woven into every page of the novel. Each character is defined in terms of how he sees, what he sees, and, perhaps most importantly, how he feels about seeing. It is not ordinary perception which is the issue here, but a kind of

seeing through or beyond ordinary events in order to discover their hidden meanings.

(116)

This analysis of haunting as represented in the novel will therefore link back to the more formal analysis of the text and provide an explanation of how the novel demonstrates a yearning for wholeness and for the ability to fuse everything together, to condense, merge, and, as Watson writes in her journals, “make it come whole—to fuse completely character, event, setting” (*Always Someone to Kill the Doves* 151).

In my reading of Watson’s novel, the scholarly work done on figures, tropes, and literary and cultural archetypes allows me to shed light on *The Double Hook*’s function as a literary site of encounter with specters. In his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of *The Double Hook*, John Grube reaches for some of these tropes to identify what are, according to him, the literary genres to which the novel corresponds. Grube argues that readers may find that “the novel appears to be written in the clichés of the regional idyll, the western, the ethnic-group novel” (73). However, in his analysis, Grube concludes that, rather than merely conforming to these literary genres, Watson’s novel “explodes” their tropes and archetypes and becomes the “anti-western,” “anti-regional,” and “anti-ethnic-group” novel (80). Furthermore, Grube’s use of the word ‘ghost’ to describe the genres he claims the novel explodes introduces a new ‘figure’ in the treatment of the text and in considerations of the text as being haunted by other texts. Grube’s use of the word ghost, in fact, points to the presence of textual specters in the text and recuperates the notion of haunting found in the world created in the novel to discuss the text’s own haunted nature. In the gaps that exist between the world created in the novel by language

and the world ‘outside’ of the novel (notably the speculative scholarly world),¹ Grube hints at the presence of ghosts that undermine the very distinction between language and the world. However, to say that Grube is one of the few scholars to *see* other literary texts, whether they are existing texts or archetypes and genres of literary works, is an understatement. In fact, scholars have observed the presence of other literary texts (either in the form of traces which have been interpreted by readers or in the form of more explicit and less subjective allusions and textual elements) in the novel.

The novel’s intertextuality, its existence as a text in which other texts appear, offers an opportunity to discuss its structure. For Mark Wigley, because of their inherently fragmented nature,² texts can no longer be viewed in terms of the rigidity of their words and of their meaning. Wigley writes that “[t]he fissures that divide any text are actually folds that bind them to that which appears outside them, and it is precisely these folds that constitute texts as such, producing the very sense of an inside and outside that they subvert” (5). Furthermore, Wigley’s study of deconstruction’s relationship to architecture proves relevant to a study of Watson’s *The Double Hook* because of the novel’s architectural style. In “Sheila Watson, Trickster,” George Bowering observes that “the book is a spatial art, unlike film or music with their passive audiences, more like sculpture or architecture” (189). Therefore, *The Double Hook*, like any text according to Wigley, subverts its own divisions and, its fragmented prose, which has often been

¹ Here, these scholarly speculations may be understood from Jacques Derrida’s point of view when he writes that “[s]peculation always speculates on some specter, it speculates in the mirror of what it produces, on the spectacle that it gives itself and that it gives itself to see. It believes in what it believes it sees: in representations” (183).

² Wigley, drawing upon the work of Walter Benjamin on translation and on that of Jacques Derrida on deconstruction, advances that “a text is never an organic, unified whole. It is already corrupted, already fissured, inhabited by something ‘alien’” (3).

deemed poetic and therefore highly dependant on structure, folds in on itself and becomes part of the world it creates. However, because “the 1:1 relationship of word to world found in the usual Canadian prose (Rule, Munro), does not hold here [in Watson’s novel]” (Bowering 189), the subversion of an outside and inside by the text is even more dramatic. Watson’s novel demands that the very notions of inside and outside be revisited in order for the ways in which it conveys meaning to be grasped. Textual haunting in relation to the novel can therefore be considered both as a means of exploring meaning in a text and the result of the conflation between a text’s ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ discursive spaces; the outside text created by readers coming back to haunt the original text and bringing with it other texts, interpretations, and meanings.

The dichotomy between that which is represented in the novel (inside) and that which, in the world outside of the novel, the signified,³ is further blurred by Watson’s own writings about her intentions in creating *The Double Hook*. Watson’s own words concerning her intentions with the novel when, for example, she writes that she wanted to “do something about the West, which wasn’t a western; and about Indians which wasn’t about...Indians” (What I’m Going to Do 14) have accentuated the impression that *The Double Hook* is not a vehicle for truths about existence (of texts within a text and of ‘beings’ in a broader sense), but a textual space where language comes in direct contact with so-called truths and undoes them. At this meeting point between the word and the world,³ Watson’s fragmented prose and enigmatic storytelling take the reader into the gaps left by metanarratives. The traces of the conventional

³ I use the word signified according to Ferdinand De Saussure’s theory in *Course in General Linguistics* to refer to the ‘concepts’ which ‘exist’ in the ‘real-world’ as opposed to their signifier, which, simply put, are the words used to refer to these ‘concepts.’ Although I use the word for the practical purpose of explaining what I mean by the ‘outside’ of a text, it links back to Derrida’s deconstructionist ideas, among which is his theory of hauntology.

western narrative, or those of stories about Indigenous mythologies, are present in the novel but Watson makes it clear that this is not what she intends the novel to be about. Rather, these traces, whether they are those of other literary works that resemble or that may seem to have inspired the novel, or those of some of the novel's figures—depictions of a landscape that comes to life and invades human characters, for example—have a decidedly haunting function resulting from Watson's careful use of language. Despite its seemingly simple structure, the novel offers a complex and open use of language, symbols, and literary tropes that allows for a multiplicity of voices to come back and haunt readers. Watson's poetic-prose, and her task as a novelist that must negotiate the complicated area between the world and the word, have been the subject of several inquiries by scholars of Canadian letters and, in this thesis, I will consider these inquiries in relation to how they can inform the novel's function to blur its own inner and outer discursive spaces.

One of the ways in which the novel blurs the divisions between these spaces (the world inside the novel and the hermeneutical world of readers) is by seemingly coming to life and having a fluid semiotic flow. In Philip Child's early essay about the novel he explains that the novel "has plot, but the flesh and the searching spirit of the book lie in its symbols which flow through it—sometimes flaring out in sudden meaning, sometimes growing like trees in a forest branching to touch other trees" (31). Child's engagement with the novel as a "prose-poem," evokes the rhizomatic flows that have characterized readings of the novel throughout the years. Child's reading of the text as being 'alive' when he writes that its "[symbols] change their meaning as things and words and people do in life, seeming for an instant to hook some enigma of life or death, some glory or fear, or some glory-fear, only to twist away and brush some other enigma with a moth's wing" (31) points to the text's openness. In this thesis, I will read some

of the haunting in the text as being the effect of it being open as it “emphasizes or foregrounds process, either the process of the original composition or of subsequent compositions by readers, and thus resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material and turn it into a product; that is, it resists reduction and commodification” (Hejinian 43). Another function of the text, which in this case comes from what the novelist (as opposed to the poet) must do, according to Robert Kroetsch, will derive from a social (and fictional) rather than textual haunting.

This ‘textual haunting’ is, for the purposes of this thesis, the term I will use to refer to how Watson’s use of intertextual references and fragmentation permits the text to be haunted or to ‘feel’ haunted. Contrasting with this notion of textual haunting is the fictional haunting which is found in the world created by Watson in the novel. In both these sites of haunting, the novel navigates the ‘double hooks’ of existence. “The novelist,” Kroetsch explains in a conversation about Sheila Watson with Diane Bessai, “must tell the sacredness and the profanity of existence” (215). In *The Double Hook*, Watson’s use of Gothic tropes and symbolism creates a world where human existence is a site of encounter between figures and ground and between the sacred (the glory in the religious, mythical, and human creations) and the profane (the darkness of the landscape in death and desolation). For Kroetsch, what Watson shares with other modernist writers is the feeling that “the problem is not how to get to heaven. Or even to hell. The problem is how to live: here: now. Individuals, alone, living together. Together, living alone.” To this, Kroetsch adds that “[t]he ultimate fall of man is the fall out of time” (215). Kroetsch’s concern with the novelist’s task, which is to work through existence and non-existence, time and non-temporality, and humans and “the ground,” points to what makes Watson’s novel particular in comparison with other texts, especially with other English Canadian novels. A problem of

living, of existing with the other, which I will argue is also true of the literary work as it exists along with other texts, is the very subject addressed by the haunting that takes place in Watson's *The Double Hook*.

It is, in fact, in the haunting by which some of the characters and figures of Watson's novel operate that the representation of the problematic condition of living is accomplished. When, in the novel, the Old Lady re-appears after being pushed to her death by her son James, the community and the Old Lady's family are led towards reconciliation with The Old Lady's specter; towards the necessity of learning, or unlearning, to live with the dead; the undead. If the haunting of the community by The Old Lady informs us of anything in relation to the problem of living Kroetsch refers to, it does so by providing "one of the archetypes for the specter of life turned in upon itself, narcissistic, frozen in its own reflection or caught in the grip of its own past" (Jones 43). The specters that are found in the novel are caught in time or, rather, they have fallen out of time: The Old Lady's specter continues to haunt the landscape and community and Coyote, if we chose to consider this figure as a specter, escapes the mortal constraints that time imposes on the human characters of the novel. This fall out of time is an important aspect of studying specters. Specters are figures that have an unsettling relationship to time: they return from the past and destabilize the present.

The novel, which features the haunting represented in the revenant figure of the Old Lady, presents the characteristics of the conventional Gothic text as it "concerns itself with haunting and issues of unresolved mourning, while featuring a vengeful return from the tomb" (Castricano 5). But, to note that ghosts are represented in the text is insufficient to a study of the textual as well as fictional haunting in relation to the novel. As Avery Gordon writes in *Ghostly Matters*,

If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. (8)

The ghost as social figure existing among the living without being alive is an aspect at the center of my reading of Watson's novel in this thesis. In fact, it links back with Jacques Derrida's argument with regards to the ghost as social being. Derrida argues that, to acknowledge the haunted nature of existence, we must

learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But with them. No being-with the other, no socius without this with that makes being-with in general more enigmatic than ever for us. And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations. (xviii)

As Derrida states, in this conversation with specters, with ghosts that have, similarly to *The Old Lady*, fallen out of time, the reader who is learning, or indeed unlearning, to live is faced with the enigmatic and the unknown. The process of talking back to specters is therefore closely linked with secrecy. "Conversing with specters," Colin Davis writes, "is not undertaken in the expectation that they will reveal some secret, shameful or otherwise. Rather, it may open us up to the experience of secrecy as such: an essential unknowing which underlies and may undermine what we think we know" (2005). Revelation and understanding are not the ends attained with confrontation and subsequent conversation with ghosts. What the ghostly and the

spectral bring to the experience of living is an undoing of knowledge in the form of ‘truths.’ In Watson’s text, this undoing operates on two levels. Textually, Watson’s use of language provides the reader with interpretive liberty and, fictionally, ambiguous characters and plot elements unsettle notions of being and presence. Therefore, the haunting nature of both figures such as the Old Lady and Coyote, and that of the traces of other texts that break down truths conveyed by metanarratives, contributes to the creation of instabilities in our understanding of existence and of our relationship to language.

To read Watson’s novel as a literary site that allows us to come in contact with unsettling specters will constitute the crux of this thesis. If my intention is to begin with the ghost as the figure that marks the shift towards an appreciation of these instabilities, ghosts must be at the center of this reading of the novel. However, as I have discussed early on in this introduction, ghosts are a distinctively problematic site of analysis in Canada. As Marlene Goldman observes in response to Derrida’s claims, “learning to live with specters seems vexed and difficult to heed in a settler-nation such as Canada, which for many years, was renowned for its supposed lack of ghosts” (4). Goldman further explains that, for a long time in Canada, writers have been suggesting that “it’s only by our lack of ghosts that we are haunted” (Birney as Cited in Goldman 3). If Earle Birney’s line in his poem entitled “CanLit” is problematic for a number of reasons, chief of which is that it idealizes Canada as being a nation ‘untouched’ before the settler-colonizer arrives, it nevertheless admits to haunts in the national Canadian discourse. The latter is further complicated by Goldman’s study of haunting in Canada and, more specifically, her study of haunting in Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook*, in which she contends that, in the novel, the modern nation-state’s attempts to transform Native ghosts into ancestors is countered by the forceful irruption of repressed histories including traces of Coyote and, by

extension, Native people's prior ownership of the land; the transgressive and incestuous excesses associated with Christian, patriarchal rule; and a return to less differentiated, dyadic states. (*Dispossession* 62)

Goldman's study of haunting in Watson's novel warns scholars of the potential risks that the figure of the ghost may pose in relation to a text written in such a context as the colonial state of Canada. However, not only do some of her arguments suggest that there may be a productive facet to the haunting in Watson's novel, but that ghosts have, similarly to what Wigley argues, a highly subversive function in both language and fiction. My intention here is not to describe haunting in positive or negative terms, but to explore this phenomenon in order to uncover how it destabilizes conventional and normative ideas of texts, nations, and existence.

