

## The Supernatural and Cultural Agency

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Critics have pointed out that ghosts allow us to “successfully broaden and deepen our world and perhaps open ourselves to a greater reality” (Walker 6). Lois Parkinson Zamora also asserts that ghosts often serve as “guides,” and they are, along with much magical realism, “particularly well-suited to enlarging and enriching western ontological understanding,” for their “counterrealistic conventions” reject “the binarisms, rationalisms, and reductive materialisms of Western ontological understanding” (119).<sup>1</sup> As such guides, the specters in magical realist works such as Alice Hoffman’s *The River King* (2000), Susan Power’s *The Grass Dancer* (1994), and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) aide the characters in exploring and understanding the world around them. Characters such as Hoffman’s Carlin Leander, Power’s Charlene Thunder, and Morrison’s Denver are each isolated from their cultural community. Effectively, they are each on the margins of the margins.<sup>2</sup> On one hand, none of the girls are members of the white, hegemonic culture. On the other, their isolation places them outside their own community’s hegemony. Through their alienations, the girls develop negative and self-deprecating identities. Oppressed, it is the appearance of specters in each work that allows each girl to wrestle with both her history and inheritance, enabling their process of healing and self-discovery. Thus, within each author’s magical realism, the supernatural acts as a cultural agent: the ghosts serve as guides, opening Carlin’s, Charlene’s, and Denver’s eyes to a greater reality. Furthermore, it is only when each character accepts the ghostly guidance that she is empowered, positively renegotiating ideologies and identities. This also brings about an understanding of the

community from which they were isolated. In gaining this understanding, they are able to adapt to the community while simultaneously keeping their sense of individuality.

As Jacques Derrida notes in his influential work, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, the spectral is important for it provides a path for transforming and rethinking ideological stances. It does this by calling up what already has occurred, hence it is always repeating (a “revenant”), always coming and going, but never completely gone.<sup>3</sup> This revenant becomes “hauntology,” for, as Derrida says, one cannot truly learn to live without the specter and its lessons. In fact, Derrida posits that learning to live

can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death *alone*. What happens between two, and between all the “two’s” one likes, such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only *talk with or about* some ghost. . . .The time of ‘learning to live,’ a time without tutelary present, would amount to this, to which the exordium is leading us: to learn to live *with* ghosts. . . .And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generation. (xviii-xix)

As Derrida notes, we cannot live without ghosts because they provide the key for understanding and remembering what has happened in the past—our memory and inheritance. Without understanding these things, we are not truly living, but simply stuck in a stagnant “now.” We see this in *The River King, The Grass Dancer, and Beloved*. Each character is fixated on her recent past, on things that cannot be changed. Consequently, they are trapped in an endless cycle of self-degradation, as well as isolated from their societies. Hence, the ghosts push these past occurrences to the forefront and provide Carlin, Charlene, and Denver a path for renegotiating

both inheritance as well as ideological perspectives. This, in turn, allows each character to finally move forward.

Derrida also speaks of “justice” which is not yet present. According to Derrida, we cannot even begin to imagine a justice or equality for all people without speaking “*of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it*” (xix). Doing so allows us to critique the past, righting injustices in the present. As Derrida notes,

Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question “where?” “where tomorrow?” “whither?” (xix)

Consequently, present-day hegemony is what recalls the specter. As Derrida says, “Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony” (37). If we want to eliminate hegemonic repression, we must revisit the past and learn from its ghosts. Hoffman, Power, and Morrison illustrate this through their texts. Ostracized from their communities, to combat each hegemony, Carlin, Charlene, and Denver must confront the ghosts of their pasts. Concordantly, the specters also are the compulsory result of each girl’s repression (which we will explore later). The girls’ communities, as the dominant group, represses them, belittling them for choices their parental figures made. Therefore, the ghosts step in to alleviate this repression, providing the key for Carlin, Charlene, and Denver’s growth and escape from their oppressive circumstances. Thus, as Derrida asserts, it is through the spectral that each character renegotiates their place and role in society.

Traditionally, ghosts in U.S. magical realism have been analyzed for their role in ethnic-American texts. Three dominant theories for their appearance are often proposed, theories that are directly linked to Derrida's correlation of the specter and hegemony. The first posits the idea that apparitions are a way for marginalized peoples to come to terms with violent and/or repressive histories, which, in turn, allows them to move forward. As Arthur Redding writes,

it is by excavating the suppressed possibilities of a past that has been erased, by conversing with those ancestral ghosts that lay claim on us, that we can begin, again, to participate in the process of ethnic self-determination. The past, which has been either denied or utilized as a means of imprisoning us, can begin to function as a haunted place, a place through which we begin to imagine a future. (174-75)<sup>4</sup>

Thus, ghosts not only aid ethnic communities in recapturing the past (past memories, traditions, etc.), but also redefine ethnic identity in the present and for the future.<sup>5</sup> The second theory, inexorably tied to the first, stresses the importance of specters as the carriers of communal/collective memory and history. As Kathleen Brogan notes, "[t]hrough the agency of ghosts, group histories that have in some way been threatened, erased, or fragmented are recuperated and revised" (6).<sup>6</sup> Since specters in ethnic texts come to represent a shared history, they are often read communally, rather than individually. Finally, given the importance of community/ethnic identity, many scholars also believe apparitions aide in the reintegration of those isolated in individuality. According to Zamora, ghosts "often act as correctives to the insularities of individuality, as links to lost families and communities," as well as, "dissent . . . from modernity's . . . psychological assumptions about autonomous consciousness and self-constituted identity and propose instead a model of the self that is collective" (118). The spectral

represents ethnic history and oppression, therefore, it commonly illustrates the importance of a collective ethnic identity, while also enabling ethnic groups to reclaim history and memory and reshape ethnic identity for the future.

