Hollow
(a novel)

and

‘I do not think it is the end quite yet’: The Uncanny Return of the Past

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Abstract

Hollow is a story of loss and the uncanny reappearance of the dead. It begins when Isabelle, the novel's narrator, encounters the ghost of Freddie, a boy she met when she was fourteen years old. Now, at the age of twenty-four, Isabelle recalls the summer she knew Freddie, spending days with him at the staithe beside the river in the small market town where she lived with her mother. Shifting back to the early days of their friendship, it becomes clear that Isabelle's mother – along with the older generation of the town – disapprove of Freddie and his young mother. What also becomes clear, in the movements between past and present tense, is the haunting nature of memory, as brief glimpses of Isabelle's adult life suggest that something terrible will happen to Freddie.

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Reflecting on the creative development of the novel's themes, my essay, *I do not think it is the end quite yet: The Uncanny Return of the Past*, explores the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny at the intersection of loss and resurrection. In this essay, I will suggest that the Gothic, in its set of conventions, is a genre that speaks of loss, while the uncanny negotiates the return of the loss – whatever it may be – through resurrection, repetition, re-creation. When faced with loss in Gothic fiction, the uncanny experience finds its place in the return. In this essay we will witness loss in many forms – in the loss of place, the loss of self, the loss of a loved one in death. And we will see these losses returned to us, as the Gothic and the uncanny meet: the re-creation of place in fiction, the reconstruction of the self, the return of the dead to reside again amongst the living. In dealing with these losses and their returns, I will discuss my novel, *Hollow*, and the way

the writing process, the life experiences lent to it, and the losses and returns featured in the story all call attention to the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny.

In Chapter one, *How it Began: Crafting Uncanny Spaces*, I will suggest that the experience of writing Bungay – the place I spent my adolescence and the place I have used to inspire the landscape of my fiction – relies on blurring, on the suspension between reality and fiction. I will detail the ways in which this writing process demonstrates the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny in the constant tension between the loss of place and its uncanny reconstruction in fiction.

Chapter two, *Uncanny Recurrences*, is divided into two sections, each addressing the loss and reconstruction of the self. The first section, *Repeat After Me*, will address the unusual circumstance of finding myself reflected in my fiction as a result of the life experiences I have lent to my protagonist. In dealing with Gothic loss and the uncanny, I will suggest that this time, the return comes before the loss, that the experience of finding myself uncannily reconstructed in fiction signals the loss, or the unstable sense of self. The second section, *The Figure of the Ghost: He does not get on with being dead*, also demonstrates the loss and the return of the self, this time with focus on the novel's characters. We witness Isabelle's experience of loss as a double loss, and in this section, we see the way Gothic loss and the uncanny find their places in my novel. In the figure of the ghost, we witness a double loss returned: we see at once the return of Freddie and the reconstruction of Isabelle, as she returns as something other.

At the end of this essay, I return to my mother's house. I return to Bungay. In the final chapter, *The Uncanny Return*, I

stand on my mother’s doorstep and I reflect on the ideas raised in this essay. I reflect on the Gothic losses that have been returned to us, and the way the uncanny finds its place in these returns. I stand on the unstable ground between absence and presence, loss and return, and consider how each case affects my return to Bungay.

List of Illustrations
All photos by author.

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Part I:

Hollow

(a novel)

[REDACTED]

Part II:

‘I do not think it is the end quite yet’: The Uncanny Return of the Past

INTRODUCTION: THE BEGINNING IS ALREADY HAUNTED

> The uncanny entails another thinking of beginning: the beginning is already haunted.
> (Nicholas Royle)[1]

I am looking up at a house. Picture it. The windowpanes are gone. Ivy snakes up the drainpipe and disappears over the roof. If I get close enough, leaning in towards the door, I can see the handle, one that may not have been used for years, and the lock where a key should go. The place where the comings and goings should happen, but do not happen, or at least not anymore. The house is adjacent to a level crossing. Here, at the intersection, the barriers come down, the lights begin to flash, and trains full of people, full of life, barrel past this empty house.

I have never seen this house before. It is abandoned, and I have found it only accidentally, on my way home from a long walk. I have never walked this route before, but as I stop at the train tracks, as I turn my head and look up at this house, there is the sense of the familiar. Its structure is familiar. After all, it still looks like a house. But something is wrong. It *feels* wrong. As though there is something wrong with time. I have to tilt my head right back to see in through the window, to catch a glimpse of a bedroom, the children's wallpaper: pink and peeling, with the hint of a face on the walls – cartoon characters, I think. It is a glimpse into someone else's past, something physical that I, in the present, can set eyes upon, but only wonder at what had been before, only imagine the life that happened inside that house, at the

[1] Nicholas Royle, *The uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.1.

child who once slept in that room. I begin to piece it all together, the feeling I am experiencing – peculiar, strange, a vague but distinct sense of dread. And it almost makes me shudder. It makes me step back and move away.

The image of this house is an image traditional of the Gothic genre. Abandoned. Bleak. Crumbling. Overrun with weeds. Early works of Gothic fiction, as Botting notes, were 'often tempered with decay: deserted, haunted and in ruins'.[2] This house, in all its emptiness, signals a sense of a life and of people disappeared. I stand here, faced with the blending of the past and the present, a disruptive temporal shift, a shared moment in which the living and the ghosts of the past reside. Botting also notes that 'old buildings in gothic fiction are never secure or free from shadows, disorientation or danger.'[3] And when I consider the shadows inside this house, of the former inhabitants of the place, there are a swarm of questions: Where are they now? Why did they leave? What *happened* to them? As David Punter recognises in his study *Gothic Pathologies*, the sense of Gothic dread is tied up with the idea that we 'cannot know that it happened, whatever it was; only that something happened, and that we are now in the wake […] of its effects'.[4] The house presents a loss. A loss of knowledge, a gap, a hole where something should be whole. As I cannot know what happened, I try to piece it together, the how of it, the why of it, even the who of it all. And in doing so, it is my imagination that fills this gap, my imagination that brings back an option of the truth. And in this coming back,

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[2] Fred Botting, *Gothic: The New Critical Idiom,* 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2014), p.4.
[3] Botting, p.4.
[4] David Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, The Body and The Law* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p.209; see also: David Punter, 'The uncanny', in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

the return of what (might have) happened, I am faced with the uncanny effect. Its structure, both familiar and unfamiliar, reminds me, suddenly, of Edgar Allan Poe's narrator facing the House of Usher, a house that, as Sue Chaplin states, is 'typical [of] Gothic space: gloomy, isolated and crumbling'.[5]

> While the objects around me – while the carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy – while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this – I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up.[6]

I too experience these unfamiliar fancies, stirred up by the ordinary image of the house. And what is this experience? The feeling I experience as I look upon a house that is at once familiar and unfamiliar? Anthony Vidler describes Poe's house as itself an 'uncanny power […], the more disquieting for the absolute normality of the setting, its veritable *absence* of overt terror. The effect was one of the disturbing unfamiliarity of the evidently familiar.'[7] The same effect can be said of the house I look upon. The psychological experience known as the uncanny directs my emotional response to the house, to the Gothic image, a picture inadvertently an echo of Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

I walk away from the house. I leave. I feel relieved. And why is this? As Martin Heidegger notes in his work on 'The Structure of Uncanniness', the 'absolute helplessness in the face of the threatening, because it is indeed indefinite,

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[5] Sue Chaplin, *Gothic Literature,* (London: York Press, 2011), p.95.
[6] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher', in *Selected Tales*, ed. by David Van Leer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 49-65 (p.52).
[7] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), p.18.

because it is nothing, offers no ways and means of overcoming it. Every orientation draws a blank.'[8] The experience or the feeling stirred up by the image of the house, then, offers no stability of orientation – it only offers the collision of the past and present, the living and the absented, the total uncanniness at the intersection of 'then' and 'now'. This experience of the uncanny relies on feeling, on the sense of strangeness. Its powers of doubling, of repetition, of defamiliarizing or destabilising the familiar rely on the subject's personal experience and response to the manifestation (material or otherwise) of the uncanny. Julian Wolfreys states that the uncanny 'is not merely a category in its own right but is itself another name, an image without an image perhaps, for spectrality and haunting'.[9] This comes down to the fact that the uncanny can never be pinned down to one thing, it is an *experience*, is in itself a spectral presence – or absence – a disturbing, uneasy sense of the familiar and strange. Like being haunted, the uncanny, as Sigmund Freud defines it, 'is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed.'[10] And in Gothic texts, the past, as Catherine Spooner states, 'returns with sickening force'[11].

The Gothic genre is obsessed with the past. The past is obsessed with the present, with disturbing and destabilising the familiar and the 'now'. This constant and uncanny return of and to the past is the core of the genre, for as Punter

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[8] Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. by Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 283-92 (p.290).
[9] Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.15.
[10] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p.148.
[11] Catherine Spooner*, Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p.18; see also: *Terror and Wonder: The Gothic Imagination*, ed. by Dale Townshend (London: The British Library, 2014).

suggests, the 'Gothic trades on the sense that "we have been there before.'"[12] In Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, for example, the narrator, in encountering her first apparition at Bly, wonders: 'Was there a secret at Bly – a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected refinement?'.[13] As Peter K. Garrett notes, these literary echoes of *Jane Eyre* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* prompt 'self-conscious reflections in James and his readers, indicating a genealogy for his Gothic story that stretches back more than a century'.[14] Gothic successors emerge from a long history of work in order to echo and reflect those that came before. It means that the Gothic emerges today as a genre that replays the original tropes of the eighteenth century, an uncanny echoing and repetition of those earlier themes and ideas. As Wolfreys states, 'there can be no narrative, in short, which is not always already disturbed and yet made possible from within its form or structure by a ghostly movement.'[15] The genre is haunted by itself, the Gothic haunted by the Gothic, by its restricted set of devices, continually reminding both writer and reader that there is something behind us – that we should be looking over our shoulder. The genre is, as Spooner suggests, 'profoundly concerned with its own past, self-referentially dependent on traces of other stories, familiar images and narrative structures, intertextual allusions.'[16]

The home is an enduring component of Gothic fiction, the site of fear and insecurity. Be it a labyrinthine castle, an ancestral mansion, or a modest, contemporary semi-detached,

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[12] Punter, p.209.
[13] Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw & The Aspern Papers*, ed. by Claire Seymour (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993; repr. 2000), p.20.
[14] Peter K. Garrett, *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), p.4.
[15] Wolfreys, p.3.
[16] Spooner, p.10.

the place our character calls home becomes the sphere of contested safety, the site of the uncanny. The Gothic responds, as Chaplin states, 'to the conflicts and anxieties of its historical moment and that is characterised especially by its capacity to represent individual and societal traumas.'[17] In this way, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Gothic became, as Bette B. Roberts explains, 'the expression of repressed fears and anxieties resulting from women's actual oppression in a male-dominated environment.'[18] One of the political anxieties that emerges from works of the period saw, over and over again, the central pattern of imprisonment and escape, in works that would later become known as the Female Gothic.[19] This term was coined in 1976 by Ellen Moers, who stated that the 'Female Gothic is easily defined: the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic'.[20] These works, with their own literary conventions, featured confined and imprisoned heroines subject to the abuse of tyrants, confining architecture or supernatural adversaries that came to represent the patriarchal society. As Sara Wasson notes, 'since the eighteenth century, home has been increasingly imagined as a private sphere distinct from public space, the public space gendered male and the private female.'[21] Gothic

[17] Chaplin, p.4.
[18] Bette B. Roberts, 'Gothic Fiction (1780-1830)', in *Women's Studies Encyclopaedia,* ed. by Helen Tierney, rev. edn, 3 vols (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999) II (1999), 602-03 (p.602).
[19] It should be noted that by the 1990s, the term 'Female Gothic' was hotly contested, and has since undergone a variety of titles. Eugenia C. DeLamotte, for example, in her study *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (1990), uses the term 'Women's Gothic'. For an examination of the term 'Female Gothic' and the way women use and engage with the Gothic mode, see: Ellen Ledoux, 'Was there ever a "Female Gothic"?' *Palgrave Communications*, 3 (2017) <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.42>.
[20] Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p.90.
[21] Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War: Dark London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.106.

texts initially foregrounded the home as a sphere of safety, yet as Katherine Cooper identifies, 'in terms of the female gothic, the very notion of the domestic as a sphere of safety is entirely false.'[22] As Eugenia DeLamotte notes, the repetition in Gothic novels 'mimes the claustrophobic circularity of women's real lives in that it shows the heroine, who must confront the same terrors repeatedly, doing the same thing over and over.'[23] DeLamotte continues:

> women's Gothic shows women suffering from institutions they feel to be profoundly alien to them and their concerns. And those institutions were all too contemporaneous with the lives of women who wrote and read Gothic literature in the 1790s and early 1800s: the patriarchal family, the patriarchal marriage and a patriarchal class, legal, educational, and economic system.[24]

In the eighteenth century – a century in which married women lived in properties built and owned by men – due to their roles as femme couvertes under established law, women's legal rights and rights to own property were subsumed by their husband. In Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* the centrality of real estate is not only a defiant discussion of the rights of women, seen through the battle for ownership between heroine and villain, but also a metaphor for the figuring of women as property. Not only fighting for her rights to inherit her property, Emily fights for her liberty, as she considers of Montoni that 'if she could once escape from his castle, she might defy his power'.[25]

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[22] Katherine Cooper, 'Things slipping between past and present: Feminism and the gothic in Kate Mosse's *Sepulchre*', in *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction,* ed. by Katherine Cooper and Emma Short (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.153-170 (p.160).
[23] Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.177.
[24] Ibid., p.152.
[25] Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. by Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966; repr. 1998), p.310.

Gothic fiction is in itself an uncanny mode, featuring the constant 'coming back' of the same ideas and central themes. This sense of déjà vu creates a haunting sense of something 'prior', something that existed before and has come back, now in a different form. The uncanny repetition of female imprisonment and escape can be found in the twenty-first century writing of Gabriel Tallent, whose novel *My Absolute Darling* features the confined and controlled life of a young female named Turtle, and her escape from her tyrannical father, who claims he 'loves [her] too much to ever let [her] go.'[26] As Spooner states, the Gothic genre is 'cannibalistically consuming the dead body of its own tradition',[27] and here we see this repetition of the female Gothic formula – the imprisoned female, the confining architecture, the abusive tyrant, but with modern resonances and anxieties: child abuse. As Punter informs us: 'What haunts the Gothic, we might provisionally say, and more especially in contemporary contexts, is Gothic: a ghost haunted by another ghost.'[28]

It may be of interest to note, here, that in the early stages of my thesis, I referred to an expanse of inspirational critics when viewing my writing through a Female Gothic lens.[29] Like Tallent's protagonist, Turtle, I likened my fourteen-

[26] Gabriel Tallent, *My Absolute Darling*, (London: 4th Estate – Harper Collins Publishers 2017), p.377.
[27] Spooner, p.10.
[28] Punter, p.14.