It is therefore crucial that the ghosts I am addressing be viewed as social 'beings' that interact with and unsettle our relationship with the world. In fact, ghostly figures as conventions of the Gothic provide a nuanced understanding of social relations. This is clearly depicted in Watson's novel with the figures of the specter of Mrs. Potter and Coyote, again if Coyote is considered as a ghost: an idea that Turner and Goldman's writings will allow me to develop later on in this thesis. The figure of the revenant coming back from the grave also ties back in with the textual attributes of a text since it drives the plot and structure of a novel. In that sense, as narrative devices, ghosts have a function in hermeneutics. Anne Williams addresses this in *Art of Darkness*:

[n]arrative strategies are only one class of Gothic conventions that imply a fascination with the problem of language, with possible fissures in the system of the Symbolic as a whole. Most, perhaps all, Gothic conventions express some anxiety about "meaning." In Gothic, fragments of language often serve ambiguously to further the plot-in letters (lost,

stolen, buried); in mysterious warnings, prophecies, oaths, and curses; in lost wills and lost marriage lines. Such fragments may be misinterpreted (often because they are removed from the original context), and frequently deceive or betray the interpreter. (67)

Williams's points are applicable to Watson's novel since, at the very junction between language and the reader, Watson enters a new paradigm with novels where the author enacts the role of the trickster. A paradigm where "possibilities not only coexist but contradict. Where thesis inspires antithesis. Where day and light of chapter one become the night and darkness of chapter two, where the blind see and the seeing are fooled, not only by the trickster and each other — but by seeing." (Bessai and Kroetsch 210). To come back to the notion of speculation, the author as trickster, a reflection of the character of Coyote, may misguide readers and scholars towards the necessity of speculating. I want to use some of these speculations as indications that point toward new ways of reading Watson's novel and I want to follow these speculations to see if they may lead to ghosts that hide in Watson's text.

Early readerly responses to the text may therefore hint at specters that have surfaced in Watson's text. Since the novel's publication, literary critics and scholars have speculated on what the novel contains, and the meaning of the text has taken several tangential turns from being the subject of several attempts at decrypting the secrets that lie inside it. In early reviews, the novel prompted readers to discover what lay between its lines. Hugo Mcpherson writes that the novel "kindles diverse echoes from the Book of Job, the *New Testament*, Anglo-Saxon poetry, *The Wasteland*, and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. This is much more than the record of James Potter's ordeal: it is a story about Mankind" (24). Mcpherson's reading emphasizes the universality of the text; it underlines how Watson's novel talks back to other texts and is inhabited by literary revenants. In another early review, Don Summerhayes reads the tropes of

the western in the spare prose for which *The Double Hook* is now known. Summerhayes observes that “[t]he prose style, which imitates the laconic speech of westerners — suggesting, through its use of punctuation, pauses and hesitations and dwellings on unspoken associations — is an ideal vehicle for this tension between fact and meaning” (29). Here we see the intrusion of the question of fact and meaning; this important theoretical argument that links Watson’s use of language with how the text enables the formation of fissures, of gaps between the world and the interpreted word.

1.1 Authorial Haunts: Watson Responds

In some of the haunts that I have been describing, scholarly work has taken precedence over the thoughts of the author about reader’s responses to the novel. I would like to rectify this and to include, in my reading of the novel, Watson’s own thoughts about interpretive gestures that have been made by readers of her novel. When asked by Stephen Scobie about the presence of texts such as T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* in *The Double Hook*, Watson’s response is clear: “I hope you don’t think that the novel is simply a rewrite of *The Wasteland*” (32). Watson’s reaction to the speculations concerning her novel’s resemblance to other literary works warns scholars of the reductive and narrow understanding of the text that such speculations may lead to. If the impulse from critics, even those that were close enough to Watson to be able to discuss the novel with her, is to find what other texts exist in the novel or which the novel resembles or parodies, then Watson’s discontent with this impulse to reduce the work to comparisons underlines the problems that arise from such readings. However, Watson’s engagement with the scholarly desire to compare her novel with other works plays with the possibility that it is possible to find the traces of other texts in *The Double Hook*. In fact, in their conversation, Watson directs Scobie’s attention toward the character of Felix who, as Scobie finds out, evokes

Eliot's *Four Quartets* poem rather than *The Wasteland* (Scobie 32). Despite Watson's hope that her novel does not appear to readers to be a mere re-writing of modernist texts such as *The Wasteland*, the importance of her 1959 novel may be attributed to, in part, its rich and palimpsestual nature; it is not merely a novel about a rural community coming to terms with isolation and death, but one that addresses literature, history, and mythology by compressing time into a moment. Reading Watson's novel as a palimpsest⁴ of texts in a similar fashion to that employed by scholars who have viewed the modernist poem as "a palimpsest of the quotidian, a writing upon other writings in which prior traces are left visible, in which the page retains vestiges of its evolution" (Davidson xii) poses a complicated question about the nature of a text and its existence in the literary landscape and, in a broader sense, in the world of language. What a text such as *The Double Hook* becomes, if readers are to consider the presence of other literary works in the text itself because it is necessarily opened towards other texts—whether this is observed as the result of the novel's structure or of the figures represented in the novel—is a space where language comes in contact with time in a condensed and dislocated form.

As many critics of Watson have noted, the lack of information regarding Watson's intentions and influences up until a certain point in her career has allowed for her work to be at

⁴ The use of the term 'palimpsest' or 'palimpsestual' to describe Watson's novel allows me to treat all of the traces of other texts that I will find in the novel as equals. By doing this, I avoid running the risk of having a certain text take precedence over another. My use of the term relies on Michael Davidson's reading of the modernist text in which a "palimpsest of other writings visible in the manuscript testifies to the contingent character of writing, the degree to which texts speak to their moment as well as to other texts and writers" (xiii).

the center of scholarly discussions. However, as Scobie argues, the few biographical facts scholars have gathered about Watson do hint at the fact that

something of the characteristic duality of her thinking, the pattern of the double hook, may be seen in the various juxtapositions of convent schooling and avant-garde literature, of the need for order and the need for disorder, of the local and the cosmopolitan, of conservative tradition and endlessly youthful intellectual inquiry (*Sheila Watson and Her Works* 4).

To read Watson's oeuvre by acknowledging that her writing reflects her thinking therefore seems both conflictual, in relation to how she intended her work to be read, and productive because the few thoughts she has offered about her intentions in writing the novel do not guide readers towards a unifying and closed reading of the text but open the text. As Joseph Pivato observes, "Sheila Watson, like the modernist writers she read and taught, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein, believed that the text should stand on its own without the biographical information or personal intentions of the author influencing the reader" (*Sheila Watson: Essays on Her Works*, 8). Scobie and Pivato have, in their respective accounts of the scholarship done on Watson (Scobie wrote his in 1984 and Pivato in 2015), both suggested that there is value in going against what the modernist writer's intentions were in erasing any biographical facts from discussions and readings of the work. Watson's intention with *The Double Hook* was to write about "figures in a ground, from which they could not be separated" ("What I'm Going to Do" 15). Part of this thesis will therefore be dedicated to a study of what Watson's novel does to reconcile, or rather to fuse, ground and figures together. A paramount element of this reconciliation, I will argue, is the haunting that takes place in the novel by figures such as The Old Lady and Coyote and through the religious, literary, and mythological tropes

that permeate the novel. Watson “didn’t think of [the characters] as people in a place, in a stage set, in a place which had to be described for itself, as it existed outside the interaction of the people with the objects, with the things, with the other existences with which they came in contact” but as being “entwined in” and “interacting with the landscape, and the landscape [...] interacting with them...not the landscape, the things about them, the other things which exist” (“What I’m Going to Do” 15). In the few words Watson has given readers about the thinking behind her novel, we see a concern for complications pertaining to existence and to contact between populations and the land they inhabit. It is perhaps, I will argue, in Watson’s writings and thoughts about her novel that we find some explanation and confirmation of the presence of other texts in *The Double Hook* and it is in her hesitant and convoluted discussion of the novel, which often addresses ontological questions, that insights about the spectral may be found.

1.2 Beginning with Ghosts

In the following pages, I will construct what I will refer to as a hauntology of Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook*. In this reading of the novel, I view ghostly figures, not only spectral characters such as the Old Lady, but also the literary ghosts to which John Grube and other literary critics refer, as signs of instabilities in both the fictional world represented in the novel and the language used to produce meaning by Watson. A reading of this work of fiction from a hauntological perspective, which situates the analysis in the complex area between existence and non-existence in which ghosts make their presence felt, will cover the various facets and currents of the discourse behind what is now most commonly referred to as ‘hauntology.’

The term hauntology comes from the marriage of the words haunt and ontology. As a near-homonym⁵ of ontology, hauntology, a term introduced by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* in order to come back upon Heidegger's discussion of existence and time by acknowledging what haunts it, itself pushes language to the limits of the capability of words to convey meaning.⁶ However, as a theoretical movement, hauntology does not simply appear with Derrida's coining of this portmanteau term for ontology in *Specters of Marx*.

The study of haunting in relation to existence has its origins in Derrida's collaboration with Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in *The Wolf Man's Magic Words*. Derrida's foreword "Fors" applies a distinctively deconstructionist approach to Abraham and Torok's notion of cryptonymy that allows him to enter a text as he would a safe or a crypt. For Derrida, the text as crypt becomes an obligatory site for encounters with the undead: the dead who are kept alive by their very concealment in a crypt.

Whereas Derrida views this cryptic concealment of meaning in texts as a phenomenon which should be observed, analyzed, and discussed, Abraham and Torok's theory is focused on the resolution, through their theory of psychoanalysis, of the conflicts that arise from the presence of ghosts. In *The Shell and the Kernel*, Abraham and Torok who, in their psychoanalytic theory, have been concerned with what they refer to as "phantoms," use their clinical work as the foundation for the study of a phenomenon of intergenerational transmission

⁵ Both in French and English *hantologie* and *hauntology* are almost phonetically identical to *ontologie* and *ontology*.

⁶ For Derrida, ghosts not only allow for a discussion of presence in relation to time, but they should be the starting point of all ontological discussions. In fact, Derrida warns that the fault of ignoring ghosts is reproduced and must be watched out for: "If Marx, like Freud, like Heidegger, like everybody, did not begin where he ought to have "been able to begin" (beginnen können), namely with haunting, before life as such, before death as such, it is doubtless not his fault. The fault, in any case, by definition, is repeated, we inherit it, we must watch over it" (220).

of traumas that are unspoken. Their approach with regards to phantoms is to reduce them, in turn reducing the impacts their haunting leaves in the lives of patients (or in the case of a literary work, in the lives of characters):

Though no ready formula is available, the way is implied in the very nature of what returns to haunt, in the nature of the thing “phantomized” during the preceding generation, “phantomized” because it was unspeakable in words, because it had to be wrapped in silence. Reducing the “phantom” entails reducing the sin attached to someone else’s secret and stating it in acceptable terms so as to defy, circumvent, or domesticate the phantom’s (and our) resistances, its (and our) refusals, gaining acceptance for a higher degree of “truth.” (*The Shell and the Kernel* 189)

This approach has yielded few literary analyses, but those scholars who have endeavoured to use it in their criticism of literary works have found innovative ways of reading fiction. Esther Rashkin’s *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* is a rich example of the application of the insightful thinking behind Abraham and Torok’s work on phantoms. In her book, Rashkin uses an approach in which

the linguistic elements of the text are considered to be incomplete and need to be joined with their missing complements, whose traces are embedded in the text. This union of complements enables the reader to perceive or conjecture a concealed drama in the family history of the character that occurred, in most cases, prior to the events of the narrative. The result of this approach is a reconsideration of extant conceptions of narrative limits and textual boundaries and a rethinking of the notion of textual origins.

(5)

Rashkin's work explores narratives through what may be understood as omissions in a text. This, in the case of Watson's novel, may prove to be a fruitful approach as much of the details about the Potter family and the other characters in the novel are omitted or lacking. Rashkin's approach may allow for a reading that investigates the events in the novel to elucidate what may have caused such dismay in the community. This will be part of my reading of the novel in the second chapter of this thesis. However, Abraham and Torok's theory, when applied to literary studies, will also prove relevant to my reading of the textual hauntings of the novel in the first chapter of this thesis. Nicholas Rand, in his translator's introduction to Abraham and Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, outlines the characteristics of their theory of readability:

Whereas most contemporary critical approaches deal with the perception and production of meaning, or alternatively, with its potentially indefinite deferral, the theory of readability implied in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word* proposes ways in which significance can be conjectured despite its apparent absence. Rather than analyze the vicissitudes of meaning (which may include its negation) within a signifying process, Abraham and Torok's theory of readability begins by addressing the problem of establishing a signifying process. (lii)

Thinking about Watson's novel using Abraham and Torok's theory will therefore help me in uncovering how the presence of several literary influences in the text may be understood in terms of haunting, how the text itself may be haunted by cultural archetypes and tropes, and how representations of ghosts in the novel can inform our understanding of the ways in which the condition of existence can be haunted.

2 Textual Hauntings and Ghosts in the Intertext

This chapter is devoted to addressing the texts that haunt Watson's *The Double Hook* (what I call textual hauntings) and to describe what, in the novel's composition,⁷ is conducive of these hauntings. In my reading of Watson's novel, I turn to and shed light on the language and structure of the novel as well as on the texts that Watson's writing evokes. Scholars of Watson's work have argued that *The Double Hook* contains the traces of several other literary genres and entities. There are the conventions of the "film Western," the "ethnic-group novel," and the "regional novel" John Grube identifies as those archetypes by which Watson's *The Double Hook* is haunted and which the limits of it "explodes" (80); there are "allusions" to and "associations" with biblical figures outlined by Beverly Mitchell, and there are the resemblances with modernist texts such as *The Wasteland* which scholars such as Stephen Scobie have addressed. Specifying the kind of novel that Watson's text is by looking at resemblances between it and other literary works is not my focus in this thesis; rather, I am interested in reading the presence of such textual entities as a way for Watson to rectify and respond to the view that the Canadian collective imaginary is "haunted by its lack of ghosts." In that sense, the textual hauntings I discuss in this chapter allow Watson to portray a community whose Indigenous roots are displaced and whose people are alienated from their myths and rituals,⁸

⁷ Here composition points back to Gertrude Stein's notion of language as landscape and as being contingent on both time and space. Stein's influence on Watson's writing is part of Barbara Godard's argument in her article "Between One Cliché and Another." Godard writes: "Although I do not propose to make explicit comparisons between Stein and Watson, it will be evident that the techniques Watson uses for changing our perception of language through emphasis on its rhythmical functions are derived from Stein's earlier experiments" (163).