Given the different time periods and ethnicities, the overarching purpose of each ghost is not the same for Hoffman, Morrison, and Power. While Carlin, Charlene, and Denver come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, each girl has comparable experiences of isolation and loneliness. However, race and ethnicity do play a differentiating factor in *The Grass Dancer* and *Beloved*. Indeed, much has been written about the role of race, history, and beliefs/traditions of the respective peoples. In *The Grass Dancer*, which focuses on the Sioux/Dakota people, the ghosts serve as a reminder of Native American tradition and its incompatibility with “the rational, technological, and spiritual groundwork of the west” (Wright 39).<sup>7</sup> *Beloved*, in turn, uses specters to explore the history of pain and violence African Americans inherited from slavery and how African Americans can come to terms with this history.<sup>8</sup> Regarding apparitions in ethnic works, Redding sees them as shedding light on a past and history that has been obliterated and oppressive, allowing healing to take place.<sup>9</sup> Many scholars believe that the magical realism in ethnic works springs from belief systems, stories, and even histories not found within white culture<sup>10</sup> To this effect, it is obvious that ghosts provide specific statements about race, culture, history, and tradition in multiethnic American writing, hence ghosts in the three works serve multiple and varied purposes, often based on the particular ethnic group’s history and culture.

Yet, this emphasis on ethnicity almost always excludes white ethnicity from its discussion of specters in magical realist works. While Zamora does recognize the role of ghosts in white texts, noting the culturally-specific role they play in both Flannery O’Connor and

William Faulkner's fiction, she does not go into any great depth about their appearance in white works. Similarly, despite the fact Brogan says "[g]hosts are not the exclusive province of any single ethnic group" (29), she does not focus on any works from white authors.<sup>11</sup> Thus, white authors such as Hoffman are frequently eliminated from discussions of the topic. This commonly occurs because of the long-standing idea of white privilege, where preference and special treatment is given to this group based on their "superior" race.<sup>12</sup> While white privilege still exists, many scholars are beginning to take note of the variances in this privilege based on socioeconomic status. As Monica McDermott and Frank L. Samson write, "[p]oor . . . gay . . . or otherwise marginalized whites are likely to have a different experiences of their privileged racial identity than are others able to see the direct payoff of white skin privilege" (249). Since many whites have come to view whiteness as a privilege only for upper classes, new studies have begun to focus on white racial identity.<sup>13</sup> According to McDermott and Samson, "[g]iven the close association between whiteness and socioeconomic privilege, poor and working class whites are especially likely to be aware of their whiteness as well as to have a complex understanding of what it means to be white in the United States today" (249-50). And, this is where Hoffman's Carlin Leander falls. Coming from a poor, single-mother home, she is starkly aware of the differences between herself and the privileged, upper class white students at the Haddan School. In fact, as we will see, it is Carlin's view of her own white racial identity that informs her self-deprecation. Therefore, Brogan is correct when she says "[i]f the historical and cultural differences that emerge in these many rich and complex haunted tales are ignored, the parallel I would draw devolves into meaningless or, worse, would contribute rhetorically to the very ghosting or erasure of ethnic otherness that these haunted texts explore and combat" (16). Thus, the need each girl has for ghostly guidance stems from her own particular ethnic dilemmas.

Given that Carlin, Charlene, and Denver are all on the margins of the margins, I will look specifically at each hegemony and at the guiding role apparitions play in *The River King*, *The Grass Dancer*, and *Beloved*.<sup>14</sup> While each girl's experiences differ based on ethnicity, what joins the works is the fact that the specters provide the characters a path for healing and self-discovery.<sup>15</sup>

### **Navigating Hegemony**

As noted earlier, Derrida posits that hegemony and specters are linked: as long as hegemonic oppression occurs, the specters will come back. Thus, oppression produces the ghosts. Once the ghost returns, as Derrida puts it, time becomes "out of joint."<sup>16</sup> In all three works, once the specter appears and time becomes out of joint, none of the girls are able to understand or critique the past, present, or future. Therefore, each ghost represents a past that Carlin, Charlene, and Denver have avoided. Furthermore, given their inability to address and/or comprehend the past, we see how each girl reaches her breaking point. It is at this point that the girls become receptive to the ghosts' aid, and the ghosts enable the girls, for the comfort each finds in the ghost's presence allows them to begin a healing process. Therefore, the specters become cultural agents, helping the girls to navigate hegemonic oppression as well as their inheritance.

It is important to examine Derrida's view of "time out of joint" in relation to each character. Drawing from *Hamlet*, Derrida says time is out of joint when "something in the present is not going well, it is not going as it *ought to go*" (23). For Derrida, this disruption of time is injustice—injustice that goes unrectified in the here and now.<sup>17</sup> What occurs, as Derrida

illustrates through Hamlet, is paralysis: Hamlet is unable to properly analyze his past, which, in turn, makes him unable to act in the present or look to the future. It is time out of joint, in conjunction with hegemonic oppression, that also immobilizes Carlin, Charlene, and Denver, leading to the emergence of the ghosts and later their breakdowns.

First, we must examine the injustice and hegemonic oppression that leads to the appearance of the specters. For Carlin, the injustice is the murder of Gus Pierce, who becomes the ghost who helps her. Gus, when alive, is marginalized even more than Carlin, described as a “loser” who “wore a long, black coat that hung like a sackcloth on his spindly frame. . . .An unlighted cigarette dangled from his wide mouth. Even with the fresh air streaming in through the window there was no way to disguise the fact he stank” (Hoffman 26-27). Gus is far removed from the beauty and wealth of the other students attending the private Haddan School, and like Carlin, is there only because of a scholarship. Given his appearance and status, his dormmates immediately begin tormenting him. Eventually, one of their “pranks” goes horribly wrong, and the boys in the dorm murder Gus, disguising the crime to appear as a suicide.<sup>18</sup> While Carlin feels something is not right about Gus’s death, there is no evidence to suggest anything other than suicide, and his murder goes unpunished.

Carlin’s oppression begins before Gus’s death. First, because of her intelligence and beauty, she is an outsider in her own impoverished Florida community. Rather than being proud of Carlin, the community instead believes “any girl with a mind of her own was . . . an aberration of nature’s plan. . . .[and] most folks chose to celebrate a girl’s weaknesses and ignore her strengths” (Hoffman 24-25). Thus, Carlin, who does not wish to marry young and spend the rest of her life barefoot and pregnant, feels she has no choice but to leave the community as soon as possible. She knows she will never be accepted or happy “stranded in a town where a traveling

carnival was considered a cultural event.” (Hoffman 24), and if she stays in the community, she will never have the chance to follow her own dreams. Her “out” ends up being a swimming scholarship to the Haddan School. However, Carlin can see no way into this community either, for the Haddan students are wealthy and flaunt it. In fact, the girls in Carlin’s dorm, St. Anne’s, “had filled their closets with boots and wool jackets and dresses so expensive that a single one cost more than Carlin had spent on her yearly wardrobe, most of it bought at secondhand stores and at the Sunshine Flea Market” (Hoffman 38). Given the obvious socioeconomic differences immediately evident in the contrast between Carlin’s and the other girls’ attire, the girls quickly begin snickering and whispering about Carlin behind her back. Furthermore, Carlin’s friendship with Gus further distances her from the rest of the Haddan students. This distance and Carlin’s oppression only continue to grow after Gus’s death, especially when she begins wearing his shabby black trenchcoat.