[29] For further reading on the Female Gothic and on children in contemporary society, see: Bauer, Gero, *Houses, Secrets, and the Closet: Locating Masculinities from the Gothic Novel to Henry James* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016); Beard, Mary, *Woman as a Force in History: A study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Macmillan, 1946; repr. New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2015); Botting, Fred, *Gothic*: *The New Critical Idiom*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2014); Castle, Terry, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Clemens, Valdine, *The Return of the Repressed* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Clery, E.J., *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2000); Ellis, Kate Ferguson, *The Contested Castle:*

year-old protagonist, Isabelle, to the ghostly shades of women depicted in Female Gothic fiction, considering children and adolescents, without voice or authority, to have an equal legal non-status as the marginalised woman of early Gothic works. Although I was adamant, when setting out to write *Hollow*, that my novel wouldn't be a novel about sex, about gender, about what it means to be female, the story took on a life of its own. The novel is as much about haunting as it is about growing up and discovering oneself. The tensions between Freddie and Isabelle are preoccupied with the discovery of sexual and gender identity. Over the course of one summer, we see Isabelle and Freddie embark on adventures: they steal a canoe, they talk to God, they reckon with their desire for one another. In my novel, I play on female views that generalise men and the male role, particularly in relation to sex. In the novel, Sadie, an older girl who takes part in a group sex act with Freddie during a day trip to the beach, tells Isabelle: 'It's what they wait for. […] Freddie is just the same."' In her adult life, the string of lovers Isabelle takes easily compounds this

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Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Freeman, Claire, and Paul Tranter, *Children and their Urban Environment: Changing Worlds* (Earthscan: London, 2011); Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literacy Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Goodenough, Elizabeth, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi B. Sokoloff, eds, *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994); Hoeveler, Diane Long, 'The Female Gothic, Beating Fantasies, and the Civilizing Process', in *Comparative Romanticisms: Power, Gender, Subjectivity*, ed. by Larry H. Peer and Diane Long Hoeveler (Columbia: Camden House, 1998), pp. 103-32; Horner, Avril, and Sue Zlosnik, eds, *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Howarth, Michael, *Under the Bed, Creeping: Psychoanalyzing the Gothic in Children's Literature*, (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2014); Jones, Phil, *Rethinking Childhood: Attitudes in Contemporary Society*, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009); Wall, Barbara, *Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma Of Children's Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's Press Inc, 1991); Wallace, Diana, *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History, and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013); —— and Andrew Smith, *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

notion, as each are faceless and merge into one. In this commentary, the underlying suggestion is that men only want one thing, and that *one thing* is the barrier between Freddie and Isabelle, and is not a barrier for Sadie and Freddie because Sadie has recognised it in the males around her and has therefore acted and taken down the barrier. One could argue that the openness Isabelle has around sex, and the way Sadie leads the conversation and possibly the acts, shows that there seems to be a mutual enjoyment of sex, but overall the perspective of sexual relations and gender is a damaging one. Sadie's views of men – or of what men want from her – suggest a harmful perception of how she aligns herself with others in the world, and Isabelle is unhappy, alone, and uses sex as an attempt to register trauma she did not register at fourteen.

Hollow is a novel that could be analysed through the Female Gothic lens, though when I likened Isabelle to the women depicted in Female Gothic fiction, the commentary became an overview of women in eighteenth and nineteenth century texts and children in contemporary Gothic fiction, and in this analysis, I was becoming increasingly detached: I was losing sight of my characters, of my writing. I was losing sight of the story. In *Hollow*, we see Isabelle and Freddie journey through adolescence, face the challenges of the physical world and the challenges of understanding one another. It is a story about people, about trying to navigate through loneliness, to deal with loss, to overturn and eventually understand the past. It is a story that is as much about sexual development as it is about haunting. It is preoccupied with gender. But I think that first and foremost, it is a story of loss. And through Isabelle's first-person narration, through her mingling of past and present, we see the fragmentary nature of memory, and the

way that which was lost comes back to us.

Tales of haunting, of the return of the past, are always possible within the familiar, everyday space. The home is a fundamental and traditional component of Gothic fiction, where apprehension is dictated by the tensions and hidden secrets, a site which emits an uncanny power through its intermingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. As Kate Ferguson Ellis writes in her introductory essay, the home is presented as 'the place from which some (usually "fallen" men) are locked out, and others (usually "innocent women") are locked in'.[30] Inside the home, inscribed by the law of the uncanny, resides the Gothic tradition of hidden rooms and locked doors, an allegory for the past and hidden secrets. The Gothic trope of the house, in presenting a loss of safety, elicits an uncanny power through the revelation of these hidden secrets, which impacts violently on those inside the home. There is tension between secrets and knowledge, between knowing and not knowing. As Nicholas Royle explains, 'the uncanny has to do with the sense of a secret encounter: it is perhaps inseparable from an apprehension, however fleeting, of something that should have remained secret and hidden but has come to light.'[31] Moments of crisis see the violation or transgression of locked doors, rooms, walls or boundaries, revealing the past, bringing it into the present. Charles Perrault's folktale *Bluebeard* provides a paradigm for this Gothic motif, as Bluebeard's wife unlocks a forbidden door and discovers the gruesome remains of Bluebeard's murdered, former wives. In contemporary fiction, Andrew Michael Hurley's debut novel *The Loney* follows this tradition of locked doors and hidden secrets

[30] Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p.ix.
[31] Royle, p.2.

come to light, when his characters return to their familiar holiday site known as Moorings, in a house situated beside the beach. Upon their return, the characters discover a hidden door inside the old family home, and when they venture inside, they find evidence of a room used as a hospice for children with tuberculosis:

> 'What was inside?' he said.
>
> "A bed,'" Father replied.
>
> Mr Belderboss frowned.
>
> "And some toys," said Father.
>
> "Was it a playroom, do you think?" Mr Belderboss said.
>
> "No,'" said Father, barking into his fist again. "I've a feeling it was a quarantine."
>
> "For the children with TB?"
>
> Father nodded. "There's a little barred window that's been bricked up from the outside. That's probably why we've never noticed it before."'[32]

Of revelations, or the 'coming back' of the past, Michel de Certeau states:

> What was excluded re-infiltrates the place of its origin – now the present's 'clean' […] place. It resurfaces, it troubles, it turns the present's feeling of being "at home" into an illusion, it lurks – this "wild," this "obscene", this "filth," this "resistance" of "superstition" – within the walls of the residence.[33]

While both Hurley's characters and Bluebeard's wife physically unlock a door to discover the past, the Gothic can also reunite the living and the buried past through the unlocking of the psyche, of something repressed or forgotten in the mind. The past returns to imprison those in the present, though these

[32] Andrew Michael Hurley, *The Loney*, (Leyburn: Tartarus Press, 2014; repr. London: John Murray Publishers, 2015) p.110.
[33] Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; repr. 1997), p.4.

sites of imprisonment evolve through the decades. As Spooner describes:

> The labyrinthine underground vaults and torture chambers of eighteenth-century Gothic texts; the secret passages and attics riddling the ancestral mansions of the nineteenth century; the chambers of the human heart and brain in twentieth-century writing.[34]

In Joy Kogawa's novel, *Obasan*, Naomi describes her entrapment: '[W]e're trapped, Obasan and I, by our memories of the dead – all our dead – those who refuse to bury themselves.'[35] Here, Kogawa exposes the Gothic genre's capacity for reinvention. As Gerry Turcotte notes when regarding Kogawa's writing, 'whereas in traditional Gothic, barriers are physical, with locked doors and dungeons signifying entrapment – here it is memory that imprisons.'[36] Even in tales which seem to have given up the ghost, or are cast out of their traditional locked-door dwellings, the manifestation of anxiety, of despair, of displacement, is expressed in the home and elicited through the uncanny experience, in its relentless power to keep on returning.

And all the time, we are reading the traces of where the Gothic has been. Haunting, in the uncanny return of the past, is always possible within familiar spaces, because, as Wolfreys states, the haunting process is nothing more than the 'destabilisation of the domestic scene, as that place where we apparently confirm our identity, our sense of being, where we

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[34] Spooner, p.18.
[35] Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (Canada: Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd, 1981; repr. New York: Anchor Books, 1994) p.30.
[36] Gerry Turcotte, '"Horror Written on Their Skin": Joy Kogawa's Gothic Uncanny' in *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*, ed. by Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte (Waterloo: Wilfrid University Press, 2009), pp.75-96 (p.85).

feel most at home with ourselves.'[37] I experience this uncanny effect in my dreams (nightmares, actually), when I think I have woken up and I realise, slowly at first and then all at once, that I am not in my bedroom. The door is on the wrong side of the room, or there are shelves on the wall that I do not remember assembling. I do not recognise the radio alarm clock on the bedside table because I have never owned one, and the window, when I look for it, is always too small, too high up in the wall. This imitation of my domestic space is strange but not entirely unfamiliar. I have a sense or the distant knowledge that this is my room. It *feels* like my room. But the terror resides in knowing something is wrong, in the destabilisation that comes with the feeling that I do not belong. This place is not my place, not the space I thought I knew. I am *at a loss*: completely and utterly. Confused and uncertain. Often, I try to convince someone I know that I am dreaming – because someone has appeared, inexplicably, into the dreamscape - and they try to soothe me, pointing out the strange and unfamiliar features of the room, and they will not listen, even as I scratch and bite, even as I scream, even as I pull at my eyelids and try to wake myself up: there is no convincing them that this world is not the real world. And it is there, even when I wake, the creeping dread, the fear that something is amiss. As Dylan Trigg states, 'when we are shocked by things in the night, then it is only because we already have a relationship not only with the night, but also with the things that seek to commune with us from the beyond.'[38] To reiterate: the uncanny is based on feeling, relies on sensation. And as Heidegger states, the uncanny is a feeling in which 'one no longer feels at home in his most

[37] Wolfreys, p.5.
[38] Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012), p.289.

familiar environment […] in dread, being-in-the-world is totally transformed into a "not at home" purely and simply'.[39] And what is frightening, when I am experiencing these dreams, is the realisation that I am *not at home*. I have lost my sphere of safety, and I have lost my sense of self: the real me is asleep in bed, in the real world. This sensation is riddled with uncanniness, for the uncanny can involve, as Royle states, 'feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one's sense of oneself […] seems strangely questionable.'[40] I find myself, or rather I do not find myself, as my own sense of self seems threatened, just as Gothic subjects, as Robert Miles states, are presented in a 'state of deracination, of the self finding itself dispossessed in its own house, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation'.[41]

As Heidegger suggests, 'that of which we are frightened can be (and most of the time is) something with which we are very well acquainted.'[42] I am confident that I am very well acquainted with my home, and (most of the time) with myself. And so it qualifies that the disjunction, the defamiliarizing of my home and of my own self should be a nightmare, should transpire as that which is frightening.

The uncanny experience, the feeling that comes with fear and with disjunction, can be a central theme in Gothic fiction. The Gothic genre is a repetition of tropes, an echo, with ever evolving yet ever-present themes and ideas that seem to resist erasure. We cannot lose them – they fight for themselves again and again in contemporary fiction. They come back alive and kicking. Contradictorily, my sense of the

[39] Heidegger, p.289.
[40] Royle, p.1.
[41] Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.3.
[42] Heidegger, p.288.

Gothic is about loss. The Gothic presents us with loss. As we have seen in this chapter, the Gothic can present us with the loss of the living in an abandoned house, the loss of freedom and identity in the home, the loss of sense of self in sites of contested safety. It is about dealing with loss, being at a loss, getting lost.

The Gothic, does, however, constantly seek the return of that which has been lost. As Punter suggests, in Gothic 'we do not directly ask, What happened? We ask, Where are we, where have we come from?'[43] We are constantly looking back. In order to move forward, we must turn right around to the past. In asking where we are, what we are, who we are, the Gothic actively seeks the return of the loss – whatever it may be. And the uncanny, in directing our emotional response, comes into all of this through the return of these losses. The uncanny is about resurrection. It is about coming back and repeating.

This thesis will demonstrate the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny at the intersection of loss and resurrection. In this essay, we will witness loss in many forms – in the loss of place, the loss of self, the loss of a loved one in death. And we will see these losses returned to us, as the Gothic and the uncanny meet: the re-creation of place in fiction, the reconstruction of the self, the return of the dead to reside again amongst the living. In dealing with these losses and their returns, I will discuss my novel, *Hollow*, and the way the writing process, the life experiences lent to it, and the losses and returns featured in the story all call attention to the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny.

In chapter one, *How it began: Crafting Uncanny Spaces*, I will demonstrate the relationship between the Gothic and the

[43] Punter, p.209.

uncanny through the loss and the resurrection of place through fiction. I will discuss my writing process and the uncanny experience that came with it. I remember the day, when I was thirteen and living in a small town in Suffolk, that a boy moved to the area from London. By the time we were fourteen, we were close friends. One evening we were standing on the street outside his house with another friend, wondering whether it was too cold to go down to the river. *Perhaps we should just go inside*, someone said. Our friend looked up at the house and suddenly exclaimed that she had already been inside. I remember the boy, just staring at her, as she told him that his house used to be a fish and chip shop. She told him that she had sat on the window ledge in his lounge while she waited for her chips. I remember his shudder as she pointed at the window, as she peered inside the house through the blinds and pointed to his sofa, where the counter used to be, at the space in the room that was once filled with hungry customers. It was an invasion of his home, of his private life, of his place of shelter. A girl that he had known for less than a year had been inside that space without his invitation. Her past presence in his home shone new light on the history of his house, something he and I were unaware of, and now the past found its place there – inside there lingered old ghosts.

At fourteen, I didn't know that the moment was uncanny. I only knew that the revelation of the hidden past – an old building transformed and therefore hidden – evoked strangeness, a feeling of unease. I had no idea, either, that I would use Suffolk to set my novel, that I would use the small town of Bungay and its surrounding spaces in my writing, and that in writing them, in that very recollection, I would bring back the past. In remembering my past, my memories of East

Anglia, I have shaped my novel, *Hollow*. In writing Bungay's landscape and my mother's house in my fiction, I experience, simultaneously, a loss of place and a return of place. In my fiction, I reshape and recreate a place that comes to exist on the liminal border of memory and imagination. As Erica Moore suggests, the human mind 'is a Gothic landscape, painted as an unsettled space where memory intermingles with history, and fact is perpetually contested and re-memorialized'.[44] As I re-memorialise Bungay in my writing, the effect is one of strangeness, an uncanniness, an experience of both the loss and resurrection of place. Throughout this chapter, I will also look at the ways the uncanny experience affects my protagonist within the spaces I have crafted.

Chapter two, *Uncanny Recurrences*, is divided into two sections, each addressing the loss and reconstruction of the self. In the first section, *Repeat After Me*, I will consider the connection between myself and my protagonist and attempt to prove the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny through the loss and displacement of self and the reconstruction of the self in fiction. I will demonstrate the unusual circumstance of finding myself reflected in my fiction, of my own self returning. At fourteen years old, my protagonist – Isabelle – meets a boy who has moved to the small town from London. I watch her swim in the river and lie in the sun, watch her act out things that I did, things that I never did, things I wish I hadn't done. She repeats incidents, repeats behaviours. In dealing with Gothic loss and the uncanny, I will suggest that this time, the return comes before the loss, that the experience of finding myself uncannily

[44] Erica Moore, 'Haunting Memories: Gothic and Memoir', in *Gothic Landscapes: Changing Eras, Changing Cultures, Changing Anxieties*, ed. by Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 169-198 (p.169).

reconstructed in fiction signals the loss, or the unstable sense of self. As Moore states, 'memory is a Gothic haunting'[45], where the words 'creep silently inside the writer's unconscious and are projected onto the shadowed walls of the blank page, enacting a puppet show replete with uncanny props and a recently unearthed, now un-dead, script'.[46] I found myself, constantly, in Isabelle, in the world I had created, a place both familiar and unfamiliar, in a place that both exists and does not exist, and in this state of disorientation, I start to wonder: in her repetitions, is Isabelle haunting my memories? Or am I the haunting presence, the figure lingering in the margins of her story?

The second section of *Uncanny Recurrences*, entitled *The Figure of the Ghost: He does not get on with being dead*, also demonstrates the loss and the return of the self, this time with focus on the novel's characters. We witness Isabelle's experience of loss as a double loss. As she navigates her grief, she is faced at once with the loss of Freddie in death, and the loss of herself as she repeats the past, over and over. Having witnessed an event that she cannot fully register, and without real understanding of *what happened* to Freddie in life, Isabelle is caught up in repetition, in going back. As Punter proposes, in Gothic we are faced with 'a question of how it is that we have "come adrift", what the lingering, haunting sense of oneness is that relegates all our present actions to simulacra, fragments, ghosts.'[47] Isabelle loses herself in her compulsion to repeat, in her obsession to get to grips with the past by re-enacting and recreating one incident over and over. In her repetition we witness Isabelle's change and development, and we witness her return in the form of

[45] Moore, p.169.
[46] Ibid., p.169.
[47] Punter, p.209.

someone – or something – almost unrecognisable. In figure of the ghost, we witness a double loss returned: we see at once the return of Freddie and the reconstruction of Isabelle, as she returns as something other.