⁸ I elaborate on Watson's concern for this issue in section 2.1.

and that is very much haunted by a kind of lack of ghosts but more precisely by its very repression and silencing of these ghosts. Moreover, Watson's novel is haunted by its own past; by earlier versions that were more explicit about cultural narratives and practices that have been lost or silenced. Through Watson's revision process, some important information about characters and setting are concealed and hidden from readers. Since some of this information is concealed and not explicitly referred to in the novel, I am choosing to read the text as one that is "cryptomimetic," a term introduced by Jodey Castricano to draw attention "to a writing predicated upon encryption: the play of revelation and concealment lodged within parts of individual words" (6). Cryptomimesis stems from a deconstructionist impulse that calls for "a practice of writing that simultaneously encourages and resists transcendent reading and, because it involves the play of phantoms, compels an irreducible plurality" (7). The cryptic aspects of Watson's writing are exemplified in her revision process which I will turn to in the first section of this chapter. Through a reading of the novel as a crypt that contains the vestiges of the past, this chapter therefore consists of a search for the particularities of Watson's use of language and her incorporation of other texts in the novel.

Ultimately, this chapter aims to analyze the ambiguous presence of these texts and to understand their function with regards to how meaning is both produced and perceived in *The Double Hook*. In fact, my argument revolves around the issues of presence and absence, concealment and revelation, and the spoken and the unspoken. To speak of the existence of these texts in Watson's novel indicates an awareness of the instabilities of language. From this perspective, meaning in the text can hardly ever appeal to a singular interpretation. My focus will therefore not be specifically on what each of the spectral texts found in Watson's novel are, but on what their presence allows the novel to do. The presence of these texts in Watson's novel,

I will argue, opens the story to interpretation and to “an irreducible plurality” (Castricano). It also puts the reader in contact with uncanny apparitions that resonate as the echoes of archetypal texts. Watson’s incorporation of the scriptures, the modernist poem, and the traditions of the western in her narrative (albeit not without parodying almost all of them), gives the text depth and thickness. If such textual traces are to be ‘seen’ in *The Double Hook*, this phenomenon has an unsettling effect on readers. As Turner observes,

[t]he intertextual nature of the work, which relies on the code texts of the books of the Prophets, the Psalms, Roman Catholic liturgy, native mythology, classical mythology, and modernist literature, requires the reader to listen to the echoes, close the gaps, and make the connections that Watson refuses to, at least at one level. (67)

I will address some of the connections Turner claims Watson refuses to make later in this chapter in the section on Watson’s writing process and will explore how we may listen to the echoes of other texts in future readings of the novel.

In this chapter, I am exploring the echoes and traces, which I use the term specter to describe as this allows me to further complicate the notion of their presence in the novel, of western as well as non-western texts or discourses that are inscribed in the intertext of the novel. However, there is already a problem in my treatment of the literary specters I allude to. This problem, inherent to any discussion of the ambiguous concept of spectrality, is that of presence and of understanding this presence as being the effect of a return from the past (and there are different historical pasts from which these specters come). The specter—and in the case of this chapter the specter of a text which is not, in any instance, the text itself—must be separated from the original iteration. In that sense, it becomes difficult for me to argue that, for example,

Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*,⁹ a text which evokes the regionalist tendencies of both novels in this comparison, exists in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*. The simple fact of reminding the reader of another text, of "seeing" this text in the novel, whether this effect is achieved by explicit references or by implicit allusions, is therefore simultaneously insufficient for me to claim that a text may be present and the very unstable grounds that allow me to claim there is a textual presence haunting the novel. As Julian Wolfreys argues,

haunting is irreducible to the apparition. The spectral or uncanny effect is not simply a matter of seeing a ghost. The haunting process puts into play a disruptive structure or, to consider this another way, recalling the idea of the phantom or phantasm as 'gap,' a disruption that is other to the familiarity of particular structures wherein the disruption is itself structural and irreducible to a simple, stabilized representation. (*Victorian Hauntings* 6)

By my very admission that I am 'seeing' ghosts in Watson's novel, I am identifying gaps in the language used to create the world in the novel. Scholarly readings that speculate on the presence of particular texts in Watson's novel will therefore constitute linguistically and culturally unstable but fertile grounds for my argument. Thus, the ghost of a text, and this is where I am arguing this chapter will take these ideas, is never existent or non-existent; it situates itself between these two states, in a gap that appears through fragmentation, because it is present only in the form of traces and never as the whole and original text. "The efficacy of haunting"

⁹ I am not, here, coincidentally placing *The Double Hook* next to *As I Lay Dying*. Many scholars of Watson's work have put both novels next to each other because of their resembling regionalist tendencies. In "Elements Transcended," Margaret Morris even compares Mrs. Potter with Addie Bundren: "Mrs. Potter is more of a force than a character in the novel, and her figure is comparable to that of Addie Bundren in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*" (89).

Wolfreys specifies, “is in its resistance to being represented whole or undifferentiated or being ‘seen’ as itself rather than being uncannily intimated” (6). Whether they are explicitly referred to in the novel or ‘intimated,’ the haunting texts that find themselves in Watson’s novel I will turn to in this chapter resist all encompassing and singular readings and unsettle the novel’s linguistic grounds. It is these questions and complications with regards to a text’s existence that I will explore in this chapter. Due to the complicated nature of the ghost as a site of inquiry, I will view the textual ghosts that haunt Watson’s novel from a perspective that considers writing as being the result of a process that brings several textual entities together. In the context of a novel which speaks to a collective imaginary marked by colonization and intergenerational trauma, these textual entities, which come from Indigenous cultures as well as ‘western’ and European ones, reciprocally haunt each other.

2.1 Haunting in The Writing Process

Any text is the result of a process of thinking and of attempting to create something tangible. In *Ghostlier Demarcations*, Michael Davidson argues that the process of writing, which can be studied by going back to a text’s early drafts and to an author’s notes about their writing, offers insights necessary to an understanding of a text’s intertextuality. Part of the value of studying the drafts of a text lies in understanding how a text may defy genericity¹⁰ and categorization. The drafts and revisions of a text may offer insights as to why an author chooses to include or remove certain elements from their work but, for Davidson, it allows scholars to

¹⁰ I am not, here, arguing that Watson’s text defies being categorized; rather, I am using the ways Watson plays with genres and the ways in which her novel is haunted by attempts at categorizing it.

view the work as a palimpsest of several iterations that are inspired by several other works.¹¹ As Watson explains: “I wanted to fuse the dialogue with context—the reaching toward speech—the speaking out of silence—out of space” (“Interview” 1975). Watson’s text inaugurates a way of writing a context (a physical context in the sense of a land inhabited by people as well as a discursive context: the stories, ideas, and ways of speaking about this land and people) that gives a voice to the voiceless without using ‘speech.’ The representation of a community, whose silencing is, for the most part, a result of its isolation from the source of its “myths and rituals,” is at the center of Watson’s concerns:

I was concerned, too, in another sort of way I suppose, with the problem of the Indigenous population which had lost or was losing its own mythic structure, which had had its images destroyed, its myths interpreted for it by various missionary societies and later by anthropologists—a group intermarried or intermingled with people of other beliefs—French Catholics who had come into the west with the Hudson Bay Company, Biblical puritanical elements—all now virtually isolated from their source. (“Sheila Watson in Her Own Words.” (169)

Watson’s preoccupation is, however, not only with an Indigenous population, but with “a number of people who had no ability to communicate because they had found little to replace the myths and rituals which might have bound them together” (169). This is where Watson’s use of biblical references and of Indigenous mythological figures interacts with the issue of the

¹¹ Davidson notably argues that Susan Howe’s poetics have a distinctively palimpsestual resonance and that, what he refers to as her “salvage historicism,” “begins in silence, in a not-said that is both textual (the page as inscription or trace of an absence) and historical (the word of God as hieroglyph in nature)” (81). Watson’s novel is similarly inhabited by such historicism and silences.

inability to communicate. In the novel, the echoes of these tropes and texts are simply that: echoes and traces that haunt the novel as well as the community represented in the text. Their existence as traces puts emphasis on the characters' displaced and disconnected state in relation to their rituals. Watson's engagement with these traces is, in part, a result of her revision process since, in the first drafts of the novel, Watson did provide personal information about the nationality and social characteristics of her characters. This gave them a voice through which they could be recognized as being part of specific religious, cultural, or ethnic groups. However, throughout her revisions, Watson gradually removes this information. The effect this has on the reader is partly that the characters appear to be more universal. However, this also has the effect of allowing readers to fill in the gaps voluntarily left by Watson.

Archival work on Watson's writing process in creating *The Double Hook* offers crucial information with regards to how Watson creates this "speaking out of silence." This chapter will look at how the novel can be read if we are to consider that, if the novel has been viewed to re-write certain texts such as William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* by scholars such as Stephen Scobie, it is, first and foremost, a re-writing of itself. Documentation about Sheila Watson's writing and editing process demonstrates that the novel, as all novels do, went through several iterations (drafts) each of which contains traces of the ones before them. Margaret Morriss's essay "No Short Cuts," gives an account of these changes and follows the evolution of the text in the years prior to its publication. Morriss's documentary piece explores how "the author moves from the potential stereotype of the regional novel, to a universal and archetypal pattern of action" (96). Of significant relevance to this thesis, however, are the explanations for the purpose, according to Watson, of including the presence of other texts, the novel's intertextuality, in her writing. Morriss's commentary on Watson's revision process

alludes to the explicit and intentional presence of a structure that invites history in the novel. Morriss observes that “the effects achieved by the reordering of some incidents, the fragmentation of sentences and paragraphs, and the formal separation of the subsections are enhanced by changes Watson made to the indented chant/poems, which in the draft are used mainly for Coyote” (84). Watson’s fragmentation of the text as well as her use of these indented “chant/poems” comes into the text through revisions. Thus, the specific ‘poetic’ structure of these chants akin to those found in biblical scriptures brings the Indigenous mythological figure of the trickster in direct contact with Christian myths. It is in this contact zone, in this in-between space, that textual specters make their presence felt in Watson’s novel. By writing this contact zone, Watson challenges the theorization of “speech communities” “as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogenous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members” (Pratt 37). Moreover, Morriss contends that

[t]he development from drafts to the published version includes the removal of most details of personal and family history, of national or racial origin, and of references to the more institutionalized world of civilization, such as a doctor to sign the Old Lady’s death certificate or the law that Kip would bring down on James, if he knew how to go about it [...]. (78)

This exemplifies how “Watson’s revisions remove details serving to anchor the story and its characters in a too-familiar world,” thus reinforcing the uncanniness of the world Watson creates. Through these revisions, “Watson fuses characters and context with language” (Morriss 78) and places the figures “in a ground from which they could not be separated” (“What I’m Going to Do” 15). It is through the results of this revision process that I am able to read Watson’s use of language as being related to the figures she represents and to read her text as a “ground”

which is traversed by instabilities and hauntings. Watson deliberately omits details about characters so that the words that constitute them (the words they utter and the words that describe them) come at the forefront of the text.

2.2 Ghosts of the Scriptures

The novel opens with a distinctively haunted introduction of the setting and characters that constitute the world created by Watson. The first page's structure is inhabited by the textual remnants of the bible and by Coyote whose presence is more akin to that of a god than to that of a ghost as the community is situated "under Coyote's eye" and was, in previous drafts, situated "under Coyote's paw" (Morriss). This marks a first fragmentation of the biblical discourse in the novel. In her juxtaposition of both myths, Watson acknowledges that, if there is a God-like figure looming over "the fold of the hills," it is not the Judeo-Christian figure of God, but that of Coyote (Monkman). Therefore, I refer to the biblical allusion and associations (Mitchell) in Watson's novel as hauntings because their presence in the text is that of remnants and revenants. The explicit and implicit references to Judeo-Christian mythologies have been displaced in Watson's novel and they are the remnants of a distant and somewhat foreign culture to the interior B.C. that the novel represents. The bible exists only as a trace left, and imposed, by the settler-colonizers on the land and the people who inhabit this land. The bible is also a revenant in Watson's novel as it comes back to haunt both the novel and the world created in the novel through archetypal structures and figures. The first page of the novel thus presents the reader with the universe that lies inside the novel and with its limits in terms of the characters and the 'god' that watches over them:

In the fold of the hills
under Coyote's eye

lived
the old lady, mother of William
of James and of Greta
lived James and Greta
lived William and Ara his wife
lived the Widow Wagner
the Widow's girl Lenchen
the Widow's boy
lived Felix Prosper and Angel
lived Theophil
and Kip
until one morning in July (3)

This inscription presenting the figures of the novel and the “ground from which they cannot be separated” is made in “The fold of the hills,” and in the fold of a text, through a biblical structure. “The beginning, in this book,” Angela Bowering writes in *Illuminati and The Double Hook*, “is the earth, which is to say the ground, the text, the inscribing” (2). This ground, as Bowering notes, is haunted by other textual entities, it is inhabited by the echoes of a religious discourse.

Any book begins with words. This book reminds us that it does by echoing the beginning of another book that tells us that the world begins with a word. As god begins by naming the world into being, so this book begins by naming—first the earth, then Coyote's voyeuristic eye; then, echoing the genealogies of Genesis, the figures and their relationships. (2)

As Bowering's observations demonstrate, a novel necessarily begins with language. Watson's novel, however, begins with words that are haunted—words that mean something completely different for the reader who is aware of their significance both to Indigenous and Christian culture. In a sense, Watson's novel begins with ghosts.