The injustice that leads to Charlene’s oppression and the appearance of two ghosts dates back much farther to her grandmother’s, Anna “Mercury” Thunder’s, youth. When Mercury marries a white man and settles into a happy marriage, the rest of her Sioux community becomes envious. In fact, her cousin, Joyce Blue Kettle, snipingly tells her that everyone in the community believes Mercury married Emory “to get things” and that she is “greedy” (Power 228). Jealous of the marriage and the way Emory lavishes gifts on Mercury, the community turns against her. After Emory dies, Mercury’s only consolation is their son, Chaske. When Chaske becomes ill with consumption, Mercury implores Joyce to fetch the doctor. However, in a vision, Mercury sees Joyce and her daughter, Dina, instead laughing and celebrating at a community dance. While they are at the dance, Chaske dies. It is at this point that Mercury claims the hereditary magic of her ancestor, Red Dress. Red Dress, a woman with the power to

control anyone and anything, uses her magic wisely and for her people's benefit. In fact, she sacrifices herself to save her people from early Christian missionaries. When Mercury taps into this magic, she instead uses it for herself, making Dina dance in the freezing winter air until she dies. From this point on, the community rejects and oppresses Mercury. Furthermore, the more the community represses Mercury, the more she delves into magic for selfish reasons, until she only uses it to please herself and her people have completely rejected her. Thus, the initial injustice is never rectified.

Consequently, through the simple fact that Charlene is related to Mercury, the community shuns and oppresses her. For example, when Charlene blows abrasively across the microphone at a powwow, "No one would chastise her . . . for fear of waking the next morning with crossed eyes or a tongue twisted like a pretzel. No one would challenge Charlene" (Power 14). Instead, the community ostracizes Charlene, talking about and ridiculing her behind her back. Charlene becomes invisible and silenced in her own community. Even when Charlene tries to fit in, the community blatantly rejects her. She bakes a macaroni casserole to take to a powwow. Very pleased with her efforts, she is devastated when she finds it thrown out and sees Harley Wind Soldier's dog, Chuck Norris, eating it. To the community, everything associated with Mercury and Charlene is trash, and no matter how hard she tries, Charlene remains an outsider. Charlene tries to counteract the oppression, further distancing herself from the community in an effort to disassociate herself from her grandmother. While she loves to dance at the powwows, she no longer enters the competitions "because she always won. Her grandmother . . . would identify the competition and . . . [prepare] a gummy wad of bad-luck medicine. . . . The targeted dancer would sprain an ankle or succumb to a curious case of the flu before reaching the finals" (Power 27-28). Fearing the community believes she wants Mercury to help her win, Charlene now only

stands on the sidelines watching. However, the community still rejects her, and her loneliness and emptiness continue to grow. Charlene can find no way to escape the derision heaped upon Mercury and herself and no escape from the isolation imposed on her.

Similar to Charlene, the injustice predates Denver. In *Beloved*, injustice occurs when Sethe, Denver's mother, murders Denver's sister, Beloved. Having finally escaped her cruel owner and fled to safety in the north with her four children, Sethe cannot escape the memories of the abuse she suffered at his nephews' hands, the scarred "tree" on her back remaining as a painful reminder the rest of her life. Furthermore, her flight also costs Sethe her husband, who never makes it to his mother's, Baby Suggs', house where Sethe takes up residence. Settling into a calm and happy life with Baby Suggs, Sethe experiences freedom for the first time, vowing that her children will never experience slavery. However, her newfound peace is soon disrupted when she learns schoolteacher is nearing her home. Sethe has no time to escape, and rather than see her children enslaved, she decides it would be better to kill them. She succeeds in killing Beloved and shallowly cutting the throats of her two sons before she is stopped. And, as she learns later, the community, believing she was too proud and showy giving "lavish" parties at Baby Suggs, refuses to warn her in time that schoolmaster is coming. Thus, the community also aids in the injustice, while at the same time persecuting Beloved for the murder.

In fact, it is Sethe's injustice that leads to the community's oppression of both Sethe and Denver. From that point on, no one will have anything to do with Sethe. As Ella tells Stamp Paid, "I ain't got no friends take a handsaw to their own children" (Morrison 187). It is only when Denver begins attending school that she learns the truth. At first, Denver is so pleased with her accomplishments that "she didn't even know she was being avoided by her classmates—that they made excuses and altered their pace not to walk with her" (102). It is not

until a classmate asks her about her mother, if Sethe really killed her own child, that Denver realizes how the community views her family. No one comes to their house, and all Denver has is her family. One by one, each of her family members leave. Her brothers, Howard and Buglar, sneak away in the night, and her grandmother, Baby Suggs, dies. These are “serious losses” for Denver, “since there were no children willing to circle her in game or hang by their knees from her front porch” (Morrison 12). Consequently, Denver sees her world as limited to her home and mother, not believing there is anything outside of this realm for her, or that she has any possibilities. When Paul D arrives at their home, Denver realizes “It had been a long time since anybody . . . sat at their table. . . .For twelve long years . . . there had been no visitors of any sort and certainly no friends” (Morrison 12). The only contact Denver has over the years is Sethe and the ghost of her dead sister. Furthermore, she has no idea how to overcome this oppression or reintegrate into the community. Thus, she retreats into her own secret world.