At the end of this essay, I return to my mother's house. I return to Bungay. In the final chapter, I reflect on the ideas raised in this essay, on the Gothic losses that have been returned to us, and the way the uncanny finds its place in these returns. In this essay, I walk the line between the fictional and material world, the self and the double, the living and the dead, and in *The Uncanny Return* I stand on my mother's doorstep and I consider each of these cases, and the way they relate to my return, to my uncanny experience of *coming back.*

HOW IT BEGAN: CRAFTING UNCANNY SPACES

> A specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*.
> (Jacques Derrida)[48]

Let us begin by going back. Let us start with Bungay, the small market town in the Waveney Valley in Suffolk. At the neck of a meander of the River Waveney, it is situated approximately twenty miles west of the coast, and approximately thirty miles from the Norfolk Broads. Water is everywhere. All of it floods my memory. The apricot flush of stained-glass windows, the dim streetlights and coloured shop fronts. You could see the stars at night, the shy and silver reflection of the moon in the river, the sound of zipping bats overhead and the yell and roar of the sluice. My mother told me I should write about my experiences of the place. *One day*, she said – more than once – *you'll thank me, you'll thank me for bringing you here*. I should write about everything, she said; the thick smell of honeysuckle on the trellis, my first kiss at the staithe, white rain on grass. I should write about that time I slipped on the edge of the jetty and thought I had slipped into a nightmare: the shock of lime-green duckweed at my feet, the marshy smell of something dim and disgusting in the plant roots and wet wood, the blaze of smacked shins and smarting palms. Something had tried to grab my ankle, something lying in wait beneath the water. I came home wet and wild-eyed: *write it down*, my mother said.

In this chapter, *How it Began,* I will detail the ways in which my writing process demonstrates the relationship

[48] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning*, *and the New International,* trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p.11.

between the Gothic and the uncanny in the constant tension between the loss of place and its uncanny reconstruction in fiction. We will witness the connection between the landscape of Bungay, the small market town in the East of England, and the spaces I have created in my novel *Hollow*. The experience of writing Bungay in my novel relies on blurring, on the suspension between reality and fiction, and I will suggest that this writing process causes both a loss of place and an uncanny return of a place that neither exists nor does not exist. Throughout this discussion, I will also shine a light on the ways Gothic loss and uncanny resurrection work in my novel, and how loss and resurrection affect my protagonist within the spaces I have created.

It wasn't until I was in a writing class during my Masters degree that I began to take my mother's advice seriously. *Write it down*, she had said. In class, I was asked to take ten minutes to describe the house I had grown up in. I thought briefly of my father's house, which is where I was living at the time, and where I had lived as a child, until the age of eleven. I thought next of my mother's house, in the east of England, where I had lived from eleven until the age of eighteen. I had moved with my two sisters and my mother, when my parents had separated, and the house belonged to my mother's fiancé. The house was white and narrow and beautiful, but what I had written was dark, choking, a stranglehold on the past:

> The house was big, but the shape was all wrong – narrow, long, the river running directly beneath it. The house was an old watermill, and I used to swear I could hear it, the undetectable sound of the river, running beneath the house, burrowing through the crawlspace, right below our feet. And things got swept up beneath that house, things got carried away.

Figure 1: 1, The Watermill, Bungay

This is where it all began. Here is where it happened for the first time – I lost this place and gained an echo of this place all at once. In rewriting this place, I lost the exact shape, the size, the precise colour of the walls. I created a place made of tweaks and changes, little things that I coloured differently, that I tampered with, spatially and factually. In crafting the spaces of *Hollow*, I was caught up in the act of remembering. I remembered my mother's house, imagined venturing through each room, pushing open the doors, peering up the stairs, swiping dust with my fingertips. Where to start? I wondered. In his study of spaces, Georges Perec notes that within houses 'each room has a particular function',[49] and so I re-memorialized these rooms, gave each of them a function:

> I should start, I think, with the house. We stayed there even after my father died, my mother sleeping in the room they used to share, the giant emptiness of the double bed taking up most of the space. She slept beneath his ghost, in the bed facing the window, the room overlooking the river and the brown light of morning. My room was on the other side of the house, full of giant skylights and no blinds so that morning light cleaved the room open from above.

[49] Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. and ed. by John Sturrock, rev. edn (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.28.

> Downstairs, the house ran narrow and straight, something shallow about it, with its low ceilings and the dim, empty colour of the walls. Off-white. Not quite grey. We never used the front door – I'm not even sure if my mother owned a key to it – and so it stiffened over the years, the wide keyhole filling with gunk until I poked my finger inside, wriggled it around, gave up and went to fetch a stick from outside, disturbing whatever it was that had laid its eggs in the deep neck of the keyhole.
>
> We used the back door that opened into the kitchen so that there could be no lingering in the hallway, no pause or moment of stillness: straight into the house to the smell of casserole or spicy tea or something stirring in the slow cooker. We ate at a table next to the window, while the clocks in the kitchen ticked at different times.
>
> At the other end of the house, the lounge had wide windows that stretched across the length of the wall. Nothing went unseen in that room. Every inch of it could be seen from the outside. It was always tidy in there, the carpets always clean. *It's like nobody lives here*, I used to think, whilst taking off my shoes.
>
> The house tunnelled out from there, moving narrowly out to the hallway, the corridor dipping suddenly into more space, forming a little room that sat, purposeless, between the lounge and the kitchen. There was no door, in this little non-room, just an open space that we called The Cubby. There was a heavy brown armchair that used to be my father's, and a piano that no one knew how to play. It was where she took me to pray, my mother on her knees, tucked between the piano stool and the bookcases, the shallow, watery light streaming in from the small, square window, pooling at our feet.

I experience it here – a loss and a return of place. I remember The Cubby – though we never called it by that name. We called it the 'Piano Room', long after my sister gave up learning how to play. When it had been me, when I was the one inhabiting that space, there had been a computer, pressed close against the far wall, the piano on one side and the small, square window on the other. And in that strange corridor of a

room, there was always the sense of someone else in there with you, even when you sat alone; people passing through, moving in and out between the kitchen and the hallway, across the threshold, always just out of sight. And in recalling this, it is drawn to my attention: the way my writing process presents both a loss and a return of place, a sense of the familiar and the unfamiliar combined. In her study of place in fiction, Eudora Welty notes:

> the writer must accurately choose, combine, superimpose upon, blot out, shake up, alter the outside world for one absolute purpose, the good of his story. To do this, he is always seeing double, two pictures at once in his frame, his and the world's, a fact that he constantly comprehends; and he works best in a state of constant and subtle and unfooled reference between the two. It is his clear intention – his passion, I should say – to make the reader see only one of the pictures – the author's – under the pleasing illusion that it is the world's.[50]

It is through this process of 'seeing double'[51] that the spaces I crafted in *Hollow* became fused with an uncanny power; the duplication of space, made uncanny, to me, by its strange familiarity. Through the doubling of memory and imagination, I create spaces that exist both in the real world and the story world. It is the uncanny experience of, as Royle states, 'the peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar.'[52]

In the story world, as I make my familiar space *un*familiar, I have described The Cubby as 'purposeless', and yet it is not empty, void, unfilled. As Perec states, it is impossible to imagine a 'useless room, absolutely and intentionally useless. […] Language itself, seemingly, prove[s]

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[50] Eudora Welty, 'Place in Fiction', in *Critical Approaches to Fiction*, ed. by Shiv Kumar Kumar and Keith F. McKean (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2003), pp. 231-248 (p.238).
[51] Ibid., p.238.
[52] Royle, p.1.

unsuited to describing this nothing, this void, as if we could only speak of what is full, useful and functional.'[53] In The Cubby there are objects - a 'heavy brown armchair that used to be [Isabelle's] father's', and 'a piano that no one knew how to play.' These objects signal loss, as I use this room as a medium, transmitting the uncanny force of Isabelle's father's past presence and present absence. It becomes a space where Isabelle experiences the uncanny effect. In considering absences and presences, Gordon C. F. Bearn suggests that 'the absence of what ought to be present is eerie'.[54] His example expands on this idea:

> Chairs themselves are meant to be filled, and this may explain why an empty auditorium or stadium – even outside the context of graduation – can feel eerie: those seats were meant to be occupied.[55]

It is eerie, then, the emptiness of the room, the unoccupied chair and the silent piano. And yet this emptiness does not mean that this space is unused; if, as Perec states, we can 'only speak of what is full',[56] then the room is in fact filled with the dead. As an inverse definition of the eerie, Bearn defines the *uncanny* as the 'presence of what ought to be absent',[57] and with regards to Isabelle's father, the room is full, fit to bursting, with the presence of his absence. We see it here, the close relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny, at the intersection of loss and resurrection. In this Gothic room, a room filled with loss, we meet the uncanny at the moment of resurrection, the coming back of memory. Not only does the room act as a passage through to the rest of the house, but a

[53] Perec, p.33.
[54] Gordon C. F. Bearn, 'Wittgenstein and the Uncanny', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 76. 1 (1993), 29-58 (p.33).
[55] Ibid., p.33.
[56] Perec, p.33.
[57] Bearn, p.33.

passage to the past, the objects in the room signalling a loss, determining an uncanny channel through which the dead come back, always just out of sight. This uncanny effect is not dissimilar to that created by Anne Enright in her novel *The Gathering*. In this novel, Veronica stands in her Grandmother's old house, in the site of her brother's abuse, and she imagines talking to an architect about having 'the place cleaned out with something really strong.'[58] The space is stained by the past presence of the perpetrator, a place unoccupied but which can never again be described as empty or void. Like The Cubby in *Hollow*, it is filled with the past, with memories and the associated uncertainties that come with them.

Such confrontations with the past, triggered by reminders - objects, places, smells – can, as Maria Beville suggests, 'engage a living past and can allow us to "re-live" the past in a spontaneous moment of emotional connection.'[59] I experienced such a moment myself, when, in the middle of writing my novel, amidst the clutter and chaos of imagination, I visited my father's house and rifled through the drawers of an old cabinet. What was I hoping to find? Nothing, in particular. My father was in the kitchen, cooking tea, and in the lull, I dove head-first into the past, into the jumble and muddle of mislaid treasures. In the bottom drawer, beneath a pile of old photographs, birthday cards, shopping lists and sheets of paper marked with my own handwriting (very early drafts of *Hollow*!), I came across a Christmas card: small, square, neat corners. Why I chose to open that card, that one in particular, I can't explain. But when I did, I saw my mother's handwriting, the small letters, the scrunched vowels,

[58] Anne Enright, *The Gathering*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007; repr. London: Vintage Books, 2008) p.238.
[59] Maria Beville, 'Gothic Memory and the Contested Past: Framing terror', in *The Gothic and the Everyday: Living Gothic*, ed. by Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Maria Beville (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 52-68 (p.56).

the brisk scurry of her pen. She had written my father's name, and her own, top and bottom. '*Merry Christmas'* had been printed for her. The rest was blank. How strange it was, that he had kept it, buried beneath a pile of disorganised papers. I know my father, and he did not keep it through sentiment or bitterness or loss – only through a lack of organisation, a laziness of thought. He did not tidy up my mother's things after she had left, did not throw them out. There was no culling, no stripping of the walls, and so she lingered there; even now there are moments of her in his house. I see her in the Burne-Jones painting in the lounge, in a wooden frog above the television. I see the uncanny for myself, the return of the lost, of the absented. I see what Bearn means by 'presence of what ought to be absent.'[60] As I stand in my father's lounge, I am standing in a room shaped by the past. As Joana Rita Ramalho states:

> Video tapes, DVDS, audio recordings, portraits, and photographs seize death and resurrect the dead before us. The spirits of the past take shape through the objects we choose to keep close. At the click of a button or at the sight of a picture the past returns.[61]

Thus, in my father's house, my mother hangs on. And in my novel, Isabelle re-lives this already uncanny experience; she too experiences the crossing of loss and resurrection when, standing on the piano stool in The Cubby, she discovers a Christmas card written by her dead father. Such an experience disrupts the temporal familiarity, and triggers a beautiful sense of melancholy that reverts Isabelle and myself into a timeframe we were never consciously a part of. When

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[60] Bearn, p.33.
[61] Joana Rita Ramalho, 'Mobile Maps: The Face of Death in 1940s Romantic-Gothic Films', in *From the Supernatural to the Uncanny*, ed. by Stephen M. Hart and Zoltán Biedermann (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), pp. 155-173 (p.173).

regarding the connection between photography and phenomenology, Trigg states that 'what remains is something like a damaged memory, deprived of all its reality and yet charged with a sense of that prominence becoming lost.'[62] In gazing upon an old photograph, the object is a symbol of passing time, at once it appears both 'familiar and unfamiliar. A gaze – a place or person – is returned, but now conditioned by a fundamental absence, full of empty pathos.'[63] The Christmas card, discovered first by myself and then by Isabelle, represents not only, in its mere anonymity, the absence of a parent, a Gothic loss, but it also causes an uncanny return, a moment of mutual time, a shared time frame within which the living and the absented reside. Again, we see Gothic loss and the uncanny return of loss. We see the way my writing process causes both a loss and return of space, and the way the space produced affords Isabelle the experience of the uncanny: again, in The Cubby, in a space that signals loss, the memory of the dead returns.

In my writing, I witness a returning, a constant 'coming back' of the same places: the watermill, the staithe, that small market town in East Anglia. As Welty states, 'the novel from the start has been bound up in the local, the "real," the present, the ordinary day-to-day of human experience. Where the imagination comes in is in directing the use of all this.'[64] The first description of the jetty at the staithe uses the 'real' and the 'local', the reality of the place, but ghosts are blended into the space:

> Here is an image from ten years ago. I am fourteen. I am alone at the jetty, leaning over the river, spinning clumps of duckweed with a finger. Green strings slide across my knuckles, climb around the

[62] Trigg, p.18.
[63] Ibid., p.18.
[64] Welty, p.232.

joints in my fingers. A wood pigeon clips across the railings of the bridge. It plunges into the air, lifts up. The meadow opposite is empty, all grass and silence. I pull at the sludge of weeds, feel the weight of them as they come up and out of the water. It leaves a gap in the sheet of leaves across the water's surface, a hole that expands and opens, a well of black water that shines and then begins to shrink, already closing up. I squeeze the weeds in my fist, wringing them out before throwing them back into the river, a glop of green string jam that smacks and sinks. I lean over the edge again, lowering my hand for another dip. I think I am alone until Freddie appears, bursting out from beneath the water, his head cleaving the surface, his arms up: *here I am.* He ripples through my head, sending a wave of colour that crashes and blooms in my skull: white skin, green spatters, pinks, blues, greens. He does not belong here, I am sure this memory is false, but I watch him anyway, the ghost of something real, pulling back and disappearing, coming up again with the bridge to his back, waving at me from far off, even though he is only a few feet away.