From the beginning of the novel, the world created by Watson and the language used to create this world are haunted by several discourses. Although “the opening lines of the novel define the limits of its universe by a literal list of its inhabitants, and by a visual typography that abruptly circumscribes the personal relationships it contains,” (“The Elements Transcended” 83) this universe is not impermeable. The limits of the world created in the novel rely upon a text permeated with the language of a religious discourse. The structure of the genealogy of the characters in the novel reflects that of the genealogies in the scriptures. However, it is not a mere reflection of these genealogies, but a simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar (uncanny)¹² return from a distant past in the form of a rhythm which contains the echoes of Christian myths¹³. In her study of the novel's “both implicit and explicit biblical overtones,” Mitchell suggests that “Mrs. Watson has ‘displaced’ the biblical myths” (102). Displacement, in fact, is an important aspect of any haunting figure. As Julian Wolfreys writes, “it is the case that haunting remains in place as a powerful force of displacement, as that disfiguring of the present, as the trace of non-identity within identity, and through signs of alterity, otherness, abjection or revenance” (Wolfreys 1). Because Watson displaces the biblical myths outlined by Mitchell (102), their

¹² Freud's notion of the familiar becoming unfamiliar in “The Uncanny” is widely known and relies upon these strangely familiar and unfamiliar events and figures.

¹³ Beverly Mitchell emphasize the fact that “if one is familiar with the various genealogies found in both the old and the new testaments, the cadence of the list of characters which introduce the novel is also familiar” (102).

specters are a defamiliarization of their original or ‘known’ form. If Mitchell views these traces as being the explanation for readers having “the feeling of ‘déjà vu’ or sense that the story is vaguely familiar” (99) when encountering them in the novel, her point may be further strengthened through my acknowledgment of them as ghosts. That these traces are not mere allusions or associations but uncanny apparitions in the form of textual specters not only explains the strange familiarity that readers feel towards the text—readers being able to recognize the structure of the scriptures and the figures of the bible “despite the novel’s setting in the interior dry-belt of B.C., and despite the fact that the characters are consonant with the 20th century” (Mitchell 102)—but the very compelling forces that the text has upon readers. Mitchell’s view of the references to the bible in Watson’s novel, especially her contention that most if not all characters have an equivalent in the scriptures, is one interpretation among myriad possible interpretations. Moreover, the bible, itself being subject to an infinite number of interpretations does not take precedence over Watson’s novel, but unsettles it even more thereby causing it to ambiguously appear to be a reproduction of another text. As Wolfreys argues, “the spectral is that which makes possible reproduction even as it also fragments and ruins the very possibility of reproduction’s apparent guarantee to represent that which is no longer there fully” (2). In that sense, not only is the novel on shaky (and haunted) grounds but the grounds of the texts it appears to reproduce are equally porous and unstable. Now this, one could argue, may be the result of language’s inherent instabilities. This is, in fact, how Castricano links Derrida’s concept of *différance* to cryptomimesis: “To be caught up in the delirium of cryptomimesis is to participate in the ebbs, flows, currents, and undertows of its sea-changes: the always already pluridimensional condition of *différance* in language” (110). Watson’s incorporation of the

scriptures in the opening inscription of her novel therefore inaugurates a style of writing that mimics and displaces that of a hegemonic and normative religious tradition.

However, as Mitchell observes, Watson's style is only a part of the strangely familiar biblical overtones that surface throughout the novel. Religious figures and scenes are overwhelmingly present in the first three parts of the novel. On the second page of the New Canadian Library edition of the novel, right after the reader is introduced to the characters and setting through a defamiliarizing anaphora that contains the traces of the structure of the scriptures, this equally uncanny scene of God coming to haunt the community strengthens the spectral nature of the religious discourse found in the novel:

Still the old lady fished. If the reeds had dried up and the banks folded and crumbled down, she would have fished still. If God had come into the valley, come holding down the long finger of salvation, moaning in the darkness, thundering down the gap at the lake head, skimming across the water, drying up the blue signature like blotting paper, asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke; she would have caught a piece of mud and looked it over; she would have drawn a line with the barb when the fire of righteousness baked the bottom (4).

As Mitchell argues, "associated with Mrs. Potter is a sense of loss, a loss which affects nearly all the other characters" (103). However, what stands out in this paragraph if we are to read the religious figure of God as foreign to the landscape depicted in the novel is the defiance and conflict between God and Mrs. Potter. Here the Old Lady's fishing gestures, an explicit response to Christianity, disturb the biblical myth of salvation; the thundering down of God upon the humans of the community. The Old Lady resists God's reprimands and draws the line; she continues fishing. The Old Lady fishes despite "James's words: This is my day. You'll not fish

today” (4) and despite God’s uncertain presence which threatens with its existence. The threat of the existence of God, its continuous suggested presence in the hills where the community lives, looms over the characters and, in a similar way, over the language of the novel. God’s absence in the lives of the humans that inhabit the land described in Watson’s novel emphasizes their isolation. This religious figure’s absence, however, is never complete. As with most ghosts, the religious mythology that haunts the novel and its characters is always posited as this ambiguous presence:

Even God’s eye could not spy out the men lost here already, Ara thought. He had looked mercifully on the people of Nineveh though they did not know their right hand and their left. But there were not enough people here to attract his attention. The cattle were scrub cattle. The men lay like sift in the cracks of the earth (7).

When compared to the biblical city of Nineveh, the community in the novel is too small to deserve the Judaeo-Christian god’s attention. This lack of attention is reflected in the community’s decay: scrub cattle and humans who are not differentiated from the land they inhabit. By bringing religion into this equation and by using the bible as a text which serves to dehumanize the community in her novel, Watson puts emphasis on the gap that exists between this group of human beings and the ones represented in the bible. Surely, the community “in the fold of the hills” is never free from the word of god, but it is also never directly addressed by this religion. Felix is ironically named “Saint Felix with a death’s head meditating” (DH 9), The Widow Wagner is constantly repeating “Dear God, dear God” (59), and Coyote recites chant/poems that resonate with Jehovah’s utterances:

In my mouth is the east wind.

Those who cling to the rocks I will

bring down

I will set my paw on the eagle's nest. (9)

All these instances in which characters are described according to biblical figures or utter words that echo some religious discourses find their way into the novel through displacement. Felix, although he recites prayers from the bible, is distinctively detached from the Judeo-Christian 'roots' of his father.¹⁴ The words of "rituals" come through him in automation as if he was not the one uttering them: "His mind sifted ritual phrases. Some half forgotten. You're welcome. Put your horse in. Pull up. *Ave Maria. Benedict fructus. Introibo*" (37). The words come to him through memory; repressed memories of his father and of his community's past, perhaps:

Introibo. The beginning. The whole thing to live again. Words said over and over here by the stove. His father knowing them by heart. God's servants. The priest's servants. The cup lifting. The bread breaking. *Domine non sum dignus*. Words coming. The last words. (37)

Here the words that come after the storm are the words of beginnings and of servitude. However, they are the words that Felix's father would utter and repeat over and over and not Felix's own words. In this scene, Felix's house of servitude to God; 'Domine non sum dignus' evoking one's unworthiness to welcome God in their home, is the site of an encounter with broken time for Felix and the girl. I will come back to this uncanny scene of Felix's relationship with his father, the cup and bread (also religious symbols), and the condensation of time which allows for ghosts to surface from the past. Suffice it to say for now though that the haunting of Felix by religion

¹⁴ Barbara Godard reads Felix's words in a similar way when she writes that as Felix "searches for words, sounds pour forth devoid of all sense for him. Their meaning has been forgotten. These words have once been a means of expressing truths, and, ironically, they are still denotatively dense for the reader" (167)

is exemplified in this scene. Later in the novel, when he needs to find the words to comfort Angel, Felix recites a prayer: “Peace be with you, he said. Forgive us our trespasses, Felix said” (67). The language of the bible comes to the community again as a sort of ventriloquism; it is Felix speaking here, but to the others the words have an uncanny resonance. Upon hearing Felix, Theophil responds to this prayer: “The priest taught me the same way he taught you, he said. He spat on the floor” (67). Theophil reminds Felix that the words of God are mere repetitions. Angel echoes Theophil’s thoughts: “I’ve heard those words before, she said. What’s the use of going from worse back to bad?” (68). The words of God are heard, repeated, ventriloquized by the characters but they know that they belong to a past that is only haunting them. These words have little relevance in the countryside where Felix and the others live. As has been established in the earlier sections of the novel, religion does not care or see the inhabitants of this isolated community. The Widow Wagner’s repetitive calls to God are echoes in the absence of a listener; her incessant “Dear God” is useless and leads to no further reaction from the other characters in the novel.

The community’s relationship with the scriptures and with the Judeo-Christian tradition has a distinctive relation to its isolation. The few references to biblical figures in parts IV and V of the novel account for the ghostly and uncanny presence of a religion which is slowly disappearing as the community comes to term with trauma. In the beginning of part IV, the haunting nature of the words of God is almost revealed after Greta’s symbolic suicide in the fire of the Potter family home: “The words of the lord came, saying: Say now to the rebellious house, Know you not what these things mean?” (103). In this short utterance that irrupts as chaos settles after the fire, a question is asked by what can only be seen as an intrusion from a God-like (and ghost-like to be sure) voice in the text, a fragment of a religious presence asking what this event

means. Here, however, the question can be turned back on the very words themselves: “what these things mean?” becomes “what these words mean?” The function of the haunting religious figures in the novel comes into light and becomes clearer as the novel nears its ending. Above all, however, this irruption of a religious voice in the narrative confirms the Christian deity’s presence in the landscape and its satisfactory view of the burning of the Potter family house. At last, the Christian narrative is successful and the rebellious house, the house led by women who refuse to conform to the community’s ways (also the house of matricide), is eradicated. Like the Christian God, Coyote appears and is no longer just a voice in the mountains:

Above them a Coyote barked. This time they could see it on a jut of rock calling down over the ledge so that the walls of the valley magnified its voice and sent it echoing back:

Happy are the dead

For their eyes see no more. (105)

As the text closes upon a significantly redemptive message, some of the ghosts that have haunted the characters of the novel as well as the novel itself show themselves. However, they do not show themselves in resolution as much as in posing additional questions to both the readers and the characters. In reading the novel, readers uncover a significant part of the complexities which writers in Canada are subjected to; notably, that writing in such a context must compose with the looming presence of the ghosts of a religion which is simultaneously far removed and always in the background of this land in which they are writing. By displacing, fragmenting, and overtly referencing this religious discourse, Watson writes a text that is constantly undoing itself and shooting out towards a multitude of voices and interpretations.

2.3 Language and Messengers in *The Double Hook*

Language in *The Double Hook* is the site of tensions between mythological discourses and the characters' need to communicate and their relative isolation to themselves and to the rest of the world. Watson explores this uncomfortable zone by experimenting with the limits of language. On the one hand "because of its generally stereotyped nature, language constitutes a problem for Watson." However, on the other hand, Watson moves away from clichés and, through character such as Felix, demonstrates her "concern with the act of writing as the actual reality of the moment, metalanguage, which opens up the disintegrative possibilities of language" (Godard 167). Part of my argument consists of viewing these possibilities of language as being an inherent characteristic of language that is amplified by Watson's particular incorporation of spectral textual entities in her novel.

Language as potentially disintegrative rather than constructive creates doubts and fragments in the process of the production of meaning. In the novel, Watson equates these instabilities with some of the characters' difficulties to ground their knowledge in language:

William would *try* to explain, but he couldn't. He only felt, but he always felt he knew. He could give *half* a dozen reasons for *anything*. When a woman on his route flagged him down with a coat and asked him to bring back a spool of thread from the town below, he'd explain that thread has a hundred uses. When it comes down to it, he'd say, there's no *telling* what thread is for. I knew a woman *once*, he'd say, who used it to sew up her man after he was throwed on a barbed-wire fence (*Italics mine* 5).

In this passage, William struggles to formulate a precise explanation for the Old Lady's specter's fishing habits; he attempts to describe the indescribable, to speak of ghosts using language. The passage is imbued with uncertainties, words that have a vagueness to them which elude rather

than explain the phenomenon of haunting that unites the community (the sight of Mrs. Potter's specter). William's thoughts are fragmented: he does not 'know' but only feels he knows. The anecdote he recalls only serves to further his vagueness and to conclude that "there's not telling what thread is for." Here thoughts and language have an affinity with the thread being described: there is also, in the case of William's relationship to knowledge, no telling what language is for. Watson uses these descriptions of characters falling into abstract thinking and reveries to portray a complicated relationship with knowledge and truths. Moreover, as Godard observes, Watson is preoccupied with sounds, not only with the sounds of language but with representing humans' relationship to the sounds that surround them.¹⁵ "Now he sat silently as an osprey on a snag. Waiting. Because he knew how to wait. Watching only the images which he could shatter with a stone or bend with his hand. He heard a fish break water. He did not stir. He heard a bird's wing cut the air. He heard a mouse turn in the hollow of a log" (41). Here Watson describes William through his relationship with the sounds surrounding him and also uses assonance in her fragmented sentences. The use of the participles "Waiting" and "Watching" emphasizes the temporality of the moment that is described. This use of participles allows Watson to situate the language in "the reality of moment" Godard refers to. William watches only that which he can grasp; the images that he is able to manipulate in violence, to break and bend. He listens to the rest, the landscape, the birds and rodents. This scene of contemplation also highlights William's relationship with language. By "watching only the images which he could shatter with a stone or bend with his hands," William looks only at what he can understand through physicality, through unyielding and brutal responses. As a messenger and communicator, then, William's

¹⁵ In "Between One Clichés and Another," Godard comes to the conclusion that Watson "moves beyond language into music" (176).

relationship with language and images is quite poor. In fact, Dawn Rae Downtown characterizes his communicative abilities as “illusory,” neutral, and lacking in depth (181). Such a character as William therefore serves to provide an example of the disintegrative nature of language. Language, for William and for the reader who is reading descriptions of William, becomes an alienating and destabilizing rather than unifying and encompassing force.