Since the communities hold each girl back from realizing their full potential and worth, it is only a matter of time before the ghosts make their appearance. It is at this point that time goes out of joint for each girl, and each girl becomes paralyzed, unable to properly analyze past, present, or future and unable to make the right choices in the present. While Carlin has full knowledge of her past, she is unable to disentangle herself from it, aligning her own identity with that of her mother’s, a woman who is content with a simple life and little money in a town that undervalues women. Consequently, she becomes paralyzed. She separates herself from the Haddan students, believing her lower class origins make her unworthy. Aligning herself with the “misfit,” Gus, Carlin is completely desensitized after, as she believes, an argument leads to his suicide. Furthermore, as soon as Gus’s ghost appears immediately following his death, we see how Carlin’s time is out of joint. She blames herself for his death, believing “[h]er wretched

actions . . . had destroyed both Gus and their friendship and gone on to form something cold and mean in the place where Carlin's heart ought to be" (Hoffman 118). Through Carlin, Hoffman illustrates the numbness that occurs when someone is unable to "right" time. Since Carlin cannot properly analyze her past, she also cannot understand the present. "Stuck," she neither comprehends the invalidity of Gus killing himself over an argument, nor can she take the proper action. Instead, she quits caring about everything, cutting herself off from all social interactions, including with her boyfriend, Harry. When she does begin to feel again, she fixates on what she views as her own lack. Holding herself up to the rest of the Haddan students, she denigrates herself. Thus, she begins slicing her arm with a razor, "[h]er own flesh was a ledger upon which she measured all she'd done wrong" (Hoffman 119). Finally spurred into action, Carlin cannot fix injustice, but only abuse herself. Again, signifying her immobility, her only action is to replace emotional pain with physical pain.

Unlike Carlin, Charlene only has access to a fragmented past. According to her grandmother, Anna "Mercury" Thunder, her parents died when she was a baby, leaving Mercury to raise her. While Charlene does realize there is something "off" in Mercury's explanation, specifically that her grandmother never showed her a death certificate or told her where her parents were buried, Charlene never probes further. Charlene also doesn't probe into Mercury's past, questioning how Mercury came to practice "bad medicine," taking whatever she wants or why their Dakota community ostracizes both her grandmother and herself. The few pieces of information Charlene has are not enough for her to critique. This, in conjunction with the appearance of Pumpkin's ghost (a half Menominee, half Irish girl whom Charlene met at a powwow and who died in a car accident leaving the dance) in her dreams, makes Charlene's time out of joint. She sees black birds flying out of Pumpkin's mouth and smashing into glass

every time Pumpkin tries to speak. Because Pumpkin expressed interest in Charlene's love, Charlene believes Mercury killed her, thus she is horrified, feeling the burden for Pumpkin's death. Furthermore, having fought so long to be different, to be viewed differently, from her grandmother, Charlene quits caring. Numb, all she craves is love, no matter what it takes to get it. Like Carlin, when Charlene does take action, it is the wrong action. Baking a love potion into cupcakes, Charlene distributes them to the boys in her homeroom class. Her total disregard for these classmates, as well as her use of Mercury's brand of selfish magic, indicates the depths of self-loathing to which she has sunk. Believing she will never find love and happiness on her own, Charlene entrances the boys in her class. Charlene expects more rejection, but is surprised when the boys readily accept the cupcakes. She immediately regrets her decision, thinking, "*Maybe they don't lump me with Mercury after all*" (Power 295). However, it is too late; "There was no giving back their naïve faith, no calling off the medicine Charlene sensed rushing through her veins" (Power 295). Charlene knows that once the boys come out of it, they would realize what she had done. She will never get the boys' trust back or the real affection she craves. Charlene also realizes that her use of magic has now irrevocably linked her to Mercury.

Yet, her decision to use the magic has even more devastating affects. Incapable of comprehending the magic's full force, Charlene becomes "aware of a growing tension; admiring eyes followed her thick figure, hearts pounded, fingers were busy writing her love messages" (Power 296). It is not happiness Charlene associates with this attention, but rather friction. Since she has never received this kind of interest from the opposite sex before, Charlene, at first, revels in it.<sup>19</sup> However, she quickly sees there is still emptiness in this attention, for it is not real or sustainable; none of the praised offered to her has any value, coming not from the heart, but from a potion. All Charlene can do is wait out the potion's effects. However, Charlene had not

anticipated the power of having six boys simultaneously desire her so intensely. Unable to turn the magic back, she is raped and left curling “her body into a lonely ball of sore muscles and injured flesh” (Power 298). Battered and bruised, Charlene has reached the ultimate depths of despair. Not only is she alone and violated, but also she has demolished any remaining trust in her classmates.

Denver, on the other hand, completely avoids her past. As Morrison relates, Denver despises any story “her mother [Sethe] told that did not concern herself, which is why Amy [the story of Denver’s birth] was all she ever asked about. The rest was a gleaming powerful world made more so by Denver’s absence from it” (62). In fact, the appearance of Beloved’s incorporeal specter insulates Denver, and when she is not active, Denver longs “for a sign of spite from the baby ghost” (Morrison 12). Focusing much of her love and attention on the ghost, Denver refuses to hear about the past and time becomes out of joint. In fact, when a classmate reveals a part of her past, Denver goes deaf, completely retreating from the world around her. Consequently, Denver cannot decipher the actions of anyone around her—neither her mother’s nor the community’s. Thus, Paul D’s arrival immobilizes Denver, for he takes away the two things she does understand: her mother’s attention and Beloved’s incorporeal presence. While this nonphysical ghost only invisibly and angrily strikes out at the household, Denver views it as her “only company” and is “miserable” (Morrison 19) once it disappears. She retreats to her secret boxwood bower where, “closed off from the hurt of the world, Denver’s imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. *Wore her out*” (Morrison 28-29). Without Sethe’s undivided attention and the presence of Beloved’s ghost, Denver becomes numb. She feels she has no protection left from “the condemnation Negroes heaped on them [Sethe and Denver]”, and her world becomes “flat”

(Morrison 37). For Denver, her only “solace” is retreating into her secret bower, hence further into her loneliness and despair. The appearance of Beloved’s corporeal manifestations furthers Denver’s displaced time. Denver’s emotions swing and she becomes manically ecstatic with Beloved and in Beloved’s presence. In fact, she fluctuates between this mania and fear, terrified that Beloved will disappear again. With time out of joint, Denver also cannot properly analyze her past and takes the wrong action. When a corporeal manifestation of Beloved returns and tries to choke Sethe, Denver turns her head. While she finds Beloved’s action “troubling,” it is far more horrifying to think of losing Beloved again. Instead of protecting her mother, Denver only sits by and watches. Thus, Denver permits a new injustice to occur.