Figure 2: The river Waveney, the jetty, and the sluice at Bungay Staithe

Whilst the jetty, the river, the sluice and the bridge are all markers of the real landscape of Bungay, my imagination directs this place towards the haunted: a quiet, unwavering

loneliness that is broken only by the intrusion of Freddie's ghost. As Susan Hill explains in her introduction in *The Spirit of Britain: An Illustrated Guide to Literary Britain:*

> Absorbing a sense of place, a landscape, a city, through the imaginative literature is […] not a second best. Sitting in an armchair we are transported to places and move among characters, experience a wide variety of events and emotions but they are both real and not real. They bear a close relationship to actual places and yet at the same time are landscapes of the mind, invented, endowed with a spirit that does not actually exist, is a fantasy, a chimera, yet as powerful (more so perhaps) as those everyday 'real things' of life.
>
> We see a place through the writer's eyes and it is their place and that of their work.[65]

The landscape in my novel is both real and not real. It bears a close relationship to a real place. So close, in fact, that in re-writing and re-shaping space, I lose some sense of the real place. My mother calls me, and tells me there has been a flood, and her voice comes down the phone: 'Freddie would drown in all this water. Even he wouldn't survive.' And it stops me for a moment, this suspension between reality and fiction. As Royle states, the uncanny sensation comes from the idea that the uncanny 'is different (yet strangely the same) every time: its happening is always a kind of unhappening. Its "un-" unsettles time and space, order and sense.'[66] When I think of the jetty, just beyond my mother's house at Bungay staithe, the image immediately springs to mind. I can see it in my mind's eye – this place I used to sit and to smoke, to scramble into and out of canoes. But in re-writing Bungay's landscape,

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[65] Susan Hill, 'Introduction', in Piers Dudgeon, *The Spirit of Britain: An Illustrated Guide to Literary Britain*, ed. by Susan Hill (London: Headline Book Publishing, 1994), pp. 6-12 (p.7); see also: *Landscape and Englishness*, ed. by Robert Burden and Stephan Kohl (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).
[66] Royle, p.2.

by turning it into something else, something other, there comes the uncanny echo, repetition, reconstruction of this place. The certainty of place, the certainty of *what is real*, all of this is disturbed and unseated. As Trigg asks:

> After all, what can be fused with greater intensity of strangeness than the experience of remembering, which by dint of its structure, invites a no-longer-existing world, fundamentally absent in its structure and discoloured in its content, into the experience of the unfolding present?[67]

With each word I wrote, I was inviting a no-longer-existing world into the present. With each word I wrote, I was losing the sense of the real world, whilst simultaneously witnessing its return. Though when it came back in my writing, it came back differently. And yet strangely the same. When I picture the space related to Freddie, when I picture Freddie's jetty at Bungay staithe, the image that springs to mind is not the image of the real world: it is not a present, evolving, unstable landscape, but a static image. The space belonging to Freddie, when I picture it, is an image of an image, a close copy, invented and non-existent.

[67]Trigg, p.33.

Figure 3: A picture of a picture of the jetty at Bungay Staithe

This place is the landscape of the mind. My writing process at once erases and returns the landscape of Bungay to me, as a place that has been repeated, adapted, edited, creatively reconstructed. There is constant tension between the differences and the similarities of the geographical space and the mental space mediated by imagination. As Vidler explains:

> the "uncanny" is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming.[68]

And here lies the uncanniness in my writing process, that slippage between the real and the unreal. The uncanny is itself an *experience,* a response to the disturbance or destabilisation of the familiar. This sense of strangeness is itself a spectral

[68] Vidler, p.11.

presence, an experience defined by Terry Castle as 'itself a sort of phantom, looming up out of the darkness'.[69] In my writing process, I lose a sense of a real place, and see it return, albeit differently, in fiction. The spaces of my novel are made uncanny, to me, by their echo and return.

In *Hollow*, I have grafted ghosts onto the landscape, but outside of my fiction, Bungay's landscape is, interestingly, tied up with the spectral. Through folklore, the present is haunted by a figure of the past; something dark, massive, brutish, that is said to claim the lives of lonely wanderers. When I was young and I walked through Bungay at night, often after visiting a friend who lived on the other side of town, there was a shortcut through a dark alley. Often, I would take the long way home, back through the open streets, beneath the streetlights, but at other times – particularly if I was already past my curfew – I would cut through this alley, wondering what I might find at the end of it. In the alley I was sure I would encounter it, standing in the light at the end of the tunnelled path, a great, black hulking shape, breathing heavily, its legs ready to spring and chase me with enormous speed. My friends used to laugh, used to poke me, used to howl into the night: *What are you scared of? Are you scared of the dark?* Eventually I had to admit it: I was scared of The Black Dog.

During a thunderstorm in 1577, the beast is fabled to have attacked the parishioners of both St Mary's Church and Blythburgh Holy Trinity Church. Described by Abraham Fleming, a witness to the alleged assault, as the 'divel in such

[69] Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.7.

a likenesse',[70] the dog swept through the church, wrung the necks of two parishioners where upon they 'straungely dyed'.[71] David Waldron and Christopher Reeve, in their study of the folklore, state that 'in Bungay itself he is reputed to haunt the graveyard at St. Mary's, the ruins of Bungay Castle and the path of Bigods Way'.[72] The thought of the dog - sharp teeth, eyes blood-red and frenzied - came to me in the dark, made the rustle of leaves or the patter of rain sound threatening. The Black Dog was very much alive, existing – and continues to exist – in Bungay's identity and culture, as the town is stocked with imagery, from the weathervane, the coat of arms, the Black Dog Running Club, and the local shop, Black Dog Antiques. Even now, when she visits from Bungay, my mother brings me gifts: Black Dog wine, Black Shuck gin, coasters and mugs.

[70] Abraham Fleming, *A Straunge and Terrible Wunder Wrought Very Late in The The Parish Church Of Bongay…* (London: [J. Allde(?)], [1577(?)], reprinted by David Waldron and Christopher Reeve, in *Shock! The Black Dog of Bungay: A Case Study in Local Folklore* (Harpenden: Hidden Publishing, 2010), pp. 128-137 (p.133).
[71] Ibid., p.133.
[72] David Waldron and Christopher Reeve, *Shock! The Black Dog of Bungay: A Case Study in Local Folklore* (Harpenden: Hidden Publishing, 2010), p. 11.

Figure 4: The Black Dog weathervane, Bungay

The Black Dog, a story that haunts the town's history and its landscape, was a gateway into the Gothic, an opportunity to Gothicise, through folklore, my fiction. My mother and I explored the exterior of St Mary's Church, hoping to spot the scorch marks allegedly left there by the hound's fiery paws, saw the place that echoed with the past, that was marked with the shade of the Gothic. Waldron and Reeve state that 'whilst the storm and the deaths (attributed to lightening striking the tower) are mentioned in the Parish Registry, there is no mention of The Dog'.[73] It is spectral, invisible even in its own historical records, the troubling ghostliness of its own history.

The story of The Black Dog offers terror, offers a haunted, dangerous landscape. It offers familiarity in the form of a dog, but terror in its unfamiliar and unknowable spectral state. I tried to use the obscurity, the dread, the uncertainty of the tale in my fiction. I remembered my fear of The Black Dog, the terror of the unseen, and I used this in an attempt to

[73] Waldron and Reeve, p.11.

haunt the landscape of my fiction, to root the place in something uncertain and threatening:

> The tapestry was over six feet long and the embroidered black body of a beast slunk down the dark borders. Its long, thin paws were shown slipping through the broken window of the church, its wild eyes blood red. The story went that The Black Dog had smashed through the window of the church and slaughtered the parish, ripped out their throats and ran circles round the church. Some people said the dog was a hellish creature sent by the Devil, while others said it was an old story intended to scare children. I remember my mother telling me, when I was very young and in a bored sort of voice, that the dog was said to be roaming the town even now, seen only by solitary individuals at night. She told me, as she cooked – distracted for a moment by the sautéed potatoes – that to see the Black Dog meant that you had sinned and was to be considered a portent of death. I cried all night, waking her several times, and eventually she was forced to admit that she had made the entire story up, so that I would sleep again. The tapestry hung low and red and during each service I sat and watched those eyes watch me.

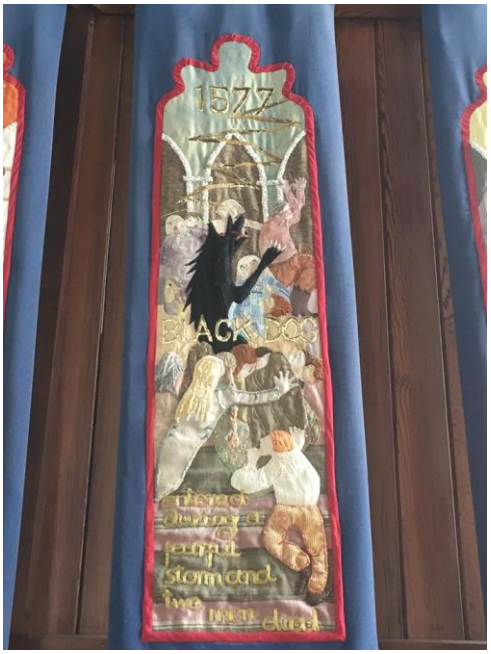

Figure 5: The Black Dog tapestry at St Mary's Church, Bungay

But that wasn't me, that wasn't the story I wanted to tell. To return, once more, to Welty, she states that:

> The business of writing, and the responsibility of the writer, [is] to disentangle the significant – in character, incident, setting, mood, everything – from the random and meaningless and irrelevant that in real life surround and beset it. It is a matter of his selecting and, by all that implies, of changing 'real' life as he goes. With each word he writes, he acts as literally and methodically as if he hacked his way through a forest and blazed it for the word that follows. He makes choices at the explicit demand of this one present story; each choice implies, explains, limits the next, and illuminates the one before.[74]

And the choice I made, in setting and in character, was to remove The Black Dog from my landscape. Whilst I liked the idea of recognising the history of Bungay through The Black Dog, a confrontation with a spectral hound would steer my novel in an unwanted direction. Instead, the small, domestic cat that prowls the landscape, that can share the landscape with Isabelle the way a dog is unable to do, is a subtle and silent observer, and one that does not stray far from Gothic ideals. With its links to superstition, witches and the occult, the figure of the cat also carries with it whispers of Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic tale, *The Black Cat*. In Poe's tale, after the protagonist murders his pet cat, another returns in its place. This animal hounds the protagonist, driving him into the depths of insanity. In attempting to murder this second cat, he instead buries an axe into his wife's head. The cat ultimately condemns him to death when, in a 'wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph,'[75] the cat reveals the corpse of the

[74] Welty, p.235.
[75] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Black Cat', in *Selected Tales*, ed. by David Van Leer (New York, Oxford University Press, 1998; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 230-238 (p.238).

protagonist's murdered wife, hidden behind a wall in the cellar. The return of the cat after both acts of murder seem to come to the protagonist as a representation of inescapable consequences, of things 'coming back', embodying the truth which cannot stay hidden – behind a brick wall or in the past – no matter how deep you think they are buried. Unlike Poe's black cat, my cat is not presented as 'other' beside the human presence in the novel. Both Freddie's relationship and Isabelle's relationship with the cat emerge out of a need for connection. Whilst Mr Ackerman warns Isabelle that the cat 'isn't very friendly', the cat and Freddie appear as companions. When Freddie returns for the first time after his death, both Isabelle and the cat can see his ghost in The Square: the cat's 'ears pricked as though listening. As though waiting for something.' It is only when Isabelle is grieving at the end of the novel that the cat offers her both company and companionship. Death becomes a form of connection. Here we are reminded that like the adventures of that summer with Freddie, death is a part of the material world experienced by both Isabelle and the cat.

What we have seen in this chapter, what has become visible, is that in Gothic, when something is lost, the uncanny always brings it back to us. In the process of writing Bungay in my fiction, I am faced with the sense of losing place and yet seeing its return, albeit in modified form. As Welty has told us, the matter of writing is a matter of 'changing "real" life'[76], a process which proves uncanny in the constant tension between the loss of real place and its return in fiction. In remembering and writing about Bungay, I bring the place of my past into my present. I am caught up in the act of remembering, the act of misremembering, of unsettling time and space. As Freud

[76] Welty, p.235.

states, the uncanny relates to 'what was once well known and had long been familiar'.[77] It is the reappearance or repetitiveness of something no longer belonging in the space of the present. And through all of this, through all of my writing, I have used and dismissed, adapted and reshaped the geography of Bungay; I have dug it all up and pieced it back together. I have grafted characters onto this space, into these places – the watermill, the staithe, with the sluice and the jetty, along with Falcon Meadow, Bridge Street and St Mary's Church, all of which are real markers in the landscape of Bungay. I have created Gothic spaces that speak of loss, and it is within these spaces that Isabelle experiences the uncanny. As Royle states, it is 'not so much darkness itself […] but the process of revelation or bringing to light, that is uncanny.'[78] In the spaces I have crafted, Isabelle faces the return of the past, the return of those belonging to the past, the return of the dead, to reside again amongst the living.

And in all of this, Isabelle's scope of space is limited. In *Hollow,* there are simple, central place markers (the staithe, the town, the home, the church) and limited excursions (The Sandy, the beach), because Isabelle's field of vision is limited. The focus, the core, the root of her story is Freddie: 'I could see only one thing, through the riot of heavy breathing and loud, thumping pressure in my ears – Freddie.' She sees Freddie and only Freddie, a limited field of vision: '*all [she] sees are his eyes*, the greens and blues'. As Perec enlightens us:

> Our field of vision reveals a limited space, something vaguely circular, which ends very quickly to left and right, doesn't extend very far up and down. If we squint, we can manage to see the end

[77] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.124.
[78] Royle, p.108.

> of our nose; if we raise our eyes, we can see there's an up, if we lower them, we can see there's a down. If we turn our head in one direction, then in another, we don't even manage to see completely everything there is around us; we have to twist our bodies round to see properly what was behind us.[79]

In what follows, we must turn around to the past, to what was behind us. In what follows, we must begin by coming back.

[79] Perec, p.81.

UNCANNY RECURRENCES

> You do an awfully good impression of yourself.
> (Bret Easton Ellis)[80]
>
> From now on we are destined to speak *of* Paul de Man, instead of speaking *to* and *with* him.
> (Jacques Derrida, after the death of his friend Paul de Man)[81]

There is a strong evocation, as Royle states, of the uncanny being 'bound up with a sense of repetition or "coming back."'[82] My writing is flooded with repetitions, almost-repetitions: Isabelle repeats incidents and repeats behaviours. The following sections in this chapter both address the loss and reconstruction of the self through doppelgänger moments created in repetition.

Repeat After Me considers the connection between myself and my protagonist, the similarities and the differences that come to light in the way Isabelle repeats me. I lose myself in Isabelle's repetitions. She lives in my old home, walks where I have walked; when she speaks, she borrows words from me. In this section, I attempt to demonstrate the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny through the loss or displacement of the self and the reconstruction of the self in fiction. I will demonstrate the unusual circumstance of finding myself reflected in my fiction, of my own self returning. I will suggest that this time, the return comes before the loss: the experience of finding myself uncannily reconstructed in fiction signals the loss of, or disorientation of my sense of self. And in this state of disorientation, I start to wonder: is Isabelle

[80] Bret Easton Ellis, *Lunar Park*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005; repr. London: Picador, 2011), p.3.
[81] Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.72.
[82] Royle, p.2.

haunting my memories, or am I the haunting presence, the figure lingering in the margins of her story?

The subsequent section, *The Figure Of The Ghost: He does not get on with being dead,* also explores the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny through the loss and undetermined return of the self, this time with focus on the novel's characters. Haunted by the uncertainty of Freddie's sexual encounter witnessed on the beach, Isabelle's experience of loss is twofold. She faces the sense of loss itself in the death of Freddie, but in remembering the past and re-enacting the same moment over and over, Isabelle also experiences a loss of stable sense of self. Both experiences of loss are made uncanny by their return: in the figure of the ghost, we witness a double loss returned. In Freddie's ghost, we witness the 'coming back' of the past and of the self, in the uncanny presence that lingers at the window.