In experimenting with language’s capacity to defamiliarize otherwise familiar concepts, Watson fragments the text through repetition. Repetition serves to constantly shift emphasis and to emphasize temporality. In the following passage, Kip’s stance does not change, he is constantly standing and thinking, but the emphasis through repetition is defamiliarizing and fragmentary.

He stood thinking of the light he’d known. Of pitch fires lit on the hills. Of leaning out of the black wind into the light of a small flame. Stood thinking how a horse can stand in sunlight and know nothing but the saddle and the sting of sweat on hide and the salt line forming under the saddle’s edge. Stood thinking of sweat and heat and the pain of living, the pain of fire in the middle of a haystack. Stood thinking of light burning free on the hills and flashing like the glory against the hides of things. (13)

This moment in which Kip stands thinking lasts for much longer than the time it takes to think. By using repetition, Watson manipulates time and allows the reader to stumble on each repeated “stood thinking.” In talking about her own work, Lyn Hejinian describes repetition’s effects in a relevant way to the repetitions in Watson’s novel. Hejinian explains that, through repetition, “the initial reading is adjusted; meaning is set in motion, emended and extended, and the rewriting that repetition becomes postpones completion of the thought indefinitely” (46). Throughout her novel, Watson uses repetition, fragments, and sparseness of prose, which are

characteristics of what Hejinian refers to as “open texts,” inspired for example by writers such as Gertrude Stein, to write a novel that undermines a simplified understanding of the relationship between the word and the world.¹⁶

2.4 Echoes of Modernism

Next in my investigation of the textual specters that haunt *The Double Hook*, I turn to some modernist texts which often come back in discussions of the novel. Because of the text’s openness towards other literary works, I argue that Watson’s novel introduces an array of potentially clashing intertexts. Since Watson’s scholarly work addresses modernist writers such as Wyndham Lewis, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein, critics have been speculating on the degree to which her work was inspired by these writers and whether or not she has included the traces of their works in her writings. In this chapter, I am narrowing my analysis to readings of some of Eliot’s poems in Watson’s novel, but I must stress that there are several other texts that could be the subjects of my argument. As I have mentioned in section 1.1 of the introduction of this thesis, Watson dismisses the assumption that her work is a re-writing of *The Wasteland* and invites Stephen Scobie to view the plurality of modernist references in her novel rather than reduce the work to a narrow comparison. If the novel contains the traces or echoes of ‘international’ modernism, that is if it is not read as a modernist text itself (categorizing the novel is not my intention with this thesis), Watson invites readers to view the effects that these texts’ presence may have on how the novel is read.

¹⁶ Hejinian argues that open texts demonstrate the author’s awareness that “words are not equal to the world, that a blur of displacement, a type of parallax, exists in the relation between things (events, ideas, objects) and the words for them—a displacement producing a gap” (48).

To understand the effect that a plurality of intertexts in the novel may have, though, I will, like Scobie, explore the comparison between *The Double Hook* and *The Wasteland* and *Four Quartets*. The comparison with *The Wasteland* is interesting for me because it situates Watson's novel in a modernist tradition which has a tendency towards universality that does not account for the particularities of the regional, national, and cultural context that Watson's novel explores. The context of contact between Indigenous peoples and settler-colonizers is therefore overlooked by such a comparison. Scobie grounds his comparison to *The Wasteland* on the fact that "both *The Double Hook* and *The Wasteland* use the imagery of drought, that both are in five parts, that in both Part IV is stylistically set apart from the rest, and that in both Part III concludes by purification with fire" (32). Indeed, for the reader who is familiar with Eliot's *The Wasteland*, uncanny echoes can be found in Watson's *The Double Hook*. Not only do both texts reference biblical figures, but they both address decay and demise in humanity's relationship to the land. The word wasteland is in fact used by scholars who write about Watson's novel to describe the landscape depicted in it.¹⁷ In the palimpsestual economics of Watson's novel, Eliot's *The Wasteland* occupies an important place. Uncanny resemblances between the two texts are sites that pose important questions about texts within texts, not only about intertextuality, but about what it means to hear the voice of another writer or to see another text from the past (or the future) within the text a reader is engaging with at a precise moment. Julian Wolfreys argues that

¹⁷ In "Elements Transcended," Margaret Morriss writes, "The image of life as a silent suspension, waiting for the end of a factor seen as immortal; the implications of disease and distortion, primitive animalism, and a repressive dictatorship; the fear of vision, knowledge and immortality; the relation of eyes, Coyote, Greta, the Old Lady, death and decay; all these elements are integral to the wasteland of *The Double Hook*" (84).

Such voices are the others of the very texts we read in any given moment. Texts are neither dead nor alive, yet they hover at the very limits between living and dying. The text thus partakes in its own haunting, it is traced by its own phantoms, and it is this condition which reading must confront. (xii)

In the case of *The Wasteland* and *The Double Hook*, both textual entities assume ‘lives’ of their own while, simultaneously, through readerly interactions with their form and themes, come to exist into one and the other. However, throughout my reading of the novel, and especially in the present section of this first chapter, I have not so much conversed with specters, but anthropomorphized texts. I have given examples of the fact “[t]hat acts of reading anthropomorphize the text suggests how uncomfortable we are with ghosts. We want to bury the text, to entomb or encrypt it, in the name of tradition or heritage for example, and yet we cannot quite live with such *necrobibliography*” (Wolfreys xii). If, as Eli Mandel argues, “[i]t is surely difficult to contemplate the fierce images of *The Double Hook*—the old lady fishing, the blazing furnace of valley and house, messengers in the dry land—without recalling something of the iconography of *The Wasteland*, *The Tempest*, and the bible” (148), this is only true insofar as we view these texts as living entities. However, this would suggest a certain stability of the living text, a function of intertextuality which is not, in any way, what intertextuality ‘does’ in Watson’s text. Rather, the conjuncture of several textual entities that hover between existence and non-existence, presence and absence, is a testament to the destabilizing forces of language in Watson’s novel. Speaking of textual haunting and specters offers an appreciation for these forces rather than an attempt at harnessing and understanding them.

Moreover, the similarities between the novel and other modernist texts confirm the thematic preoccupations the novel foregrounds. As Scobie discovers, Felix’s relationship to the

condensation of time echoes Eliot's *Four Quartets*. The lines "Time annihilated in the concurrence. The present contracted into the sweet cup he fondled. Vast fingers circling it" (25) that describe Felix holding the cup in which the present is contracted have an uncanny resemblance to the theme of condensed time in Eliot's poem. Indeed, here are the first lines of *Four Quartets*: "Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future,/ And time future contained in time past./ If all time is eternally present/ All time is unredeemable" (1-5). Furthermore, as Scobie's reading of both works points to, the lines "[...]the still point of the turning world[...]Where past and future are gathered" (Eliot as cited in Scobie 32) echo the condensation of present, past, and future in a contracted moment found in the novel. These echoes of modernism in Watson's prose simultaneously confirm the shared preoccupations by Watson and Eliot for the condensation and dislocation of time that allows for haunting to take place and unsettle the textual grounds of Watson's novel by bringing texts from the past into a different 'literary present.'

2.5 John Grube and Writing Western Canada

In *The Double Hook*, Watson uses pauses, silences, and, as I have explored in the previous sections of this first chapter, archetypal religious figures and texts to create a text which is inhabited by gaps that complicate the production of meaning. Thus, Watson demonstrates her awareness of the unique condition of writing in Canada. "As a Canadian writer," Robert Kroetsch explains, "I don't for a moment expect to be told more. The method of the novel precludes a further telling. The themes of the novel preclude a further telling. In a small community it isn't polite to ask. And besides: the person's not-telling tells you what you have to know" (188). The context in which Watson is writing the novel and that of the world represented in the novel are both traversed by the echoes of a great variety of traditions and

discourses. It is therefore quite interesting to encounter John Grube's use of the word "ghost" in his exploration of these traditional texts to which Watson's novel speaks in his introduction of New Canadian Library edition of the novel. As Grube writes, at the time when Watson was writing the novel, it had "become traditional for Canadian novelists to concentrate on the regional idyll, the novel with a Western setting, and the novel dealing with a special ethnic group" (73). Watson is, indeed, aware of this as she writes the novel in answer to the challenge "that you could not write about particular places in Canada: that what you'd end up with was a regional novel of some kind" ("What I'm Going to Do" 14). However, Watson's novel inscribes itself in contrast to this traditional mode of writing in Canada. According to Grube, if it "appears to be written in the clichés of the regional idyll, the Western, the ethnic-group novel," Watson's novel confronts and "explodes" the limits of these traditions (80). What interests me in this thesis is the fact that Grube mentions that the novel "appears" to present the characteristics necessary to make Watson's novel a part of this tradition in Canadian writing and therefore that these traditional texts are ghosts that haunt the novel's appearance (the ghosts of these texts come to life and re-appear through Watson's recuperation of their tropes). I do not mean to cling onto a specific term such as ghost here; rather, my argument is that Grube's use of the word ghost is not coincidental as it directs us towards considerations of 'traditional' writing in Canada as haunting Watson's novel and, by extension, that national discourse that characterizes the early 20th century literary scene in Canada. Watson's novel is haunted by its literary predecessors, it is haunted by a mode of writing, by clichés that make it appear to be something it is not. However, whereas Grube views the novel to challenge and "explode" these conventional texts as it moves towards a universal mode of storytelling, I am not convinced that it accomplishes

this entirely. It is much more relevant for me to understand the novel as unsettling the notion that parody explodes and undoes conventions.

Grube's contention that ghosts "must be laid before the novel can attain the true structure that is inherent in the material" (80) indicates a desire to view the text as introducing a novel way of writing the national Canadian discourse. Grube argues that by confronting the conventional genres to which it may be compared, *The Double Hook* somehow comes to a resolution and attains its "true structure." But what is this true structure and how true is it? The novel certainly has structure and what can be qualified as an overarching message of redemption. However, once the symbolic and mythological aspects of the novel have been accounted for, we are left with a narrative which is permeated with irony, parodied myths, and great anxieties about unifying truths. The novel operates through "a kind of counterhegemony, not an escape from the structure of discourse and ideology but a turning and multiplying of them" (Dennis Foster as cited in Castricano 111). Although Grube's point that the novel "explodes" conventions is well informed, it idealizes the novel as a universal and transcendental text rather than one which is counterhegemonic, regional, focused on a particular ethnic-group, or conventional. It gives an idea of the novel as stable which enters in conflict with the very haunting aspect of the intertextuality of Watson's novel. "Whether one speaks of discourse in general," Wolfreys writes, "or of text in the particular sense of the web of words which make up and yet are irreducible to a book, one is forced to concede, from the perspective of considering the notions of haunting and the spectral, that the idea of text is radically unstable" (xiii). The ground of the novel, its structure and the language used to compose it, is soft rather than solid. It is not only fragmented in its sentences, as I have shown in section 2.3, but it is composed of the fragments of several other texts, discourses, and myths. This composition

conceals several textual remnants, which may or may not be dug up considering that their presence may force us to face uncomfortable entities and interact with an uncanny world that apparently comes from the world outside the novel but is never evoked by anything else than the novel.

3 Ghostly Figures in *The Double Hook*: The Uncanny Now, Here, and There

Uncanny apparitions that come from temporal, textual, and spatial ‘elsewheres’¹⁸ unsettle the linguistic grounds of Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook*. “The biblical God,” for example, is a figure of settler culture Turner argues “exists as well in the patterns of Coyote’s speech, which are formed on the books of the Prophets as well as on the Psalms and the Mass” (70). In this encounter with displacement and textual entities existing in the novel as the echoes and traces of texts from an array of cultures, the reader is introduced to the experimental ways in which Watson’s novel approaches our relationship to language and to the production of meaning. Like the textual entities I addressed in the first chapter of this thesis, several of the fictional figures in the novel are not fixed and solid conveyors of meaning but ambiguous figures whose existence can be interpreted in many ways. In fact, Turner contends that “[b]y undercutting both registers [Christian and Indigenous] as she introduces them, Watson disallows a secure position for either the figures in her novel or its readers: this condition of the text comes near to undoing the reader, as well as the text and the issues it has raised” (70-71). Most of the characters in Watson’s novel bring readers to confront the difficulties of existence and, in turn, dislocate spatial and temporal conceptions of what it means to exist in such a context as the ‘settler-colonizer’ nation of Canada. This second chapter is aimed at providing a close reading of some of the haunting and haunted figures of the world created by Watson in *The Double Hook* to understand how they inform ontological questions pertaining to human existence in

¹⁸ By elsewhere I am referring to that which seems to come from outside of a text, either from readers or from other texts.

general and, more particularly, to human existence in a context of colonization and isolation. Watson writes *The Double Hook* with the intention of describing, as she points out in “What I’m Going to Do,” “how people are driven, how if they have no art, how if they have no tradition, how if they have no ritual, they are driven in one of two ways, either towards violence or towards insensibility—if they have no mediating rituals which manifest themselves in what I suppose we call art forms” (15). In this chapter, I view the spectral figures represented by Watson in her novel as indicators of this lack of rituals which unsettles the existential condition of the characters of the novel.