Time out of joint, in conjunction with hegemonic oppression, completely paralyzes Carlin, Charlene and Denver. Relegated to “outsider” status, the girls have no avenue for righting present, much less past injustice. Furthermore, without the ghosts, each girl succumbs to hegemonic oppression, unable to navigate the communities from which they are isolated and unable to progress. Consequently, it is magical realism, or the ghosts, that form the bridge between the girls and community. As Redding says, “the ghost is a figure by which we might imagine bridges across difference” (180). Through ghostly guidance, Carlin, Charlene, and Denver finally become a part of a community. This is first seen with Carlin. When she receives Gus’s black trenchcoat after his death, she puts it on and “[i]nstantly, she felt comforted” (Hoffman 140), something she has not felt since before coming to the school. At first, she doesn’t recognize Gus’s presence, only finding solace in the coat’s damp wool—a wool that should have been long dried. Carlin feels the coat cloaks her in silence, protecting her from the rest of the world. It is Gus’s ghost that saves her from the desensitization occurring because of her oppression, forcing her to think about both her actions and those of the people around her.

Every time Gus approves of what she is doing, minnows appear. When he disapproves, stones appear. Minnows appear whenever she is near Sean Byers, the only person besides herself to befriend Gus. As the two form a friendship, more and more minnows appear. During one of their nightly swims, Carlin suddenly finds her pulse “going crazy,” and that “[i]t was lovely to be in the dark, alone, yet not alone” (Hoffman 236). For the first time since Gus’s death, Carlin feels both happy and comfortable with someone else. It is at this point that the minnows stream through the pool. Through his guidance, Gus has nudged Carlin into a friendship and closer to community belonging.<sup>20</sup> As she becomes more comfortable in and with the community around her, Gus’s presence slowly diminishes. In the end, Carlin becomes so in tune with the society around her that when she swims in the river, even “[t]he fish had grown used to her, and they swam along beside her, all the way home” (Hoffman 324). The fact that she considers Haddan home indicates her adjustment to and involvement in the community. It is at this point that Gus’s ghost disappears; Carlin no longer feels or needs his presence.

After the emergence of Red Dress, the ghost of Charlene’s ancestor, Charlene finds a power within herself she never knew she had. Previously, she was unable to stand up to her grandmother. After her encounter with Red Dress, Charlene not only denies Mercury her company, but also she mounts the stairs to her room “[w]ith sudden boldness” (Power 300). This is an amazing turnaround for Charlene. Always an outsider, Red Dress not only provides the key for Charlene’s acceptance into a community, but also a new, loving community. Magically, Charlene finds a news article in her desk; an article that has no source. Reading it, Charlene makes the startling discovery that her parents are still alive. Charlene finds herself “ready for pure action” (Power 304). She tracks down their phone number and calls from her school guidance counselor’s office, despite knowing the wrath this would incur in Mercury.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, she finds acceptance within her original community, for several members come to understand and sympathize with her, putting her up for the night so she can avoid Mercury and taking her to the bus stop in the morning. Leaving the reservation the next day, Charlene feels a happiness she has never experienced before.

Similarly, Denver feels an immediate comfort and affinity for Beloved when Beloved's ghost appears. As soon as she hears Beloved's name, "she [Denver] was shaking. She looked at this sleeping beauty and wanted more" (Morrison 53). Denver instantly develops a purpose, something she had lacked before. She diligently administers to the ailing Beloved, giving both new life. Denver even develops a "passion" (Morrison 54), something long eradicated from her being before Beloved's emergence. Unlike the previous works, however, the guidance Denver receives from Beloved is inadvertent.<sup>22</sup> Beloved does not intentionally help Denver, but rather it is her selfish actions that provide guidance. At first, of course, Denver is enthralled with Beloved. However, once Sethe sees Beloved's scar under her chin and realizes she is her daughter, Denver is completely cut out. She is no longer included in the games they play, and "[e]ven the song that she used to sing to Denver she sang for Beloved alone" (Morrison 240).<sup>23</sup> It is not until things until Beloved has almost completely sucked the life out of Sethe that Denver finally wakes up.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Denver is faced with a choice: Sethe or Beloved, for it is obvious that only one can survive.

Through Beloved's possessiveness, Denver is forced out into her community. Visiting her former school teacher, Miss Lady Jones, she asks for help. With this step, we also see Denver's integration into her community. Neighbors begin leaving baskets of food for the family. Where before they had cut her family out, now they begin caring "whether she ate" and taking pleasure "in her soft 'Thank you'" (Morrison 250). They respect the fact that Denver

“stepped out the door, asked for the help she needed and wanted work” (Morrison 256). In forcing Denver out into the world, Beloved paves the way for her acceptance into the community. Furthermore, Denver’s actions also pull the community together, and they rally around both Denver and Sethe. Recognizing Beloved’s presence as an “invasion,” the women come together at the family’s home, driving Beloved away. Here, Denver takes charge. Sethe, believing a local man is the slave master coming to take Beloved away, attacks him with an ice pick. Denver is “the first one to wrestle her mother down. Before anybody knew what the devil was going on” (Morrison 266). Through her selfless actions, not only does Denver become a part of the community that shunned her, but also Beloved disappears forever.

### **Unraveling Inheritance**

As we will see, this ghostly guidance helps each girl sort through their convoluted inheritances. According to Derrida, “[a]n inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the injunction to reaffirm by choosing. ‘One must’ means one must filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction” (16). For Derrida, the specter represents history and inheritance, and it is not until we wrestle with the ghosts that we can come to a full understanding of our inheritance and what that inheritance means to us as individuals. As Derrida says, the “specter demands that one take its times and history into consideration, the singularity of its temporality or of its historicity” (101). Given that each girl stands outside hegemony, on the margins of the margins, their understanding and knowledge of their inheritance is fragmented. As they do not understand why hegemony isolates and oppresses them,

they also do not have full access to or understanding of their inheritance. What little they have managed to piece together is not to give them a full picture. Consequently, basing their identities on what little they do know, they form negative, self-deprecating identities. It is only through the ghosts that girls finally come to sort through and understand what their inheritance is, as we will see.