Repeat After Me

It is unnerving, at times, the similarities – the way Isabelle repeats me – and her differences. As Royle explains, the uncanny effect surfaces in repetition, in 'the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat'.[83] In Isabelle, I have the lurking sense that I have done this all before. As Punter tells us, it is the sense of déjà vu that makes our attempts to give an 'account of ourselves pointless and desperate, for we do not know, we cannot remember, where it is we have "been"'.[84] Punter goes on to

[83] Royle, p.2.
[84] Punter, p.209.

state that in these cases, we move as though 'we are sleep-walkers, finding ourselves constantly in places which are neither familiar nor unfamiliar'.[85] And this is the strange circumstance I find myself in – discovering myself, constantly, in the pages of my novel. In this section, I will determine the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny by examining this loss of sense of self and the uncanny reconstruction of the self in fiction. Unusually, however, it was the experience of finding a shadow of myself in Isabelle that signalled a loss of self, a disorientation. The uncanny return seemed to precede the Gothic loss.

Before we begin, I should point out the obvious: Isabelle is a fictional character. She is a character grated onto (to borrow Hill's words) the *'landscape of the mind'.*[86] She belongs in a different timeframe, one I will never be a part of, somewhere unspecified but uniquely her own. Sometimes when I see myself in her, I think that it is only a trick of the light. My novel is a work of fiction. If you can see yourself within these pages, then you are only seeing ghosts.

But this brings us to another set of questions – questions beyond the loss of self. These questions beg: whose ghost? Who is haunting whom? Isabelle repeats me. She haunts my story. She is made by my memories. And yet when I find myself in her, I wonder whether I am the ghost, the trick of the light. I wonder whether she is not so much haunting my memories, as I am haunting her story, the ethereal figure in the margins of the text. We cannot expect easy or simple answers to these questions, but in trying to find a solution, or even a response, it is the search that pushes us forward.

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[85] Ibid., p.209.
[86] Susan Hill, 'Introduction', in *The Spirit of Britain: An Illustrated Guide to Literary Britain*, ed. by Susan Hill, p.7.

Let us start by repeating. As Royle explains, the uncanny effect surfaces in repetition, in 'the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat'.[87] There is an uncanniness to Isabelle's existence, an uncanniness to her repetitions, for the uncanny character, as Freud states, is given its power through the 'constant recurrence of the same thing'.[88] I am telling Isabelle's story and (through repetition) she is telling mine. We are inextricably entwined. I use my own experiences to guide her, my own memories to nudge her forward, inscribing my fiction with a faint sense of something autobiographical. When Freddie is dismissive, loses interest, is rude, and I am stuck in the writer's *what next?* dilemma, I turn to my past and wonder: *what would I have done? What would I have said?* She uses me. She copies me. It is there, that uncanny repetition, that 'constant recurrence of the same thing,'[89] that compulsion, somewhere in me, to repeat. As Richard Albright states, in repetition 'the apparent closure of the past is reopened and infused with new potential'.[90] Take, for example, an incident I experienced at a party during my final year of school. I was leaving Bungay very soon to attend university, and half-drunk, half-nostalgic, I felt a sudden and somewhat misplaced sentiment for the town I had felt strangled by, the place I had lived through, always counting down the years. An old friend was at the party, and I saw him through the mist of softening years, of glorified memories of evenings at the staithe, text messages and the sharing of indulgent, adolescent secrets. I couldn't remember exactly

[87] Royle, p.2.
[88] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.142.
[89] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.142.
[90] Richard S. Albright, *Writing the Past, Writing the Future: Time and Narrative in Gothic and Sensation Fiction* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2009), p.46; see also: Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984).

what those secrets were, only that we had shared them, and I was swept up in the sentimentality of it all, of the romantic nature of departure. When I asked him if he was having a good night, he looked at me so blankly I thought for a moment he hadn't heard me. And then his voice came over the music: *Amy, if you ask me that one more time, I'll punch you.*

I felt embarrassment, at first, but later I thought the incident was fascinating, even funny, exposing the reality of my friendship. In repeating this incident through Isabelle, I found, in her repetition, an experience riddled with the sense of déjà vu, with the uncanny, with the feeling that I had *been here before*. As Freud states in his research *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life,* the uncanny experience can be one of that 'peculiar feeling we have, in certain moments and situations, of having had exactly the same experience once before or of having once before been in the same place'.[91] In recreating moments through Isabelle, I experience this uncanny sensation:

> We ordered chips, to share, Freddie dunking them in thick mayonnaise, licking vinegar off his fingers.
>
> "Are you having a nice day?" I asked him.
>
> He dropped a half-eaten chip back into the bowl, leant back in his chair.
>
> "I swear to God," he said, speaking through his teeth, "if you ask me that one more time I'll punch you. I mean it, like *actually* punch you. Maybe even in the face."
>
> I laughed quietly, feeling my cheeks run red. I smiled, though, making a chip dance across the table, glancing up at him to check that he was joking. He blew air through his lips.

[91] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud: The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Volume 6 (1901)*, ed. by James Strachey and others, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1960; repr. London: Vintage, 2001), VI, p.265.

"I haven't even asked you," I said.

"It's all you've asked me. All morning."

I bit into a chip.

"These are nice," I said, for anything else to say.

He looked down at the bowl between us, back up at me, and then out to the sea.

This exchange is an echo of my past. In repetition I turn back to the past, repeat moments of miscommunication, misperception, misunderstandings, all of which are similar, but are at the same time, different. As Albright states, commenting on the narrative repetitions in Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, we perceive repeated incidents as 'both similar – as repetitions – and as different. The tension between similarity and difference is sufficient to produce the uncanny effect, to render the incidents as doppelgängers.'[92] In these two exchanges, mine being the original and its doppelgänger repeated with Isabelle, I see twice the undermining of the romantic portrayal of friendship, I see twice what has only happened once, but has happened again, reoccurred, in an uncanny repetition, in an uncanny doppelgänger effect. As Royle states, '*déjà vu* is the experience of the double *par excellence*: it is the experience of experience *as* double. There can be no uncanny, perhaps, without some experience of this duplicity.'[93] And certainly I am *experiencing* my own experiences as double. There are two images when there should only be one. We overlap, Isabelle and I, stand side by side, on top of one another, blend and merge. This uncanny experience of recognising myself in my own work of fiction signals a loss – it makes me wonder: Does this double vision mean I have lost myself? Or that I have doubled? If I am not lost, then I am at least dizzyingly

[92] Albright, p.47.
[93] Royle, p.183.

disorientated. As Miles recognises, 'the very repetitiveness of Gothic writing is regarded as mysteriously eloquent: in its inarticulate way, Gothic worries over a problem stirring within the foundations of the self.'[94] I am certainly worrying over this problem. I find myself, and with the uncanny experience of coming back I realise, only after the fact, that I had lost myself. Where am I? Where have I been? These questions seem suited to the loss and chaos both caused and dealt with by Donna Tartt's characters in *The Secret History*. When a group of students decide to have a bacchanal, the experience leads to the accidental death of a farmer, information that a student named Bunny uses to blackmail the group. When, finally, the group are unable to meet his demands, they conspire to murder Bunny and push him over a ravine. Just like my aim in this section, the narrative of Tartt's protagonist, Richard, is an attempt to take control of a story (the murder of Bunny) that sees loss as both anticipated and unexpected. In Richard's first seminar on campus, he recalls that the 'discussion that day was about loss of self.'[95] This discussion inspires the subsequent bacchanal, the purpose of which, as Henry tells Richard, is to 'stop being yourself, even for a little while.'[96] While Bunny's death is a central loss in the novel, the loss of self is just as pivotal, as Henry explains: 'One mustn't underestimate the primal appeal – to lose oneself, lose it utterly.'[97] In describing his experience of loss of self and his eventual return, Henry states that 'when we came to ourselves we had no idea where we were.'[98] Which is an experience I find myself relating to. If not a total loss, then – at the very

[94] Miles, p.2.
[95] Donna Tartt, *The Secret History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1992; repr. London: Penguin, 1993), p.38.
[96] Ibid., p.182.
[97] Ibid., p.182.
[98] Ibid., p.188.

least – I experience a disorientation in the 'coming back' of myself through Isabelle: I see myself through the unintentional return and repetition of my past.

Repetition is a hallmark of the Gothic genre. As Allan Lloyd-Smith states, 'Gothic characters are often shown struggling in a web of repetitions caused by their unawareness of their own subconscious drives and motives.'[99] But in my writing process, I have become caught up in this tangle, in this web of repetitions, in the uncanny retelling of parts of my past. To repeat Royle, 'the uncanny seems to be about a strange repetitiveness.'[100] I am telling Isabelle's story and (through repetition) she is telling mine. Which means I am returning, reconstructing myself through fiction. I am coming back before I realise I have gone. And this experience seems to go on. This duplicity endures. When I moved to East Anglia, and began a new school term, almost everybody I sat with or passed in the hallway asked me: *Why have you come here? Why did you move?* And so I began to recite the short, two sentences that seemed, apparently, to explain it all: *My parents broke up. I moved here with my mum*. And on and on, until I wasn't new anymore. And when, two years later, a new student started and became the new *new kid*, I saw I had been replaced. He had moved from London – from the loud, ant-scrambling bustle of the city – to the country, to the heart of flatlands, grasslands, close to the coast, the edge of the world. As we became friends, and I began to mention him at home - short anecdotes of funny phrases and jokes swapped at breaktime – my mother asked me why he had moved here. *I've no idea*, I said. *I haven't asked him.*

My relationship with Freddie is very much the same. If

[99] Allan Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), p.2.
[100] Royle, p.84.

someone were to ask me what he was like, or why he had moved to The Maltings - Freddie, a key character in my fiction - I must source my answer through Isabelle, because Freddie survives only through her. His image, his actions, reactions, and dialogue only exist through Isabelle's voice: only through her words does he live and not live. In death, she makes him 'tell [her] things [she] never knew', but even in life, he does not exist beyond his interactions with Isabelle; he is shaped only by her perception of him. The reality of his life, and who he is without her, can only be imagined:

> I wondered what he was like at home. Did he smoke inside? Did he open his window when he did? I saw him in his room, eating spaghetti from a bowl, a cigarette left propped on the windowsill, as he sat on the bed with his shoes still on.
>
> Even now, when I imagine it all, he is in bed with his shoes on. It is a game I like to play – building and un-building Freddie's room, putting the pieces together and letting them come down around him. I put a TV in his room, a desk, and a bedside table. The light in his room is low and dim, because a lamp has appeared beside his bed. This time it is pink – why not? – and spills out a shadowed glow, the colour of pomegranate seeds, across his bedroom floor. His mother sits downstairs, in front of another television. She moves to the sink, glancing up at the ceiling, where her son sits above, shovelling strings of pasta into his mouth. They move in and out of each other's company: he says he is going out for the night, and like that it is done; he swipes a bottle of brandy and she pretends she hasn't noticed. Or he comes home at the end of the day with wet hair and wet clothes, and she asked him where he has been, and like a broken dam he comes alive, pouring out his colours, painting for her the muted water of the river, the fizzing sluice, and the almost-pretty girl he sometimes sits with, if only she would fix her teeth. His mother smells like pink soap and washing powder. She watches him eat, watches him talk with his mouth full. When she speaks she has perfumed breath.
>
> *Isabelle White?* she says. *Her teeth aren't so bad.*
>
> And then Freddie makes off with a handful of chocolates and

> her laugh sounds like sherbet, because I am imagining them sweet and happy – I am imagining Freddie and his mother the way I imagined them at the start of the summer, the way I imagined them before I knew anything about them. They retire, happily, to separate televisions, one crackling over the other, the sound of the news mixing with the sound of cartoons, or whatever it is Freddie watches on TV.
>
> But *I don't watch cartoons*, I hear him say, and I tell him that it doesn't really matter, either way. His ghost grins back at me, like he might just understand.
>
> When I ask about his father – something I never did – he turns quiet and unlike himself; in my head he is twisting his fingers, his head down, his legs tucked up to his chest. I imagine him telling me that his father was a mean, pointed man: everything he did, he did with violence. Even his laughter shook the roof. I can't think of a reason to make this man leave them, so I make Freddie tell me that he doesn't know either, plucking a cigarette from his mouth and smiling, a glaze of smoke running across his teeth.

Even within her own imagination, Isabelle highlights the failure of communications with Freddie. She portrays herself as a willing communicator, seeking answers from Freddie, keen to have an insight into a life she knows little about. However, the futility of the construction is seen in multiple ways, as in her mind she lets things shift and change (the colour of Freddie's bedside lamp, for instance), and she cannot imagine an explanation for Freddie's father's absence. She cannot construct a story for Freddie beyond the information she already has, and so even within the realms of artificial communication, Freddie remains estranged. Isabelle admits her disregard for Freddie, 'not knowing, as I sat there, that my time with him was already measured and that I would miss the chance to ask him such things; that all those days with him would be lost, and that those minutes should not be wasted.' In struggling to remember the sound of his voice, as a voice in

an 'unreal whisper', her memory portrays Freddie as mute, and communication from Freddie is often misheard or altogether missed: 'He said something as he slipped into the river, something I didn't hear over the sound of my own voice.' Freddie is only a shade of himself, ghostly before the ghost, a shadow that Isabelle tries to place at the centre of things and yet is unable to find room for him. In this, I know Isabelle really well – she is a reflection of myself and of the selfishness of adolescence. I see for myself what Lloyd-Smith means when he says that the Gothic 'isn't so much a matter of whether you can repeat the past as whether the past will repeat itself in you'.[101] Why don't I know why Freddie's father left? Or whether his father is even alive? Because Isabelle doesn't know – like me, she never asked. Again, it makes me wonder. In all of this repetition, in all of these tangled webs of recurrence, who is haunting whom? Is there a hint of me, within Isabelle's story? Or is my story suddenly crowded by the ghosts of my fiction? As Carol Mejia-LaPerle notes of Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography, there is a 'reciprocity between the telling of memory and the evanescent shapes that haunt the telling.'[102] Am I the evanescent shape that haunts Isabelle's story? Is that my shadow, there, coming up across the path, gone before I can be sure? I am lost in it – is Isabelle the haunting figure, the one who repeats and echoes? Or is it me, am I the one who haunts the story, the ghostly shade of what has come before, somewhere in the shadows? As Peter Buse and Andrew Stott note, 'in the figure of the ghost, we see that past and present cannot be neatly separated from one another, as any idea of the present is

[101] Lloyd-Smith, p.1.
[102] Carol Mejia-LaPerle, 'The Ghostly Rhetoric of Autobiography: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* as American Gothic Narrative', in *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film and Anime*, ed. by Andrew Hock Soon Ng (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2008), pp.108-122 (p.108).

always constituted through the difference and deferral of the past.'[103] Isabelle behaves like this ghost, the one that opens up the past, infuses it with new potential, brings it into the present. And the certainty of who is who, the certainty of my sense of self, the certainty of what is real, all of this is disrupted and repeated.