The haunting through characters and figures in the novel unsettles the supposedly stable grounds on which discourses concerning existence and human occupation of the land are established. For Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, the uncanny feelings solicited¹⁹ by specters disrupt the homogenizing discursive forces that construct settler-nations. In “The Post-Colonial Ghost Story,” Gelder and Jacobs write that “[w]e often speak of Australia as a 'settler' nation - but the 'uncanny' can remind us that a condition of unsettled-ness folds into this often taken-for-granted mode of occupation” (182). Like Australia, Canada is often discussed in terms of settlement; it is assumed that the colonizer populations are solidly implanted in the land they have come to occupy. However, as Gelder and Jacobs observe, the words ‘settle,’ ‘settler,’ and ‘settlement’ involve notions of stability which haunting and the uncanny subvert (182). Drawing

¹⁹ Gelder and Jacobs’ Derridean deconstruction of the word ‘solicit’ and its verbal forms, although it serves them in their analysis of specters in relation to Aboriginal populations in Australia, contains important insights with regards to the treatment of post-colonial ghosts. Gelder and Jacobs write that solicit “can mean, firstly, 'to incite', 'to allure', 'to attract' - definitions which rightly draw attention to the seductive features of Aboriginal spirituality, sociality, and so on for many modern non Aboriginal Australians. But there are other, less benign meanings embedded in this word: 'to disturb', 'to make anxious', 'to fill with concern'” (182).

upon Gelder and Jacobs' claims, Marlene Goldman makes the connection between the uncanny they discuss in relation to Aboriginal peoples in Australia and the uncanny figures represented in Watson's novel. As Goldman writes, "the community that constellates, in true Gothic fashion, remains predicated on the expression of direct threats to its cohesion, namely, the unsettled and unsettling desires of nomadic Native peoples and women who refuse patriarchal and Christian models of domestication" (43). In this chapter, I argue that this resistance to homogenizing discourses is part of the role of most of the ghosts and ghostly apparitions in Watson's novel and, that it is the very ambiguous existential condition of these spectral figures that creates a doubt and evokes uncanny sentiments about the stability of their existence and presence in the land they inhabit. Moreover, adding to the instabilities that the figures in the novel evoke, the existential condition of specters and ghosts is, by default, never settled, and this chapter explores complications with regards to how certain figures, notably the Indigenous trickster figure Coyote, may or may not be read as specters. Goldman's in-depth comparative study of what she refers to as "the uncanny gendered and racialised [sic] nature of haunting in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*" (39) provides a detailed analysis of several of the ghostly apparitions and Gothic tropes in the novel. Extending on Goldman's work, I take part in a reading of the spectral figures of the novel less centered around national questions and more around ontological (hauntological) issues. A reading predicated upon these issues therefore considers both the haunting that is particular to the context, in the case of Watson's novel a context of intergenerational trauma following colonization in North America, and that which is inherent to human existence and representations of it. I should make clear that my reading should not, in any sense, reduce the significance of the particularly troublesome nature of the ghostly Indigenous figures Goldman addresses in her writings, but that it complements her reading by

addressing other, less particular to the context of Canada, figures that present spectral characteristics. Ultimately, because of the lack of tangible information about the characters, places, and communities in the novel, and because of ambiguities pertaining to how some of the characters' 'state of being' may be perceived, I argue that most, if not all, of the figures of Watson's novel present some spectral characteristics. Whether their spectrality manifests itself through conventional Gothic tropes, issues related to visibility and invisibility, or disturbances in linear conceptions of temporality, it is a significant aspect of how Watson's novel addresses crucial ontological and socio-cultural questions. My exploration of haunting in *The Double Hook* is therefore, above all, a reading in which I explore the spectral characters and figures as markers of a haunting which "is neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis," but "a generalizable social phenomenon of great import" (Gordon 7).

Underlying interrogations about the nature of being in this chapter, I will look at how the ontological questions the novel is concerned with extend to the community and to human existence in a group. What does it mean to exist among others? Is it necessary to be seen and recognized by others to exist? If this is so, what does Watson's treatment of the Indigenous trickster figure suggest about the recognition and vision of Indigenous peoples in Canadian writing? Goldman's argument that "Watson's narrative relies on invisibility and the trope of the ghost to underscore the limits of and the errors associated with vision, particularly when it comes to Canada's indigenous peoples and their cultures" (195) suggests that Watson's use of specters and ambiguously existing figures serves to provide insights with regards to the condition of living in Western Canada. However, if haunting is specific to the locale of novel, it is also the result of a condensation of time, space, and history; it is a universal as well as regional phenomenon. Haunting is therefore entwined with "a subtext that manages to call up remnants

of prehistoric, tribal, pagan, and christian ritual which resonate in the backward and abyss of consciousness; time is abolished: everything happens at once” (Angela Bowering 15). In this chapter, I pay close attention to time and to dislocations in time and history. Where does haunting begin? As Derrida claims, haunting begins with ghosts that are anticipated:

The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated: this, the thing (“this thing”) will end up coming. The revenant is going to come. It won’t be long. But how long it is taking. Still more precisely, everything begins in the imminence of a *re-*apparition, but a reapparition of the specter as apparition *for the first time in the play* [novel]. (*Specters of Marx 2*)

Haunting begins in the future that exists in the present as it is anticipated, as well as in a past because it involves revenants. The ‘thing’ that indicates haunting, this thing which is never a conveyor of ontological certainties (in the case of the novel this thing may take various forms such as that of the Old Lady), will come, it comes in the first pages of the novel and stays with the characters and readers to haunt them. As has been the case with the textual haunting in the first chapter of this thesis, the haunting to which I turn in this second chapter significantly informs our relationship to the ‘other’ and are testaments to life’s complexities.

3.1 The Old Lady, Specters, and ‘the Other’

The revenant figure of the Old Lady is the first archetypal spectral figure that readers encounter in the novel. Readers are made aware of the uncanny coming back to life of the Old Lady when, in a sense, James utters his mother’s specter into returning to haunt him and the community. The Old Lady is pushed “By James’s words: This is my day. You’ll not fish today” (4), but these same words (spoken by James to silence and kill his mother) are recuperated in the prose to create this coming back to life or, rather, the seething and continuous presence of

the Old Lady. The sequence of the words “You’ll not fish today” (James’s way of asserting his mother’s death) and “Still the old lady fished” (the existential sign that the Old Lady is still present: fishing being the condition or occupation by which the Old Lady is recognized and through which her specter is witnessed) is what complicates the existence of the Old Lady and makes her presence ambiguous. A reading that would attempt to assert some kind of truth about the Old Lady’s existential condition in the novel could attempt to make evident the fact that, if the Old Lady has been killed, the only way that she can still be seen by the rest of the community is either by returning as a supernatural being or if the other characters who are seeing her are hallucinating. Here, I do not wish to address the probability of the existence of supernatural beings; rather, I argue that the way in which Watson uses this revenant figure informs our understanding of the instabilities pertaining to existence and presence. As Frederic Jameson argues in “Marx’s Purloined Letter,”

Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work within the living present: all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us. (86)

In the case of the Old Lady, the living present in which the other characters are seeing this central spectral figure is, from the first encounter with the specter, considerably destabilized. It is through the Old Lady’s re-appearance that the community is faced with the problem of living with others and death; aspects of life that are riddled with uncertainties and rooted in the unknown and unknowable.

The Old Lady is at the center of an unstable understanding of existence; this character symbolizes the readers and characters' inability to understand existence through 'known truths' about others, life, and death because it exacerbates conflicts in interpreting what this character truly is: dead or alive, ghost or tangible being, or nor or neither. For Derrida, the specter of the King of Denmark in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* provides similar insights in conversations with specters. However, while the Old Lady's specter recalls some elements of the King of Denmark's spectrality in *Hamlet* (both are murdered by a member of their family so that this character can gain some of the murdered parent's powers), a comparative reading of both figures demonstrates that the Old Lady's spectrality is even more ontologically unsettling than that of the King of Denmark's ghost. Contrary to the ghost of Hamlet's father, the specter of Mrs. Potter is silent; it never addresses its own spectrality by speaking and is only recognized through sight. Its spectrality is therefore only accounted for through an "other." Furthermore, the Old Lady's silence mirrors the community's inability to communicate and therefore contributes to making the community's interacting with this spectral entity even more difficult. When the Old Lady's specter comes back to haunt the community, it does not utter any words and exaggerates the silence the Potter family has lived in before the matricide:

This is the way they'd lived. Suspended in silence. When they spoke they spoke of hammers and buckles, of water for washing, of rotted posts, of ringbone and distemper.

The whole world's got distemper, he wanted to shout. You and me and the old lady. The ground's rotten with it.

They'd lived waiting. Waiting to come together at the same lake as dogs creep out of the night to the same fire. Moving their lips when they moved them at all as hunters

talk smelling the deer. Edged close wiping plates and forks while the old lady sat in her corner. Moved their lips saying: She'll live forever. And when they'd raised their eyes their mother was watching as a deer watches. (29)

As is the case with the kingdom of Denmark in *Hamlet*, "something is rotten"²⁰ with the Potter family and James's world. Even before her death, the Old Lady stood for the inability to communicate: their lips are moving or seen moving without words being uttered. The Potter family is communicating in a sort of ventriloquism in which lips are seen moving but in which they remain "suspended in silence." In contrast, King Hamlet's ghost identifies itself as being the spirit of the King, not the King himself; "I am thy father's spirit" (1.5.14-28). As a spectral figure, the Old Lady shares attributes with other literary specters, but its particularities make it a specter whose existence exacerbates the need to address its relationship with other characters.

As a haunting figure in the community and as a social ghost, the Old Lady's specter makes us rethink its relationship to the other characters of the novel. The first character to witness this specter is Ara. The way in which Ara sees Mrs. Potter's specter is an example of its relationship with other characters: "Ara saw her fishing along the creek. Fishing shamelessly with bait. Fishing without a glance towards her daughter-in-law who was hanging washing on the bushes near the rail fence" (4). Ara's reaction to the spectral apparition who is not returning her glance is telling of the kind of relationship the characters have with the Old Lady's specter. "I might as well be dead for all of her, Ara said" (4). Ara's interaction with the ghost of Mrs. Potter is, in a sense, a reversal of the roles of the haunted and the haunting; Ara is faced with her own invisibility and mortality as the Old Lady ignores her. In her reaction to the apparition

²⁰ Taken from the line "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act-I, Scene-IV).

of the Old Lady, Ara transfers her feeling of being rejected by the other to this spectral figure. The Old Lady mirrors the alienation Ara experiences from the others in the community. Like the specter in *Hamlet*, the Old Lady becomes a symbol of disjuncture and of the disconnected state in which the members of the community are in relation to 'the other.' Derrida's treatment of disjuncture in relation to the spectral apparitions in *Hamlet* suggests that the questions brought up by specters are of significant relevance to existing with the other. Derrida asks: "Is not disjuncture the very possibility of the other?" (*Specters of Marx* 26). Inherently, the other is "out of joint" with the self because it is not the self. When the Old Lady re-appears after her death, a death which the other members of the community are not yet aware of, she awakens the disjuncture that the inhabitants of the community experience towards each other.

The old lady was rounding the bend of the creek. She was throwing her line into a rock pool. She was fishing upstream to the source. That way she'd come to the bones of the hills and the flats between where the herd cows ranged. They'd turn their tails to her and stretch their hides tight. They'd turn their living flesh from her as she'd turned hers from others. (5)

The harshness of the land and the brutish nature of animals in an isolated place is reflected in the Old Lady's turn inwards and away from the others. In this passage, the humans of the community are reduced to flesh—reduced to the cold material which constitutes them, and which blends in with the landscape. Ground and humans are fused together: hills and humans have bones and the hides of cows hardens on their bodies. That which could bring humans together, the flesh and the land they share, is dislocated and made bare.

In the novel, the figure of the Old Lady brings the other characters together in their reaction to her 'selfish' exploitation of the land they ought to share when she fishes

“shamelessly” in everyone’s pools. The Old Lady appears and disappears to cause oftentimes violent reactions to these appearances. Felix is the second character to witness the apparition: “Felix saw the old lady. She was fishing in his pool where the water lay brown on the black rocks, where the fish lay still under the fallen log. Fishing far from her own place. Throwing her line into his best pool” (7). Felix’s first encounter with the Old Lady’s specter accounts for its displacement from where she ought to be according to him. The Old Lady is far from the Potter family home and her presence invades the other inhabitants of the community’s space. In his reaction to the Old Lady’s fishing, Felix wants to remove this specter from his territory: “He thought: I’ll chase her out” (7). However, the Old Lady appears and re-appears and makes this conjuration of her specter difficult: “When at last he went down to the creek the old lady had gone” (8). Felix’s reaction to the Old Lady’s presence is violent, it is marked by his desire to rid the community of this haunting presence and to displace the Old Lady from his plot of land. Felix intends to catch the Old Lady and to possess and contain her: “Someday I’ll put a catcher on the fence and catch her once and for all” (8). Watson ensures that Felix’s antagonism towards the Old Lady is not hazardously linked to her fishing in his pool and, in a passage in which Felix burns a fish carcass (an explicit symbol of the Old Lady) after fishing himself in the same pool as the Old Lady, creates an image of Felix as an evil figure rather than a man of God: “At last he threw the bones in the stove. The heat from the stove, the heat crept in from the day outside, anointed his face” (9).