First, we will see how the ghosts help each girl sort through and understand their inheritance. Furthermore, we will also examine how comprehending the past allows Carlin, Charlene, and Denver to renegotiate not only their identities, but also previous ideologies surrounding their sense of self. For Carlin, Gus's stones and minnows provide the key to unraveling her inheritance and its relationship to her identity. Whenever she is with Harry, "she would discover a stone in the pocket of Gus's coat. . . .The floor of Carlin's closet was now covered by a collection of such stones" (Hoffman 226). Carlin begins to recognize Gus's guidance, feeling his "disapproval whenever she was with Harry" (Hoffman 195). Given her community's view of women and Carlin's belief that her poverty makes her a lower class citizen, Carlin was delighted when Harry, the most popular and handsome boy at school, began paying attention to her. Her low sense of self worth makes her unable to see Harry for the "monster" Gus says he is.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, she quickly and unquestioningly begins dating him, finding conditional (on the condition that she dates Harry) popularity, acceptance, and love. It is only after the Gus's ghostly guidance that she begins to suspect Harry's motives and true personality. This is compounded when, a few nights after Gus's death, she stumbles across all his dormmates in a secret meeting in the woods. When Carlin startles them and sees their expressionless faces, she feels fear, for "the way they were staring brought to mind the bands of wild dogs that roamed the woods in Florida. . . .*They could hurt me if they wanted to*" (Hoffman 144). As Carlin begins

to understand the specter's actions, her mistake, blindly and trustingly loving Harry, also begins to dawn on her.<sup>26</sup> Through Gus's guidance, Carlin finally starts sifting through her inheritance, one entrenched in views of women as devalued and of socioeconomic status as defining self worth. She realizes that these views have tainted her perceptions of herself, allowing her to be sucked into a harmful relationship. She comes to understand that it is because of her own self-deprecating sense of self that she became enamored of Harry in the first place, as well as how her inheritance influenced her ideology about self worth and identity.

However it takes a little more ghostly pushing before Carlin fully explores inheritance, identity and ideology. Given her experiences with Harry, she is terrified to find herself falling in love with Sean, despite the minnows that appear whenever she is near him. Afraid of being vulnerable and exposed, she assumes that all relationships portend disaster and pulls away from him. Furthermore, she denigrates herself, "disgusted with herself for having been with Harry, as though she'd been contaminated somehow" (Hoffman 248). She has no faith in herself, much less others, therefore pushes Sean away. Consequently, Carlin becomes even more withdrawn and isolated than before, feeling "[a]ll the world out there was liquid, all of it enough to pull her down" (Hoffman 298). Instead of facing her fears, she runs back to Florida and the life she so desperately wanted to escape. She settles into a rote life, hanging out with childhood friends, drinking beer, and watching TV. Through her despair, she not only "settles" for the same life she once denounced, but also completely loses what little sense of self worth she had. When her friend, Johnny, praises her intelligence, she jumps on him, denying who she really is. When he addresses this, she replies, "'I don't know what I am. . . I have no idea'" (Hoffman 320). Again, it is Gus's guidance that allows her to completely sort through her inheritance. Once she begins seeing the stones, she becomes more aware of the people around her. She is surprised when

former classmates discover that “[p]eople were nice to . . . [her] and several girls she’d known in grade school came over to tell her how great she looked, in spite of the haircut. Lindsay Hull, who had never included Carlin in anything, went so far as to invite her to the movies on Saturday with a group that went to the mall together on a weekly basis” (Hoffman 320). Suddenly, Carlin realizes that she has misjudged both her community and her inheritance. With Gus’s help, she realizes her potential and capabilities as a strong and independent woman. As she watches the New England weather on T.V., she knows that not only will she return to Haddan, but also that she will succeed, and she happily embraces a new life and a new ideology about her own self worth.

Given that neither the community nor Mercury relates any information to Charlene about her past, Charlene has no clue as to why she is isolated and oppressed, other than the community fears and despises Mercury’s magic. Consequently, she not only believes Mercury makes her an outsider, but also develops the ideology that there also is a lack that lies within her. This, in turn, leads to her self-deprecation and eventual rape. Thus, when Charlene does receive ghostly guidance, it is very abrupt. While still at the abandoned house where she was assaulted, Charlene realizes “*I’m not alone*” (Power 298). It is here she sees the ghost of her ancestor, Red Dress. Red Dress very bluntly tells her, “I’m going to say this only once, so you better sober up and listen. . . . You misused the medicine because you have a bad example. If you are selfish with it, someday it will be selfish with you. We do not own the power, we aren’t supposed to direct it ourselves. Give it up if you don’t understand my meaning. Put the medicine behind you” (Power 299). Red Dress’s words strike Charlene. For the first time in Charlene’s life, someone has exposed her grandmother for what she truly is. Understanding her inheritance fully, she knows the magic must only be used for good. Abusing the magic, as Mercury does,

will only lead to devastation and despair. Red Dress's words provide the guidance Charlene needs to change both herself and her path. Taking the words to heart, Charlene finally seizes control of her life. She now understands that if she wants to attain the love she desires, she must stand up to her grandmother, must become her own person. With this guidance, Charlene is emboldened, and does not hesitate to contact her parents once she finds the news article. Again, we see Charlene reevaluating her inheritance once she finds her parents. As she puts the pieces together, she finds that she is not alone, that she can find love and affection with no strings attached and that she is not the worthless individual she had perceived herself to be. For Charlene, understanding her inheritance also means abandoning what was passed down from Mercury for something new—an inheritance from loving, selfless parents.

While on the bus taking her to her parents, Charlene receives one last bit of ghostly guidance. Charlene is “startled to find the roof of the bus gone, sliced away” (Power 309). Peering outside the open bus, Charlene again sees Pumpkin, dancing alongside. She sees the birds, once again, emerge from Pumpkin's mouth. She flinches, waiting for them to die. However, this time “the birds . . . darted away. . . Quickly, easily, the birds flew past her teeth. . . Charlene coughed, but the birds coasted down her throat” (Power 309-10). Here, Charlene is finally liberated. Given that the birds come out of Pumpkin's mouth, that birds are renowned for their song and that they easily glide down Charlene's throat, it is as if she is finally given a voice. Furthermore, the fact that they come from Pumpkin indicates Charlene's need to forgive herself. Thus, Charlene finally can fully evaluate her inheritance. Away from her grandmother, Charlene comes to peace with herself and abandons the selfishness that surrounded both her and her grandmother. With this last vision, Charlene quits blaming herself for Pumpkins death and understands “*It wasn't your fault. . . These things happen. There was nothing you could do*”

(Power 310). Through the ghostly guidance, Charlene is empowered. She transforms from the scared, lonely girl who uses magic in the same, selfish way as her grandmother into a woman who understands love is given, not taken and who can finally accept herself. With these realizations, Charlene “laughed, the relief lifting her out of her seat. She danced up and down the aisle, from one end of the bus to the other. She swallowed the birds and heard them sing, *It wasn't your fault*” (Power 310). The road that lies ahead is now full of hope as her grandmother diminishes into the distance.