What we have witnessed here, what we have lost ourselves in, is a question of loss and resurrection. I am found in the pages of my novel, reconstructed, returned. The uncanny return of myself signals a loss: finding myself makes me wonder where I had gone, where I have been. It is this 'coming back' *to* myself, and *of* my own self, that is disorienting, the uncanny recurrence of myself. Isabelle's narrative – also my narrative – repeats my past, became, unintentionally, a spectral retelling of particular life events and behaviours. As Wolfreys states, 'all forms of narrative are spectral to some extent',[104] and so my narrative of my narrative is also spectral. When somebody asks me how my writing is going, and often when they don't, I speak of Isabelle, and also of Freddie, as though they are bodily, tangible, a real thing existing: 'Freddie fell down the sluice today,' I say. Or, 'Isabelle got into that canoe.' Once, in a tragic moment of writers block, when I was coming to the end of my novel, when I was close to the unveiling of Freddie's death, and unsure how to execute it, I reached out to a friend with a text message: *I am crying. Not because Freddie is dead. But because he is still not dead.* These characters are something invisible, almost visible, just glimpsed at around the dinner table, as I discuss them, draw them into the realm

[103] Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, 'Introduction: A Future for Haunting', in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 1-20 (p.10-11).
[104] Wolfreys, p.2.

of the living. Which of course, only adds to the confusion. I bear witness to something other. Many times, throughout my writing process, I heard other people talk about Isabelle as though she were real: 'What will she do next, Amy?' they ask, and I must admit that I was stunned – this casual and immediate bringing to life of my character, one that is neither dead nor alive. As Wolfreys states, characters become haunting figures when we misrecognise their images as 'images of "real" people, their actions, and the contexts in which the events and lives to which we are witness take place.'[105] Wolfreys expands on this with the idea that 'we "believe" in the characters, assume their reality, without taking into account the extent to which those figures or characters are, themselves, textual projections, apparitions if you will.'[106] Isabelle's uncanny repetitions seem to appear as a figure of otherness – an apparition not simply in the dead coming back to haunt the living, because Isabelle is not dead, but in an uncanny echo of my past. I 'believe' in her and her reality, and yet she is not alive. She traverses and blurs any neat and understandable definition. Though she can, in a way, 'live on', in some sense of the word, without my help. I have written her. I have done my job. All she needs is a reader. Who will find what? Some other shadow lingering in the margin? The haunting figure of a woman who came before? In considering the haunting process, Punter suggests that 'in order for the haunting to occur at all there must always have been something prior'[107] – in which case, I was here first. Which means I am the prior, the thing that came before. Which means I am not the haunted, but the *haunt-er*, the shadow that lingers in someone else's story. I am the thing

[105] Wolfreys, p.xiii.
[106] Ibid., p.xiii.
[107] Punter, p.14.

that is coming back, the loss and the returned.

And perhaps this is where I lose myself, at this very point, now that the writing process is over. During the writing process I had a purpose, an identity – I was *The Writer*. I shaped and carved and holed out all the hollowness in *Hollow*, only to be left behind. I was present, once, in the construction of the novel, and now I am gone, returned only in the traces left in some of Isabelle's actions and choices.

A final reminder, then: if you can see yourself in these pages, then you are only seeing ghosts.

The Figure of the Ghost: He does not get on with being dead

> I see Freddie waiting for me at the top of the stairs. He stands by the window, a little yellow light cast upon his feet. I try to shout to him, but my voice is bunched in my throat and there is nothing but a sharp silence between us. I am not sure if he has seen me, a small, grey figure crouching on the lower step. I run too quickly up the stairs and he is gone.

Freddie lingers, he haunts, he occupies, he inhabits the world of thought, a process, as Castle describes it, of the '"ghostifying" of mental space'.[108] When Isabelle sees Freddie, 'trapped somewhere between the doorway and [her] imagination', Isabelle is trapped too, caught up in the past, caught up in a solitary dialogue with this spectre. In this section I will attempt to determine the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny through Isabelle's (double experience of) loss and the undetermined return of the self, through the figure of the ghost.

[108] Castle, pp. 141-142.

Isabelle's loss is a double loss. Not only does Isabelle lose Freddie and find herself navigating through this loss 'as [she] tumble[s] into [her] grief', but she experiences a loss of self, as she assumes the form of someone unrecognisable, as she transforms into something 'other'. And yet even in the face of these losses, in the face of sheer grief, as Isabelle attempts to realise and accept Freddie's death, as she attempts to understand what happened to Freddie in life, the things she loses come back to her: a double loss returned and transformed into the figure of the ghost.

Let us start with Freddie. With the loss of Freddie. Let us tumble into Isabelle's grief. In dealing with the loss of Freddie, we are dealing with the feeling one has when something or someone you love is taken from you permanently. Death in Gothic fiction often gives us a place to start. It is only when something is taken from us that something other can return in its place. To start, in the figure of the ghost, not only is there a question of what Freddie is, what he represents, what is remembered, but there is the brutal and inescapable fact that there is remembering at all. It must be remembered, first and foremost, that Freddie is dead. Freddie is gone. In acknowledging a person's death, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes:

> We only understand the absence or death of a friend in the moment in which we expect a response from him and feel that there will no longer be one. At first we avoid asking the question in order not to have to perceive this silence and we turn away from regions of our life where we could encounter this nothingness.[109]

There is loss, first and foremost. There is the sense of loss itself. Isabelle, however, does not avoid encountering this

[109] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. by Donald A. Landes (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 82-83.

'nothingness'. She throws herself deep into the silence, asking Freddie to come back. She asks for his uncanny return:

> On the jetty, the night he was buried, I called for him, tried to feel him in the water, one foot at a time.
>
> "I'm here!" I shouted, into the night. "Here!"
>
> I took off my shoes because it made sense, then, in my head. Even in the winter, when everything else was turning in on itself, hibernating and holed up, I felt the need to do it Freddie's way: bare feet, stripped down, peeled open.
>
> And I asked him to come back.
>
> Scanning the trees, the bridge, the meadow, eyeing the blackness in the water, trying to make him out, from wherever it was he was hiding.
>
> "Come here. Come back."

This yearning for the past – even recent past – is also seen in John Banville's *The Sea*, when Max, a widowed art historian, returns to his childhood town 'to live amidst the rubble of the past.'[110] In his return to the past, Max mourns both the loss of his wife and the loss of his childhood friends. Joanne Watkiss observes that 'Max's work of mourning involves a desire to be haunted, a conjuring of the dead through the spaces of the past.'[111] And this desire to be haunted is where we leave Isabelle at the end of my novel: the beginning of the return, asking for Freddie's ghost to come back.

To return, once more, to Bearn, who states that where the eerie is 'the absence of what ought to be present'[112], the uncanny, enacting an opposite, is the 'presence of what ought to be absent'.[113] Emptiness is eerie; silence is eerie. The uncanny is loud, full, occupied: the presence of Freddie's ghost is uncanny, his (infrequent) speech, his image, where there

[110] John Banville, *The Sea*, (London: Picador, 2005; repr. 2006) p.4.
[111] Joanne Watkiss, *Gothic Contemporaries: The Haunted Text* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p.46.
[112] Bearn, p.33.
[113] Ibid., p.33.

should be none, is uncanny. The Gothic creates the loss of Freddie in death, but the uncanny brings him back. As Freud states, the 'height of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts',[114] as the spectral form is a sharp conflict between the familiar (the person who has died) versus the unfamiliar (their resurrected form).

Freddie's ghost forces Isabelle to return to the past, to *bring back* the past. At fourteen years old, Isabelle bore witness to an event that she never fully registered. When she finds Freddie, Sadie and Jake in the sand dunes, she catches sight of Freddie's first sexual encounter, an event that Freddie's reoccurring ghost will not forget:

> When I remember what I saw, the images pop wildly in my head, one shattering into the next and the next until all the colours are mixed up and everyone is Freddie, staring up at me in greens and blues.
>
> A tangle of things. Of limbs. All of them knotted like roots and unfurling like fronds or wide, open flowers. Freddie is startled, as though he had forgotten me, like he didn't think I would find my way back. The girl is lying on the sand beneath him, her legs yawning apart like the break in the dune, and it is in the space between that Freddie crouches, his hands in the sand, his face upturned, pale and frightened. Jake is fastened onto this fold of people, too, and it is hard to see where he begins, where his body stops being his body and starts to belong to somebody else. All three of them are connected, Freddie between her legs, Jake somewhere near her head, though now when I remember it, I start to wonder whether Jake was only watching, sitting close but not a part of it, but there is so much sun, so much white flesh that I can hardly make sense of the picture. From where Jake is crouched, I cannot see the girl's face and suddenly I cannot remember her name and I realise that her name or who she is hardly matters.

[114] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.148.

> Nobody is moving because time has stopped and I am on my knees leaning into the hollow.

Time has stopped. Let us take stock here. Let us pause.

Time has not stopped. Time never stops. But through echoes, through memories, through re-enactments, time can, and does, in fact, repeat itself. In considering the haunting sensation, what threatens, as Heidegger tells us, is the nothingness, the groundlessness of the apparition: it 'is nothing definite and worldly, and yet it is not without the impending approach which characterises the threatening.'[115] Freddie's ghost is not frightening, but he threatens. In the figure of the ghost, he threatens progress, threatens the natural order of time, of *moving on*. His ghost has an inherent connection to Isabelle, to the events or the places she occupies. As Trigg notes, a 'placeless ghost, is after all, as inconceivable as a placeless memory; the shadow in the hallway does not linger aimlessly, but dwells in a specific place.'[116] With this in mind, when does Isabelle see Freddie's ghost? At what point does she feel him the most? As Avery F. Gordon states, 'ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view.'[117] Isabelle does not try to hide the 'trouble' from view, does not try to contain or repress that summer, but actively seeks out a repetition of the events, in order to process what happened to Freddie. Freddie's presence, therefore, is heightened in 'the bedroom, in the room made for sleeping, in the room made for sex'. Freddie's ghost – the ethereal figure who lingers at the window –

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[115] Heidegger, p.289.
[116] Trigg, p.294.
[117] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd edn, rev. by Avery F. Gordon and Janice Radway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p.xvi.

appears in times of remembering trauma. In both remembering and not remembering, in both knowing and not knowing what happened, Isabelle, as an adult, creates a doubling of events in order to repeat and therefore offer the possibility of understanding Freddie's sexual experience on the beach:

> I do not know what to believe in, anymore.
>
> Perhaps you can agree to it without saying anything at all. Which is where I find myself, more often than not, in bed with a man who has done all the talking, and I have obliged him, just by being quiet. Or perhaps he did notice it, the look on my face or the way I am swamped by my own hesitation, but he overlooks it, pretends it is not there. And so I follow his lead, persuaded by his body, believing that yes, perhaps I do want this, after all. I have played the game.

But even before his death, Freddie is presented as a loss. After he leaves for boarding school, Freddie is presented as the disappeared, a loss, a spectre at Sadie's party:

> I stood with Sadie in the kitchen. We didn't speak about him, but he was there, Freddie, somewhere between us. Every time the front door opened I spun round, peering through the kitchen doorway into the lounge, thinking for a second that he had made it, bursting into the room with his arms above his head: *here I am!*

Freddie's existence is determined through Isabelle: in life and in death he relies on Isabelle to tell his story. Here, before his death, he is already gone. Here, before his death, Isabelle is still trying to 'scramble towards the truth', is still trying to make sense of that summer, because, as Gordon states, 'when ghosts appear to you, the dead or the disappeared or the lost or the invisible are demanding their due.'[118]

[118] Gordon, p.182.

> The image of him in that kitchen, the one I had dreamt up, turned suddenly pale. It was the same look he had that day on the beach, the look that complicated everything – the who did what and to who – that made understanding all of it unbearable.
>
> He was frightened.
>
> Or he wasn't.
>
> He was surprised to see me.
>
> One human, looking at another, trying to communicate something, or not trying to communicate at all. His eyes, green and blue, were impossible.

At this party, Freddie's ghost does not speak; it is not Freddie who reveals the fact that Isabelle may have got things wrong. She reaches this understanding herself, through memory, through 'seeing' (remembering) Freddie, who turns 'suddenly pale'. As Martha J. Cutter explains, 'only when something is appropriately remembered can social progress or healing of any sort begin.'[119] Isabelle cannot fully remember what she saw: 'there is so much sun, so much white flesh that [she] can hardly make sense of the picture', and only by going back, by repeating, can Isabelle make sense of the past. Memory works to channel that which both exists and does not exist. As Punter states, 'Gothic is the terrain on which we are never sure what – if anything – we have remembered.'[120] The unreliability of memory, as it lingers like a Gothic shadow between recollection and reconstruction, gives way to the uncanny. In remembering, we bring back the forgotten or the repressed, the recurrence of the once familiar: even the dead are given a route in 'coming back'. The uncanny figure of the ghost is how that which was lost finds us again.

As Trigg notes in the case of trauma, 'the human body becomes the host for an experience that has yet to be fully

[119] Martha J. Cutter, 'Editor's Introduction: The Haunting and the Haunted,' *MELUS,* 3. 37 (2012), 5–12 (p.5).
[120] Punter, p.208.

registered, thus producing two distinct experiences, one cognitive in focus and the other corporeal, both of which dwell in the same body.'[121] After his sexual experience on the beach, Freddie attempts to corporeally register the extent of his experience, as 'he used his body for other things, even broke his bones to prove his body was still his.' He falls down the sluice, breaking his wrist, and while his body is in a state of repair (wearing 'his horrible cast') he is sent away to boarding school. His search for understanding or else his quest to take ownership of his own body ultimately leads to his death, as he falls from the rooftop of the school's dining hall and breaks his neck. Isabelle's second experience of loss is inherently connected to this loss of Freddie, as she faces the loss of her sense of self through figuring a reconstruction and a re-enactment. In her constant and compulsive return to the past after his death, Isabelle uses her body to reclaim the memory of Freddie's sexual encounter; the events are doubled, recreated. In the corporeal sense, Isabelle reclaims the memory of Freddie's sexual experience, using her body to create doppelgänger moments in which the uncertainty of consent is central. Simultaneously, Isabelle attempts to understand Freddie's sexual experience cognitively, figuring a production, through the recalibration of human thought, of a ghost, a figure in which she attempts, but fails, to engage in a dialogue that might reveal Freddie's response to his experience:

> Afterwards we would lie in the dark, and sometimes they would smoke before they left. Sometimes they would sit on the side of the bed, leaning down to pull on their socks, drawing out the long curve of their spine. Some of them would prop themselves up on one elbow, gazing at me as though love could ever work that

[121] Trigg, p.290.

> quickly. And I would lie there, breathing in the sweat and salt and wafting silence. And in the end, they figured it out. *This was fun*, they might say, in that serious and kindly manner, polite and signing off. And then they would leave, going back downstairs, in search of another beer. And I would wait a while, realising that I have not found it. Whatever it was I was looking for.
>
> *Never mind*, Freddie would say, from outside the window. *Maybe next time.*

Freddie's ghost, then, inhabits the world of thought. Freddie is recalled as spectral. The ghost represents Isabelle's double experience of loss. The first is the loss of Freddie, in the projection that adopts his appearance, his voice, the 'wild look in his eyes', however inauthentic. His ghost is both the loss and the return of the loss: it is both Gothic and uncanny, as it takes the double position of presence and absence, of loss and return.

And yet the ghost not only epitomizes a loss of Freddie, but also, in inhabiting the world of thought, a loss of self: what Isabelle sees, in the 'room made for sex', is the fragmented self, divided and externalised in the form of a 'little boy [she] barely knew.' He is a part of Isabelle that clings to the past. Jacques Derrida explores this notion in his work *Memoires for Paul de Man*, in his account of an intellectual friendship and of the existential experience of a friend's death:

> The movement of interiorization keeps within us the life, thought, body, voice, look or soul of the other, but in the form of those hypomnemata, memoranda, signs or symbols, images or representations which are only lacunary fragments, detached and dispersed – only "parts" of the departed other. In turn they are parts of us, included "in us" in a memory which suddenly seems greater and older than us.[122]

[122] Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. by Kevin Newmark (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.37.

Freddie, as the 'departed other', is a part of Isabelle, a memory within her which she externalises. Isabelle is haunted by an incomplete and often changing image of a constantly deferred self. As Shane McCorristine states, 'the ghosts which really haunt us today should be considered as spectres of the self.'[123] In attempting but never authentically experiencing Freddie's first sexual encounter, she constructs and externalises a figure (Freddie) who tries to help her in her search for 'whatever it [is] [she] [is] looking for.' As Steven Bruhm explains, 'to repeat is to visit the same place but with a difference: in repetition we relive an event but […] the repetition cannot be perfect or authentic, […] it can only produce the original experience differently.'[124] Freddie's ghost will never bring the answers, will never ascertain the answers, as his ghost comes from within Isabelle, is a fragment of Isabelle split or doubled from the whole.