In considering Felix and the community’s reaction to the Old Lady spectral apparition, it seems relevant to mention that the Old Lady has been read, because of the information given about her in earlier drafts of the novel, as being implicitly referred to as partly-Indigenous. A return to Morriss’s detailed analysis of Watson’s earlier drafts demonstrates that it is possible

to read the Old Lady as a part-Indigenous figure: “Draft I and II contain far more background information: Old Man Potter was an Englishman, while no one knows where the Old Lady came from; Kip and Angel are ‘pure-blooded’ Indians, but William and James (and presumably Greta) are ‘a mixed lot’” (83-84). The expression ‘a mixed lot’ may or may not indicate that this ‘mixed lot’ is indeed mixed in terms of its Indigenous and non-Indigenous descent. If, however, we are to read Mrs. Potter as part-Indigenous—which, given the fact that the earlier drafts already mention that some of the characters in the novel are “pure-blooded Indians,” is not an unrealistic reading—this makes her spectrality a problematic phenomenon in relation to the reactions it causes in the other characters. Felix’s reaction to the Old Lady’s specter is, along with his overarching function as the main figure for Christianity in the novel, demonstrative of the kind of repressed Indigenous haunts that the community is attempting to rid itself of. However, because it is so evasive and never fully encountered and repelled in the early encounters between it and the other characters of the novel, the Old Lady’s figure does not stage a sufficient and tangible spectrality to yield a productive coming to terms with hers and the community’s indigeneity. It is only after James’s last encounter with his mother’s specter and Greta’s burning of the family house that this specter of Indigenous descent—this figure who, as Goldman suggests, “may be doubling back, looking for traces of Native culture that have been effaced and repressed by the settler-invaders” (46)—is finally removed from the land in the novel. The Old Lady’s specter follows James to town: “And there on a bar at the foot of the pier on which the arch of the bridge rested he saw the dark figure of his mother playing her line out into the full flood” (83). In one of the last appearances of the Old Lady, this “dark figure” is no longer “fishing shamelessly” in other people’s pools. In fact, it has followed James, the son who could not bear her fishing and who could not bear his not bearing her fishing as this caused him to

murder his own mother. This murder, which we could speculate may have been a way for James to assert his English descent and to escape the shame his Indigenous blood signified for him, casts the Old Lady's existence as a haunting figure now fishing in "the full flood." Given the symbolic importance of water in the novel, the Old Lady's final fishing gesture in an abundance of water as opposed to the dry land "in the fold of the hills" idealizes the Old Lady's disappearance from the community: her specter will no longer haunt this community and she will no longer shame her children as she will be fishing in abundant waters.

3.2 Coyote: God or Ghost or Nor or Neither

One of the constitutive figures of Watson's *The Double Hook* is that of Coyote, the Indigenous trickster figure. In the fictional world of the novel, the community is cast under this mythological Indigenous figure's gaze. In a conversation with specters such as the one I am endeavouring to take part in in this thesis, a God-like rather than ghost-like figure such as Coyote is a peculiar site of analysis. In Watson's novel, Coyote can be said to haunt other characters because this figure is paralleled with a malevolent God figure. However, Coyote's own haunted existence; the fact that Coyote simultaneously haunts and is haunted by an Old-Testament Christian discourse, is what makes this Indigenous figure, which is displaced from its own indigeneity by a dominant Christian discourse, highly unstable. As Goldman claims, "the figure of Coyote serves as the locus for competing discourses: patriarchal/Christian/heterosexual/settler-invader versus matriarchal/nonheterosexual/Native" (39). To this, Goldman adds that

Ultimately, the features that threaten to subvert the dominant discourses of the modern Canadian nation-state are expelled—the Gothic mother and the Native other, who are both aligned with the spirit of Coyote. Owing to this process of abjection, the integrity

of the nation is seemingly secured. Despite the characters' attempts at exorcism, however, Coyote's ghostly presence continues to haunt the land. His spectral presence hints at several possibilities for a doubling back to repressed origins that include Native people's prior claim to the land, matriarchal and non-Christian spiritual traditions, and, finally, non-individualistic dyadic states epitomized by the mother-child bond and represented by the threat of the lesbian couple. (39)

Goldman's detailed argument about the exorcism of indigeneity performed by the characters of the novel suggests that, by the end of the novel, the traces of this indigeneity have not been completely erased from the landscape and the ground. However, even as Coyote remains present by the end of the novel, this presence may be problematic.

The cultural erasure and cleansing that James and Greta go through and are actors of, as well as the violent reactions to the specter of the Old Lady, push Indigenous cultural voices to the background of the novel. Indeed, Coyote is a competing voice to that of the Christian God often alluded to in the novel and Watson's hesitation to include Coyote in the text demonstrates that this presence of an Indigenous mythological figure may be superfluous for the author. As Watson writes, "I don't know, if I rewrote it, whether I would use the Coyote figure. It's a question. However, it begins with this *dramatis personae*, I suppose, and that is the mouth of this figure who keeps making utterances all through the course of the novel" ("What I'm Going to Do" 15). Watson's comments about the presence of Coyote in the text emphasize the complexity of writing an Indigenous figure that has such import for the novel's structure as well as for the Canadian collective imaginary. Furthermore, the fact that Coyote's utterances are built on the structure of chant/poems in the scriptures complicates how readers interpret and recognize this Indigenous figure. As Samara Walbolm argues,

While *The Double Hook* enacts some type of new world experimentation against a narrative (European) norm, it is a reaction (albeit powerful) which appropriates Native myth to serve a white settler (critical) literary objective. The first Nations subject—as the voice and creator of this myth—is neither fully depicted nor recognized and celebrated. (81)

Walbolm's argument is simultaneously reflected in Watson's hesitation to include Coyote in the novel and complicated by the author's admission that it is Coyote's voice that punctuates the issues the novel addresses. Coyote's function as trickster in Indigenous mythology, which can be compared with the function of the author as trickster, is appropriated by Watson but not fully recognized and, ultimately, pushed to the background of the narrative. As Monkman remarks, "out of the recognition of the dual aspects or 'double-hook' of glory and darkness in human existence rises the promise of a benevolent deity, implicitly affirmed in the character of Felix who will supersede both the malevolence of Coyote and the cruel justice of the Old Testament Jehovah" (69). Therefore, to read Coyote as a specter further complicates the presence of this Indigenous figure in the novel. I would suggest that Coyote is the very embodiment of the "dual aspect" (the 'double hook') of haunting in the novel—that Coyote is both haunting and haunted and presents a doubly destabilizing figure in a conversation with specters. Coyote's function is that of trickster and reading Coyote as a ghost is part of the trickery, it consists of being tricked by the very ambiguous nature of this figure. Coyote, like the specter of the Old Lady, emphasizes how, as Arnold E. Davidson argues, "you can't catch the glory of this text on the hook of a final definitive interpretation, for when you fish for story you catch the darkness too, especially if your fishing partners are a dead Fisher Queen who still waits for the right questions and Coyote who happily provides all the wrong answers" (73). To read Coyote as ghost simultaneously

undermines the presence of an Indigenous culture in the world of the novel and recognizes the function of this indigenous figure. “I have set his feet on soft ground; I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders of the world” (125). These final words uttered by Coyote prolong the trickery and put into doubt the stability that the community has supposedly achieved by the end of the story. In a sense, Coyote sets the child, and the reader, on haunted, sloping, and unstable grounds.

3.3 Letting the World See: Vision, Sight, and Presence Under Coyote’s Eye

The relationship to sight and vision that the characters have in the novel is a crucial aspect of how it addresses ontological questions. Kip’s relationship to sight, to his own blindness, and to light and darkness, and James’s desire to be seen by others and to attract the attention of the other members of the community by leaving the community, inform conceptualizations of what it means to be seen, heard, and acknowledged. In a sense, because ghostly apparitions inherently complicate certainties about seeing and being seen, as I have demonstrated in my reading of Ara’s initial reaction to the specter of the Old Lady, I argue that most of the novel’s characters share ghostly attributes because of how they are seen and how they see each other. If to be seen is to exist, then several of the novel’s characters ambiguously exist according to certain discourses. Their isolation is the result of them not being seen by the rest of the world and by God. As Nancy F. Corbett writes,

the theme of sight and insight is woven into every page of the novel. Each character is defined in terms of how he sees, what he sees, and, perhaps most importantly, how he feels about seeing. It is not ordinary perception which is the issue here, but a kind of

seeing through or beyond ordinary events in order to discover their hidden meanings.

(“Closed Circle” 116)

Being transparent and ‘seen through’ is an essential characteristic of specters. By not being fully seen, or by being ambiguously observed by others, some of the characters in Watson’s novel do not stand solid in the production of meaning. Coyote and the Old Lady escape certainties relating to their existence and contain hidden and potentially deceiving meanings. Their presence, Coyote’s may be equated with an Indigenous mythical presence and the Old Lady’s with that of a ‘rebellious matriarch,’ if it can only be accounted for through sight by the other characters of the novel, is never complete: it is always, rather, a constant undoing of presence. Moreover, if these characters’ existence can only be accounted for through vision by an ‘other,’ this further emphasizes the sociological aspect of their spectrality. Therefore, to read these characters as specters brings us to face the very anxieties associated with being and being in relation to the other. These anxieties are emphasized by the fact that, in a context of colonization, being with the ‘other’ is often fraught with violence and trauma. The Indigenous ‘other’ in Watson’s novel, whose myths and beliefs are represented by the figure of Coyote and whose place in the landscape depicted in the novel is represented in the passage in which James comes upon the reserve when he is leaving the community “in the fold of the hills,” is never fully present and never completely seen by the characters of the novel.

At last he came to the pole fence of the Indian reservation. The cabins huddled together. Wheels without wagons. Wagons without wheels. Bits of harness. Rags and tatters of clothing strung up like fish greyed over with death. He saw the bone-thin dogs. Waiting. Heard them yelping. Saw them running to drive him off territory they’d been afraid to defend. Snarling. Twisting. Tumbling away from the heels they pursued. (82)

This short encounter with the living conditions of Indigenous peoples in the novel is a testament to the visible aspect of indigeneity to which the characters of the novel are exposed. The Indigenous other, in this passage, is reduced to an outline, to a façade characterized by decay and the incomprehensible grunting of dogs. All that James *sees* and *hears* of Indigenous peoples in this passage indicates that these people are no longer seen or heard by others in this country; they are a mere trace or shadow by which people pass when they are going to the city. This problematic representation of Indigenous peoples has the effect of emphasizing the bare and dehumanizing characteristics of social relations described in the novel. However, Watson's inclusion of this short passage about the reservation indicates the anxieties associated with Indigenous representations in Canadian novels. While, in studying the sociological aspects of haunting, "we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us" (Gordon, xvi), the scene of James's passing-by the reservation is the very sign that something is being concealed. In the world created in the novel, the indigeneity of characters as well as the presence of Indigenous peoples is concealed; thus rendering this site of human existence barely visible.

In the novel, sight as a means of accounting for one's existence takes precedence over hearing. For example, it is quite significant to my analysis of the theme of sight that the community in the novel is situated "under Coyote's eye" as this establishes a particular relationship between Coyote and the community. This situation shows that Watson places the inhabitants of the community in a position in which they are to be seen by the haunting Indigenous trickster figure whom, for most of the novel, they can only account for through hearing. For Lenchen, her experience with vision and with seeing the other, and in her case the

other whom she is having an intimate relationship with, is punctuated with the memories of hearing this other speak. When Lenchen cannot see James, she is unable to imagine how he exists:

James had not come as he promised. She had not seen him for days. Except from the crest of the hill. She had seen him below at work in the arms of the hills near his own house. Going from house to barn. Sometimes alone. Sometimes with Greta. She could not imagine the life he lived when the door closed behind him. (15)

Whereas, in this passage, seeing is a more direct way for Lenchen to account for how James lives and therefore to relate to his existence, hearing as it is described in the novel is a less complete and more haunting way of living with the other. In fact, Lenchen hears the voices of a multiplicity of male others: “She heard [James’s] voice again: This is no place for her. And Heinrich’s voice: She’s been at it from a kid, like me. You’ve just not noticed before. She’s been round here always, like the rest of us” (15). The male voices that contradict and talk to themselves in Lenchen’s mind have similar haunting characteristics to that of Coyote. They resonate in the background of Lenchen’s female voice and haunt her performance of her gender. As a character whose decisions are marked by other male characters’ expectations of what she ought to be (how she exists), Lenchen is haunted by masculine voices and echoes that speak to each other. James’s voice suggests that this ‘ground’ is no place for her, and Heinrich responds by asserting her belonging in the community. In James’s words we see an attempt to displace a female character from a male dominated environment. By murdering his mother, James is trying to gain some of her power over the community and to make this day his day, to be seen as the dominant male, heterosexual figure of the community. However, despite his matricide and his contention that Lenchen, the woman pregnant with his child, does not belong in this place in

which the community lives, James is also existentially subjected to rejection and displacement when he decides to leave the community to head into town: “James had simply saddled his horse and ridden through the gate. Let the world see me now if it cares, he thought. The world didn’t seem to care” (81). In this humorous passage, the reader is made aware of James’s complicated relationship with others and the world around him. His arrogance and attempt at making himself visible to the others in the community, either by appearing as the dominant male figure by blinding Kip or by attempting to control Lenchen, ultimately fails and confines him, like the other members of the community, to the unseen and dark places of this world. The world does not care, and James is not seen. In reading how James’s voice haunts Lenchen and how ‘the world does not care about him,’ we may venture to argue that James indeed presents some attributes of specters.

3.4 Inescapable Temporalities: Felix and Specters

In the novel, time as a stable construct that progresses in a linear motion from moment to moment is significantly destabilized by ghostly apparitions and by some of the characters’ relationship to time. Although the temporal aspects of the events that unfold in the story follow a linear structure, some of the characters’ relationship to time and the phenomenon of the re-appearance of the Old Lady complicate this linear conception of temporality. It is therefore not so much the narrative structure of the novel which distorts time but the haunting function of some of the figures of the text. As Mark Fisher indicates in “What is hauntology?,” “[h]aunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space. It happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time” (19). The haunting in Watson’s novel functions according to Fisher’s description and the dislocation of time in the novel is dramatized by the Old Lady’s

anachronistic return from death. Initially, time in the novel is set in a simultaneously ambiguous and precise moment: the characters live “under Coyote’s eye” “until one morning in July” (3). From this moment marked by the word “until,” time, which is compressed into an infinitely dense moment before the action of the novel, begins to dislocate itself.