Beloved's consumptive possession is what guides Denver, forcing her to address her inheritance. Whereas before, Denver retreated into her own world of selfish need, she is now faced with Beloved's even greater, unhealthy desire. In fact, Beloved immediately stakes her claim on Sethe, unable to “take her eyes off Sethe. Stopping to shake the damper, or snapping sticks for kindling, Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe was in unless required or told to” (Morrison 57). When Denver tries to stake her own claim on Beloved, Beloved tells her ““She [Sethe] is the one. She is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have”” (Morrison 76). It becomes increasingly apparent that Beloved needs the same, unconditional love from Sethe that Denver craves from Beloved. However, Beloved also needs more; she needs Sethe to pay for what she did. Beloved becomes a vampire.<sup>27</sup> Beloved cannot get enough of Sethe, and her desire becomes consuming. Sethe devotes all her time and energy to Beloved. When she loses her job, she doesn't even bother to search for a new one. Instead, “Sethe played all the harder with Beloved, who never got enough of anything: lullabies, new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk” (Morrison 240). When there is little food left, Beloved gets it all. Thus, as she grows fatter, Sethe becomes thin and frail, as if Beloved is feeding on everything Sethe has.

Beloved's possessiveness and demand for love moves beyond even Denver's to the point where there is no satisfying her, and it threatens Sethe's very existence.

Therefore, Beloved forces Denver to sift through her inheritance. Denver must decide whose actions are worse: Denver's past or Beloved's present actions. Whereas before, she always chose Beloved, now Denver chooses Sethe. She now realizes that Sethe's actions were motivated by love, whereas Beloved's are based solely on revenge. As painful as her inheritance is, Denver finally stops seeing Sethe as the monster and understands how lonely her world would be without Sethe. Thus, Denver is forced to take action. Realizing she must seek outside help, Denver "stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch. . . . Out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again" (Morrison 243-44). Denver's ideology mirrors that of Sethe's: that the outside world is fearful and that danger lurks at every corner. However, Denver finally faces her fears, something she would not have done had it not been for Beloved. She soon finds that what had terrified her, what she had found overwhelming, is actually very "small." As Denver progresses through the neighborhood, her confidence grows. Denver becomes self-assured in a way she had never been before. Emboldened, she picks her way through the Cincinnati streets, finding a job through which she can support Sethe and Beloved. As Denver comes to understand her inheritance, her self-confidence and self-reliance continue to grow. She even applies for a second job and goes back to school, with plans to attend college. Completely transformed, Denver not only comes to realize her own self-worth and capabilities, but she also comes to understand her inheritance. Realizing how family, community, and self all are tied to the same violent history, and how that history must be navigated before the self is empowered, the fearful, lonely child in Denver disappears forever.

In the end, it is only through the ghostly guidance that Carlin, Charlene, and Denver come to reassess both their own self views, as well as their ideological outlooks on life. Previously, their ideologies revolved around their own lack, which, in turn, paralyzed each girl, keeping them from exploring their full potential and realizing their own value. Through the spectral, each girl comes to realize her own self worth, something hegemonic oppression had previously obscured. Interceding, the ghosts provide the necessary bridge between character and community, allowing each character entrance into their community, while also helping them shift their ideological perspectives of self and the world around them. Setting aside the negative view of self they had developed, each girl finally grows as an individual. Following the guidance, Carlin, Charlene, and Denver are finally able to take charge of their lives. Carlin returns to school, knowing she can and will succeed. Charlene abandons the reservation and seeks the love and comfort her parents offer, and Denver finds the outside world is not as scary as she thought, delighting in her future work and education options. Furthermore, they also sort through their mottled inheritance. In doing so, not only do they come to an understanding about their community, but also about themselves. Each girl comes to realize how community aids in their development as an individual. Furthermore, Carlin, Charlene, and Denver see how their inheritance influences their lives, and it is not until they navigate that inheritance that they understand the world around them. Thus, magical realism helps them set aside their fears, and each girl is empowered and strengthened through their ghostly encounters. As Derrida says of ghosts, they are the “untimely specters that one must not chase away but sort out, critique, keep close by, and allow to come back” (87). This is exactly what the three girls do, and, in doing so they open themselves up to new worlds and possibilities, overcoming the stifling fears that kept

them rooted in a stagnating perception of the world. Through magical realism, we see Carlin, Charlene, and Denver emerge as strong, self-assured women in charge of their own destinies.

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<sup>1</sup> Zamora explores the role of ghosts within magical realist fiction in her article “Ghostly Presences: Magical Realism in Contemporary Fiction of the Americas,” as does Arthur Redding in “‘Haints’: American Ghosts, Ethnic Memory, and Contemporary Fiction.”

<sup>2</sup> While Carlin is not marginalized because of her race, she is marginalized because of her class. As a member of the white, lower class, she is removed from the dominant, white culture. Carlin is then doubly marginalized through her alienation from her own, lower class community.

<sup>3</sup> As Derrida says, “a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*” (11).

<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Brogan also notes that “[g]hosts in contemporary American ethnic literature function similarly: to re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present” (4).

<sup>5</sup> As Brogan says, “the ghosts in stories of cultural hauntings are agents of both cultural memory *and* cultural renewal: the shape-shifting ghost who transmits erased or threatened group memory represents the creative, ongoing process of ethnic redefinition” (12).

<sup>6</sup> Zamora also writes of this in her article.

<sup>7</sup> Neil Wright talks more of this in his article. Similarly, Roland Walter notes that Power “uses the dual character of magical realism – the harmonious intertwinement of the natural and supernatural categories of reality – as a means of resistance to internal colonization and the resulting disruptions of psyche, memory, and identity” (68).

Additionally, Margara Averbach looks more generally at Native American myth, belief, and history in her article “Technology, ‘Magic,’ and Resistance in Native American Women’s Writing.”

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Horvitz writes about the role of memory and history in “Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*,” while Kristin Boudreau’s article “Pain and the Unmaking of Self in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” looks at the history of violence and the role of pain in constructing the self, to name just a few of the many examining Morrison’s *Beloved*.