The return of this loss of self comes in the form of something other. At times, Freddie's ghost watches her, watches from an outside window, or from the corner of a room. At other times, she 'watches' herself, in times of (sexual) uncertainty, remembering 'that kiss as if [she] had not lived it, as if [she] [were] watching, now, from the other side of the river.' As a spectator, she wonders: 'I must have wanted it, or I must have wanted to get close to it, whatever "it" was.' This uncanny ability to stand outside of herself, to see herself as 'other', means that in these moments she has become the ghost, the 'other', who watches the scene, the spectre who is divided, split from the whole: 'I leave my body

[123] Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.1.
[124] Steven Bruhm, 'Contemporary Gothic: Why we need it', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 259-276 (p.273).

there and I go outside. I watch through the outside window, just to check, to study my own face, to make sure I want it.' Isabelle's loss is returned to her in the ambiguous reconstructed self, this uncanny and nearly unknowable person who looks in at the window. Here, Isabelle develops, comes back, returns as someone unconnected from her own body, someone almost unrecognisable, someone 'other.' Similarly, when Freddie's ghost appears in her dreams, Isabelle tries to shout to him, but loses the ability to speak. When she states that she is 'not sure if he has seen me, a small, grey figure crouching on the lower step', there appears a fluidity to the figure of the ghost, momentarily unclear, in this encounter, who is haunting whom, who is enacting the ghost, the figure who may or may not be visible. She is distinguished here, as a figure separate to Freddie's ghost, and yet his ghost cannot be easily distinguished as a thing separate to her own identity. The uncanny, as Royle states, has to do with 'a sense of ourselves as double, split, at odds with ourselves',[125] which is what makes this moment uncanny, these two fragments of Isabelle, doubled, split: a double loss returning as one. This flexible figure of the ghost, taking the corporeal shape of Freddie or enabling Isabelle to become the spectral spectator, is possible for, as Derrida states in *The Work of Mourning*, 'we are only ever *ourselves* from that place within us where the other, the mortal other, resonates.'[126]

What has become clear in this section is the double loss Isabelle experiences after the death of Freddie. Not only is she faced with the loss of Freddie in death, but the loss of herself through the compulsive return to the past. But these losses have come back to us. What we have also seen in this section

[125] Royle, p.6.
[126] Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p.117.

is the return of Freddie and the reconstruction of Isabelle's self. In the figure of the ghost, we see a double loss returned. The ghost is a part of Isabelle, something split or doubled from the whole, a projection whose uncanny existence signals a return of Isabelle's losses – Freddie and herself. As Mejia-LaPerle explains:

> Ghosts show us that both the past and the self are knowable only through the tenuous creation, rather than recollection, of memory. Ghosts emphasize what is constructed – therefore fleeting, undependable, ephemeral – yet this constructedness is proof of, and perhaps the only tenable foundation for, one's own identity.[127]

Isabelle reconstructs past events (in her repeated sexual intercourse) in order to prove that the past is knowable. She constructs Freddie's ghost in order to engage in a dialogue with the past, but she is only talking to herself. When Freddie speaks, it is through Isabelle, as he is a part of Isabelle. Freddie's ghost, in his constructedness, moves only when Isabelle decides he'll move, speaks when she says speak:

> Sometimes he sits and smokes: *these things will kill you, you know?* He winks – which I never saw him do in life – and he laughs. Other times he is quiet, and this is when I make him tell me things I never knew - *dead secret, don't tell anyone but, listen to this* - his legs bunched up to his chest, his voice an unreal whisper.

This voice, this 'unreal whisper', belongs to Isabelle, comes from Isabelle: words are put into his mouth. As Trigg states, in the voice of the ghost, in the dead sitting beside those who speak among the living, 'dialogue would invariably prove to be a solitary act, a summoning of one's own failure to transform the losses of the past into the gains of the present.'[128] Isabelle attempts to transform her losses of the past into her present –

[127] Mejia-LaPerle, in *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film and Anime*, ed. by Andrew Hock Soon Ng, pp.108-122 (p.119).
[128] Trigg, p.283.

they become the figure of the ghost. And this figure highlights Isabelle's double loss, but its very existence is uncanny: it lingers in the bedroom, it is present, it is here, it has come back to us. It is both at once the return of Freddie and the reconstruction of Isabelle. It is this coming back, the loss returned to us, this *resurrection*, that allows for the uncanny experience.

As Trigg states, 'just as the ghost's presence in space is not incidental lingering, so its occupancy of time is governed by a purpose and a specific end.'[129] The part of Isabelle that will not let go of the past, that will not give up the ghost, is governed by the specific: Isabelle's need to comprehend a past event. She wants the past to become knowable, wants to understand what happened to Freddie, to understand how he reacted or managed or did not manage his experience. And this process is ongoing. It is unfinished. Freddie's cigarette never goes out:

> Sometimes I meet him on the bridge.
>
> "Let's go for a walk," he says. "I'll just have a cigarette, ok? Just one cigarette. And then we'll get going."
>
> He pulls me down to the river, the sluice and the bridge disappearing behind us, as we loop down the path towards the jetty. He lights his cigarette and he grins at me. I wait for him to finish, but he never does. That cigarette never shrinks – he smokes it forever, and I sit beside him, waiting.
>
> *And then we'll get going*.

Here, at the 'end' of the story, Freddie lingers, he persists; he endures all time and space. The loss of Freddie is ever-present, and his promise that we will 'get going' prepares us for repetition, for the going back, for the uncanny return of the past.

[129] Trigg, p.302.

THE UNCANNY RETURN

> We still believe there is a truth about the past; we base our memories on the world's vast Memory, in which the house has its place as it really was on that day, and which guarantees its being at this moment.
> (Maurice Merleau-Ponty)[130]

I do not know the truth of this place anymore.

I am standing in the grass, at the staithe, the river to my back. The weeping willow has gone. The appalling size of that tree – a tree I always liked – has been cut down to a stump. I turn around, see the long run of Falcon Meadow on the other side of the bridge. The sluice gates are open, the way I like them: they have a roar like white noise that both soothes and terrifies me. The jetty is just out of sight.

I walk away from the river, away from the staithe. In less than a minute I am looking up at my mother's house, the low, tunnelling structure of that building, those wide windows, all that white paint. I peer through the windows.

Sometimes, when I look hard and long enough, I catch a glimpse of something, something else inside that house - a child standing in the centre of the room, or a shadow gliding over the stairs: Isabelle has found a way inside.

What we have witnessed so far in this essay is the way the Gothic and the uncanny meet at the intersection of loss and resurrection. It is this unstable ground, between absence and presence, between loss and return, that unites and unties the chapters in this essay. In dealing with Gothic loss and uncanny resurrection, we have navigated through the ambiguous space between real and fictional landscapes, the self and the double, the loss of a loved one and the figure of

[130] Merleau-Ponty, p.81.

the ghost. In this chapter, I will return to Bungay to consider the losses and returns given to us in this essay. I will consider how each of these cases affects my return to Bungay. I stand on my mother's doorstep and I witness first the differences and similarities between the non-existent world of my fiction and the reality of the ever-evolving material world. Next, I consider the way I lose myself in my mother's house, as I regard Isabelle as a spectral presence, as we seem to occupy the same space, even though she is in a different time, a different world. Finally, I consider Isabelle's uncanny return. Through her first-person narration, through the mingling of past and present, we see the fragmentary nature of memory, and the way she returns to tell her (ghost) story. In this chapter, I reflect on the unstable ground between absence and presence, loss and return, the Gothic and the uncanny.

In Chapter 1, *How it Began: Crafting Uncanny Spaces,* I demonstrated the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny through the loss and the return of place through fiction. I detailed the uncanny writing process of reconstructing the reality of Bungay in my novel, an experience of writing which relies on the suspension between reality and fiction. I considered the way writing Bungay seemed to trigger a loss, the way details of the landscape seemed to alter or fall away completely. And I considered the way Bungay returns to me in my fiction, albeit in distorted form. And what could be more uncanny, I ask now, than returning to this place? What could be more uncanny than coming back to Bungay, to witness and experience the differences and similarities between the evolving reality of place and the static construction of my fiction?

When I visit this space, when I return to it at Christmas, in the summer, or in the quiet months between, I am faced

with the uncanny experience of finding myself again, amongst the spectral presence that is my fiction. As Paul Ricoeur states, we can see 'memory as presence of the absent encountered previously'.[131] In repeated memories, the ghostly whispers of my past haunt my writing, the absent becomes present. Yet the whispers of my past seem silenced when I return –as though I have never lived in this place. It seems it is I that is othered, the presence that does not belong. The town is familiar – I did, after all, live there for eight years – and yet every time I return the high street seems to have altered – the loss of a shop, the discovery of a new one, new paint, new colours – or the meadow has been cut back and cleared so that the view across the grassland is clear, peeled back, *different*. Of the instability of spaces, Perec imagines the existence of 'places that are stable, unmoving, intangible and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep-rooted.'[132] He goes on to state that such places don't exist, that spaces 'are fragile: time is going to wear them away, to destroy them. Nothing will any longer resemble what was.'[133] When I return, the seasons roll on in a way they cannot in my novel: the bare, skeleton trees are a shriek of change, where in my writing they stand still in time, forever in full bloom.

[131] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.39.
[132] Perec, p.91.
[133] Ibid., p.91.

Figure 6: Falcon Meadow June 2019

Figure 7: Falcon Meadow December 2019

On returning to a place after a long period of absence, Trigg notes:

> We are often shocked by both the small and the vast changes, effectively alerting us to the radical indifference places have to the sentiment we apply to them. Here, our own selves can become the site of an internal quarrel as to how a place once was; by claiming to cognitively remember the feel of a place, our bodies can provide a different history of the past. The result is that place can take on a life of its own, quite apart from the way it is experienced or remembered.[134]

[134] Trigg, p.2.

Figure 8: Bungay Staithe July 2018

Figure 9: Bungay Staithe June 2019

When I return – every time I return – when I step out of the car and look up at the house, I see it is just the way I have described it in my novel: long, narrow, white. We go through the gate, through the back door and into the kitchen. The room is white in my memory, but I notice – as though for the first time – that the walls are painted green. As Watkiss states, 'by reoccupying space, memory is rebuilt,'[135] but as the house tunnels out from here, moving narrowly out to the hallway and the lounge, I am swept up in a sense of dislocation. This is the place where I spent my adolescence; I have fought with my mother across the kitchen table, laughed with my sisters, smoked out of an upstairs window. I have cried here, and I have kept my deepest, darkest secrets here, because there is nothing more private or important than the boy who refuses to text you back. And yet there is no sign of me. I have left no marks. Everything that once belonged to me

[135] Watkiss, p.54.

has been boxed up; it resides in the attic space above, or is with me in my own home. I look into the smallest bedroom – which was once my room – and see it filled with my sister's things. Suddenly, my memory space is distorted. My memories are attached to the narrowness of that bed, to the high ceilings, the skylights with the broken blinds. My memories are attached to sleeping here, to waking, to being disturbed by a loud rapping on the door on Sunday mornings because it is time to go to church. In remembering space, Perec notes that 'the resurrected space of the bedroom is enough to bring back to life, to recall, to revive memories, the most fleeting and anodyne along with the most essential.'[136] And this is the experience – I remember drinking tea in bed, eating chocolate and hiding the wrappers under my pillow. I remember writing, deciding I would be a writer, staying up late to write. But something gets in the way of these memories. The space is not the same anymore. My sister moved into the room when I moved out, and now it is crammed full of things that do not belong to me, and the bed is on the wrong side of the room. It will change again, when she moves out, and when it does, I will be confronted, again, with this difference.[137] The place has moved on, as I have; it is only in my writing that it stands still in time.

Of this temporal duality, Gothic author Susan Hill, writing in an article for The Guardian, describes her hometown and the setting of her fiction on the Yorkshire coast:

[136] Perec, p.21.

[137] Whilst I have been working on this essay, my sister has moved out of my mother's house. The room has changed once more. The walls have been repainted; the furniture has been moved. The blinds have been fixed and the room has been dusted. It has all been scrubbed clean. There is no sign of her. Not a hair band on the floor, not a mark on the wall. Like me, she has left nothing behind. Everything has reset, the room has started again. All the ghosts have been cleaned out.

> On the foreshore, the dodgems, candy floss and amusement arcades were all out of bounds. We went penniless. Sometimes they gave us bags of sweet drum-scrapings and we cadged free rides. I set short stories there, decades later.
>
> It all exists when I return (not often enough). I am in the now-and-the-then simultaneously, transfixed again by the gliding snake cables of the cliff tram. Time means nothing. Scarborough is out of time. It means everything.[138]

Re-writing and recreating real places into fictional places returns the past to the present, and then to a state of timelessness, a place where things live and breathe but cannot move, cannot transcend beyond the 'now.' It looks so similar, the world I have created and the world I once lived in, but when I return and step in to face reality, I see that some of the detailing is wrong, lost, invented. As Trigg states, 'encountering a place from our past in the material world establishes itself in a relationship of difference and otherness to that of our memories.'[139] For me, this experience relates not only to my memories but to the reimagined place I have created in my writing. On the one hand, the house that exists in the material world is as ordinary and familiar as it always was. But on the other, there is an otherness about it, so very familiar to, and yet with startling differences, to the house I have been writing about, the place I have grown accustomed to, inside my own head. As Freud explains, 'the uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary.'[140]

In my writing, I have created Gothic spaces that speak

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[138] Susan Hill, 'Susan Hill on Scarborough: "My first haunted place was a bombed girls' school"', *Guardian*, 03 November 2018, Books section <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/03/susan-hill-made-in-scarborough-yorkshire> [Accessed 08 September 2020].
[139] Trigg, p.36.
[140] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.150.

of loss, and it is within these spaces that Isabelle experiences the uncanny. But in my return to these spaces, the spaces of the material world, I find myself experiencing the uncanny effect: it is the experience I must face every time I return. I am surprised, for a moment, that the kitchen table is in the middle of the room and not beside the window, the way I have written it. As Thorsten Botz-Bornstein states, 'the uncanny always exists as an overlapping of normality and non-normality',[141] and in facing the reality of the setting alongside the imaginative world, I am faced with something strange: something distantly familiar, and yet, strangely new. Every time I visit it is like I have never lived there. It is like I am exploring each room for the first time and I look around the way I would a stranger's house. Strangely, the place of my adolescence is destroyed and lost, replaced by something new: my memory of the place is dislodged and replaced by the fictitious version of Isabelle's world.

I have created a space which is occupied by both myself and Isabelle. And it is only when I return that I see it: the way I share this space. In Chapter two, section one, *Repeat After Me*, I explored the connection between myself and my protagonist and attempted to draw out the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny through the loss and displacement of self and the reconstruction of the self in fiction. Unlike this experience of *finding* myself in my fiction, when I return to Bungay, I am faced with the strange experience of losing myself. In *Repeat After Me* I discussed my accidental findings – the way Isabelle reflected me, the way she brought me back (to myself) before I knew I was lost. But now, standing in my mother's kitchen, I am looking for myself,

[141] Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *Films and Dreams: Tarkovsky, Bergman, Sokurov, Kubrick, and Wong Kar-Wai* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 120.

purposefully. And I cannot see a thing. In the face of the double, as Trigg suggests, 'the fabric of the life-world [is] shown to be prey to an abiding sense of otherness.'[142] The otherness comes from the doubling of place, the repetition of a real place in fiction. This is where Isabelle doubles me, repeats me – she eats dinner at the old kitchen table, sits in the lounge in the early evening. At night she sleeps in my old bed, in the room with no curtains or blinds, and in the morning she traces my steps, down the stairs, into the hallway. And as I stand in this space, the strangest sense of displacement occurs. I blink. I check my pulse. I press my palms against the wall, just to feel something. There are ghosts in this house. And I have asked them inside.