A main character in the dislocation of time that the novel explores is Felix. Being one of the pillars of the community, Felix, who helps Lenchen give birth and comforts Angel, Theophil, and Kip, is a symbol of stability and of unity in the novel. In fact, in her reading of Felix as the ‘artist figure’ in the text, Linda M. Morra contends that “Felix is driven towards neither violence nor insensibility, but towards positive action that effects change and generates communication” (214). For Morra, Felix is a protector and a neutral character. I would add that Felix symbolizes the solidity of the present and a form of refusal to face what haunts him and the community. Following a memory of him saving Angel from a bear, Felix is represented at the center of this present moment: “The remembrance of event and the slash of rain merged. Time annihilated in the concurrence. The present contracted into the sweet cup he fondled. Vast fingers circling it” (25). Felix’s grasp on the present and on the community is symbolized by his holding the cup, which can also be read as a symbol of Christ, in which time is reduced to a singularity. The stability Felix symbolizes has to homogenize time and history whereas ghosts, haunts, and specters are decidedly resistant to homogeneity and instead disrupt and traverse time and space in heterogenous ways.

The character of Felix is a prominent benevolent figure in the scholarly work done on Watson’s novel and he is, indeed, at the center of the ‘positive’ outcome of the novel. The child of James and Lenchen is named after Felix in a symbol of rebirth and stability. However, as I have shown in the section on the spectrality of the Old Lady of this chapter, Felix’s reaction to

the specter of the Old Lady is not entirely non-violent. Morra's argument, since it does not address Felix's relationship to the haunts in the novel, ignores Felix's conflictual position facing some of the characters' Indigeneity. Felix is not only "the artist figure" as Morra argues, but a character that stands in for the Christianity that is now far-removed from its European origins. Furthermore, Morra's reading inscribes itself in an analysis of Watson's modernist aesthetics and of her novel's relationship to the ideas of Marshall McLuhan. Morra writes that,

[u]ltimately, Watson shows that productive communication, as McLuhan would also suggest, is generated from one's heightened awareness to a situation to which others then react; in other words, it is only when Felix recognizes and then responds to the needs of the community and to the situation at hand that communication is effected.
(216)

Here Morra makes a substantial argument about Felix's function that, for the most part, disregards the function of the Indigenous trickster figure of Coyote and that of the Old Lady in the community's coming to terms with insensibility and violence. The Old Lady forces the community to face an Indigenous presence that is otherwise only apparent as a myth in the form of the figure of Coyote. The two characters complement themselves in asserting the existence of an 'old-world' discourse that is continuously repressed by characters and scholars. It is telling that, at the basis of Morra's argument, is a similar conception of language in the fictional world of the novel as that presented in Godard's "Between One Cliché and Another."²¹ Both scholars offer a simplifying reading which does not enter in conversation with the ghosts that haunt these "beginnings of language." However, this, as Samara Walbohm argues, "decreates an old world

²¹ Again, in this article Godard's central claim is that Watson's *The Double Hook* is "above all, a dramatization of the beginnings of language and cultural order in a primitive people" (159).

narrative” (81). Contrasting this ‘old-world narrative,’ a new-world narrative is gradually developed around notions of stability that are significantly undermined by the sites of haunting in the novel. The Potter family house is one of these sites where technology and progress are associated with dislocations in time:

We’ve never had a pump in our house all the years we’ve lived here, she’d heard Greta say. Someday, she’d say, you’ll lift the handle and stand waiting till eternity. James brings water in barrels from the spring. The thing about a barrel is you take it where you take it. There’s something fixed about a pump, fixed and uncertain. (6)

In this passage, Ara hears Greta talk about a water pump, a sign of one’s stable occupation of the land. Greta and the Potter family’s reluctance to adopt the water pump testifies to their mistrust of the settler-colonizer ways of occupying the land. The parallel between fixity and uncertainty is alien to the settler-colonizers’ goal, which is to implant themselves in the land they colonize. By defamiliarizing this mode of obtaining water, the Potter family disrupts settler-colonizer culture and its fetishization of sedentary modes of occupying a territory.

In many ways, Watson uses these disruptions and haunting figures to, as Cynthia Sugars argues of several Canadian authors who write in the Gothic mode, “textualize a form of White history which cast colonized or invaded peoples and the colonial landscape as a ghostly or monstrous threat to the civilised (White) world” (22). However, while this is in part true because the Old Lady and her spectral form, whose Indigeneity is omitted from the final version of the narrative but can still be acknowledged, are gradually removed from the narrative, and because Coyote is relegated to the background of the community as the child of James and Lenchen is named in honor of Felix (a predominant Christian figure in the text), Watson’s narrative complicates this by representing the difficult condition of living in a space where this civilized

white world is struggling to come to terms with the stability it so desperately needs to function according to its own norms. A stability that, I should add, is in very little ways coincidental as it is the foundation of the new-world discourse the novel is pitting against an old-world discourse.

3.5 The Burning of the House

There are characters who exist in the thin (or indeed increasingly wide if we are to consider the existential condition of many of the characters in the novel) margin between tangible, ‘verifiable’ existence, and death and complete absence in several of the spaces described in the novel. The Potter family house, in which Greta ‘resides’ forever as she commits suicide by burning the house down with herself in it, is one of these spaces and it is one that is at the origin of much of the haunting going on in the novel. The house’s relevance in relation to haunting and hauntology is crucial. Freud’s very use of the term “uncanny” in psychoanalysis introduces the home as a site of familiarity which is, through the uncanny and the unfamiliar, made unhomely (the *unheimlich*).²²

In the novel, the wilderness and the “outside” world are quite explicitly paralleled with Indigeneity and with the uncanny: “But outside was night. Outside was Kip. Outside was floorless, roofless, wall-less” (54). Here, the outside is darkness, it is Indigeneity since Kip, as we learn from Morriss’s reading of the novel’s drafts, is Indigenous, and it is the unhomely (the uncanny) as it has no walls, floors, or roofs. The outside is the uncontained and ‘uncivilized’

²² In “The Uncanny,” Freud writes that “[t]he German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *Heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning ‘familiar,’ ‘native,’ ‘belonging to the home’; and we are tempted to conclude that what is uncanny is frightening precisely because it is not known” (418).

wilderness. Greta, by burning the house in which part of her indigeneity (her dead part-Indigenous mother) is still present, destroys the home that has become unhomely and expels her family's indigeneity. As Gaston Bachelard would suggest, "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17). The burning of the house shatters this illusion of stability. Kip is blinded and relegated to the background of the novel as other characters take precedence in the events that culminate in the birth of James's and Lenchen's child. James vows to build a house "on one floor" which both prevents further murders by pushing a parent down the stairs of the house and symbolizes a desire for simplification and stability. In the fire that takes Greta and her mother's corpse away from the physical setting of the novel, James's guilt, along with the secrets that the Potter family home holds, are removed from the collective imaginary of the community: several gaps are created, and justice is not made as James is allowed back in the community. However, the Old Lady and Coyote linger in the air around the community:

And in the shadow of the girders fear unwound itself again like the line from his mother's reel.

Where is your hope?

Better go down to the bars of the pit

Better rest in the dust

Justice is swifter than water. (112)

While Greta takes James's and the family's secrets with her in the fire, the haunting figures of Coyote and the Old Lady remain present albeit in more subtle and hidden ways: the Old Lady no longer appears and symbols of her haunting are paralleled only to James's fear, and Coyote's voice is not introduced by the usual "Coyote cried." Despite the images of liberation and rebirth

that the end of the novel presents, hope and justice are repressed and put aside. Readers may interpret that Coyote and the Old Lady will haunt the community forever even as they do not explicitly return in the final pages of the novel. As Abraham and Torok suggest, “all the departed may return, but some are destined to haunt: the dead who were shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave” (171). By removing the Old Lady’s indigeneity from the final version of the novel and by expressing doubts with regards to the relevance of the figure of Coyote in the novel, Watson creates secrets that are not spoken in the text. In fact, the Indigeneity of several of the characters in the novel being omitted, and the death of some of these characters (or the physical violence they endure as, for example, is the case with Kip) silences this Indigenous portion of the narrative. This is what haunts, in the most predominant way, the novel itself and the characters in the novel. There are gaps in how characters are constructed and in how the novel is written and these gaps are the very haunts with which readers enter in conversation when reading the text. It is the living, both the living characters and the living readers, who are left with the need to invent some kind of ghostly figure that must be present in these gaps. As Abraham and Torok’s conceptualization of what haunts us would suggest,

It is a fact that the ‘phantom,’ whatever its form, is nothing but an invention of the living. Yes, and invention in the sense that the phantom is meant to objectify, even under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations, the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object’s life. The phantom is therefore also a metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others. (171)

Haunting in the novel is this very type of spectral ‘coming back.’ It is an invention of the living: in the case of the novel both an invention of the living author (Watson voluntarily creates haunting in her novel as a Gothic trope and through her omission of some of the characters indigeneity) and the living characters who, by hearing and seeing the specters that haunt them invent these very specters by way of projecting their fears and anxieties onto their existence. Ultimately, what Watson’s novel is ‘above all’ about, I argue, is the infinitely complex condition of living in a present that is constantly traversed by unspoken pasts and unknowable futures. The characters in Watson’s novel are not a “primitive people,”²³ they have an incomplete language, they collectively constitute a fragmented narrative voice whose very fragmentation is conducive of the haunts described in the novel.

²³ I use the expression “primitive people” in response to Barbara Godard’s position in “Between One Cliché and Another.”

4 Conclusion: “Figures, Made of Words”²⁴

Discussions of Watson’s first published novel have often been concerned with the spectrality of some of its characters and with the novel’s intertextuality. The arguments I have brought forward in this thesis about both the fictional and textual haunts in relation to this seminal Canadian novel suggest that, to appreciate the extent to which the novel unsettles the realm of certainties about texts and the condition of living, we must listen to and converse with the specters that haunt both the novel and the world created in it by Watson. Specters, both in the form of echoes—manifestations heard or spoken in language, in voices ventriloquized by beings who are not conventionally ‘there,’ meaning that they often appear to be in a place but that their relationship with themselves or with others suggest they are not completely in this place—and in the form of traces, which is to say visible ‘things’ (shapes or recognizable forms, also recognizable structures in the case of a text), are haunting the novel. By addressing these specters in this thesis, I am admitting, in a sense, to seeing things that others may not see. Such a seeing that is particular to the individual is a fundamental characteristic of any spectral apparition. However, in this thesis, I have been concerned with making these specters visible to other readers of both the novel and the scholarly work that has contributed to my argument. I do not, therefore, contend that any of the spectral figures and texts I have alluded to in this work exist in any certain way; rather, what I have been getting to with this thesis is that texts such as Watson’s *The Double Hook* are explorations in the realm of untold truths which, when they are spoken and voiced by language, crumble because the grounds they simultaneously stand on and

²⁴ Taken from George Bowering’s “Sheila Watson: Trickster.”

represent are unstable. The ghosts that appear in Watson's work owe much of their characteristic effect on readers to those found in Gothic works of fiction:

The amorphousness of Gothic effects enables authors to tap into resonant yet frustratingly intangible forces of collective identity and historicity, all the while, at base, recognizing such processes for what they are: spectral. There is something to be said, after all, for a ghost that you can't see. (Sugars 247)

While Watson's novel progresses towards an understanding that Canada is a nation that is haunted by a multiplicity of ghosts, and that the Canadian national imaginary is not devoid of haunts, it remains ambiguous in its treatment of spectrality; it refuses to say: 'this is what a specter is, or this is a ghost.' The novel, however, remains positively engaged in saying something about specters and, how it treats the question of spectrality in Canada surely has its issues: the convolution of a haunting past that is represented through erasure and an equally haunted present in which the ghosts of Indigenous characters are repressed and replaced by narratives of stability, highlights the anxieties that occur in the contact zone that gathers Indigenous and settler discourses. As Sugars remarks, "the persistence of Gothic motifs of haunting and monstrosity that revisit the colonial past testifies to the incomplete resolution of these histories in Canadian culture, alongside the continued sensation of a need to populate Canadian culture with fortifying hauntings" (146). Watson's *The Double Hook* offers these very Gothic motifs and, ultimately, experiments with the possibilities in the production of meaning in a 'new-world' whose foundational grounds, both discursive and figurative, are fragmented and inhabited by an array of disruptive entities.

In this thesis, I have made the claim that I am seeing something, that I am convinced of some presence in my reading of an important work of Canadian literature. To describe this

uncanny apparition as ghost, whether it is a text that I am claiming ‘exists’ in the novel’s intertext or a character that I am arguing is a specter, allows me to imbue any concern about this apparition with doubt. I should be careful to note that I do not intend to cast doubt on everything that the novel stands for or accomplishes; rather, I wish to expand the conversation about what the novel does to how it does it and, my claim is that one of the ways in which it does what it does is by haunting. The novel does not convince readers that they are seeing something, it lets readers know that there is nothing to be convinced about here, that convictions can be disrupted and that a text haunts and destabilizes convictions. In Bowering’s short essay “Sheila Watson: Trickster,” scholars and readers are reminded of the novel’s playful and unstable experimentation with language:

A fictional character is someone you are convinced you have seen, though she is not there. In that sense the posthumous Ma Potter is more real for Felix and Ara than they are for us. In truth they are all equally figures, made of words. If they live, it is under Coyote’s eye. Our rewarding for reading the book is language, not character development, not edification, not diversion, but language. This language, as anyone exposed to the first page will know, is not at rest and not seeking rest, but challenging us to form a logos out of our own unknowing. (189)

Like the undead and like ghosts, like language and characters, the novel refuses to rest, it repudiates stability from within its pages and becomes a world in itself.

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