<sup>9</sup> For more on Redding’s analysis, see his article. Additionally, Cynthia Dobbs’ “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: Bodies Returned, Modernism Revisited, Jan Furman’s “Sethe’s Re-memories: The Covert Return of What is Best Forgotten,” Eusebio L. Rodrigues’s “The Telling of *Beloved*,” and Karla F. C. Holloway’s “*Beloved*: A Spiritual” all discuss *Beloved*’s use of African, oral tradition and “rememory” as part of the healing process.

<sup>10</sup> Speaking generally of African American and Native American magical realist works, Walter says they are linked to “world view[s] deeply steeped in the myths and legends of cultures with a ritualistic-religious foundation” (64). Similarly, Wright looks specifically at “the weaving of many ancestral stories and legends into a true narrative whole” (39) in *The Grass Dancer*, while Linda Krumholz looks at the role of ritual, the trickster character, and the history of slavery in *Beloved*.

<sup>11</sup> Brogan also writes that “the contemporary American ghost story is . . . a pan-ethnic phenomenon” (3-4).

<sup>12</sup> Monica McDermott and Frank L. Samson discuss both the practice and problems of white privilege in their article “White Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States,” as do Gregory Jay and Sandra Elaine Jones in “Whiteness Studies and the Multicultural Literature Classroom.”

<sup>13</sup> For more on this, see McDermott and Samson’s article.

<sup>14</sup> At this point, very little critical attention is given to either Charlene or Denver, yet the affects of ghosts on these characters are crucial to understanding the role ghosts play in each work. Much of *The Grass Dancer*’s criticism is devoted to Harley Wind Soldier’s visions and ghostly guidance, which Walter sees as a “ritual power” that heals (67-70). Less attention has been given to Charlene Thunder’s own evolution through such guidance. Similarly, Krumholz’s and Horvitz’s essays, as well Elizabeth B. House’s “Toni Morrison’s Ghost: The Beloved that was not Beloved” are only three of the articles on *Beloved* that focus on Sethe’s healing. Redding makes a brief reference to the impact *Beloved* has on Denver, stating, “*Beloved* is in some sense Denver’s coming of age story” (171), but he does not go into anymore detail. Krumholz simply notes, “In her lonely withdrawal from the world, due in part to

Sethe's isolation, Denver is as trapped by Sethe's past as Sethe's inability to find psychological freedom as Sethe herself is" (119), but also does not go into any further detail about Beloved's impact on Denver.

<sup>15</sup> Maryanne O'Hara explores this aspect of Alice Hoffman's works, while Walter, Hogan, and Wright explore this in Power's *The Grass Dancer*. Similarly, Linda Krumholz and Carl D. Malmgren examine this in *Beloved*.

<sup>16</sup> For more on this, see Derrida's chapter "Injunctions of Marx."

<sup>17</sup> Derrida's chapter "Injunction of Marx" goes into more detail on this subject.

<sup>18</sup> Gus's death occurs when the boys dunk his head in a toilet. They are expecting Gus to struggle before they pull him out, but Gus is knocked unconscious when they push his head in the bowl, and the boys end up drowning him.

<sup>19</sup> Never one "to receive valentines," Charlene finds that through the magic, "poetry erupted; her features were praised, her disposition complimented. It was fun for a few class periods, but eventually it became depressing" (Power 296).

<sup>20</sup> Gus's final nudge comes after Carlin has fled home to Florida, convinced that she will never fit into the Haddan School society. Once home, Carlin begins finding black stones everywhere: "on the back porch, in the kitchen sink, beneath her pillows" (Hoffman 322). Carlin also feels Gus's presence wherever she goes, and his coat persistently streams water. Thus, it is through Gus's guidance that Carlin finally decides to return to Haddan.

<sup>21</sup> Ecstatic to have found her parents, she tells her mother "I know why you did it. We don't have to go through all that. I think I would do the same thing to get away" (Power 306).

<sup>22</sup> There is much debate over Beloved's status as a ghost. Many scholars, such as Dobbs, see Beloved as a conflation of both those lost in the middle passage and of Sethe's dead daughter. Others, such as Martha J. Cutter, do not see Beloved as a ghost, but only as a middle passage survivor. Similarly, Carl D. Malmgren sees the novel as fantastic. In his view, however, the corporeal Beloved who emerges after Paul D chases the ghost from the house is not a ghost, but a woman who has survived the middle passage and escaped her white captors. Details about Beloved do match those of a girl held hostage and sexually abused by white men, match those of a woman surviving the middle passage, as well as match those of Sethe's dead daughter. For example, when Beloved talks of where she came from, she claims it is "'Dark. . . I'm small in that place. . . Hot. Nothing to breathe down there and no room to move in'" and there are "'Heaps. A lot of people is down there. Some is dead'" (Morrison 75). These references, as well of others, call to mind descriptions of the middle passage aboard slave ships. When she says such things as there was a white man "in the house I was in. He hurt me" (Morrison 215), Beloved validates the belief that she escaped white captors. Her questions about the diamond earrings Sethe wore for her wedding and singing the song Sethe made up and sang to her children validate her existence as the ghost of Sethe's murdered child. I would agree with Deborah Horvitz, who sees Beloved as an amalgamation of all these aspects. However, for my purposes here, I am looking specifically at Beloved as a ghost.

<sup>23</sup> Sethe also lets Beloved take "the best of everything—first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair, and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children. . . None of which made the impression it was supposed to. Beloved accused her of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her" (Morrison 241).

<sup>24</sup> As Morrison writes, "little by little it dawned on Denver that if Sethe didn't wake up one morning and pick up a knife, Beloved might" (Morrison 242).

<sup>25</sup> Harry had "decided he wanted Carlin as soon as he spied her in the doorway to the library one rainy afternoon. . . He knew right then that he had to have her, never doubting for a moment that like everything else he had wanted, she'd be his before long" (Hoffman 72). Furthermore, Harry only sees Carlin as another conquest. Having already "ruined" the lives of many of the girls at the school, he is "bored" with "those who persisted in calling him long after his disinterest was evident. . . primed for a challenge . . . it amused him to wait for Carlin outside the gym" (Hoffman 73).

<sup>26</sup> In fact, Carlin now starts avoiding Harry, noticing "the traits Gus had warned her about: the smile that could be turned on and off at will, the selfishness, the certainty that his own needs were at the center of the universe" (Hoffman 195).

<sup>27</sup> Trudier Harris examines Beloved as demonic and the need to "exorcise" the demonic for peace to occur in her article "*Beloved*: 'Woman, Thy Name is Demon.'"

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