Trigg states that having experienced the uncanny effect 'we turn to ourselves in order to ask the following question: *What just happened to me?*'.[143] Like waking from a dream, forgetting where you are or who you are, a feeling of dislocation occurs. Between this house and the staithe I have eaten, spoken, cried, laughed: I have stolen things and returned things, sat at the table to do my homework, re-filled the kettle, made cups of tea. All of these things I know as facts, but I do not *feel* them anymore. Lurking there instead, edging along my periphery, are the shadows of Freddie, Isabelle, her mother. As Trigg states, 'the experience of the double casts a shadow over the materiality of the world,'[144] a displacement which is inevitable, considering it was me who invited Isabelle inside, and now she will not leave. My past self - the one who used to live here - has been displaced. Where in my writing, I found myself all too often, I am lost in the material world. I have returned, but found no trace of myself.

[142] Trigg, p.291.
[143] Trigg, p.28.
[144] Trigg, p.291.

Of this fragmentation, Trigg states that 'the self-presentation of the "I" as occupying a particular place is overturned by the gaze of another "I"'.[145] As I stand in the hallway, residing somewhere between reality and fiction, I am confronted with Welty's idea of 'seeing double, two pictures at once in his frame, his and the world's,'[146] a feeling riddled with the uncanny as I occupy the same space as Isabelle, even though she is in a different time, a different world. My own self becomes a character of the past. I come to experience myself as double, split, as *other*, for there exists – simultaneously, and in the same house – myself, and a modified version of myself. Whilst Chapter two, section one, *Repeat After Me* highlighted the way I return in Isabelle, the way I find or see myself in her, when I return to Bungay I struggle to find myself so easily. In *Repeat After Me*, in pairing the uncanny life experience with my writing, I found myself accidently. But this time I am looking, and I am like a vampire looking for her own reflection. Or perhaps when I look into the mirror, I see a reflection that augments 'myself,' a reflection that displaces and unseats all sense of self. In my fiction, I have created a space that doubles reality, and in returning to my mother's house I am faced with a sense of strangeness, standing in a house that exists in both the real world and the story world. As Wolfreys states, 'to tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns.'[147] And I have unlocked the doors. I am living my own ghost story – transgressing my own time frame. I do not live there anymore, in that long and narrow house beside the river: that is the past. But, as Diana Wallace observes, 'the past in the

[145] Trigg, p.291.
[146] Welty, p.238.
[147] Wolfreys, p.3.

Gothic never quite stays dead.'[148] We return to tell our (ghost) stories – Isabelle and I caught up in 'the constant swaying, the sickness of going back'. We see it in our narratives, the constant return of and to the past.

Because like me, Isabelle is always returning. In Chapter two, section two, *The Figure of the Ghost*, I attempted to illustrate the relationship between the Gothic and the uncanny through Isabelle's loss of self and the undetermined return of self. In this section I explored Isabelle's loss as a double loss – her loss of Freddie prompts a loss of self as she is compelled to repeat a singular past event, over and over. The ambiguity of Freddie's sexual experience that day on the beach can never be resolved. What happened to Freddie is in the past. But Isabelle is constantly returning. She returns to Freddie. She goes back to see 'his legs pulled up to his chest, his hand dipping to his side, his mouth round and his head raised to exhale grey breath, the smoke from his cigarette curling round his wrist.' Isabelle's story is a story of loss, and in her narration, she returns this loss to the present. Both the Gothic loss and the uncanny return are compounded by Isabelle's narration. She narrates what is both to come and has already passed, and in doing so she both anticipates and returns her loss. When she recalls Freddie, she brings him back from the dead: he is spectral, a stranger, uncanny. In considering the uncanny in the short story *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*, attributed to Daniel Defoe, Wolfreys tells us:

> What is uncanny is the act of telling, the narrative act of bringing the ghost back in a temporally disjunctive manner, which destabilises the cognition of temporal order as a perceived sequence of events. The spectral is, therefore, a matter of recognising what is

[148] Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History, and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p.4.

> disorderly within an apparently straightforward temporal framework.[149]

Freddie is 'living and dead, all at once', and it is the ghost, the memory of Freddie, that disrupts the linearity of Isabelle's narrative. She admits: 'the day Freddie kissed me at the gate was not the same day we went to see the church. I have blended them together, clumsily, as I scramble towards the truth.' The uncanny act of *telling the story* brings Freddie back from the dead.

Freddie's death defies all laws of time. It is both at once passed and still to come. Isabelle's story both begins and ends with death, so that Freddie, 'even as he arrived, […] was already in the process of leaving.' Commenting on the narrative structure of George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*, Wolfreys states:

> In the narrative which carries the reader back in time even at the same time as it is moving forward toward the eventual end, scenes from a future which is also a past are projected as double phantom moments: as the narrative of the scene told with hindsight, and as the scene which is projected in the narrator's mind (as foresight) in anticipation of its arrival. Then the scene arrives again in the narrative to be reiterated, enacted over again, though still, we should remember, also projected as a return of the past in first-person narrative.[150]

These double phantom moments are also seen occurring and reoccurring in contemporary fiction. Emily Fridlund's *History of Wolves*, for example, begins with Paul's death and continues to come back to the same fact in repetition: 'By then, I later learned, Paul had an hour before he slipped into a coma,

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[149] Wolfreys, p.5; see also: Monica Germanà, *Scottish Women's Gothic and Fantastic Writing: Fiction Since 1978* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).
[150] Wolfreys, p.74.

another four hours before cardiac arrest.'[151] Like the scenes with Freddie, the scenes with Paul are always told in hindsight, but with the anticipation of the arrival of his death. There is tension between what we know (Paul is dead) and what we don't know (the how and the why of his death). And we see this framing of memory in Isabelle's narration, as she returns, and is always returning, to the past. As Trigg states, 'memory persists in some sense into the present. Once lived, the past does not temporally expire, even though the event itself may have ceased to exist. Instead, it stretches out into the present.'[152] In this way, Freddie is kept alive, though is always moving forward towards his death. These double moments, in repeating themselves, narrate what is both at once to come and already passed:

> And I would be faced with it, when I ran to The Maltings, when I banged on the door and waited, when there would be no laughter coming from the other side of the door. I would be faced with it, with the absolute certainty of his going away: Freddie, in the dredge of light from the hallway, would look sad and say *yes, yes I am* and I would cry – right there in front of him – and Freddie would stand and watch, utterly bewildered, utterly terrified, until Alice appeared and invited me inside. Then we would all sit round the kitchen table and I would see it for myself, the small wooden table top covered in a thick white lace, with round, plain coasters and a vase with no flowers. And no one would talk about the leaving or the going away, and instead we would talk about the weather and how beautiful it is, the countryside, in the summer. And when I come to leave, Alice will give me a small, sharp wave, relieved that she has been polite and made me tea and that I have not been seen by her parents, who can be heard in some other, secret part of the house.

[151] Emily Fridlund, *History of Wolves*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson – Orion Publishing Group Ltd, 2017), p.264.
[152] Trigg, p.47.

These actions are narrated through memory, as a return of the past, though they come to us as something like foresight, as anticipating the action that will be reiterated, as the scene arrives again, as Isabelle enters The Maltings:

> And then Freddie's face in the doorway, white and speechless, saying *yes, yes I am*, and me, crying, wanting something from him (a hug? A quick grin?) and him backing away, turning his head to look at someone coming up the hallway behind him. In my memory he stands miles away, in the distance, the door and the rest of the house impossibly tall behind him, like looking at him through a small tunnel, or through a gap made with your hand in a fist. Freddie is appalled at the sight of me, unable to speak, standing in navy shorts and bare feet. I am saying *when?*
>
> *When. When. When.*
>
> I am saying it over and over like the beat of a drum when Alice comes to the door, pulls back her son and invites me inside.
>
> And then I pull myself together, take a deep breath and a long step into the house that is still spinning out of focus, the one I remember through a kaleidoscope, the outside swirling and popping, the only colour the yellow paint of the walls.
>
> Alice is looking stiff – her jaw locked and her eyes are a mean shade of green – but still this is not the worst look I will see on her face. When he dies, that will be it. That will be when the shadow comes, that completely unutterable look – the one that says: *I am defeated*.
>
> In her kitchen she does not talk about it, so neither do I, and neither does Freddie. I sit listening to the house, to the footsteps going through it, the voices running along the upstairs hallway. Freddie's grandparents, the smooth voice of his grandfather, his grandmother saying, *is this bag for the car?* or *don't forget those socks, now*. Packing their bags. I look around the kitchen, at the
>
> table lined with a thick lace cloth that screams of my mother, and a painting propped up in the corner of the room.
>
> I remember that, the painting of the little grey mouse. It is so unusual I will remember it for a long time: the little pink teeth, the blood-red bonnet, with a ribbon tied under its chin.
>
> Alice said something about the weather and I said something

> about the countryside in summer. Freddie said nothing, fiddled with his cast.

We see it here, the narrating of what will come and yet what has already been and gone: 'when he dies, that will be it'. It is through this double narration that Freddie is kept spectral, liminal, existing in both the past and the present, a figure occupying both timeframes through Isabelle's return.

Through her narration, the loss of Freddie is ever-present, and his uncanny return persists. Isabelle narrates her double loss through double phantom moments, and like Freddie, she moves between timeframes. And these shifts between past and present tense leave us with the feeling that there is something wrong with time. Things are not straight-forward. The narrative gives us insights into Isabelle's present life, but these moments are never fixed: we can never be sure of where or *when* we are. As Jean-Michel Ganteau tells us, 'present-tense narration does not only evoke present-time narration, but rather stretched-time or atemporal narration espousing the contourless features of a world from which time has absented itself.'[153] Like the ghost, present tense narration constantly and consistently defies and upsets time. The past stops time moving forward. Like Freddie's ghost, the present-tense narration reminds us that things are ongoing and unfinished, that closure – or even the *end* – is provisional. Thoughts and actions are constantly repeated, doubled, stretched between past and present, until, at the very end of the novel, Isabelle acknowledges it: 'I do not think it is the end quite yet.'

And she is right. It is not the end. Not quite yet. Though

[153] Jean-Michel Ganteau, 'Vulnerable Form and Traumatic Vulnerability: Jon McGregor's *Even the Dogs*', in C*ontemporary Trauma Narratives: Liminality and the Ethics of Form*, ed. by Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 89-103 (p.94).

I find us, now, drawing to a close, I am trying to finish something that will never *feel* finished. Standing with my back to the river at the staithe, watching the trees lose their leaves, or searching for myself in my mother's house, or standing in the space where Freddie once spoke, I know that it is not the end. The leaves will grow again, I will find myself beyond the shadow of the double, Freddie will speak again. All of it will come back. Bungay will never be the same – it will never *stay* the same. In the uncanny return, the end can never be made certain. We are bound up in repetition. In the differences and similarities of the intervening time and space, the 'then' and the 'now'. In the constant and interminable act of *coming back*.

What this essay has shown is that the Gothic and the uncanny meet at the intersection of loss and resurrection. We have walked the line between fiction and reality, the self and the double, the living and the dead. In each of these cases, we have witnessed loss and return, over and over, until finally, I returned to walk the line myself, to return to the landscape of Bungay.

When I leave the house, and I hear that crunch of gravel underfoot, the first thing I think of is writing about Freddie, about the way he stood, 'hands in his pockets, his toe digging through the gravel, watching the stones rolling over the tops of his shoes.' When I look around, I notice the houses that surround the watermill, the reality of them: they do not make up a square, at all. In the uncanny experience of re-writing place, of doubling place in fiction, my writing process saw to the suspension of reality and fiction, the uncanny similarities and differences between the landscape of Bungay and the landscape of my novel. And in my return, I experience this place all over again. The jetty and the river, the bridge

somewhere in my periphery. Returning to this place, it is neither the world I once inhabited nor the world I have created – in my return I am faced with the total loss of its ever-evolving state. It is not timeless. It moves, and will always move, beyond the 'now.'

It is all about timing. And our timing has never been right – in my head Isabelle and I inhabit the same place, we swim in the same river, we sit on the same jetty, but we never cross paths. I tell my story and she tells hers. Though we are intrinsically entwined. I tell her story and she tells mine. I find myself in her – my story is engraved into hers. As Isabelle recalls her past, I must recall mine. For me, my recollection is a recollection of place, of the staithe and the water, the soft rush of the sluice. For Isabelle, this act of remembering comes in the figure of the ghost, one who is grafted onto my memories of place:

> And before that final moment, I could make other things happen here, just before the truth kicks in. I could jump into the water beside him and splash him and roll around laughing; I could make him splash me back so that we are both a part of this image: giggling and playing like children until the camera pulls out and the sound of our happy voices play while the credits roll. I could make him kiss me again, with watery fingers lacing between my legs. I could make him dance, while I clapped along, make him sing until his lungs were fire. I could keep him underwater until I wanted him again, until I wanted to watch him somersault impossibly through the air. Or I could keep him underwater for good. All I have to do is say it.

In her narrative, Isabelle's double loss is compounded by double phantom moments – Freddie is always moving towards his death, always coming back from the dead. Isabelle controls Freddie's actions the way I control hers; the uncanny puppet that moves back through the landscape of Bungay. In the

midst of the uncanny effect, as Punter states, 'it is we ourselves who are cast as the ghost, the spectre, the 'revenant' who can in fact never return, but who can only watch this mysterious body performing actions below.'[154]

And so where am 'I' in all of this? In my fiction I found myself all too easily, but upon my return I see first the shadow of Isabelle before I see myself. I look up at the windows and am reminded first of Isabelle, looking down at Freddie: I see her view of this place before I see the real view. To return – as I am always returning – to Royle, he states, in the experience of writing and the uncanny:

> one tries to keep oneself out, but one cannot. One tries to put oneself in: same result. The uncanny is an experience of being *after oneself*, in various senses of that phrase. It is the experience of something duplicitous, diplopic, being double.[155]

It seems in some sense, I am on the outside, an outsider, a foreign body. As Royle states:

> It is impossible to think of the uncanny without involving a sense of what is autobiographical, self-centred, based in one's own experiences. But it is also impossible to conceive the uncanny without a sense of ghostliness, a sense of strangeness given to dissolving all assurances about the identity of a self.[156]

I experience, when I return to Bungay, a displacement, a dislocation of self: both Freddie and Isabelle have expelled and replaced my childhood ghost with their own. With regards to the haunting process, Wolfreys states that 'the phantom or the spectral is not alien to the familiar space, even if it is other, but is as much at home within the architectural space as we

[154] Punter, p.16 – 17.
[155] Royle, p.16.
[156] Ibid., p.16.

are (if not more so)'.[157]

Certainly, I am realising this. I am realising that I am no longer alone in this place: it plays host to my imagination, to the characters I have thought up. These characters that I have believed in, that have become all the more spectral, all the more haunting, in the way they signal a reality that does not exist. Rather than be reminded of *my* childhood encounters, I turn into the staithe and think, *this is where Isabelle first spoke to Freddie, first ran from him, first kissed him.* At the staithe I half expect to turn the corner onto the little grey path and see Freddie, floating there before the jetty. But then, of course, I remember that Freddie is dead. And then I remember that he never existed. Not here, anyway.

I turn around. And I go home. And when I return to Bungay again, this time in the spring, I see the new leaves on the trees. I watch them coming back. I watch the constant return. Of myself, of the seasons, of the shadow of Freddie that seems to haunt the jetty at the staithe. I see the return of it all, in the gap that opens up, in the hole that presents itself after loss. The constant return is never-ending, a resurrection after loss that articulates the knowledge: *I do not think it is the end quite yet.*

[157] Wolfreys, p. 6-7.

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Note: This bibliography is divided into primary and secondary texts and applies to both the novel and the critical essay.

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